

WHO BELONGS IN **DISCOVERY & THESIS PHASE** (AND WHO DOESN'T)

Building the Right Operating Group
Before Anything Else

WHERE THIS IS USED

- Venture Studio programs
- Corporate Incubators
- Accelerators (corporate or government-backed)
- CVC opportunity formation (pre-investment)
- AI Studio exploration and agent discovery
- Foundry-as-a-Service engagements

AUDIENCE

- CEOs
- Chiefs of Strategy
- Heads of Innovation
- Executive sponsors
- Operators responsible for early outcomes

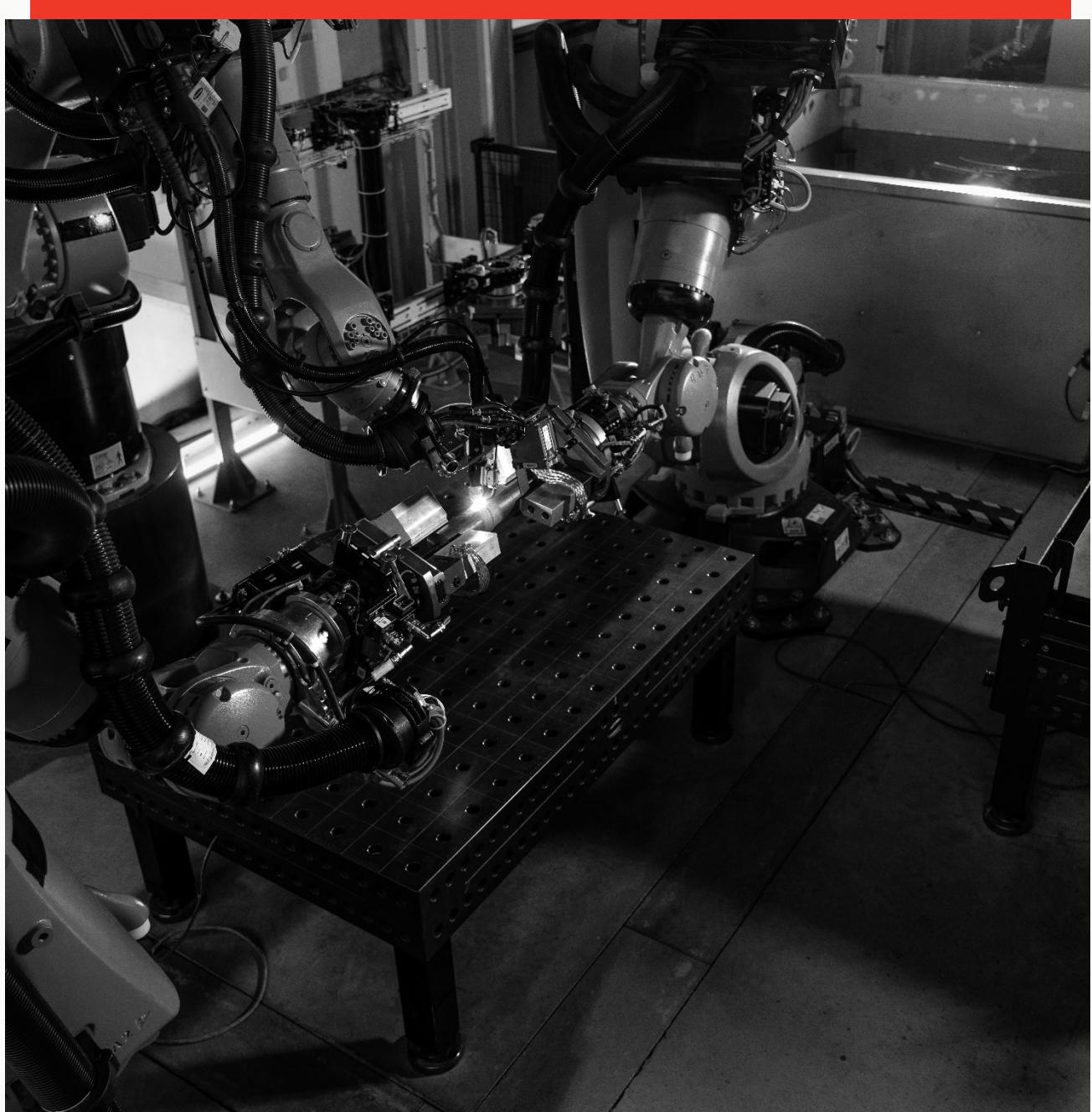
PHASE

Phase One: Pre-build / Pre-funding / Pre-team

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Phase One fails as often because of **who is involved** as because of what is being explored. Too many people slow learning. The wrong people distort decisions.

This guide explains how TURN8 composes **the Discovery & Thesis phase (Phase-One) operating group** to maximize learning speed, decision quality, and controlled downside. The goal is not representation or consensus. The goal is to involve only those who materially increase signal and to exclude those who unintentionally create noise.



THE CORE PROBLEM

In early venture work, organizations default to inclusion.

Common patterns:

- Large steering committees
- Broad stakeholder workshops
- Early involvement of delivery, legal, procurement, or branding teams

These choices feel safe, but they have predictable effects:

- Learning slows down
- Assumptions get defended instead of tested
- Decisions drift toward lowest-risk consensus

In GCC organizations, this is amplified by:



Hierarchical cultures
that reward visibility



Fear of excluding
senior stakeholders

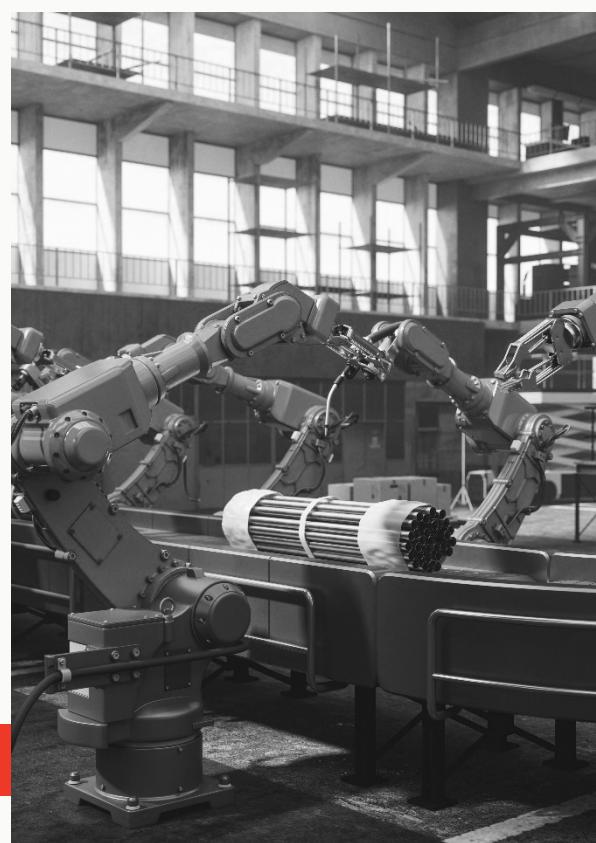


Confusion between
exploration roles
and delivery roles

The real issue is this:

**Discovery & Thesis phase
requires judgment and
learning speed, not
representation.**

Involving the wrong people too early creates governance drag that cannot be reversed later.



PREREQUISITES

WHAT MUST BE IN PLACE?

- Clear Phase-One scope and objectives
- Defined venture challenge statements and opportunity areas
- Explicit governance with go / hold / stop outcomes

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS INDICATORS

- Willingness to keep groups small
- Acceptance that exclusion is temporary, not political
- Comfort separating exploration from delivery

RED FLAGS (DO NOT PROCEED IF PRESENT)

- Stakeholders insist on attending “to stay informed”
- Delivery teams expect early involvement
- Committees are formed before decisions exist



If these conditions exist, Phase One will **default to coordination instead of learning**.



STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

STEP 1

DEFINE THE PHASE-ONE ROLES EXPLICITLY

⌚ ACTION

Identify the minimum set of rules required in Phase One.

Typically:

- One executive sponsor (decision owner)
- One venture operator (runs the work)
- Limited subject-matter access on demand

⚠ COMMON MISTAKES

- Vague role descriptions
- Treating attendance as contribution

⌚ WHY IT MATTERS

Undefined roles invite unnecessary participation.

⌚ DECISION CHECKPOINT

Can each role be tied to a specific decision or learning task?

⌚ TIME ESTIMATE

30 minutes

STEP 2

SEPARATE LEARNING ROLES FROM DELIVERY ROLES

⌚ ACTION

Explicitly exclude delivery-oriented roles from Phase One.

Usually excluded:

- Engineering teams
- Legal and procurement
- Branding, marketing, and communications

These roles join only after a **go** decision.

⚠ COMMON MISTAKES

- Involving delivery teams “just in case”
- Asking delivery teams to validate assumptions

⌚ WHY IT MATTERS

Delivery roles optimize for execution certainty, not learning.

⌚ DECISION CHECKPOINT

Would this role slow or bias early learning?

⌚ TIME ESTIMATE

15 minutes

STEP 3

LIMIT STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT BY DESIGN

⌚ ACTION

Define when and how stakeholders engage.

Typical approach:

- No standing attendance
- Input requested only for specific questions
- No veto power in Phase One

👁 WHY IT MATTERS

Stakeholders increase noise if not tightly scoped.

☑ DECISION CHECKPOINT

Does this stakeholder materially increase signal?

⚠ COMMON MISTAKES

- Allowing open-ended participation
- Treating visibility as a requirement

📅 TIME ESTIMATE

Ongoing

STEP 4

CHOOSE OPERATORS OVER ADVOCATES

⌚ ACTION

Select individuals with an operator mindset:

- One-page summaries
- Evidence tables
- Assumption logs

Avoid:

- Idea champions
- Political representatives
- Career-risk minimizers

👁 WHY IT MATTERS

Phase One rewards honesty over enthusiasm.

☑ DECISION CHECKPOINT

Has this person stopped work before without defensiveness?

⚠ COMMON MISTAKES

- Selecting based on seniority alone
- Rewarding passion over discipline

📅 TIME ESTIMATE

1 session



STEP 5

MAKE EXCLUSION EXPLICIT AND TEMPORARY

⌚ ACTION

Communicate clearly:

- Who is involved now
- Who will be involved later
- What triggers inclusion

👁 WHY IT MATTERS

Ambiguity creates resentment and interference.

⌚ DECISION CHECKPOINT

Are inclusion triggers clearly defined?

⚠ COMMON MISTAKES

- Quiet exclusion
- Promising future involvement without conditions

⌚ TIME ESTIMATE

15 minutes



DECISION FRAMEWORKS

PHASE-ONE PARTICIPATION TEST

A role belongs in Phase One only if:

1.

It directly contributes to learning or decisions

2.

It does not benefit from execution certainty

3.

It can accept stop outcomes without defensiveness

If any condition fails,
exclude for now.



RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS



PEOPLE

- 2–4 core participants maximum
- On-demand access to experts
- Clear decision owner



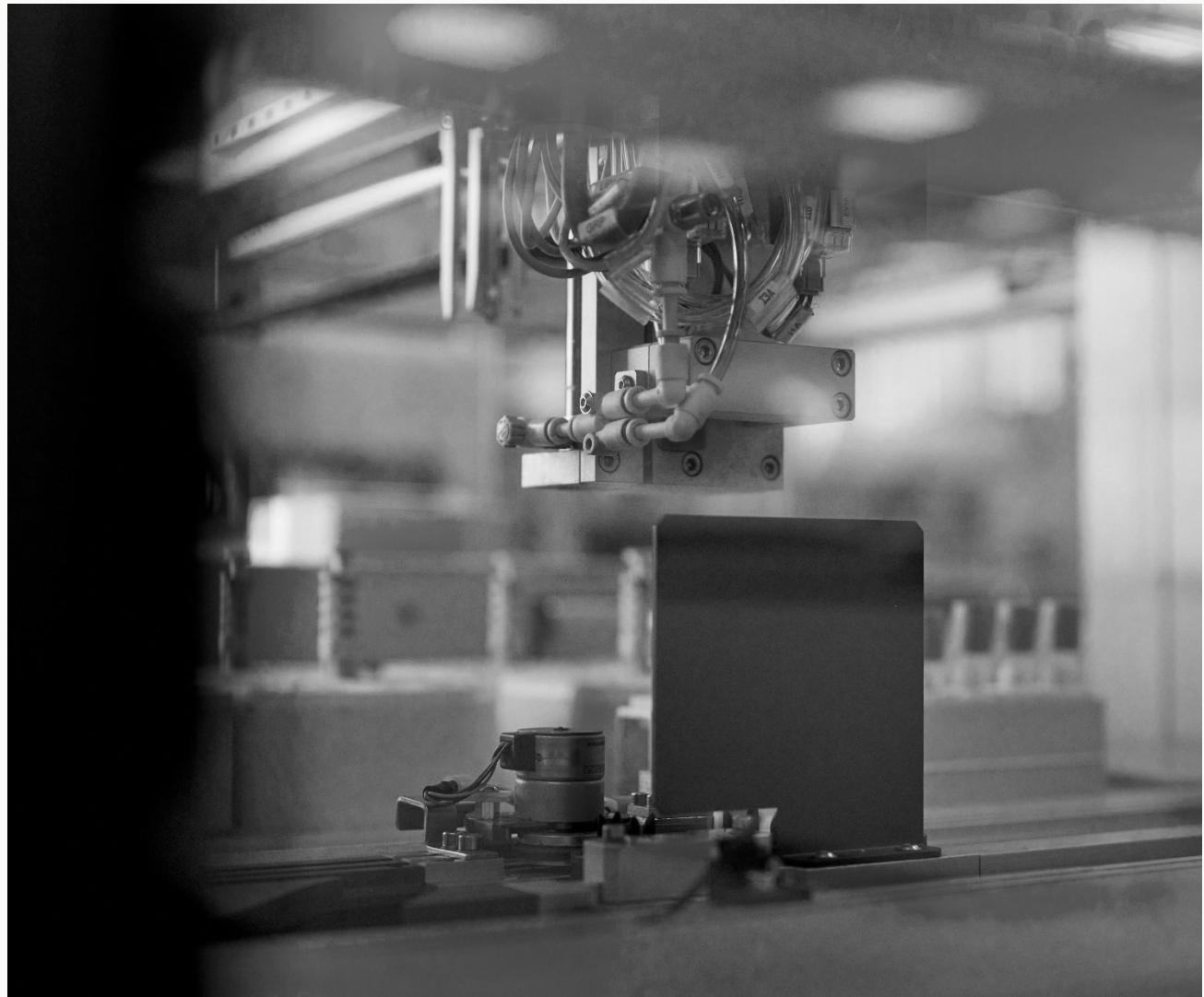
BUDGET

- Minimal
- No staffing commitments



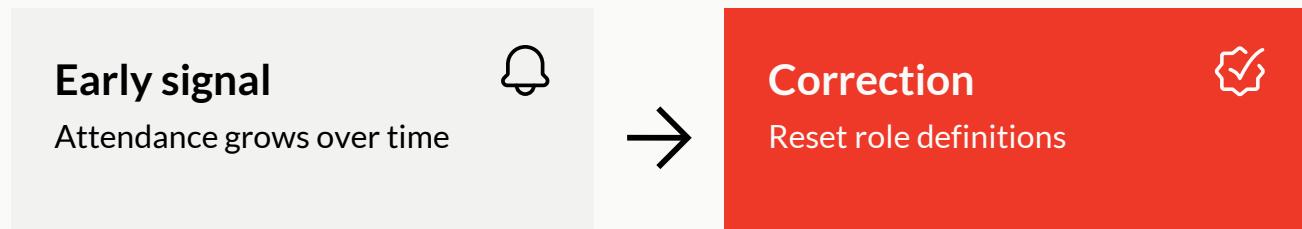
TOOLS

- Simple role definitions
- Decision and evidence logs
- AI may assist synthesis, not persuasion

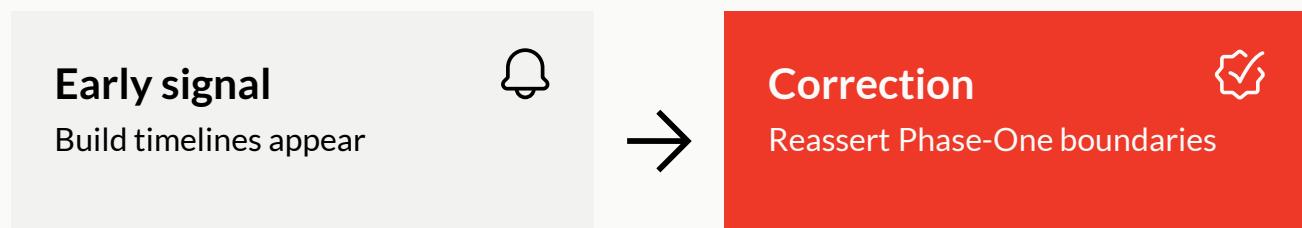


COMMON FAILURE MODES

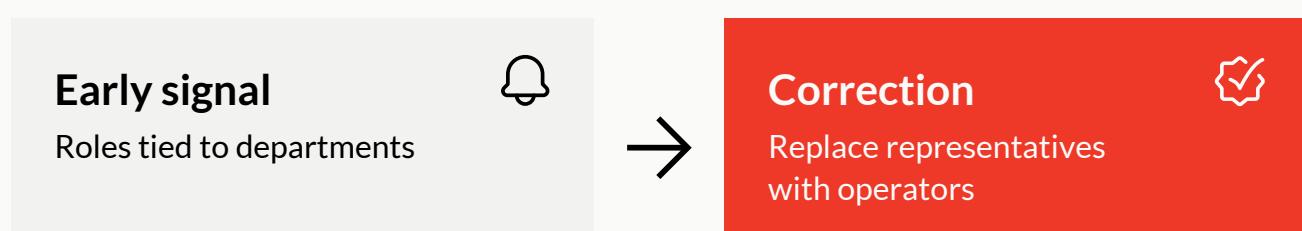
FAILURE MODE: COMMITTEE CREEP



FAILURE MODE: EARLY DELIVERY INVOLVEMENT



FAILURE MODE: POLITICAL REPRESENTATION



SUCCESS METRICS



LEADING INDICATORS

- Small, stable operating group
- Fast decision cycles
- Comfortable stop discussions



LAGGING INDICATORS

- Higher-quality Phase-One decisions
- Less rework in later phases
- Faster transition to build when approved



EXAMPLE USE CASES

This approach is typically applied when:

- Early work is slowed by too many voices
- Decisions are repeatedly deferred
- Delivery teams are pulled in prematurely
- AI exploration turns into premature implementation
- Accelerators become stakeholder showcases



10

WHO BELONGS IN DISCOVERY & THESIS
PHASE (AND WHO DOESN'T)

TURN 8

NEXT STEPS

After Phase-One roles are set:

1.

Lock participation for the duration of Phase One

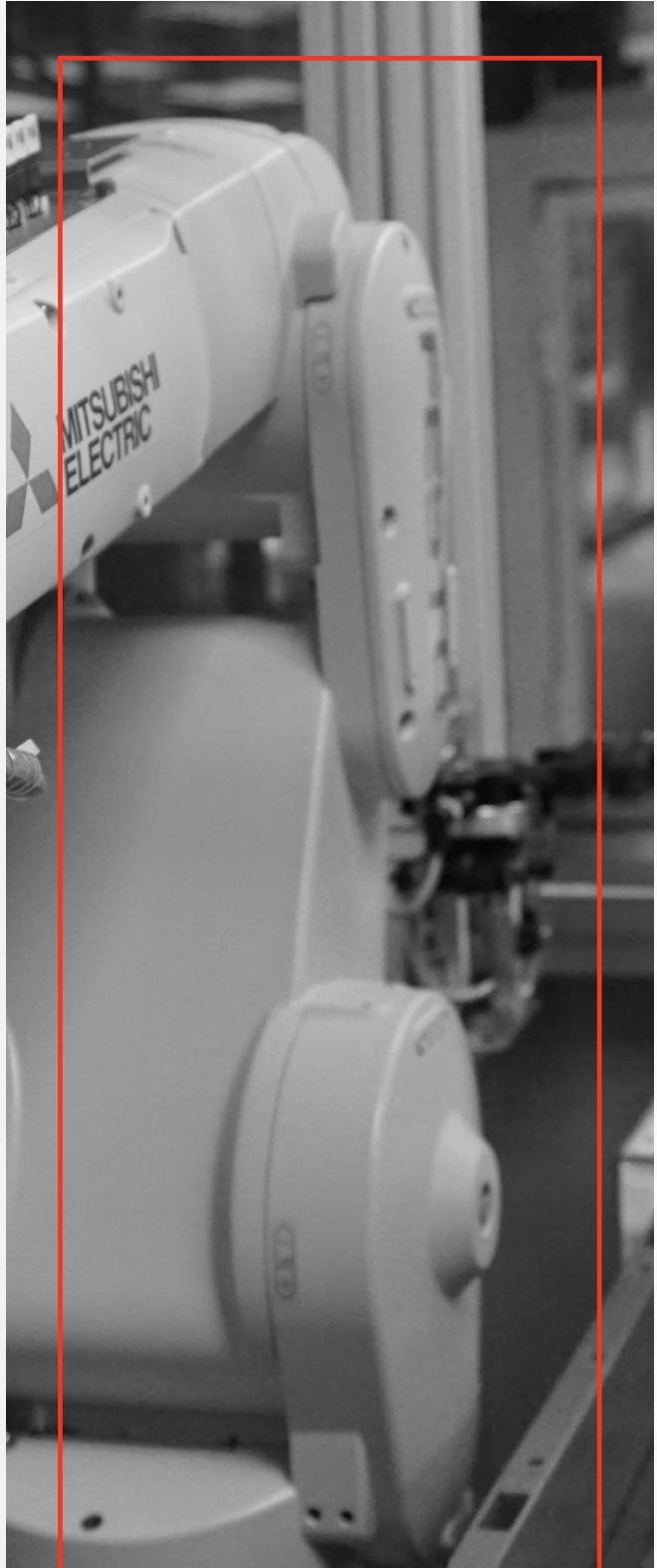
2.

Enforce role boundaries consistently

3.

Prepare delivery teams separately for Phase Two

Phase One ends when execution certainty is required.



CHECKLIST (CHEAT SHEET)

A. ROLE CLARITY

- Phase-One roles are explicitly defined
- Each role maps to learning or decisions

B. EXCLUSION DISCIPLINE

- Delivery roles are excluded
- Stakeholder involvement is limited and scoped

C. OPERATOR MINDSET

- Core participants are comfortable stopping work
- Evidence matters more than advocacy

D. GROUP SIZE

- Core group is 2–4 people
- Attendance is stable over time

E. INCLUSION TRIGGERS

- Conditions for future inclusion are defined
- Exclusion is framed as temporary

FINAL CHECK

- Participation increases signal, not noise
- Decisions feel faster, not slower

If attendance grows, Phase One is already slipping

