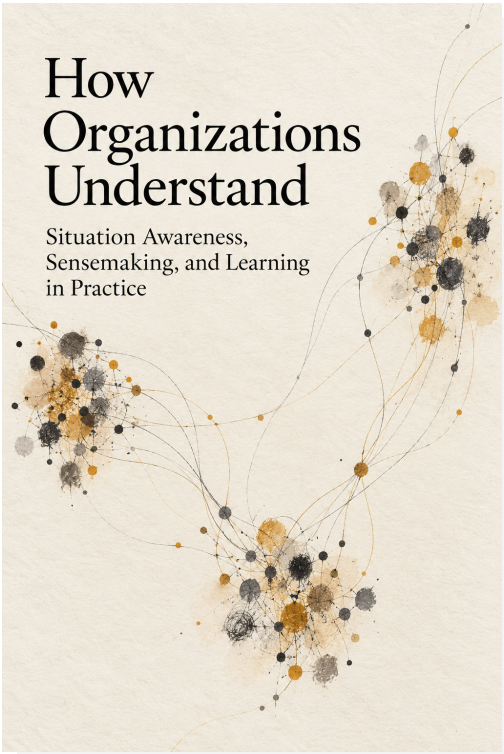


A book about the work that comes before deciding: knowing what situation you are in.

Most management systems were built for the assumption that the situation can be established first, by analysis, research or a planning cycle, and that action follows from it. That fails where the environment changes faster than it can be known.

The flow follows the emergence of understanding from perceiving to learning, then drops the simplification that one actor does it, then turns to how it is produced.

What understanding is

The continuous, shared, fragile work of knowing what situation one is in. The deciding, the executing and the data all come after that work, and they can be no better than it. It is made by people together with their artifacts, forums and structures: it is distributed, not a leader's insight.

Perceiving	**Understanding**	**Choosing**	**Acting**	**Learning**
Attending and noticing.	Being aware and making sense.	Selecting and committing.	Every action is also a probe.	Knowledge, skill and, over time, judgment.

The activities run in parallel, at different speeds, and they feed back into each other. The more useful picture is a loop, and a loop that is held by more than one person.

What the book argues

An organization cannot know its environment in advance; it has to produce understanding while acting. From understanding, experienced people mostly arrive at action without a separate act of choosing; the organization then commits, acts, and learns from what the action produced, and what it learns settles as knowledge, skill and eventually judgment. The design task is to build the whole loop into the operating model, at every level that faces its own environment, and to build it as a shared thing.

Information consumes attention, and data does not say what it means.

FOURTEEN CHAPTERS IN FOUR PARTS

From perceiving to learning

A standalone book for consultants, organization designers and researchers who want the theory — Weick, Endsley, Boyd, Klein, Hutchins, Nonaka, Argyris, Beer — and its use in organizations, in one argument.

PART I · CH. 1–2	**The problem of knowing.** Why understanding comes first, and perceiving: attention, and the signals at the edges.
PART II · CH. 3–6	**Understanding the situation.** Being aware, making sense when the picture breaks, keeping the model current, and choosing.
PART III · CH. 7–10	**Understanding together.** Where understanding is held, when groups understand more and less than their members, and whose account counts.
PART IV · CH. 11–14	**From understanding to capability.** Learning loops, the path from knowledge to judgment, making sense with machines, and the design of an understanding organization.

Every chapter states its claims and what would count against them.

An open draft.

Krishan Mathis is the author of *The Tautai Principle* and *Education is Broken*. As a consultant and trainer he works with organizations in Germany and Europe, helping them stay capable of acting while their environment changes faster than their plans.

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