

# The Crash Test

**1. The Stewardship Question:** What could break this that we are not currently seeing?

Cars are crash-tested before they reach the road. Aircraft undergo years of testing and certification before carrying passengers. Pharmaceuticals pass through multiple phases of clinical trials before reaching the market.

Yet many AI systems and AI agents are increasingly deployed into real environments while their behavior under pressure, failure conditions, edge cases, or unexpected interactions remains only partially understood. Assumptions remain assumptions until tested. Unexpected interactions remain possible. Rare events remain rare ... until they occur.

The Crash Test is the discipline of exposing plans, systems, assumptions, and decisions to pressure before reality does.

This is the third organizational gate: robustness under stress.

## 2. The Practice

When a decision, system, process, or AI-enabled capability is approaching implementation, consider the following questions:

Expose Assumptions.

*What assumptions must be true for this to succeed?*

Preserve Exposure to Failure.

*Were possible failures made visible?  
Which failures may have been filtered, softened, or normalized by our systems or processes ?*

Test the Edge Cases.

*Under what conditions is this most likely to fail?  
Which rare or unusual situations are we currently ignoring?*

## Challenge Confidence.

*What are we treating as certain that is still uncertain?  
Are confidence and evidence being confused?*

## Confront Reality.

*Which conclusions come from real-world observation?  
Which come primarily from forecasts, simulations, recommendations, or expectations?*

## Learn Before Deployment.

*What can still be discovered before this reaches full scale?  
What can fail safely while the cost and consequences remains manageable?*

## Consider the Unexpected.

*What outcome would most surprise us?*

### 3. What This Practice Preserves

- Visibility of failure signals before deployment.
- Contact with reality beyond algorithmic forecasts and simulations.
- Organizational robustness under unexpected conditions.

### 4. Closing Reminder

Assumptions remain assumptions until reality has a vote.

### 5. Optional Bridges to Existing Frameworks

For those who prefer to connect this practice to familiar models, it aligns loosely with:

**Red Teaming:** deliberately challenging systems, plans, or assumptions to uncover weaknesses before real-world exposure. Modern AI systems can be particularly useful in this exercise by generating alternative scenarios, adversarial perspectives, edge cases, and failure hypotheses that might otherwise remain unexplored.