



Critical[®] ThinkAR

POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE AND RISK STRATEGY FIRM

www.criticalthinkar.com



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Purpose & Payoff

THE FIRM



Our Conviction

Political complexity is not a problem
to be solved.

It is a condition to be navigated.

Who we are

Critical ThinkAR® is a political intelligence and risk strategy advisory firm helping leaders and organisations navigate political complexity.

What we do

We provide structural analysis, political intelligence and strategic advisory to help leaders and organisations understand complex political environments, anticipate what those systems are designed and structured to produce, and build their capacity to navigate them with preparedness.

THE FOUNDER

“I came of age in the decades that followed the end of apartheid, in the new South Africa. I arrived at my work as a political analyst, scholar and practitioner, against the backdrop of living inside systems that rarely function the way they claim to. My work has entailed understanding, explaining and contributing to ideas and practice about closing the gap between what systems claim to be and what they actually do.

I enable individuals, leaders and organisations to prepare for and anticipate risk and disruption by helping them understand what systems are designed and structured to produce. In this way, I unlock their capacity to move, decide, act, and engage in ways that expand their agency, and that of others, in the face of structural constraints. I do this through my method and frameworks for political intelligence, sociopolitical analysis, coaching and strategic advisory.”

About

Nompumelelo Sibalukhulu Runji is the founder and principal of Critical ThinkAR®. She is a political sociologist, scholar-practitioner, transformation coach, as well as published author, thought leader and speaker.

She has two decades of experience at the intersection of political intelligence and analysis, institutional strategy and leadership development.

Her work has spanned nineteen countries on four continents - Africa, Asia, Europe and North America - through research, programme management, stakeholder engagement, and advisory services.

She has worked in various capacities in think tanks, government, media, civil society, development agency and as a consultant providing structural analysis grounded in political sociology. She holds an MPhil in Multidisciplinary Human Rights, BA (Honours) in Political Science, and BSocSci in Industrial Sociology and Labour Studies, all from the University of Pretoria.



CORE THESIS



A prosperous organisation operating inside a collapsing sociopolitical system cannot hope to be sustainable.

The Context

Sound structural analysis demonstrates that the social, political and economic crises gripping South Africa, and societies across the African continent and beyond, are systemic and structural in nature. Yet responses by leaders and institutions largely are symptomatic and reactive.

Our purpose

Critical ThinkAR® exists to provide the structural analysis to navigate structural constraints and that produces strategies that lead to sustainability and systemic resilience.

THE PROBLEM

The Crisis

Much of what is labelled political analysis in the public discourse is not analysis. It is commentary.

Commentary reads events against other events. It is reactive, comparative, tethered to the news cycle.

Analysis reads events against a fixed, declared frame. A frame built before the event, held consistently as evidence accumulates, and revised explicitly when the evidence demands

The Gap

The absence and neglect of structural analysis produces symptomatic, superficial and reactive responses to structural sociopolitical and economic conditions and systemic crises.

Sociopolitical and economic systems fail their citizens not only because leaders make bad decisions. Organisations struggle to navigate social and political complexity — thus jeopardising sustainability — not only because of governance and CSR weaknesses. ***They fail because of the analysis that informs decisions, actions and strategy.***

The result is the inability to navigate political complexity with clarity. It produces risk strategies that exacerbate systemic weaknesses, amplify structural constraints resulting in increased resistance as well as disruptions that threaten investments, operations and development.

OUR SOLUTION

We help clients shift from reactive, symptomatic and event-driven solutions and approaches to risk by developing preparedness.

To stop seeing community agency as merely a security threat and state system incapacity as a signal to retreat. We help build structural and systemic solutions and strategies to structurally driven social and political risk. Our practice uses a proprietary method and frameworks to produce:

- 1) **Political system analysis** that provides strategic clarity,
- 2) **Risk strategy analysis and development** that enables preparedness,
- 3) **Political intelligence briefings** that support sound decision-making,
- 4) **Transformational leadership coaching** that builds leadership capacity, and
- 5) **Communication design and support** for stakeholder engagement processes.

Our approach is directed at developing preparedness that expands the agency of leaders and organisations as actors within the system, to navigate complex sociopolitical environments with confidence. ***Built on two-decades of scholar-practioner expertise.***



THE PAYOFF

The return on investment for our clients is structural preparedness and systemic resilience.

-  **Capital deployment protection** — we read the localised anatomy before friction paralyses your asset.
-  **Systemic strategy development** — we move your leadership from volatile reaction to structural preparedness by showing you what the political landscape is structured to produce.
-  **Capacitated leaders that move with preparedness, clarity and confidence** — we develop the internal leadership capacity required to navigate systemic complexity and drive authentic transformation.
-  **Access to grounded and disciplined intelligence** — we go beyond incident-driven news cycles to deliver practitioner-led structural country analysis from the epicenter of South Africa's sociopolitical environment.
-  **Expanded agency to decide, act and engage** — we transform your organisation from a passive observer into an intentional actor, building the communication capacity to shape the complex environments you operate in.
-  **Strengthened stakeholder engagement and effective social compacts** — we bridge the deep trust deficit in high-strain environments, turning localized community friction into resilient multi-stakeholder social compacts.

OUR CLIENTS

We work with executive leaders and decision-makers in organisations whose success depends on prioritising sustainability and that measure their success not just by a healthy bottomline but by their capacity to decide, act and engage in ways that strengthen partnerships, build stakeholder trust and contribute to systemic resilience.

Leaders

Executive leaders focused on risk, strategy, communication, leadership development, and stakeholder engagement covering a cross section of organisations:

- **Investment firms and corporates**
- **Development Finance Institutions**
- **Diplomatic missions**
- **Government departments**
- **State institutions**
- **Civil society organisations**

Sectors

Our work focuses on clients that operate in complex political environments and that are closest to the epicentre of the consequences of sociopolitical systems under strain, including:

- **Mining**
- **Energy**
- **Insurance**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Property Development**

OUR VALUE



***We accompany clients, build and strengthen their capacity to decide, act, communicate and engage** in ways that promote sustainability, that contribute to constructing enabling stakeholder environments, and that build effective partnerships. The goal is to build systemic resilience — not just risk avoidance.*

Mission

***To enable executive leaders to develop the preparedness** to navigate political complexity and structural constraints by helping them understand what the political landscape is designed and structured to produce, and to navigate, decide, act and engage with clarity and confidence, under conditions of uncertainty.*

Vision

***To provide structural analysis, political intelligence and strategic advisory** to help leaders and organisations understand complex political environments, anticipate what those systems are structured to produce and build the capacity to navigate them with preparedness.*

For Critical ThinkAR®, the disruption caused by community agency — protest, resistance, apathy — is not irrational. It is the entirely rational response of communities navigating structural abandonment. The collapse of governance and backlogs in infrastructure and maintenance are not an aberration. They are the consequence of structural conditions in the sociopolitical and economic system.



Blueprint & Execution

Critical ThinkAR[®] accompanies clients through a structured analysis, strategy and implementation cycle.

Each stage of the cycle serves one outcome: the client's ability to navigate political complexity with clarity and confidence. It results in the capacity to engage the political landscape not as a passive recipient of its conditions but as an actor who shapes them.

Conduct Intelligence

Ongoing observation and assessment of structural conditions through the four components of the Critical ThinkAR[®] Method[™] for political intelligence.

Provide Analysis

A structural reading of the political landscape and structural risks relevant to your operating context using The Refraction Framework[™].

Develop Preparedness

Translating analytical clarity into a strategic response so you move from understanding to being positioned to navigate, decide, act and engage effectively using The Strategy Arc Framework[™].

Build Capacity

Developing the individual leader's ability to navigate constraint and act with confidence through our Inpowerment Coaching Framework[™] and Get Inpowered Programme[™].

Communication Design

Building the capacity to engage the operating environment as an actor within it, not merely an observer of it through The Agency-Expanding Communication Framework[™].

THE METHOD

The Critical ThinkAR[®] Method[™] for political intelligence is built on a four-layer stack process.

It involves scanning the political landscape, conducting structured inquiry, undertaking stakeholder intelligence which held together support judgement and inform the assessment of risk. This method keeps our practice aligned to the commitment to reading sociopolitical environments structurally to identify systemic strains, tracing the interaction of power, legitimacy, structure, and uncertainty over time.



Inquiry layer – Structured Research

Disciplined, question-driven inquiry into why something might be occurring. This stage is about sharpening questions. Rigorous. Historically grounded. Resistant to narrative convenience.



Entry layer – Media Intelligence

Structured observation and signal detection. Reading the information environment as a window into the distribution of power, legitimacy, and influence.



Relational layer – Stakeholder Intelligence

Relational analysis of the actors operating in a political landscape. Not just who the players are but what drives them.



Synthesis layer – Political Risk Analysis

Integration of the three preceding components into reasoned judgement under conditions of uncertainty. Not forecasting – the structured assessment of what the conditions, available options and what is likely to happen. Preparedness, not prediction.

STRATEGIC SUITE



Our advisory work is underpinned by proprietary frameworks for political analysis, strategy development, transformational leadership coaching and communication design.

- **The Refraction Framework™** —for political analysis
 - **The Strategy Arc Framework™** — for strategy development
 - **Inpowerment Coaching Framework™** — for transformational leadership coaching
 - **Agency-Expanding Communication Framework™** — for effective stakeholder engagement
-

FLAGSHIP FRAMEWORK

The Refraction Framework™ is our flagship structural analysis instrument.

It is a set of lenses and filters. Its Lenses read the structural conditions of a political system - how power is held, contested, and reproduced. Its two Operational Filters read how actors - individuals, organisations, institutions - exercise agency and are constrained as they navigate those structural conditions.



OPERATIONAL FILTER ONE

BALANCE OF POWER

Balance of Power reads the capacity to act and influence, and the constraints on that capacity, through three working parts: formal authority, effective influence, and dependency structure — applied to every actor in the system.

OPERATIONAL FILTER TWO

ELITE-CITIZEN ALIGNMENT

Elite-Citizen Alignment reads the constraint on, and the responsiveness of, elites to the agency of citizens. It asks whether the holders of formal political authority and economic power are constrained by and responsive to citizen agency — or whether they are overriding it.

ANALYSIS PRODUCTS



We produce three lines of analysis presenting structured political analysis reports, risk strategy assessments focused as well as a quarterly political intelligence:

Political Landscape Analysis Reports

Application of The Refraction Framework™ to a specific political landscape. Each report produces the Anatomy of Power — a durable structural reference of how power is held, contested, and reproduced in that system. Not a situation report. Not a risk rating. A structural reading that holds across news cycles and anchors every subsequent reading of events in that landscape.

Risk Strategy Analysis Reports

Our risk strategy analysis is grounded in the structural reading of the political landscape derived from the application of The Refraction Framework to a specific thematic or policy risk, producing a rigorous reading of what the political system is structured to produce in that domain, the operational consequence for organisations, and the strategic implication for risk strategy.

The Critical ThinkAR® Political Monitor

A quarterly analytical brief that reads key political developments, events, and actors against the structural anchor of our political landscape and risk strategy analyses. Not news summary. A structured quarterly reading of what is moving in the system, what is driving it, and what it means for leaders and organisations navigating the landscape. We produce it by applying the Operational Filters of The Refraction Framework™

SERVICE DIVISIONS

Critical ThinkAR® operates across four service divisions which underpin our advisory service offerings and cycle:

01 Political Intelligence and Analysis

Reads political landscapes structurally, historically, and relationally — producing analytical intelligence that is durable rather than event-driven. The division delivers tailored political intelligence products: country analyses, political risk assessments, stakeholder intelligence reports, policy briefs, and periodic analytical briefs.

02 Institutional Strategy

Translates analytical clarity into strategic readiness. Having produced a structural reading of the political landscape, works with the client to develop a strategic preparedness plan — a structured, actionable response to the conditions the analysis has revealed. The client moves from understanding the landscape to being positioned to navigate it.

03 Transformation Coaching

Works at the level of the individual leader — developing the personal capacity to navigate political complexity, institutional constraint, and conditions of uncertainty. Delivers individual and group coaching, leadership development programmes, and facilitated processes for leaders operating inside complex and contested environments.

04 Communication Design

Builds capacity to communicate in ways that expand rather than constrain agency — their own and that of those they need to move. It delivers communication strategy, stakeholder engagement design, message architecture, and facilitated communication capacity-building processes.

OUR DIFFERENCE



The conventional political risk industry is event-driven. Critical ThinkAR® is not. We start with structure.

The question is not just: "What is happening right now?" The more useful question is: "What is the political system designed and structured to produce?" That answer does not change with every news cycle. It is durable. When leaders understand that, they can decide, act and engage effectively, under conditions of uncertainty.

The Five Distinctions

The methodology is structural, not eventological.

We analyse political systems, not incidents. The analysis does not age the way a situation report ages. It produces a picture that holds — a structural reference that remains a valid anchor for reading whatever happens next.

Provide strategic preparedness.

Having read the political landscape, Critical ThinkAR® does not hand over a report and leave. It walks the client through what the analysis has revealed and what it means for how they must position and act. The client moves from understanding to readiness.

The instruments are proprietary and coherent.

We use theoretically grounded analytical instruments with a specific architecture. Most political risk products are descriptive. Ours is interpretive. It produces a reading, not a rating.

Build communication capacity.

Because the client is not a passive observer of the landscape, they are an actor within it — affecting and shaping it through how they engage, position, and communicate, we design and co-create communication to expand the agency to deliver on objectives.

Develop capacity to navigate complexity.

Because we understand that institutions are not abstract structures — they are made of people. The character of an institution is determined by the people within it: running it, working within it, shaping it.

SELECTED ENGAGEMENTS

Over the lifespan of our existence we have been trusted to conduct political intelligence, research and analysis and facilitation in support of stakeholder management and risk strategy for our target clients. Below are selected engagements:

Civil Society Participation in Provincial Legislatures (2019–20)

Stakeholder intelligence and political risk analysis to inform capacity building for civil society engagement with provincial legislatures in South Africa, an EU funded project run by for Democracy Works Foundation (DWF).

International Social Compacts Study (2020)

Comparative research on global approaches to social compacts as input to South Africa Department of Sports Arts and Culture national social compact development and stakeholder engagement process.

LGE Gender Representation Study (2021–22)

Analysis of women's representation in South Africa's 2021 Local Government Elections for the Commission for Gender Equality and implications for national and international gender parity commitments.

Climate Change Policy Analysis (2022)

Research and analysis on national climate policy and regional policy implementation in selected municipalities to inform civil society capacity building efforts of Democracy Works Foundation's Fostering Inclusive Growth through Climate Change Champions (FIGCCC).

State–Civil Society Compact Policy Brief (2023)

Policy brief on state-civil society compact for socioeconomic inclusion to inform civil society social compacting efforts for Kagiso Trust commissioned by Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA).

TRAINING & FACILITATION



Our Conviction: *“The method is teachable.”*

Building capacity

We offer training and facilitation through courses and tailored workshops informed by our proprietary method and frameworks, and delivered through the Critical ThinkAR[®] Academy. The Academy works to transfer and institutionalise our practice.

Our objective

In this way we work to realise the firm’s commitment to institutionalise and transfer structural analysis capacity, as well as critical thinking, political intelligence, leadership, coaching, strategy development and communication skills.

TRAINING STREAMS



The Critical ThinkAR® Academy produces and delivers courses and facilitation under four streams.

01 Political Intelligence and Analysis Stream - The analytical infrastructure for reading and navigating complex political environments. Courses and workshops built on the Critical ThinkAR® Method™ and The Refraction Framework™.

02 Transformation coaching Stream - A structural programme for expanding personal and institutional agency built on the Inpowerment Coaching Framework™.

03 Strategy Development Stream - A disciplined approach to building strategy from first principles using the Strategy Arc Framework™.

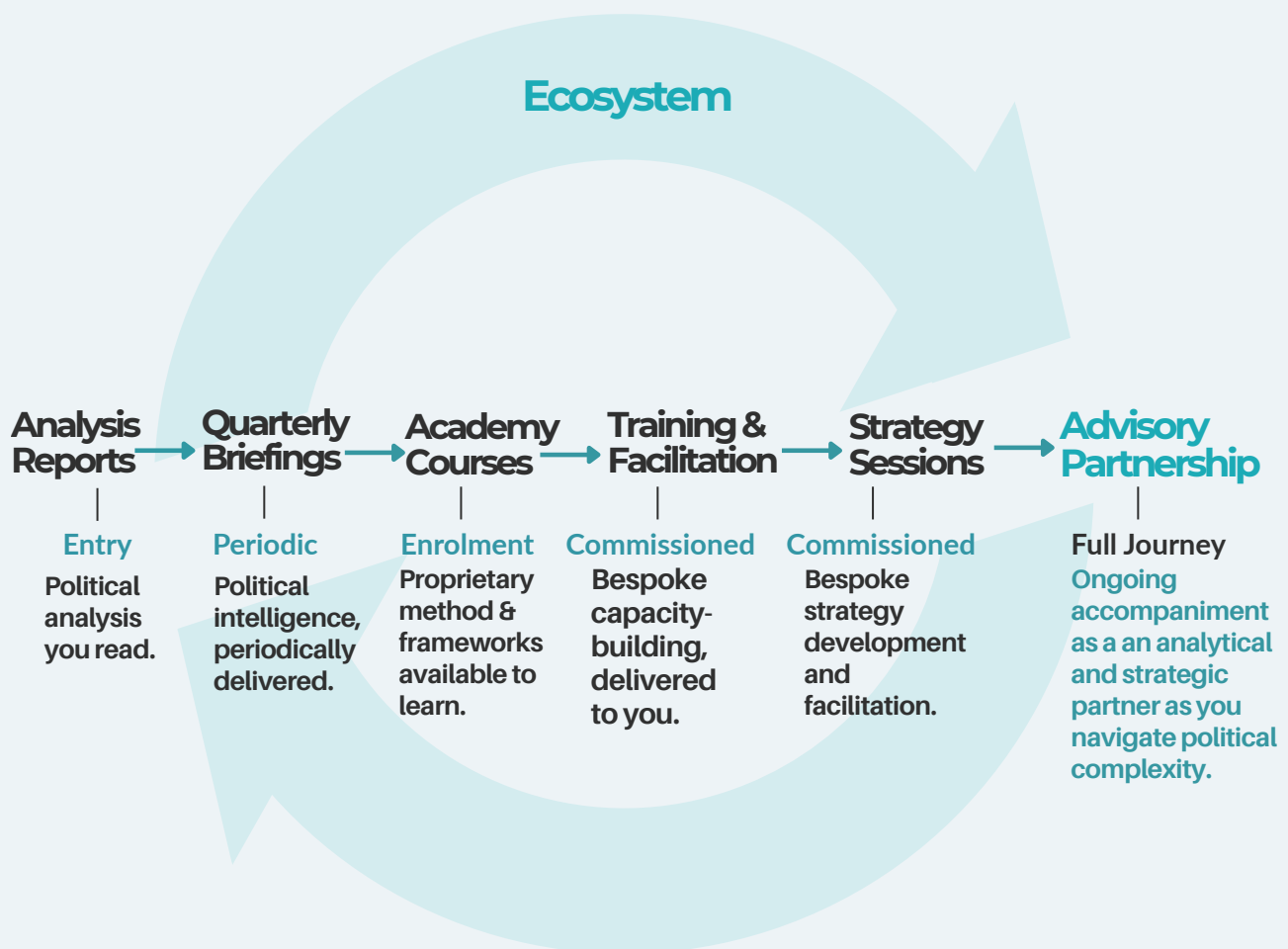
04 Communication Design Stream - A programme for building the capacity to communicate in ways that expand agency built on the Agency-Expanding Communication Framework™.

Partner & Engage

ENGAGEMENT MODEL

Our integrated product and service ecosystem ensures targeted, high-impact intervention and alignment at every stage of our clients' strategic journey.

We offer different engagement modes — from standalone analytical products to a full advisory partnership. Each mode is a complete engagement in its own right. Each can also be a step toward a deeper one.



WORK WITH US



"If you want to move with preparedness and build systemic resilience, this conversation is for you."



BOOK A DISCOVERY CALL



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