

Decision Rights Diagnostic Guide

Sequence, scoring, interpretation, and next steps

WHEN TO USE THIS PACK

This pack is designed for situations where authority failure is the underlying cause of recurring delivery problems. If any of the following patterns are present, this pack will help you name the problem, map the structure, and design a fix.

This pack can be completed by an individual leader working through it independently, by a project or program lead working with key contributors, or as a structured cross-functional session. The sequence and outputs are the same in each case. A group session typically produces richer diagnostic data and faster agreement on the Charter.

→ **Decisions keep escalating upward**

Your team consistently refers decisions to senior leaders that should be resolved at delivery level.

→ **Governance meets but doesn't decide**

Steering committees and review forums receive information and discuss options but rarely approve, reject, or formally resolve anything in session.

→ **Teams are unclear who owns what**

When a decision arises, people look around the room rather than to a named tier or defined owner.

→ **Leaders are pulled into routine decisions**

Senior leaders are spending significant time on decisions that don't require their authority. They know it.

→ **Authority has become informal or inconsistent**

Who makes decisions depends on who is in the room, how confident they are, or how long they've been in the organization, not on any defined structure.

→ **A design existed but has eroded**

There was a governance structure or authority map at the start. It no longer reflects how things actually work.

The Recommended Sequence

Work through all seven documents in order. Each one builds on the previous. The guide (this document) orients you. The Diagnostic tells you where to focus. The mapping documents structure what you find. The Charter consolidates it. The Markers tell you how close you are to the target state.

Step	Document	What it produces	Time
------	----------	------------------	------

0	Decision Rights Diagnostic Guide (this document)	Orientation: when to use the pack, how scoring works, how to interpret results, and what to	16 pages
1	Authority Opacity Diagnostic	A scored profile across six failure patterns. Tells you where the authority system is breaking	17 pages
2	Decision Category Map	A complete list of decisions your project or org must make, with current vs. correct owners	20 pages
3	Authority Tier Matrix	A structured authority design mapping each decision to the correct tier with defined thresholds	28 pages
4	Escalation Trigger Checklist	Named, specific conditions under which each decision category escalates; not judgment	15 pages
5	Decision Rights Charter	A single shareable document consolidating authority, escalation, and governance forum	7 pages
6	Healthy Decision Rights Markers	A final self-assessment against eight target-state conditions. Identifies remaining gaps.	1 page

How the Scoring Works

The Authority Opacity Diagnostic contains six failure pattern sections. Each section has five statements. Rate each statement 1 to 5.

- Step 1** Rate each of the five statements in a section on a 1–5 scale. 1 = Not at all true in this organization. 5 = Completely and consistently true.
- Step 2** Add your five ratings together. Divide by 5. This gives your Pattern Score: a single number from 1.0 to 5.0 for that failure pattern.
- Step 3** Repeat for all six patterns. Add the six Pattern Scores together. Your Total Diagnostic Score will fall between 6 and 30.

Example: You rate the five Authority Opacity statements as 4, 3, 5, 4, 3. Sum = 19. Divide by 5 = Pattern Score of 3.8. A pattern score above 3.5 signals an active, significant failure pattern.

What Your Total Score Means

Total Score	What it signals	Recommended approach
6 – 12 (Low)	Authority is reasonably clear. One or two specific Decision Category Maps will state the gaps. Consider refresh t	
13 – 20 (Moderate)	Multiple authority layers are unclear, informal, or inconsistent. The organization is experiencing Authority Tier	

**21 – 30
(High)**

Authority is structurally absent, contested, or significantly eroded. Decision phases are structurally intertwined. Ch

What a High Pattern Score Means

Any individual pattern score above 3.5 is a priority signal, regardless of your total. It means that specific failure mode is active and structurally significant. Here is what each high-scoring pattern indicates and the most direct response.

Authority Opacity (Pattern 01)

What it indicates: Roles are defined but decision rights are not. People know their title, not what they can actually decide.

Direct response: Start with the Decision Category Map. For every decision category, assign a named tier with explicit authority, not a role, a tier.

Threshold Blindness (Pattern 02)

What it indicates: Escalation is driven by urgency or individual judgment. There are no defined conditions for when a decision must move upward.

Direct response: The Escalation Trigger Checklist is your priority output. Define at minimum three concrete, verifiable conditions for escalation per category.

Governance Theatre (Pattern 03)

What it indicates: Governance forums exist and meet, but nothing is formally decided within them. Authority flows around them, not through them.

Direct response: Use the Authority Tier Matrix to explicitly assign decision authority to at least one category per forum. Review-only bodies should be labelled as such.

Tier Collapse (Pattern 04)

What it indicates: Executive-level leaders are routinely deciding things that should be resolved at working or management tier. The escalation path has effectively become one level.

Direct response: Rebuild the Authority Tier Matrix from the working tier up. Assign decisions down to the lowest competent tier. Define upward criteria explicitly.

Informal Authority (Pattern 05)

What it indicates: Real decision power sits with individuals whose authority is understood informally but not formally assigned. The org chart does not match the authority map.

Direct response: The Decision Rights Charter is your priority output. Formalize what is currently informal. Name tiers and positions, not people.

Structural Drift (Pattern 06)

What it indicates: An authority structure existed but has eroded over time. What was once explicit is now assumed, renegotiated, or ignored.

Direct response: Work through the full sequence. Use the Healthy Decision Rights Markers as a reset benchmark. Make the target state visible and agreed again.

Authority Opacity Diagnostic

Scored assessment across six governance failure patterns

INSTRUCTIONS

For each statement below, circle or mark a score from 1 to 5. Rate based on how accurately it describes your current project or organization, not how you wish things worked.

1 = Not at all true

2 = Rarely true

3 = Partially true

4 = Mostly true

5 = Completely true

After scoring all five statements in a section, add your ratings and divide by 5 to get your Pattern Score for that failure pattern. Add all six Pattern Scores for your Total Diagnostic Score (range: 6 – 30).

Pattern 01: Authority Opacity | Roles are present. Decision rights are not.

- 1 . People know their role but are unclear on what decisions they can make without asking. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
-
- 2 . When a new decision arises, there is visible hesitation about who should make it. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
-
- 3 . Decisions are attributed to 'the team' or 'leadership' rather than a named owner. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
-
- 4 . When asked who made a specific decision, the answer is vague or refers to a meeting. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
-
- 5 . Authority is assumed based on seniority or personality rather than formal assignment. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

SUM OF 5 RATINGS:

÷ 5 = PATTERN SCORE:

_____ / 5.0

Pattern 02: Threshold Blindness | Escalation happens by feel, not by rule.

- 1 . There are no written criteria for when a decision must escalate to the next tier. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
-
- 2 . Escalation is triggered by urgency or individual concern rather than defined conditions. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
-
- 3 . What gets escalated and what gets decided locally is inconsistent across similar situations. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

4 Senior leaders are regularly asked to make decisions that teams should own. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

5 Teams are uncertain whether a decision requires approval, notification, or neither. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

SUM OF 5 RATINGS:	_____	+ 5 = PATTERN SCORE:	_____ / 5.0
-------------------	-------	----------------------	-------------

Pattern 03: Governance Theatre | Governance exists. Decision authority does not.

1 Steering committees or governance forums meet regularly but rarely decide in session. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

2 Most decisions presented to governance are pre-decided; the forum is used for alignment. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

3 It is unclear which governance forum has authority over which category of decision. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

4 Governance attendance is broad, but actual authority within the room is absent or concentrated. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

5 Decisions are regularly deferred out of governance rather than resolved within it. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

SUM OF 5 RATINGS:	_____	+ 5 = PATTERN SCORE:	_____ / 5.0
-------------------	-------	----------------------	-------------

Pattern 04: Tier Collapse | Executives are deciding what teams should own.

1 Executives are routinely involved in decisions that do not require their authority. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

2 Teams escalate to avoid accountability rather than because the decision exceeds their mandate. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

3 Operational and strategic decisions are frequently resolved in the same forum. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

4 Senior leaders re-decide what was already decided at lower tiers. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

5 In practice, the escalation path is one level, regardless of what is formally designed. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

SUM OF 5 RATINGS:	_____	+ 5 = PATTERN SCORE:	_____ / 5.0
-------------------	-------	----------------------	-------------

Pattern 05: Informal Authority | Real authority is understood informally, not assigned formally.

- 1 . Certain individuals consistently shape decisions regardless of their formal tier. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

- 2 . Real decision authority is understood by insiders but not visible in any formal document. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

- 3 . New team members take months to understand who actually holds decision authority. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

- 4 . Decisions made formally are sometimes reversed or modified through informal influence. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

- 5 . The org chart does not reflect where real authority over key decisions sits. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

SUM OF 5 RATINGS:

÷ 5 = PATTERN SCORE:

_____ / 5.0

Pattern 06: Structural Drift | What was designed has eroded.

- 1 . Decision rights were defined at the start of this program but have eroded over time. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

- 2 . Authority that was once explicit is now assumed or informally renegotiated. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

- 3 . The team references past agreements rather than a current, active authority structure. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

- 4 . Governance assignments that made sense originally no longer match current needs. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

- 5 . There is no regular process for reviewing whether the decision architecture remains fit for purpose. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

SUM OF 5 RATINGS:

÷ 5 = PATTERN SCORE:

_____ / 5.0

TOTAL DIAGNOSTIC SCORE | Sum of all 6 Pattern Scores

_____ / 30.0

Return to Document 01 (Diagnostic Guide) for score interpretation, range benchmarks, and pattern-level next steps.