

# Unlocking Smarter Decisions: A Playbook for Leaders

This playbook provides practical guidance for leaders who want to create faster, fairer, and more focused teams through improved decision-making processes. Too often, organisations get bogged down when people don't know what they're allowed to decide, causing everything to be escalated, meetings to drag on, and energy to drain. This isn't a people problem—it's a system problem. Over the next sections, we'll explore how to rebuild your decision system, implement game-changing tools, create strategy that lives in decisions, and take concrete first steps towards transformation. Each approach is designed to distribute authority appropriately without creating chaos.

# Why Decision-Making Is Holding You Back

Most organisations struggle with decision paralysis, not because of poor talent, but because of systemic issues in how decisions flow. When teams lack clarity about decision authority, the consequences cascade throughout the organisation.

## Small Decisions Become Major Discussions

Routine matters that should take minutes consume hours of meeting time as teams search for consensus on issues that don't warrant it. This creates bottlenecks at every level.

## Teams Get Stuck in Analysis Paralysis

Without clear permission to act, teams gather excessive data and create multiple scenarios—not because it's needed, but because they're afraid to make the wrong call.

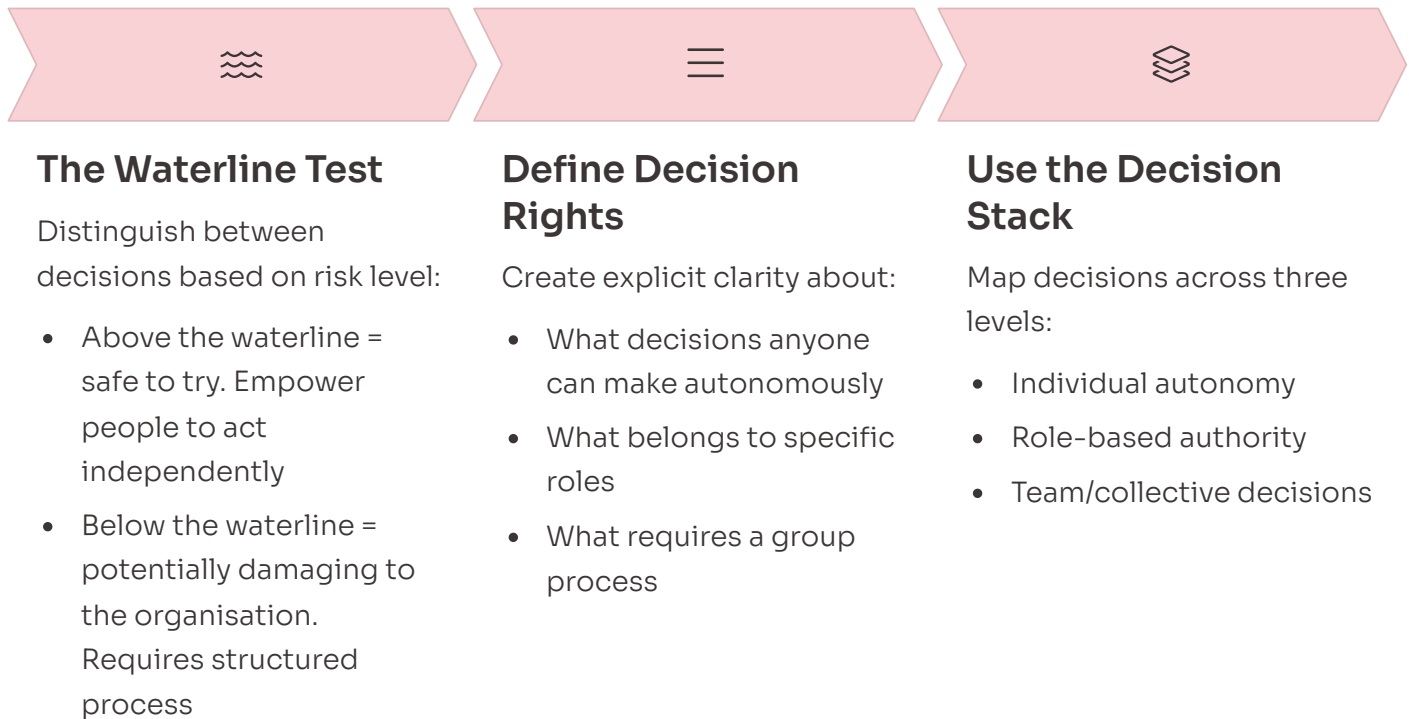
## Leaders Become Decision Bottlenecks

When every decision requires leadership approval, executives become overwhelmed with operational choices that drain their capacity for strategic thinking.

This cycle creates frustration at all levels. Team members feel disempowered, managers become overwhelmed, and executives wonder why nothing moves forward. The good news is that with the right frameworks, you can transform this pattern into a system of distributed, confident decision-making.

# Rebuild Your Decision System

High-performing teams don't just make faster decisions—they make clearer ones through a deliberate decision system. Three fundamental shifts can transform how your organisation approaches decisions:



Implementing these shifts doesn't require a management revolution. Start small by identifying one area where decision ambiguity exists, apply these principles, and watch how quickly team performance improves.

# Five Tools That Change the Game

These practical tools will transform how your team makes decisions, freeing up leadership capacity and accelerating execution:

1

## Decision Rights Mapping

A 30-minute team exercise to surface ambiguity and align on who decides what. Each team member maps what they believe they can decide, then the team discusses to align expectations and clarify boundaries.

2

## The Advice Process

For risky or visible decisions. The decision-maker owns the call but must seek advice from those with expertise or who are affected. This balances autonomy with wisdom—you don't need agreement, just learning and perspective.

3

## Integrative Decision Making (IDM)

For complex or stuck decisions. Uses a structured process to test a proposal, surface concerns, and move forward with consent. The bar is "safe to try"—not perfect or unanimous agreement.

4

## Project Prioritisation Heuristics

Clear, quick checks to stop taking on pointless work: Is it aligned with our intent? Is it important and urgent? Do we have capacity? Are people energised to do it? If not: backlog it, say no, move on.

5

## Even Over Statements

Simple prioritisation principles that create shared judgement, e.g., "Customer simplicity even over internal consistency." These statements help teams navigate trade-offs without escalation.

Each tool addresses a specific decision-making challenge. By implementing them systematically, you'll create a coherent decision ecosystem that empowers people while maintaining appropriate guardrails.

# Decision Rights Mapping in Action

## How It Works

Decision Rights Mapping makes implicit assumptions explicit by visualising who has what authority. This 30-minute exercise can eliminate months of friction:

- 1. Create a list of common decisions your team makes
- 2. Have each team member independently map who they believe makes each decision
- 3. Compare results to identify misalignments
- 4. Discuss and clarify the actual decision rights
- 5. Document the agreed framework

This simple process often reveals that team members have wildly different understandings of who can decide what, explaining why so many decisions get stuck in limbo.



✔ When a technology team at a major bank implemented Decision Rights Mapping, they discovered 78% of delayed projects were stuck due to confusion about who could approve small changes. Clarifying this saved 22 hours of meeting time per week.

Decision Type	Individual Decision	Consult Required	Group Decision
Budget changes < £5,000	Project Lead	-	-
Project timeline adjustments	-	Project Lead (consults team)	-
New feature additions	-	-	Full Team
Technical implementation	Engineer responsible	-	-

# Strategy that Lives in Decisions

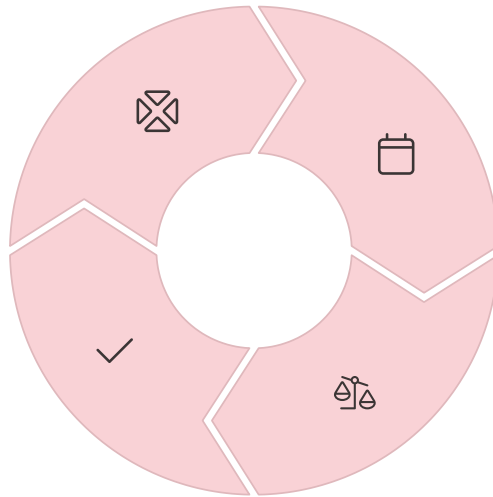
Forget the annual strategy deck that gathers dust. Effective strategy should live in everyday decisions. This requires a different approach to strategic planning and execution:

## Set Clear Intent

Define and communicate the essential purpose and direction that guides all decisions. This creates the foundation for distributed decision-making.

## Connect to Daily Actions

Identify live projects that matter and explicitly link them to strategic outcomes, ensuring alignment between strategic intent and execution.



## Quarterly Strategy Reviews

Use quarterly meetings to reflect on what's working, set focused strategic outcomes, and agree on prioritisation principles for the coming period.

## Establish Even Over Statements

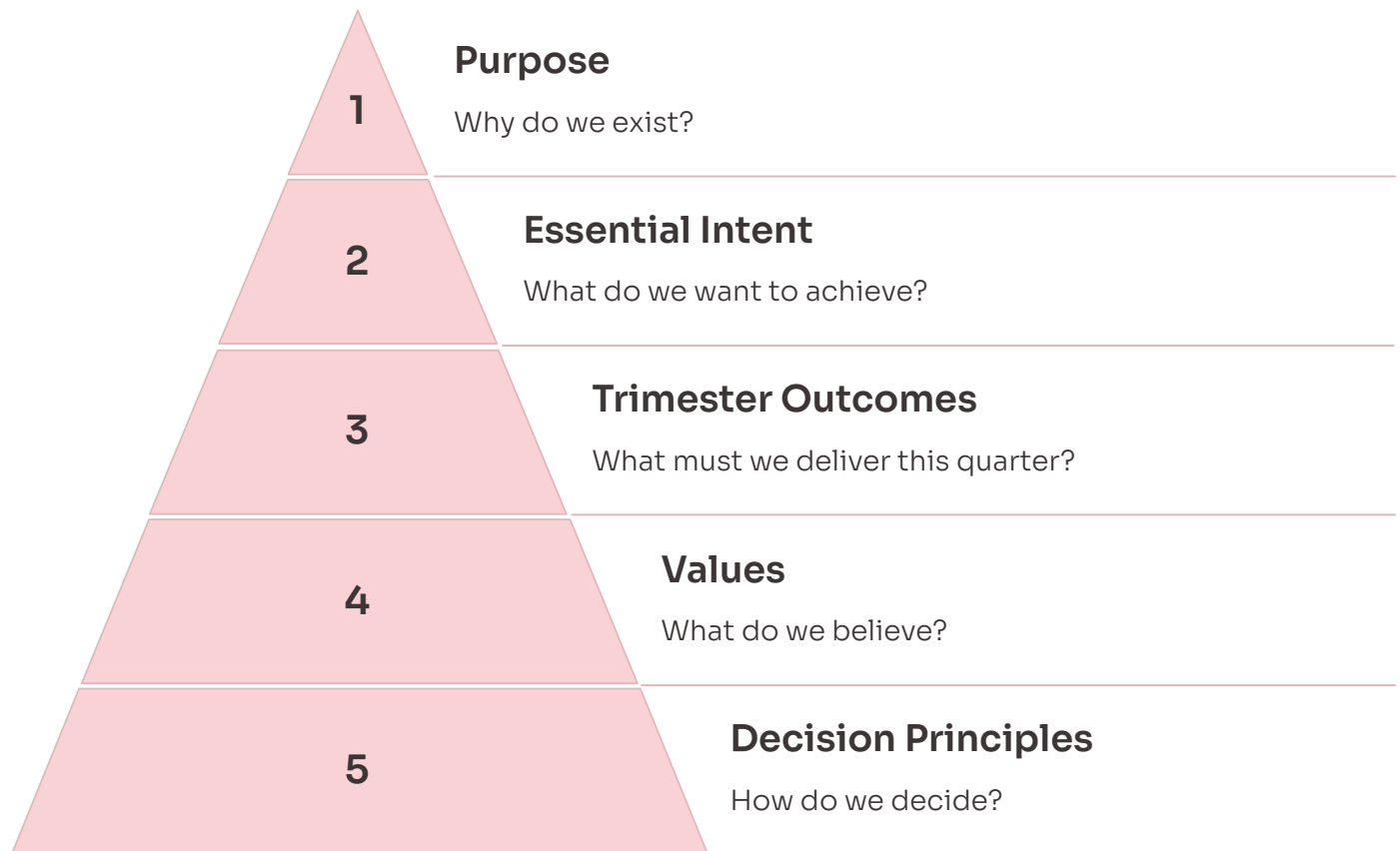
Create clear prioritisation principles (e.g., "Speed to market even over feature completeness") that help teams navigate trade-offs independently.

"Strategy becomes real not in PowerPoint decks but in the thousands of decisions made every day across your organisation. If those decisions don't reflect your strategy, you don't have one."

When strategy becomes embedded in your decision-making system, teams naturally align their choices with organisational direction without constant oversight. This creates both speed and coherence across the organisation.

# From Vision to Execution with Essential Intent

A good strategy answers five fundamental questions that create clarity from vision to daily execution. Getting these elements right creates a self-aligning organisation where teams make better decisions without constant guidance:



Essential Intent deserves special attention as it bridges purpose and action. It should be:

## Clear and Inspiring

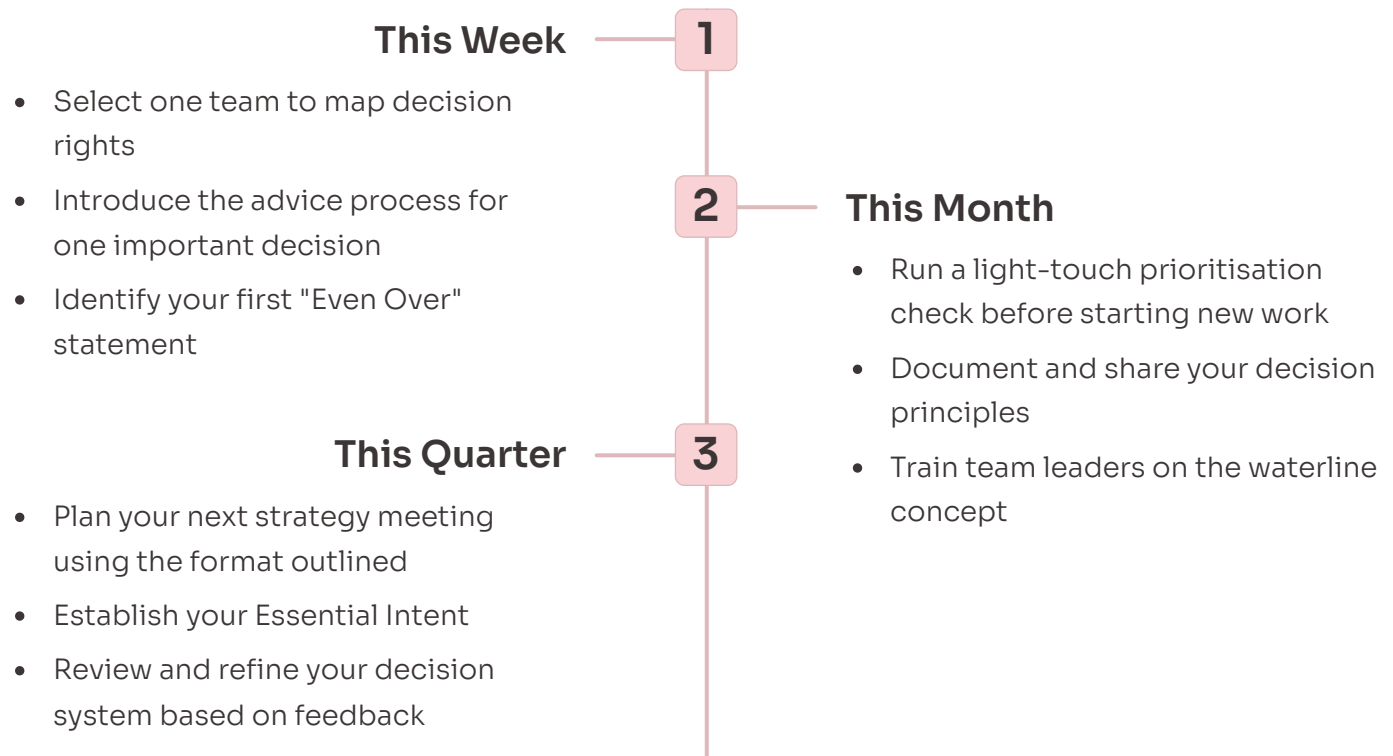
- Concrete enough to be actionable
- Inspirational enough to motivate
- Memorable enough to share
- Specific enough to measure

## Examples of Strong Essential Intent

- "Become the trusted advisor for small business finance in the North West by 2025"
- "Create the world's most intuitive project management experience"
- "Reduce customer onboarding time from 14 days to 24 hours"

# Next Steps: Make the First Move

You don't need to transform your entire organisation overnight. Sustainable change starts with focused actions that build momentum. Choose where to begin based on your most pressing decision challenges:



Remember: This playbook is your toolkit—not your rulebook. Adapt what works. Drop what doesn't. But don't stay stuck in decision paralysis.

The most important step is the first one. By taking action today, you begin the journey toward an organisation where decisions happen at the right level, with the right input, at the right speed—freeing leaders to focus on what truly matters.