

DECISION GATE

Application Guide

A single act. Four questions. One owner. The moment responsibility enters the system.

What is Decision Gate?

Decision Gate is a deliberate pause before action - a structured moment where a decision is made **consciously**, with clear **ownership** and a visible **record**.

It is not a process, methodology, or framework. It is a decision act - the moment you ask: should we actually do this? - and name the person responsible for the answer.

DECISION GATE IS NOT

- Backlog refinement or sprint planning
- A review or approval meeting
- Managerial consent (verbal or email)
- A compliance checklist
- Bureaucracy

DECISION GATE IS

- A conscious decision act before action
- Named ownership of an outcome
- A logged, dated, attributed record
- The question: "should we do this?"
- The pause that restores responsibility

If a decision has impact - it requires a gate.

When to Apply It

Trigger a Decision Gate when any of the following is true:

- The decision affects other people (users, customers, employees)
- The decision consumes significant time or money
- The decision is difficult or costly to reverse (Reversibility Index 3 or above)
- The decision scales beyond a single team
- The decision involves automation or AI
- The decision changes user, customer, or employee reality

The Four Gate Questions

Every full gate requires clear, specific answers to all four questions. Any unanswered question closes the gate.

Q1 Why?

- What specific problem are we solving?
- What is the evidence this is the right problem now?
- What happens if we do nothing?

Q2 For whom?

- Who benefits, and in what concrete way?
- Who may be negatively affected?
- Who has no voice in this decision?

Q3 What are the consequences?

- What is the worst realistic outcome?
- Reversibility Index: rate 1–5.
- What are the second-order effects?

Q4 Who takes responsibility?

- Name the owner explicitly - not a role.
- If no one accepts ownership, close the gate.
- The owner signs the Decision Log entry.

Ambiguity is not an acceptable answer - it is a signal to pause.

Reversibility Index

Rate every decision before the gate. Decisions rated 1–2 may use the Fast Track Gate. Rated 3–5 always require a full gate.

1	Fully reversible at negligible cost
2	Reversible at minor cost or effort
3	Reversible but requires significant effort or cost
4	Largely irreversible; partial reversal possible
5	Irreversible with significant long-term consequences

Gate Outcomes

Every gate produces exactly one outcome. There is no partial gate.

GO	PROCEED	All conditions met. Owner named and logged. Execution may begin.
CHANGE	ADJUST FIRST	Decision has merit but requires modification. Return to the gate.
PAUSE	WAIT FOR CLARITY	Insufficient information. Define what is missing. Set a return date.
KILL	STOP COMPLETELY	This decision should not be made. Resources released. Path closed.

Decision Flow

A full gate follows these steps in order:

1. Name the decision explicitly.
2. Assign the Reversibility Index (1–5).
3. Answer all four gate questions with specificity.
4. Assess alternatives, including doing nothing.
5. Assign the Decision Owner by name.
6. Produce exactly one gate outcome.
7. Record the decision in the Decision Log.

Decision Log

Every gate - including Fast Track - requires a Decision Log entry. A decision without a log entry is treated as a decision not made.

FIELD	REQUIRED	NOTES
Decision name	Yes	A clear, specific description of what was decided.
Date	Yes	The date the gate was passed.
Decision Owner	Yes	Full name - not a role or team.
Reversibility Index	Yes	1–5 with brief justification.
Gate outcome	Yes	GO / CHANGE / PAUSE / KILL
Rationale	Yes	Brief summary of why this outcome was reached.
Conditions	If applicable	Conditions attached to a GO or CHANGE outcome.

Fast Track Gate

Decisions with Reversibility Index 1–2 may use a simplified gate. A Decision Log entry is still required.

Two questions only:

1. Who is the named Decision Owner?
2. What is the worst realistic outcome if this decision fails?

Fast Track does not apply to decisions affecting more than one team or involving AI deployment.

AI Gate

Decision Gate is **mandatory** before deploying any AI system whose decisions carry significant consequences. Responsibility cannot be delegated to a model, a vendor, or a system.

Critical - gate cannot pass without these

CRITICAL	No named human decision owner A named individual must accept accountability for every significant outcome.
CRITICAL	Decision is non-reversible or non-compensable If the AI cannot be corrected, compensated, or appealed, this must be evaluated at the gate.
CRITICAL	Decision invisible to the person it affects If the person cannot see or understand the AI's decision, explicit ethical justification is required.

High - required before proceeding

HIGH	No human override path exists A human must be able to intervene, override, or stop the AI at every critical decision point.
HIGH	No adversarial or bias testing completed The system must be tested against edge cases, adversarial inputs, and demographic subgroups.
HIGH	Training data undocumented Data provenance, known biases, and exclusions must be documented and accessible.

Open Standard Principles

Decision Gate is not a product, a certification program, or a commercial offering.

FREE	Any individual, team, or organization may apply Decision Gate without restriction, payment, or permission. Forever.
OPEN	The standard cannot be commercialized, locked behind a paywall, or controlled by any single organization.
CITE	May be cited in publications, taught in courses, translated, and adapted - provided its meaning and intent are preserved.

CREDIT

Attribution is not required. But if Decision Gate improves how your organization decides, share where it came from.

“Decision Gate does not end decision-making. Decision Gate begins responsibility.”

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