

APPENDIX A

The Decision Lens Toolkit

Questions Worth Asking Before the Outcome Is Known

Good judgment begins before a decision is made—with how the problem is framed, which assumptions are challenged, whose perspective is considered, which alternatives are taken seriously, and what consequences are anticipated.

The tools in this appendix are not intended for every decision. A familiar, reversible decision may require only a few good questions. A consequential, uncertain, or difficult-to-reverse decision deserves more deliberate examination.

The objective is not more analysis. It is better judgment.

Use the smallest tool that helps you see what you might otherwise miss.

Tool	Use When
Tool A The Decision Frame	Make sure you are solving the right problem
Tool B The Assumption Test	Separate what you know from what you merely believe
Tool C The Perspective Test	See the decision from perspectives you may be missing
Tool D The Choice Test	Compare alternatives and make tradeoffs explicit
Tool E The Forward Test	Anticipate consequences and know when to reconsider

These tools can be used individually or in sequence.

For an especially important decision, use all five as a compact review:

Frame → Assumptions → Perspective → Choice → Forward

Tool A — The Decision Frame

Many poor decisions begin with a poorly framed problem.

Before evaluating solutions, clarify what is actually being decided and what outcome matters. A decision framed too narrowly can produce a good answer to the wrong question.

Ask:

- What decision are we actually trying to make?
- What outcome are we actually trying to achieve?
- What problem are we actually trying to solve?
- What problem is the customer actually trying to solve?
- What constraints are real, and which have we simply accepted?
- If we were starting today, what would we do differently?

The purpose is not to make the problem larger.

It is to make the real problem visible.

Tool B — The Assumption Test

Decisions are rarely based entirely on facts.

They also depend on assumptions about customers, competitors, costs, capabilities, technology, timing, behavior, and the future. Problems arise when those assumptions become so familiar that they are treated as facts.

Ask:

- What do we know, what do we believe, and what do we simply not know?
- Which accepted facts are actually assumptions?
- What evidence no longer fits our explanation?
- Which assumption can we least afford to be wrong about?
- What are people reluctant to tell us?
- What would have to be true for the opposite conclusion to be correct?
- What would change our minds?

A useful assumption does not have to be certain.

It has to be visible enough to question.

Tool C — The Perspective Test

A decision can be internally logical and still be incomplete.

People see different parts of the system. Customers experience consequences that designers may not see. Frontline employees encounter friction that executives may never experience. Suppliers, partners, and other functions may understand constraints invisible from inside the room.

Ask:

- Whose perspective is missing from this discussion?
- Who is closest to the information needed to make this decision?
- What important problem are we avoiding or normalizing?
- What are we optimizing—and what friction are we creating by doing so?
- Which tradeoff are we underestimating?
- Who will experience the friction this decision creates?

Broadening perspective does not mean giving everyone equal Authority over every decision.

It means making sure the decision is informed by the perspectives that matter before judgment is exercised.

Tool D — The Choice Test

A decision is not much of a decision if only one alternative has been seriously considered.

Once a preferred answer begins to emerge, people naturally become better at explaining why it should work. The Choice Test interrupts that tendency by forcing alternatives, tradeoffs, and reversibility into view.

Ask:

- What alternatives have we seriously considered?
- Are we comparing genuine alternatives or merely defending a preferred answer?
- What would happen if we did nothing?
- What happened when we or others faced something similar, and what is different this time?
- How difficult will this decision be to reverse?
- Are we solving today's problem at tomorrow's expense?

Not every decision deserves extensive comparison.

Reversible decisions can often be made quickly and corrected through Feedback. Difficult-to-reverse decisions deserve greater scrutiny before commitment.

The objective is not to eliminate uncertainty. It is to choose with a clearer understanding of the alternatives and tradeoffs being accepted.

Tool E — The Forward Test

A decision does not end when the choice is made.

Every decision creates consequences. Some are intended. Others emerge as the decision interacts with customers, employees, incentives, processes, competitors, and changing conditions. Before committing, look forward.

Ask:

- What else happens if we are right?
- If this decision succeeds exactly as intended, what new friction will it create?
- Which decision seems ordinary today only because its consequences have not yet unfolded?
- What should we expect to happen if our reasoning is correct?
- What would tell us that it is time to reconsider?

Before the outcome is known, state what you expect and what evidence would cause you to reconsider. Doing so makes it easier to distinguish learning from hindsight.

The Forward Test preserves the reasoning that existed before the result was known.

A Compact Decision Review

For decisions that deserve deliberate attention but not an extensive process, five questions may be enough:

1. What decision are we actually trying to make?
2. Which assumption can we least afford to be wrong about?
3. Whose perspective is missing?
4. What alternatives have we seriously considered?
5. What would tell us that it is time to reconsider?

These five questions will not eliminate uncertainty or prevent mistakes. No toolkit can.

Their purpose is to reveal where more thought is needed and make the reasoning visible before outcomes make everything appear obvious.

From Judgment to Architecture

Sometimes better questions improve the decision. Sometimes they reveal a deeper problem.

The people closest to the information may lack Authority. Decision-makers may be insulated from consequences. Incentives may encourage the wrong behavior. Feedback may arrive too slowly to support Adaptation.

These are not merely problems of individual judgment. They are problems of Decision Architecture.

If the difficulty lies not in the decision itself but in how Direction, Information, Authority, Incentives, Feedback, or Adaptation are arranged around it, use the Decision Architecture Toolkit in Book Three.

Final Thought

The quality of judgment cannot be measured only by what happened afterward. Outcomes contain luck, timing, uncertainty, and forces no decision-maker could fully control.

A better test is the quality of the reasoning before the outcome was known.

Better questions do not guarantee better outcomes. They make better judgment more likely.

