

APPENDIX A

The Decision Architecture Toolkit

Making the Architecture Visible

The concepts in this book are intended to be used.

Decision Architecture becomes useful when it helps people see why an important decision is difficult, where Information is being lost, why Authority and accountability have become separated, where friction has accumulated, or why the same problems keep recurring.

The tools that follow make the architecture visible from different perspectives. They can be used individually or together.

Use the smallest tool that reveals the problem. The objective is insight, not documentation.

Tool	Use When
Tool A Decision Architecture Map	Several elements surrounding one decision appear misaligned
Tool B Decision Flow Map	A decision is unnecessarily slow or complicated
Tool C The Ownership Test	Knowledge, Authority, accountability, or consequences are misaligned
Tool D Information Flow Map	Important Information is missing, delayed, filtered, or distorted
Tool E Decision Record	An important decision deserves later review
Tool F Organizational Debt Register	Workarounds or temporary solutions keep accumulating
Tool G Architecture Review	The organization’s broader architecture may no longer fit the work

These are starting points, not boundaries. One tool may expose a problem that another tool is better suited to examine.

Tool A — Decision Architecture Map

The Decision Architecture Map examines the architecture surrounding a specific important decision or recurring class of decisions.

Work through the six elements:

Element	Questions to Ask
Direction	What are we trying to accomplish? What matters most? What tradeoffs have been established?
Information	What must be known? Where does the Information originate? Is it timely, relevant, and reliable?
Authority	Who can decide and act? Who must be consulted, verify, approve, or merely be informed?
Incentives	What behavior does the organization actually reward, tolerate, discourage, or make easier?
Feedback	How will we know what happened? What results will be compared with expectations, and who will see them?
Adaptation	What happens when reality differs from expectations? Who can change the decision, process, or architecture?

Do not examine the elements only in isolation. Examine how they interact.

Good Information has limited value without Authority to act. Authority has limited value when Incentives discourage its use. Feedback has limited value when nobody responds to what it reveals.

Consider Risk

- What happens if the decision is wrong?
- How reversible is it?
- Does the level of Information, Authority, review, and control fit the Risk?

Risk is not an element. It influences how the six elements should be configured.

Then Ask

- Where is Information separated from Authority?
- Where is accountability separated from meaningful influence?
- Where do Incentives conflict with Direction?
- Where does Feedback fail to produce Adaptation?

Not every mismatch requires redesign. Some friction protects against meaningful Risk. Some separation of Authority is deliberate. Some redundancy creates resilience.

The objective is not to score six independent elements. It is to determine whether they work together as a system.

Tool B — Decision Flow Map

The Decision Flow Map shows how an important decision actually moves through the organization.

Organizational charts show reporting relationships. Policies describe formal responsibilities. Neither necessarily reveals how decisions actually happen.

Map what actually happens, not merely what policy says should happen.

Decision: _____

For each meaningful step, record what happens and where the decision waits.

Element	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	
Person / Function				
What Happens				
Information / Authority				Total
Work Time				
Waiting Time				

Continue for additional steps as needed, then total work time and waiting time.

A decision that takes five days may require only thirty minutes of actual work. The remainder may be architectural waiting—waiting for Information, Authority, availability, coordination, or approval.

Look for unnecessary approvals, duplicate reviews, unclear ownership, recreated Information, and decisions that escalate farther than necessary.

The goal is to distinguish necessary deliberation from unnecessary waiting.

Tool C — The Ownership Test

The Ownership Test examines whether knowledge, Authority, action, accountability, and consequences are appropriately aligned.

Decision: _____

1. **Who knows the most about the situation?**

2. **Who has Authority to decide?**

3. **Who executes the decision?**

4. **Who must approve it?**

5. **Who is accountable for the result?**

6. **Who experiences the consequences?**

Then ask:

- Does the person with the best Information have sufficient Authority?
- Does the person accountable for the result have meaningful influence?
- Does someone have veto power simply because they need visibility?
- Are consultation, verification, approval, and information being confused?

Not everyone who needs visibility needs veto power. The objective is appropriate decision rights, not universal participation.

Tool D — Information Flow Map

The Information Flow Map follows important Information from its source to the decision that depends upon it.

Unlike the Decision Flow Map, which follows the decision, this tool follows the Information on which the decision depends.

Information: _____

Decision supported: _____

Element	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Source / Recipient			
What Happens			
Delay			
Potential Distortion			

Then ask:

- Where is Information delayed, filtered, or distorted?
- What context is lost along the way?
- Does useful Information reach the decision-maker in time to matter?

A dashboard can be completely accurate and still produce a poor decision if the context required to interpret it is missing.

The objective is useful Information arriving where and when it matters.

Tool E — Decision Record

The Decision Record preserves enough of the reasoning surrounding an important decision to allow the organization to learn from it later.

Use it selectively. Routine decisions do not require a record.

Decision: _____

Date: _____

Decision Owner: _____

1. What are we trying to accomplish?

2. What Information and assumptions materially shaped the decision?

3. What alternatives were seriously considered?

4. Why was this option selected?

5. What do we expect to happen?

6. What would cause us to reconsider?

Later Review:

1. What actually happened?

2. What differed from expectations?

3. What did we learn?

4. What should change?

A decision should be evaluated based on the Information and reasoning available when it was made, not simply by the outcome that became visible later.

The Decision Record preserves enough context to learn from the decision rather than inheriting only its outcome.

Tool F — Organizational Debt Register

Organizational debt consists of temporary solutions, inherited structures, and accumulated obligations that continue consuming capacity after their original justification has weakened or disappeared.

Debt is not inherently bad. A workaround may be exactly right during a crisis.

The problem is forgetting that the solution was temporary.

Element	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
Type			
Underlying Problem			
Current Workaround			
Cost / Friction			
Risk			
Owner			
Retirement Plan			

Common forms of organizational debt include:

Element	Examples
Process	Unnecessary steps, duplicate work, inherited processes
Information	Spreadsheets, disconnected reports, missing visibility
Technology	Obsolete systems or manual workarounds
Control	Approvals or policies whose original Risk has changed
Capability	Skills or capabilities allowed to deteriorate
Decision	Unresolved decisions or unclear ownership

For each item, ask:

- Why does this still exist?
- What does maintaining it cost?
- What Risk would removing it create?
- Who owns its retirement?

Temporary solutions become permanent architecture when nobody remembers to remove them.

Tool G — Architecture Review

The Architecture Review is the broadest tool in the toolkit. The Decision Architecture Map zooms in on one decision or recurring class of decisions. The Architecture Review zooms out to examine whether the organization’s broader architecture still fits the work.

Use it periodically or after significant changes in strategy, technology, organizational structure, or operating conditions.

Element	Ask
Direction	Are priorities still appropriate and aligned? What old priorities have survived their circumstances?
Information	Does useful Information reach the right people in time? Where is it trapped, filtered, or duplicated?
Authority	Are decisions made near relevant Information? Does accountability align with Authority?
Incentives	What behavior does the organization actually reward or unintentionally encourage?
Feedback	Are expectations compared with outcomes, and does that comparison produce learning?
Adaptation	Does learning actually change processes, controls, decision rights, or capabilities?

Look Beyond the Six Elements for Problems That Cut Across Them:

Element	Ask
Organizational Debt	What temporary solutions have become permanent?
Complexity	What consumes capacity without creating sufficient value?
Obsolete Controls	Which controls address Risks that have changed or disappeared?
Decision Bottlenecks	Where do decisions wait unnecessarily?
Information Distortion	Where does reality change as Information moves through the organization?
Normalized friction	What unnecessary work has become accepted as normal?
Dependence on heroics	Where does the organization repeatedly depend on particular people to compensate for weaknesses in the architecture?

Ask the People Doing the Work

- What do you do regularly that should not be necessary?
- Where do you maintain a workaround or separate Information?
- Where do you routinely wait for someone?
- What would you change if you could?

Do not conduct the Architecture Review entirely from a conference room.

The people compensating for the architecture are frequently the people who understand its weaknesses best.

Final Thought

Decision Architecture is not static. As strategy, technology, people, and operating conditions change, architecture that once worked can become a source of friction.

The purpose of these tools is not to complete a toolkit. It is to see what would otherwise remain hidden.

You cannot deliberately improve an architecture you cannot see.

If the architecture appears sound but important work still depends disproportionately on a particular leader, use the Leadership Leverage Toolkit in Book Four.

DECISION ARCHITECTURE MAP

THE SIX ELEMENTS THAT SHAPE EVERY DECISION

