

FREE RESOURCE

The Decision-Rights Map

Twenty decisions that recur in every organisation, and the four columns that end the argument about who makes them.

Drawn from X2 · The Product-Engineering Operating Contract

Almost every recurring argument between product, engineering and data is the same argument wearing different clothes: two people both believe they own a decision, and neither has ever seen it written down.

This is a template. The rows are pre-filled because they are the same everywhere; the columns are empty because the answers are not.

The four columns

Decides

One name. Not a team, not a committee, not “we agree together”. If two names go in this column you have found a real problem and you should stop and resolve it.

Consulted

Must be asked before the decision, and their input must be able to change it. This is the expensive column — everyone you list here slows the decision down, which is sometimes worth it and often not.

Informed

Told after, in time to react. The difference between consulted and informed is where most maps quietly fail, because it is the difference people actually care about.

Can veto

Usually empty, and should be. A veto that is used more than twice a year is a decision right in the wrong column.

The twenty decisions

DECISION	DECIDES	CONSULTED	INFORMED	CAN VETO
PRODUCT				
What goes into the roadmap this quarter				
What comes out when something slips				
The definition of “done” for a feature				

DECISION	DECIDES	CONSULTED	INFORMED	CAN VETO
Whether to ship with a known bug				
Pricing and packaging changes				
Which commitments may be made to a customer				
ENGINEERING				
The architecture of a new service or module				
When technical debt gets paid down				
Adopting a new third-party dependency or vendor				
Release timing and process				
What “production ready” means				
On-call scope and severity definitions				
DATA				
The definition of a company metric				
What data is retained, and for how long				
The priority order of the data request queue				
Whether a number is fit to publish externally				
Who has access to customer-level data				
SHARED, AND NEWEST				
Whether a feature should use AI at all				
What counts as acceptable quality for a generated output				
What may be sent to a third-party model				

How to run the session

Ninety minutes, all three functions, one room

Not a survey, and not something one person drafts and circulates. The value is in the disagreement, and the disagreement only happens live.

Fill in the easy rows fast

Perhaps fourteen of the twenty are uncontroversial and take twenty minutes. Do them first so the room has momentum and can see the shape of the thing.

Spend the remaining time on the contested rows

The rows where two people both reach for the pen are the entire reason you are doing this. Resist the urge to defer them — a deferred row will be contested again next quarter.

Everyone signs it, and it goes somewhere visible

A map nobody signed is a document. A map three function heads signed is an agreement. Put it where a new joiner will find it in their first week.

Review it every six months, or after any reorg

Decision rights drift silently. The review takes twenty minutes when the map already exists.

The three rows contested in almost every organisation

“What comes out when something slips”

Everyone agrees product owns what goes in. Almost nobody has agreed who owns what comes out — which is why the answer is usually decided by whoever is most tired at the time.

“The definition of a company metric”

Product believes it owns this because it owns the outcome. Data believes it owns this because it owns the number. Both are half right, and the unresolved half is why your two dashboards disagree.

“What counts as acceptable quality for a generated output”

The newest row on the page and the least assigned anywhere. Nobody owns it in most companies, which means in practice it is owned by whoever shipped last.

IF YOU ONLY FILL IN ONE COLUMN

Fill in “Decides”. A map with one populated column and nineteen blanks is still worth more than the conversation you are currently having every quarter.

The Bridge is a training academy for product, engineering and data leaders — workshops, programmes, mentoring and advisory on the decisions the three functions have to make together. Taught live by a practising CTO. Everything here is drawn from the catalogue and published openly. thebridge.academy