

Appendix C

The One-Page DECODE Cheat Sheet

DECODE / Decision Discipline Cheat Sheet

Purpose

DECODE is a structured discipline for deciding when commitment is justified under uncertainty.

It is not a solution method and not an execution framework.

Use DECODE when:

- Uncertainty is real
- The cost of being wrong is high
- Reversal will be difficult

Do not use DECODE for low-risk, easily reversible decisions, mandatory decisions with no discretion, routine decisions governed by a proven method, immediate emergency response, or work that simply operates within an already justified structure.

D Define the Improvement Intent

Why are we even considering change?

Clarify the value or capability that matters enough to disturb the current system.

Focus on:

- Relevance, not problems
- Value, not metrics
- Direction, not action

Do not include:

- Solutions
- Root causes
- Targets or KPIs

A good intent creates space for exploration and feels slightly uncomfortable.

E Explore the System as It Exists

What does the system actually look like right now?

Describe before you explain.

Capture:

- Elements that make up the system
- Interfaces where elements interact
- Context that shapes behavior

Separate:

- Observation from interpretation

If you start explaining why something happens, stop and return to description.

C Clarify Embedded Decisions

Which past decisions are shaping what we see?

Make visible:

- Intentional decisions
- Inherited decisions
- True constraints
- Historical accidents

Distinguish:

- Constraints from assumptions

This step prevents false necessity and restores choice.

O Outline Change Boundaries

Where does change become unsafe or invalid?

Define limits early:

- Physical boundaries
- Regulatory boundaries
- Organizational boundaries

Boundaries are not obstacles.

They eliminate bad options before commitment occurs.

Late boundaries create fragile decisions.

D Decide the Improvement Path

Given what we now understand, what do we commit to?

Only three valid outcomes exist:

- Improve within existing boundaries
- Redesign beyond existing boundaries
- Preserve and do not change

These are decision paths, not detailed solutions.

They define the level and boundary of commitment.

Detailed solution design occurs after closure.

A decision is a commitment, not a plan.

If the decision cannot be stated clearly in two sentences, it is not ready.

E Establish Closure

How do we protect this decision from being rewritten later?

Capture:

- Decision statement
- Supporting evidence and reasoning
- Key assumptions
- Boundaries and scope
- Accepted trade-offs
- Revisit triggers
- Review date or review condition

Closure preserves reasoning, not outcomes.

Closed decisions become organizational assets.

Core Rules to Remember

Understanding must come before commitment.

Description must come before explanation.

Boundaries must come before options.

Decisions must be explicit and closed.

DECODE stops only after a decision has been made and closure has been established.

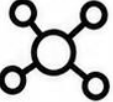
Execution begins afterward.

When this logic becomes habitual and formal DECODE is used selectively, decision quality has matured.

APPENDIX C

ONE-PAGE DECODE CHEAT SHEET

A quick reference for applying the method in practice

UNDERSTANDING		COMMITMENT AND CLOSURE	
1 D 	DEFINE THE IMPROVEMENT INTENT Core question: Why is change being considered? Output: Clarified intent and relevance • value • capability • relevance • avoid problem / solution language	5 D 	DECIDE THE IMPROVEMENT PATH Core question: Improve, Redesign, or Preserve? Output: Explicit decision outcome IMPROVE  REDESIGN  PRESERVE  • A pilot is not a fourth outcome
2 E 	EXPLORE THE SYSTEM AS IT EXISTS Core question: What is present now? Output: Shared system description • elements • interfaces • context • describe before explaining		
3 C 	CLARIFY EMBEDDED DECISIONS Core question: What past choices shape the system? Output: Visible inherited decisions, assumptions, and constraints • history • prior commitments • inherited choices • surface false necessity		
4 O 	OUTLINE CHANGE BOUNDARIES Core question: Where does legitimate change end? Output: Defined decision space and clear boundaries • hard boundaries • soft boundaries • where redesign is required • decision freedom ends here	6 E 	ESTABLISH CLOSURE Core question: What must remain legible after the decision? Output: Closed decision record DECISION EVIDENCE ASSUMPTIONS BOUNDARIES TRADE-OFFS REVISIT TRIGGERS REVIEW DATE OR REVIEW CONDITION • Ownership may be recorded separately as needed. • No execution before closure.
A. USE DECODE WHEN ① Uncertainty is real 📊 Impact is significant 🔒 Reversal is difficult or costly ⚖️ Mixed or moderate conditions: use judgment		B. STOP SIGNALS ✗ Solutions appear early ✗ "Because" enters observation ✗ Boundaries remain unnamed ✗ The decision cannot be stated clearly ✗ A pilot is proposed before the path is chosen	
C. CORE RULES ① Understanding before commitment ② Description before explanation ③ Closure before execution ④ Use DECODE selectively			
NO COMMITMENT BEFORE UNDERSTANDING. NO EXECUTION BEFORE CLOSURE.			