

LEAD THE WORK · DELIVERY & RISK

Risk Visibility & Response Toolkit

Risk is why we lead change — to prepare for what might happen and respond when it does. Risk is also emotional. How we lead through defining and responding to it matters.

- 1 What might happen?
- 2 What would we do about it?
- 3 How would we know?
- 4 What should we do now?

45 minutes

Team or solo use

Delivery & Risk

Light on technique. Heavy on value. Use it now, adapt it forward.

What you leave with

A named decision owner. A next step that reduces uncertainty. Risk triggers defined before you need them. Governance that holds without slowing the work.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Part I — Stabilization Protocol

Twenty minutes to name what is true, what is unknown, and one next step. Confirm who decides, who acts, when you check again.

Part II — Risk Trigger Framework

Define what you would observe, what you would do, and who is watching. Triggers decided before pressure arrives are the ones that get used.

Part III — Governance Under Pressure

Record decisions. Name unknowns. Define escalation before you need it. Protect legitimacy when urgency pulls at criteria.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Decision ownership is explicit.

Unknowns are named, not avoided.

Updates follow a cadence — not urgency alone.

Risk triggers exist before escalation is needed.

Work narrows before it expands.

USE IT WHEN

Pressure is rising and decisions are requested faster than clarity forms. Roles, criteria, or next steps are implied rather than named.

Operational Stability
Systems hold under load

Faster Recovery
Signal to action — no lag

Reduced Rework
Right work, right sequence

When you cannot name the decision owner and the next visible step, you are not yet ready to accelerate. That is not a failure — it is your most important signal.

PART I

20-Minute Stabilization Protocol

Before any response expands, establish the baseline. What is true? What is unknown? What is the one next step that reduces uncertainty most? These questions are not procedural — they are how a leader reclaims signal from noise.

1	Name what is true State only what is confirmed. One sentence is enough.
2	Name what is unknown List each uncertainty. Naming it is already a stabilizing act.
3	Choose one next step The single action that reduces uncertainty most. Specific, owned, time-bound.
4	Confirm ownership Who decides. Who executes. Who is consulted. Who is informed.
5	Set the cadence When you will check again, and what you will be looking for.

WORKSHEET

WHAT IS TRUE RIGHT NOW?*Confirmed facts only.*

WHAT IS UNKNOWN AND NEEDS RESOLUTION?*Name each uncertainty.*

THE ONE NEXT STEP THAT REDUCES UNCERTAINTY MOST:*Specific. Owned. By when.*

OWNERSHIP

ROLE	NAME / TEAM	IN THIS MOMENT
Decision Owner		<i>Makes the call. Names the criteria.</i>
Execution Owner		<i>Does the work. Surfaces blockers.</i>
Consulted		<i>Input before decision.</i>
Informed		<i>Update after decision.</i>

PART II

Risk Trigger Framework

A risk trigger is a decision made before the pressure arrives. It removes the need to deliberate in the moment — which is when deliberation is hardest.

A TRIGGER MUST BE:

Observable Seen or measured — not inferred.	Binary Fired or hasn't. No grey zone.	Time-bound Has a deadline. Ambiguity expires.	Owned One person watches and reports.
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RISK TRIGGER REGISTER

RISK	OBSERVABLE TRIGGER	PRE-COMMITTED ACTION	OWNER
Decision-maker unavailable	No confirmation after two attempts within 24 hours	Escalate to named sponsor. Pause dependent work. Communicate the delay.	PM / Lead
Scope expands mid-execution	Any request adding deliverables not in current register	Log it. Hold it. Bring to decision owner with impact picture within 48 hours.	Decision Owner

PROMPTS WORTH SITTING WITH

What would make the next 24 hours measurably steadier?

A question about signal, not solutions.

What decision, if made explicit now, would remove the most noise?

Implicit decisions generate the most friction.

What tradeoff are we making without naming it?

Unnamed tradeoffs surface later as conflict.

What do we need to notice early to act before escalation?

This is the trigger design question.

PART III

Governance Under Pressure

Governance is not bureaucracy. It is the set of practices that protect transparency when urgency is pulling at criteria. The moment that feels too pressured for process is precisely the moment that needs it most.

WATCH FOR

Criteria shifting without notice

Decisions made but not recorded

Escalation paths unclear until needed

Updates that inform some and not others

Fear compressing process into speed

RESPOND BY

Recording the decision and the criteria that drove it

Publishing what is known and what is not — both matter

Defining escalation thresholds before they are needed

Revisiting criteria deliberately, not reactively

Naming the value at stake before deciding

ESCALATION LADDER

LEVEL	CONDITION	ACTION	WHO RESOLVES
Level 1	Blocked more than 24 hours	Clarify and re-sequence. Name the next visible step.	Decision Owner
Level 2	Blocked more than 72 hours	Convene decision owner. Review criteria and constraints.	Decision Owner + Sponsor
Level 3	Outcome at risk	Sponsor resolves the tradeoff. Criteria revisited deliberately.	Sponsor

A TRANSPARENCY SCRIPT

Use this language when the team needs grounding, not momentum.

"Here is what we know."

State it plainly.

"Here is what we do not know."

Name each uncertainty. Owning it is steadying.

"Here are the criteria we are using."

Make them visible. Invite challenge.

"Here is when and how we revisit."

Ambiguity with a deadline is manageable.

DECISION RECORD

DECISION STATEMENT:

What was decided. One clear sentence.

CRITERIA USED:

What made this right given what you knew.

TRADEOFFS ACKNOWLEDGED:

What you accepted as a consequence.

REVISIT TRIGGER:

The condition under which you reopen this.

REFLECTION

After the Work

Use these prompts after the situation has stabilized — not to assign blame, but to understand what the work revealed and what to carry forward.

WHAT EARLY SIGNAL DID WE MISS OR MINIMIZE?

What was visible that we didn't act on — and why.

WHAT GOVERNANCE GAP DID THIS EXPOSE?

Missing ownership, unclear criteria, or an escalation path that didn't exist.

WHAT ONE STRUCTURAL CHANGE WOULD REDUCE RECURRENCE?

A process, a trigger, a role, or a rhythm.

Disruption is a teacher. The systems that respond well today were built before the pressure arrived.

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Related Resources

Alignment & Strategy Reset Toolkit

Decision & Accountability Toolkit

Disruption Stabilization Checklist

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