ASSURAS

ASSURAS PERSPECTIVE / EXECUTIVE GUIDE

From ambition *to execution*

An executive guide to decisions, capacity and ownership

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The impossible. Our starting point.

THE EXECUTIVE VIEW

Approval is a beginning.

An executive team approves an ambition. A delivery team inherits a deadline. Between those moments, several decisions may remain unsettled: what the organization will change, which work takes precedence, who can resolve a conflict and what evidence will justify the next commitment.

This guide addresses that gap. Our recommendation is to treat approval as a set of linked commitments that leaders and delivery teams can examine together. A compelling objective is the beginning. Execution becomes more credible when the people expected to deliver it can point to a consistent choice, a workable sequence and permission to act.

Use the guide for one consequential initiative before applying it across a portfolio. Bring the executive sponsor, the operating owner, the people controlling scarce resources and someone close to the affected work. Complete the decision record together. Where answers conflict, record the unresolved decision and give it an owner; do not smooth away the disagreement to finish the document.

The five questions below are an Assuras discussion framework. They are not a maturity score, a prediction of success or a claim that every initiative needs the same governance. The aim is a shared basis for action, review and revision.

FOR THE NEXT EXECUTIVE DISCUSSION

01 Which commitment currently depends on an executive decision that nobody has made explicit?

02 Where are two sponsors relying on the same capacity at the same time?

03 Which owner is accountable for a result but cannot resolve its most common obstacle?

04 What evidence would lead us to change direction, and are we collecting it?

05 After today's discussion, what will the people doing the work be able to do differently?

THE ASSURAS DISCUSSION FRAMEWORK

Five questions.
One coherent commitment.

01

CHOICE

What have we committed to, and what have we declined?

A bounded decision and its alternatives.

02

WORK

What must change for the intended result to occur?

An observable outcome and the work connecting it to the decision.

03

CAPACITY

Which people and resources can do that work, when?

A reconciled allocation and an explicit tradeoff.

04

AUTHORITY

Who may act when the plan meets an exception?

Decision boundaries and an escalation route.

05

EVIDENCE

What would justify continuing, changing or stopping?

A review decision with relevant evidence.

01 · CHOICE AND WORK

Make the commitment executable

Write the decision as an instruction that changes what happens next. Name the intended recipient of the benefit, the change that person should experience and the boundary of the first commitment. Avoid leaving a whole business ambition inside an approval for a single project.

Then connect the decision to the work. What needs to become possible? Which process, information, behavior or service must change? Who will accept that change into everyday operation? A delivered asset and a realized benefit may be separated by training, adoption, revised responsibilities and the retirement of previous work. Keep those steps in view.

NASA's decision-analysis guidance calls for a defined decision, evaluation criteria, alternatives and explicit treatment of assumptions and uncertainty. Its engineering context differs from a business initiative, but the discipline is useful when an attractive proposal has crowded out other credible choices. [1]

Compare at least the preferred commitment with a meaningfully different route. That could be a smaller scope, a different operating approach or waiting until a named dependency is resolved. State the consequence of each. A token alternative included only to make the preferred proposal look reasonable adds little.

> **ASK FOR A COMPLETION SENTENCE**
>
> We will know this commitment is operating when [recipient] can [complete the outcome] under [ordinary and exceptional conditions], and [named owner] accepts the continuing responsibility.

Separate what is agreed from what is assumed. If a dependency is uncertain, do not hide it in the schedule. Say whether approval is conditional on resolving it, whether a limited investigation is authorized or whether leadership is deliberately accepting the uncertainty. This gives the delivery team a clear instruction without pretending that all questions are settled.

02 · CAPACITY

Reconcile capacity before the promise

A sponsor can authorize an initiative without controlling the resources it depends on. Ask the managers who supply those resources to confirm the allocation in the same conversation. Include specialist time, operational cover, decision-making availability, training and support after the initial release.

Build a short view of the periods in which those demands collide. Use named people or defined skills where that detail changes the decision. Distinguish total effort from the window in which it is needed. A team may have enough hours over a quarter and still lack the right person during a critical transition.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office's Schedule Assessment Guide treats assigning resources to activities as a scheduling best practice. It explains how making resource availability visible can expose a plan that cannot be delivered as scheduled. [2]

Resolve a collision through a leadership choice: sequence the work, reduce scope, provide credible additional capacity or revise the promise. Record what changes in the displaced initiative and tell its owner. An allocation is incomplete if one plan receives the people while another quietly retains its original deadline.

> **CHECK THE ASSUMPTION UNDERNEATH THE DATE**
>
> Which resource would have to be available at exactly the right moment for this plan to work, and has the person controlling that resource agreed?

Allow for ordinary operating demands and uncertainty using evidence from the organization. Do not import an arbitrary utilization target or add a universal percentage as contingency. Revisit the allocation when demand, absence or dependencies materially change. Extra capacity also takes time to recruit, prepare and integrate; adding names to a plan does not immediately create interchangeable capability.

03 · AUTHORITY

Give ownership decision rights

The word owner can conceal several different jobs. One person may coordinate delivery, another control the people, and another accept the result into operation. Name those responsibilities separately and identify the executive who resolves a conflict among them.

For the decisions most likely to interrupt progress, specify who can decide, whose input is necessary and what boundary requires escalation. Useful boundaries include a change to the agreed outcome, a demand on another team's reserved capacity or a transition that the operating owner is not ready to accept. Match them to the initiative.

The UK Government's Project Delivery Functional Standard describes governance in terms that include authority limits, decision-making roles, autonomy and accountability. We use that distinction here to encourage explicit permission to act, rather than relying on an ownership label alone. [3]

An escalation should arrive as a decision request. Describe what changed, what the team can still do, the options available and the consequence of waiting. Name the person who must decide and when an answer is needed. If that person is unavailable, a previously agreed alternate or escalation route keeps the request from circulating without resolution.

> **TEST AUTHORITY WITH A REAL EXCEPTION**
>
> If the planned handoff fails tomorrow, can the people involved explain who decides the next move, what that person may change and how the decision reaches everyone affected?

Use these arrangements to shorten ordinary decisions. Routine choices within the agreed boundary should stay with the people closest to the work. Reserve executive review for changes that alter the commitment or require authority the team does not hold. Record consequential decisions where the team already works, with the reason and the affected commitments.

04 · EVIDENCE

Make review change the decision

Start a review by naming the decision it should inform. Should leadership expand the release, maintain the current scope, change the approach or stop further commitment? The evidence needed for each question may differ. A status presentation can describe activity without resolving any of them.

Use a small set of measures that connect the work to its intended outcome. Include the conditions that must remain acceptable, such as accuracy, unresolved demand or the burden transferred to another team. Record the source, definition, reporting period and known limitations. A movement in a metric is not useful if the team cannot explain what was counted.

GOV.UK's Service Manual recommends combining performance measures with user research and drawing on multiple data sources. It distinguishes the measurement of a transaction from assessing a wider journey or strategic objective. [4]

Apply that distinction to the initiative. Review completed outcomes alongside a few unresolved cases and the experience of the people handling them. Examine whether demand, case mix or reporting practices changed. An encouraging before-and-after result can guide the next step without proving that the intervention caused the improvement.

> **WRITE THE NEXT DECISION BEFORE THE NEXT REPORT**
>
> At the next review, we will decide [continue, reshape, expand or stop] using [specified evidence]. We will revisit earlier if [material condition] changes.

Close the review by updating the commitment, resources and authority together. If evidence is insufficient, name the missing information and decide whether obtaining it is worth the delay. A review may reasonably confirm the existing course. It should still leave a clear reason, an owner for unresolved questions and a trigger for reconsideration.

05 · WORKED EXAMPLE

A service promise becomes an operating decision

> **FICTIONAL EXAMPLE**
>
> The organization, decisions and observations below are invented to demonstrate the framework. They do not describe an Assuras client or a measured result.

A business equipment service company wants customers to receive a reliable appointment after requesting a repair. Its leadership initially describes the initiative as launching a scheduling portal. The operations director and digital lead discover that the portal depends on appointment capacity, current equipment information and a clear route for requests that cannot be booked automatically.

Commitment	Decision recorded
Choice and work	Test the complete request-to-appointment journey for one service category. Include manual handling for unbookable requests. Defer the broader portal rollout.
Capacity	Reserve a service planner and a digital specialist for the trial. Defer an internal reporting enhancement and revise its owner's delivery expectation.
Authority	The operations director owns the service outcome. The digital lead may adjust the interface within the agreed scope. The sponsor decides any expansion that competes for reserved operating capacity.
Evidence	Review completed bookings, unresolved requests, changed appointments and staff handling effort together. Examine routine requests and exceptions before deciding whether to expand.

During the fictional trial, staff observe that requests for specialist equipment are reaching the wrong service category. The team has evidence of a classification problem, but has not established its prevalence. It does not yet have grounds to declare the whole approach successful or unsuccessful.

The digital lead can clarify the selection interface within the existing authority. Changing the service categories themselves requires the operating owner's decision. The sponsor keeps the trial bounded while the team checks how often the issue occurs and what information would prevent it. Expansion remains a separate decision.

The useful result of the framework is a more specific conversation. Leadership can see the outstanding uncertainty, the action already authorized and the additional evidence it needs. No completion percentage or general reassurance can substitute for those distinctions. The next review can revise the commitment without reopening every settled choice.

A REUSABLE WORKING PAGE

The executive decision record

Complete one page for a consequential commitment. Link supporting analysis; keep the decision itself readable. Reissue it when the commitment changes and retain the previous version.

01 Decision and version	What is being authorized, by whom and on what date? Identify the next review.
02 Outcome and boundary	Who should experience what change? What is included now, and what remains outside this commitment?
03 Alternatives and rationale	Which credible alternatives were considered? Why is this choice preferable under the stated assumptions?
04 Work and acceptance	What must change in everyday operation? Who will accept the result and continuing responsibility?
05 Capacity and displacement	Which resources are confirmed, when are they needed and which existing commitments have been revised?
06 Authority and escalation	Who owns the outcome? What may the team decide? Who resolves exceptions beyond its authority?
07 Evidence and protections	What evidence will inform the next decision? What must remain acceptable, and how will that be checked?
08 Unknowns and review trigger	Which assumptions could reverse the choice? Who resolves each unknown, and what would prompt an earlier review?

SOURCES AND USE

Evidence behind the guide.

This publication presents Assuras' original management guidance, informed by the primary sources below. The framework and decision record have not been independently validated as predictors of performance. Adapt their detail to the scale, reversibility and consequences of the decision. They support judgment and existing governance; they do not replace detailed delivery planning or specialist analysis where needed.

01 **NASA**
Systems Engineering Handbook, section 6.8: Decision Analysis

Supports the discussion of decision criteria, alternatives, assumptions and uncertainty. The five-question Assuras framework is not a NASA method.

02 **U.S. Government Accountability Office**
Schedule Assessment Guide: Best Practice 3, Assigning Resources to All Activities

GAO-16-89G, December 2015; printed pages 49-61. Supports the relationship between resource availability and a credible schedule.

03 **UK Government Project Delivery**
Government Functional Standard GovS 002: Project Delivery, sections 4.1.3 and 4.4

Version 2.1. Supports distinguishing authority, autonomy and accountability. Its government-specific requirements are not presented as requirements for every business.

04 **GOV.UK Service Manual**
Measuring the success of your service

Supports combining measures and user research and matching evaluation to the question. It does not validate the example or the Assuras framework.

READ AND USE THE COMPLETE HTML EDITION

assuras.com/insights/from-ambition-to-execution/

Bring a decision that deserves a closer look. Contact Assuras at contact@assuras.com.