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THE AI DECISION GUIDE

Are you making the right decisions about AI?

A practical guide for leadership teams working through their AI decisions.

By Sue Cunningham · Founder and Principal Advisor, The Uncertainty Lab

01

Which AI decisions should we focus on?

Six questions that shape an organisation's future with AI - and how to choose which to work on first.

02

What happens if we don't make these decisions?

Five ways AI decisions go wrong, and what's usually missing when they do.

03

What makes a team decision-ready?

The five things a leadership team needs to make good AI decisions together.

Use this in your next leadership meeting.

Ask each executive to answer privately first, then compare. Where your answers differ is where the most useful conversation starts.

1. Which decisions should we focus on, and which will have the most impact right now?
2. What would it cost to leave these decisions unresolved for six months?
3. What would we need in place to make those decisions well?

Begin with the organisation, not the technology.

AI creates more possibilities than any organisation has the money, people or attention to pursue. The decisions that shape your future are about your organisation - its purpose, the people it serves and where it's heading. Explore these six questions.

The decisions we need to make

given our context, our responsibilities and our direction

1

Offering and public role

Which parts of what we provide could people soon get without us, or more easily elsewhere – and what, specifically, will they still need us for?

2

Business model and resilience

If funders or customers start paying for outcomes rather than effort, which parts of our income are exposed – and how would we need to change what we offer or how we're paid?

3

Operating model

If we designed this organisation from scratch today, what would we want people to do, what would we give to AI – and how would that change our services?

4

People and human contribution

As AI takes on more of our work, which parts must stay human because that's where our value lies? What do we need our people to be exceptional at, and how will we help them get there?

5

Risk and preparedness

How is AI changing our risk landscape, including the risk of moving too slowly – and what is our appetite for the most consequential risks?

6

Change ambition and capacity

How much change will we need to drive – or absorb – because of AI, and how ready are we for it?

Not every area needs a decision now.

Test each one against these four questions.

1. **Consequence.** What is at stake if we get this wrong, or leave it?
2. **Timing.** When does it need to be made, and what is forcing the pace?
3. **Reversibility.** How hard would it be to undo once we commit?
4. **Dependencies.** What else depends on this decision, or must come first?

Then choose the three decisions that will have the most impact on your organisation.

Three is enough to make real progress, and few enough to give each one the attention it needs.

If your team needs help agreeing which decisions to prioritise, consider the AI Decision Agenda.

Your leadership team agrees what to decide now, what to investigate and what can wait - with advice on how to approach each decision.

Discuss the AI Decision Agenda ↗

Decisions that aren't made deliberately get made by default.

Here are five common reasons AI decisions go wrong, and what might be missing when they do.

Decisions never get made The decision drifts, or is made by default.	**Clarity about which decisions you need to make, and when**
Decisions are made one at a time Each is made because it's in front of you, not because it's the most important.	**Agreed priorities to weigh each choice against**
Decisions are made on poor information Demos, vendor claims and other people's summaries are the only evidence used.	**Credible evidence about your sector and your organisation**
The most confident voice decides Not everyone understands enough to challenge, so the most confident voice carries the decision.	**A leadership team with the experience and judgement to test the case together**
Decisions are made, then stall They weren't thought through, resourced or led, and people weren't engaged in them.	**Clear ownership, resources and a plan to bring people with you**

What happens when decisions don't get made

- Money and capacity go to pilots that don't connect to strategy.
- Services get more efficient while their relevance quietly declines.
- Work gets sped up instead of redesigned.
- Staff get mixed messages about what's expected of them.
- Vendor updates change how data is handled and how systems behave, without anyone deciding to accept them.
- A few confident voices set the direction while others defer.
- Risks are discovered late.
- By the time the shift in your sector is obvious, someone else has already responded.

Waiting can be a good decision

Deliberate waiting has a reason, an owner, evidence to gather and a date or trigger for review. Drift has none of these. The question isn't whether to act now. It's whether you've chosen to wait - or just haven't chosen.

Five things a leadership team needs to make good AI decisions.

A leadership team needs all five to make good AI decisions together - and each one grows stronger through work on real decisions.

01
Clarity
Knowing which AI decisions you need to make, and which need to be made now.

02
Firsthand experience
Leaders use AI on their own work, and understand its contribution and limits.

03
Judgement
Knowing when you can rely on AI, when you can't, and where people must stay in charge.

04
Information
Credible evidence about what's happening and what's possible in your sector, and an honest take on where you currently stand.

05
Alignment
A shared view of where you are, and where you should be heading in response to AI.

Is your leadership team decision-ready?

Ten questions. Five minutes. See where your team is strongest across these five, and where to build next.

Take the AI Decision Scorecard ↗



ABOUT SUE

I help leadership teams make the AI decisions that matter and lead the change that follows.

For more than 25 years I've led organisations from $50 million to $3 billion through strategy, transformation and crisis, including Black Summer and COVID-19. Today I work alongside executive teams and boards as they decide what AI means for them - and I use AI every day in my own practice, so I know the difference between what's possible and what's promised.

I don't sell technology, so my advice serves your organisation, not a product.

120+	43	14
leaders	organisations	sectors

GAICD · B.Eng (Hons) · MIT Sloan · Oxford Saïd · INSEAD (Distinction) · Certified NLP Master Coach · Certified AI Trainer

Organisations I've worked with include

City of Melbourne · NCOSS NSW Council of Social Service · UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency Australia for UNHCR · bankfirst

WHERE I CAN HELP

Start with whatever is missing.

Each one builds one or more of the five. Each can stand alone, or work together.

If you need clarity on which decisions to make

AI Decision Agenda

Your leadership team agrees what to decide now, what to investigate further and what can wait - with advice on how to approach each decision.

Discuss the AI Decision Agenda ↗

If you need credible evidence

AI Strategic Discovery

Sector research, a review of where you currently stand and confidential leadership interviews, brought together into findings, recommendations, a prioritised roadmap and a first draft of your AI strategic stance.

Explore AI Strategic Discovery →

If your team needs firsthand experience, sound judgement and a shared view

Executive AI Leadership Circle

A facilitated program in which your executive team gains hands-on experience with AI, sharpens its judgement about what to rely on, and builds the shared view it needs to decide together.

Explore the Executive AI Leadership Circle →

If you need support to act on your decisions

Strategic AI Advisory

Confidential one-to-one advisory for the leader carrying the organisation's AI response - strategic advice, firsthand AI work and coaching, as decisions are put into practice.

Explore Strategic AI Advisory →

> "The AI discovery process led by the Uncertainty Lab brought clarity to what had previously felt like a broad and somewhat abstract conversation about AI. It has sharpened our discussions by reframing AI not as a technology initiative, but as a question of strategic risk appetite and long-term positioning."

Ruth Kestermann
Chief Operating Officer, Plan International Australia · AI Strategic Discovery

Bring a live decision to a confidential conversation.

Or a question about the value of your AI activity, or a leadership team that needs a stronger shared view. We'll work out what useful progress looks like, and whether I can help.

Book a conversation ↗

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