ONE-PAGE EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Most Decision Failures Start with Bad Framing

EXECUTIVE QUESTION
Are our decisions failing because of bad data or weak execution — or because the problem was framed wrong before either began?

CORE SIGNAL

Most decision failures trace back to how the problem was originally framed, not to the data, analysis, or execution that followed. Once a frame is mis-specified, more data, better dashboards, and faster execution tend to reinforce the error rather than correct it.

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Poor framing has been linked to capital misallocation, escalation of commitment on failing initiatives, execution rework, and elevated staff burnout and turnover — costs that typically surface later as performance, financial, or talent problems rather than being traced back to their framing origin.

WARNING SIGNS TO LOOK FOR

- ☐ A decision is discussed almost entirely as “avoiding a loss” or “protecting what we have,” rather than the opportunity available.
- ☐ The team accepted the first version of the problem statement and moved straight to comparing options.
- ☐ **Investment** or support for an underperforming initiative keeps increasing despite mounting negative evidence.
- ☐ **Discussion** stays inside the current KPI/dashboard set; issues outside those metrics aren’t raised.
- ☐ **More** data, reports, or analytics have been added without revisiting how the original problem was defined.
- ☐ **People** who question the accepted framing face pushback, are seen as difficult, or are quietly overruled.
- ☐ **The** decision is being made under time pressure with little time spent defining the problem itself.

DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

1. How was this problem originally framed — as a gain to pursue or a loss to avoid; a threat or an opportunity?
2. Were alternative framings of the problem raised and seriously considered, or was only one framing on the table?
3. Is the existing KPI or reporting structure determining which options count as legitimate?
4. Has additional data or analytics been added to this decision without re-examining the original problem definition?

DECISION GUIDE

If commitment to a struggling initiative keeps increasing → examine whether the decision is being framed around avoiding a loss → consider a structured reframing exercise (mapping objectives, constraints, and alternatives explicitly) before the next resource decision.

FIVE-MINUTE MEETING PROMPTS

- What frame — gain, loss, threat, or opportunity — is this decision currently operating inside?
- What options were excluded before we started comparing choices, and why?
- Would this decision look different if the problem were framed the opposite way?
- What evidence would tell us the current frame, not just the current plan, is wrong?

NEXT STEP
Document how the decision under review was originally framed, and bring that framing — not just the analysis — to the next management review.

Source: *SignalJournal Research: Why Most Decisions Fail: The Hidden Cost of Poor Decision Framing*

Read full article: *Why Most Decisions Fail: The Hidden Cost of Poor Decision Framing*