

The Decision Signals™ Maturity Model

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Most operating businesses have data. Very few have a decision system — the structure that reliably turns data into timely, accountable decisions. The Decision Signals™ Maturity Model defines five levels of decision-system development across five dimensions. It is the diagnostic instrument used at the start of every engagement, the shared language with the buyer, and the public framework that anchors the Decision Signals™ Method.

The overall maturity level is the *minimum* dimension score, not the average. A decision system is only as strong as its weakest surface.

The Five Dimensions

- 01 Metrics Architecture**
What gets measured, how it is defined, who owns the definition, and how revisions happen.
- 02 Decision Cadence**
The rhythm of reviews, who attends, and what kind of decisions each review is built to make.
- 03 Reporting Surfaces**
The artifacts leadership actually sees, and whether their visual structure matches the decision structure.
- 04 Human-AI Integration**
Where people, tools, and AI each sit in the pipeline — what each may inform, recommend, or automate, and who stays accountable when machine-assisted outputs enter executive decisions.
- 05 Action Linkage**
Whether what gets seen in reporting reliably changes what gets done in the business; whether outcomes are tracked back to the decisions that triggered them.

The Five Levels at a Glance

Level	Name	Defining condition	Estimated prevalence
1	Ad Hoc	Numbers exist. A decision system does not.	~25–35%
2	Functionally Defined	Each function has a system. The functions do not agree.	~40–50%
3	Executive Aligned	One operating system, one source of truth, decisions begin to flow.	~15–20%
4	Decision-System Designed	Reporting is explicitly designed for decisions, not display. AI is in the workflow on purpose.	~5–10%
5	Self-Calibrating	The decision system has a cadence for its own renewal.	~1–2%

Level Descriptions

1 Ad Hoc ~25–35% of operators

Numbers exist. A decision system does not.

CONDITION

Numbers are pulled fresh each meeting. Different attendees show up with different versions. Definitions are tribal knowledge. There is no shared scorecard. Operating reviews are mostly debate about whose number is right.

CHARACTERISTIC FAILURE MODE

Decisions get delayed or made informally outside the meeting because the meeting cannot agree on the input data. Leadership trust in the reporting is low; trust in individual relationships is high.

2 Functionally Defined ~40–50% of operators

Each function has a system. The functions do not agree.

CONDITION

Finance has its definitions and dashboards. Marketing has its own. Operations has its own. Within a function, things hold together. Across functions, the numbers do not reconcile — and that is treated as permanent.

CHARACTERISTIC FAILURE MODE

Executive operating reviews become political. Each function defends its own version of truth. Decisions that require cross-functional alignment get punted indefinitely. The CFO becomes the de facto reconciler and is overloaded.

3 Executive Aligned ~15–20% of operators

One operating system, one source of truth, decisions begin to flow.

CONDITION

There is one executive scorecard. Definitions are agreed across functions and documented. The same numbers show up in every review. The operating review is about performance, not measurement.

CHARACTERISTIC FAILURE MODE

The system is correct but inert. The scorecard is consulted; decisions still happen mostly in the meeting and rely on the same 4–5 people interpreting numbers correctly. Decisions do not scale with the business.

4 Decision-System Designed ~5–10% of operators

Reporting is explicitly designed for decisions, not display. AI is in the workflow on purpose.

CONDITION

Each surface element in executive reporting has a defined "if this moves, we do X" answer. AI tooling is in the analytics pipeline with explicit policy on what AI can inform, recommend, automate, or stay out of. Audit trail for AI-influenced decisions exists.

CHARACTERISTIC FAILURE MODE

The system is sophisticated enough that maintenance becomes the bottleneck. If no one owns the operating model itself as a product, drift sets in — definitions decay, dashboards proliferate, AI policies go stale.

5 Self-Calibrating ~1–2% of operators

The decision system has a cadence for its own renewal.

CONDITION

The operating model is treated as a product with named ownership. Metrics get retired on a schedule. AI capabilities are evaluated against a standard process before entering the decision workflow. Decision outcomes are tracked back to triggering signals, and the model adjusts based on what's working.

CHARACTERISTIC FAILURE MODE

Over-instrumentation. The model becomes so refined that the operating overhead approaches the cost of the decisions it supports. Mitigation requires explicit cost-of-the-system review at the cadence layer. Realistic ceiling for most organizations.

The 5×5 Assessment Matrix

Each cell describes what the dimension looks like at that level. The overall score is the minimum across all five dimensions.

Dimension	Level 1 Ad Hoc	Level 2 Functionally Defined	Level 3 Executive Aligned	Level 4 Decision-System Designed	Level 5 Self-Calibrating
Metrics Architecture	Tribal knowledge. Same name, different meanings across users. No documentation.	Each function has its own metric definitions documented internally. Cross-function definitions conflict.	One executive metric dictionary. Definitions agreed and documented. Revisions follow a process.	Metrics are explicitly tied to decisions. Orphan metrics get retired.	Metric catalog evolves continuously. Deprecation and addition follow a quarterly review. New signals enter the dictionary through the same governance regardless of source.
Decision Cadence	Meetings happen on a schedule but cover whatever is on the calendar. No defined decision agenda.	Function-specific reviews exist. Cross-function decisions happen in ad-hoc executive meetings.	Defined executive operating review cadence with defined attendees and a standing agenda.	Cadence matched to decision velocity needed for each domain. AI inputs pre-circulated before the meeting.	Cadence flexes based on signal volatility. Emergency reviews trigger automatically at defined thresholds. The cadence itself is reviewed annually.
Reporting Surfaces	Reports built per request, last-minute, in PowerPoint. Different stakeholders see different reports for the same review.	Each function has standard dashboards. Executives see different rolled-up versions. Layout is whatever the tool defaulted to.	Executive scorecard designed for the audience. Visual hierarchy matches decision priority. Drill-downs exist but stay out of the primary surface.	Surface distinguishes primary signals, diagnostics, and context. Each tile has an "if this moves, do X" answer. AI outputs labeled with confidence and source.	Reporting surface evolves quarterly based on which decisions actually got made. Redesign is routine practice, not a project.
Human-AI Integration	AI not in the workflow, or used ad hoc by individuals without integration into reporting.	Some AI tools used to generate parts of reports. No governance about which AI outputs are trustworthy enough to publish.	Defined places where AI is used in the analytics pipeline. Outputs reviewed before publication. Humans clearly own publication.	Explicit policy for which decisions AI can inform, recommend, automate, or stay out of. Documented audit trail for AI-influenced decisions.	AI capability boundaries reviewed quarterly. New capabilities follow a defined evaluation process. Outputs include source data, model version, and confidence interval.
Action Linkage	Reports get reviewed; few decisions get made in the meeting; action items rarely tied to specific metric movements.	Functions act on their own dashboards. Cross-functional decisions get punted. Action items exist but rarely close in a defined cycle.	Each operating review produces named decisions with owners and dates. Backlog of pending decisions is visible and reviewed.	Decisions tracked against the metric movement that triggered them. Learning loop — did the decision move the metric — is part of the next review.	The operating model itself adjusts based on which decision-types reliably produce intended outcomes. AI-augmented post-hoc analysis compresses the learning loop.

What an Assessment Produces

A Decision Signals™ Assessment delivers five concrete outputs, sequenced to move directly from diagnosis to engagement scope.

01**Scored matrix**

5 dimensions × current level, scored and documented.

02**Named maturity level**

Overall level determined by the lowest dimension score.

03**1-page narrative**

Current posture, failure modes already visible, gap to target level.

04**Target level**

Recommended engagement target — typically one level above the lowest dimension.

05**Structural changes**

The changes that close the gap, sequenced as the engagement scope.

This model is part of the Decision Signals™ Method — a structured approach to turning the scorecard, agenda, cadence, and workflow into one decision system. If you'd like to walk through where your team sits, that's a structured 30-minute conversation.

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