How Decisions Move: From Noticing to Acting

Stage 1: The Signal

Reality departs from Expected

Expected — Reality

Reality diverges away from what was expected

Signal appears

small pulse/wave
clear / ambiguous • urgent / easy to ignore

clear / ambiguous | urgent / easy to ignore

Someone notices and speaks

observation becomes communication

SIX SIGNAL EXAMPLES — HOW THE SIGNAL PRESENTS

- **Customer says something wrong** — enexpected claim or incorrect info
- **Report with number that doesn't make sense** — data anomaly or out-of-trend value
- **Technician finds early failed component** — early crack detected on component
- **Frontline employee sees safety risk** — hazard spotted on the floor
- **Finance notices spreading invoice dispute** — disputes spreading across multiple invoices

ARRIVAL CHANNELS — HOW THE SIGNAL REACHES US

- **Formal system** — tickets • reports • logs
- **Customer call** — support • sales • inbound
- **Corridor conversation** — casual chat • hallway feedback
- **Gut feeling** — intuition • unease • hunch

This first stage is often treated as automatic. It is not.
Signals are subtle and require deliberate noticing to move from observation to action.

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Stage 2: Deciding What To Do

Signal understood
Noise filtered.
Context clear.
What changed?

Options framed
Scope options.
Constraints.
Criteria.

Decision owner identified
Single responsible owner.
Authority clear.

Path chosen
Choice made.
Now it's actionable.

Three Option Paths

Fix now
Act immediately on known fix. Low risk. Short window.

Escalate
Raise to leadership. Needs more authority or resource.

Monitor & learn
Track over time. Gather data. Reassess later.

Decision Traps

No owner
Decision stalls. No accountability. Nothing happens.

Too many owners
Diffused responsibility. Conflict. Delayed outcome.

Assumed procedure exists
Nobody checks. Outdated or wrong. False confidence.

Without a named owner and a time, a signal becomes folklore."

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Stage 3: Acting and Learning

Action assigned
Task is delegated with clear owner, scope, due date, and success criteria

Execution tracked
Progress is logged, blockers flagged, milestones monitored in real time

Feedback captured
Results, outcomes, and observations are collected from the field

System updated
Outputs are folded back into processes, records, and routines

Four execution modes

- **Do** (one-time fix) — Resolve the immediate problem now. Apply a quick fix to restore function.
- **Change** (process update) — Revise the existing process to address root cause. Update steps or parameters.
- **Build** (new capability) — Create new tool, template, or automation. Add capability to the system.
- **Stop** (remove failing step) — Halt the ineffective step. Remove or deprecate to prevent future waste.

Learning loop

- **What happened?** — Record the actual outcome and evidence
- **What was expected?** — Compare to the original plan, estimate, or standard
- **What changed in the manual?** — Capture update to procedure, checklist, or policy
- **What signal will we watch next?** — Define the metric to monitor for early warning

A decision that does not change a procedure, a checklist, or a calendar will have to be decided again.