When Decisions Don’t Stay Decided

Work Decay pattern guide

1. Symptom: Decisions Keep Reappearing

Your team makes a decision, but then entertains the question again days or weeks later, as a clarification, a reconsideration, or because someone couldn’t recall the reasoning. This could look like:

- Meetings revisit prior conclusions instead of advancing work
- Contributors hesitate because the direction feels provisional
- Leaders restate decisions more often than expected
- Progress slows even when people are capable and engaged

When decisions are managed this way, people don’t trust them and hedge their work.

2. Cause: Decisions Are Treated as Moments

In most organizations, decisions live in conversations, meetings, messages, or exchanges, but are not preserved. What gets lost is usually the reasoning:

- Which options were considered
- Which tradeoffs were accepted
- Which risks were understood
- What conditions would justify revisiting

It feels reasonable and responsible to reopen decisions when new participants ask questions. As details fade over time, the system defaults to relitigation; this is a design gap.

3. Treatment: Preserve the Decision, Not the Discussion

The goal of documenting the decision is ***continuity***. A Decision Record can live in a document, shared workspace, or lightweight log. The format matters less than the habit.

A durable decision record answers four questions:

1. What was decided - The conclusion, stated clearly.
2. Why it was decided - The key reasoning, constraints, or risks that mattered.
3. What is now settled - What no longer needs debate or revalidation.
4. What would justify revisiting - The conditions that would warrant reopening.

When decisions are preserved this way, people stop reopening them by default and start building on them.

4. Prognosis: What Changes When Decisions Hold

When decisions stay decided:

- Work accelerates because the ground is stable
- Meetings advance instead of looping
- Contributors act with more confidence
- Leaders spend less time reinforcing direction

Progress compounds because the organization deliberately remembers rather than trying to recall.

Relitigated decisions are a sign that good judgment is not being preserved. Treat decisions as ***enduring assets*** to sustain momentum.

Here is a template to record decisions that affect multiple people, inform future work, and withstand time, handoffs, and interruptions. The value of the template is not the format, but the idea of a decision record that will outlive the discussion.

Download Decision Record Template