The Decision Filter: Decisions

THE 50 FACTOR — GROWTH FACTOR #21

The Decision Filter

The Complete Implementation Guide

BY SCOTT SCULLY

Principle #21: The Decision Filter

The Complete Implementation Guide

This white paper is a companion to Chapter 21 of The 50 Factor by Scott Scully.

Why This Growth Factor Matters

A founder sat under the barrel-vaulted ceiling of Union Station — the restored 1894 train station in St. Louis, all gold leaf and stained glass — and admitted to his mentor that he was drowning. Not in work. In decisions.

He'd tracked every decision that came across his desk for one week. The count: eighty-three. Expense approvals, client concessions, hiring requests, policy exceptions, process changes, vendor selections. Eighty-three decisions in five days — and when he went through the list honestly, only about fifteen genuinely needed CEO-level judgment. The other sixty-eight slowed the company down by days while waiting for his attention.

"You don't have a decision problem," his mentor said. "You have an authority problem. Your team doesn't know what they're allowed to decide."

The fix is four frameworks that work together: the Three Pillars (every decision must be right for the Person, the Company, and the Customer), the Decision Map (who decides what), Type 1/Type 2 classification (how much deliberation each decision deserves), and Disagree-and-Commit (what happens after the call is made). Together, they eliminate the CEO bottleneck and let decisions happen 3-5x faster.

The Three Pillars

Every decision in your company — from a $200 expense approval to a $2M strategic investment — should pass the Three Pillars test:

Pillar 1: The Person. Is this right for the individual(s) involved? Will it develop them, treat them fairly, and set them up for success? A decision that's great for the company but destroys a person's career or wellbeing fails this pillar.

Pillar 2: The Company. Is this right for the business? Does it protect margins, support growth, and strengthen the organization? A decision that makes one client happy but costs the company $50K in precedent fails this pillar.

Pillar 3: The Customer. Is this right for the client? Will it deliver value, build trust, and protect the relationship? A decision that saves the company money but degrades the client experience fails this pillar.

If all three pillars align, the decision is clear — make the call and move. If two pillars are in tension (what's right for the person isn't right for the company), the decision needs senior judgment. Write the three pillars on every conference room wall. Make them the shared language of decision-making in your company.

The Decision Map

A Decision Map is a written document listing major decision types and who has authority to make each one. It eliminates the reflexive "let me check with the CEO" that slows every growing company.

Example structure:

Expense approvals: under $500 = individual contributor, $500-$5K = team lead, $5K-$25K = department head, $25K+ = CEO. Client concessions: under $1K or one-time = AM, recurring or above $1K = VP Client Services. Hiring: team lead can request, department head approves, CEO approves headcount above plan. Policy exceptions: manager can grant for one person one time, VP approves pattern exceptions.

Build the Decision Map with your leadership team. Update it as the company evolves. Include it in onboarding. The goal: 80% of decisions happen without the CEO even hearing about them.

Type 1 vs. Type 2 Decisions

Not all decisions deserve the same deliberation. Jeff Bezos popularized this framework and it works perfectly in scaling services businesses:

Type 2 decisions (reversible). Most decisions fall here. If you're wrong, you can reverse course with minimal cost. These should be made fast, by the person closest to the context, without escalation. Examples: trying a new meeting format, adjusting a process, testing a new email template, reassigning an account.

Type 1 decisions (irreversible or very costly to reverse). These are rare. Hiring a VP. Signing a 3-year lease. Entering a new market. Acquiring a company. These deserve slower deliberation, more data, and more voices.

The scaling problem: most growing companies treat every decision like Type 1. They escalate, deliberate, meet, re-meet, and finally decide — two weeks after the decision should have been made. Teaching your team the Type 1 / Type 2 framework eliminates half of unnecessary escalations overnight.

Disagree and Commit

Debate is welcome before a decision. Execution is required after. Once a call is made, everyone executes fully — including those who disagreed.

This is harder than it sounds. Most teams practice a version of "disagree and sandbag" — they nod in the meeting and then execute at 60% because they didn't agree. Or they relitigate the decision in hallway conversations, creating confusion about whether the decision is actually final.

How to install it:

Create real space for debate before the decision. Don't rush to a call. Let people argue. Let dissent be voiced fully. Then be explicit: "We've heard everyone. Here's the call. We're going forward. If you disagreed, I respect that — and I need your full commitment to execution."

Call out Option B behavior privately and firmly when you see it. If someone agreed in the meeting and is undermining in the hallway, that's a values conversation — not a strategy conversation.

Publicly reward people who disagree and then commit fully. "Alex pushed hard for a different approach in our strategy meeting. I went a different direction. Alex has executed the plan brilliantly since then. That's leadership."

The Bottleneck Math

In one real implementation, a CEO tracked every decision that came across his desk for two weeks: 300 decisions. Of those, approximately 40 genuinely needed CEO-level judgment. The other 260 slowed the company down by an average of 2-3 days each while waiting for his attention.

After installing the Decision Map and teaching Type 1/Type 2, decisions got faster and better — because they were being made by the people closest to the context. The CEO freed up 15+ hours per week of decision-making time. The company accelerated visibly within 60 days.

The Founder's Hardest Shift

The hardest part of this principle isn't the framework. It's the psychology. Most founders built their companies by making every decision personally. That instinct — "I need to weigh in on this" — is what got you to $5M. And it's what will prevent you from getting to $25M.

The shift: stop answering "what should I do?" questions. Flip them. When a manager comes to you with a decision, your first response should be: "What do you think you should do?" Most of the time, their answer is the right one. Say "do that" and move on. You've just saved 15 minutes of your time and built their confidence simultaneously.

When their answer is wrong, coach — don't overrule. Ask: "Have you run it through the Three Pillars? Which pillar gives you concern?" Guide them to the right answer through the framework, not through your personal judgment. The framework scales. Your personal judgment doesn't.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Mistake #1: Building the Decision Map but not following it. If you keep overruling decisions that your Map says belong to managers, the Map is decoration. Follow it.

Mistake #2: Treating everything as Type 1. The default should be Type 2 (decide fast, adjust if needed). Only classify as Type 1 when the decision is genuinely irreversible and high-stakes.

Mistake #3: Allowing "disagree and sandbag." If someone agreed in the meeting and is undermining afterward, address it immediately. This is a values issue, not a strategy issue.

Mistake #4: Not updating the Map. As the company grows, decision authority should shift downward. What required CEO approval at $5M should be a VP decision at $15M. Review the Map quarterly.

Mistake #5: Confusing delegation with abdication. Delegating decision authority doesn't mean you stop caring about the outcome. You still review results. You still coach when decisions don't work. You just stop being the bottleneck for making them.

Quick-Start Checklist

- ✓ ☐ Read the full white paper and identify the most relevant action items for your stage
- ✓ ☐ Pick the single most impactful first move
- ✓ ☐ Implement it this week
- ✓ ☐ Review progress in your next leadership meeting

Implementation Tools

Ready-to-use templates for this Growth Factor

XLSX **Decision Authority Map**
Columns: Decision Type, IC, Team Lead, Dept Head, VP, CEO

PDF **Three Pillars Poster**
Print for every conference room

PDF **Type 1 vs Type 2 Guide**
How much deliberation?

XLSX **Decision Bottleneck Audit**
Track every decision for 1 week

PDF **Disagree and Commit Guide**
Debate well, execute fully

This is Principle #21 of 50. Part III: The Scale Engine — principles for companies growing from $12M to $25M.

Get the book: The 50 Factor by Scott Scully

The 83 Decision Problem

Here's what happens without a decision system. One founder tracked every decision that came to his desk for a single week: 83 decisions. Everything from "should we discount this deal?" to "which conference should we sponsor?" to "can this employee work from home on Friday?"

Of those 83 decisions, approximately 15 genuinely required CEO-level judgment. The other 68 slowed the company down by an average of 1-3 days each while waiting for his attention. That's not leadership. That's a traffic jam.

The Decision Map eliminates this by defining, in writing, who decides what. The Three Pillars ensure every decision is evaluated through the right lens. Type 1/Type 2 classification determines how much deliberation each decision deserves. And Disagree-and-Commit ensures that once a decision is made, the entire organization moves forward — no sandbagging, no relitigating, no hallway politics.

Together, these four frameworks produce a company where decisions happen 3-5x faster at every level — because the people closest to the context are empowered to make the call.

Building the Decision Map: Step by Step

Step 1: List the 20 most common decisions in your company. Don't guess — survey your managers. What decisions do they bring to you most often? What decisions do they defer to peers? What decisions do they make on their own and worry about?

Step 2: Classify each decision by type (Type 1 or Type 2) and by required authority level (IC, Team Lead, Department Head, VP, CEO).

Step 3: Build the map as a simple grid: decision type on the left, authority level across the top. The grid makes it visual, unambiguous, and referenceable.

Step 4: Review with your leadership team. Do they agree with the authority assignments? Where do they want more authority? Where do they feel unprepared? The conversation itself builds alignment.

Step 5: Publish and onboard. Include the Decision Map in every new hire's onboarding. Post it in shared spaces. Reference it when someone escalates a decision that belongs to them.

Step 6: Update quarterly. As the company grows, authority should shift downward. What required CEO approval at $5M should be a VP decision at $15M.

The Founder's Psychology

The hardest part of this principle isn't the framework. It's the psychology. You built this company by making every decision personally. You know the clients. You know the product. You know the nuances. And you're right — you probably would make a slightly better decision than your VP in most individual cases.

But "slightly better decisions" made by one person at the speed of one person's calendar is a worse system than "good enough decisions" made by ten people at the speed of ten people's contexts. The decision quality gap between you and your VP is typically 5-10%. The speed gap is 5-10x. Speed wins.

The shift: every time someone brings you a decision, ask "What do you think you should do?" Most of the time, their answer is right. Say "do that" and move on. When their answer is wrong, coach through the Three Pillars — don't overrule. Build the muscle, not the dependency.

Warning Signs of a Decision Bottleneck

- • You get asked to weigh in on 50+ decisions per week.
- • Your team uses "let me check with the CEO" as a reflex, not as a genuine need.
- • Decisions get relitigated in hallway conversations after the meeting concludes.

- • Projects stall for days waiting on "approval" for things that don't need your approval.
- • People say "I disagreed but nobody listened" about decisions where they never actually spoke up during the meeting.
- • You feel indispensable — which is flattering and dangerous in equal measure.

The Speed Multiplier

A company where decisions are made at the right level runs 3-5x faster than a company where everything escalates. The difference isn't talent — it's authority. Most of your team is ready to decide. They just haven't been invited to.

The Decision Map is the invitation. When a team lead can see that client concessions under $1K are their call — not the CEO's — they make the call in 5 minutes instead of waiting 3 days for an email response. Multiply that speed improvement across 260 decisions per month (the typical reduction when a Decision Map is installed), and the company moves with a velocity that competitors can't match.

Speed isn't recklessness. Speed with the Three Pillars framework is disciplined decision-making at the level closest to the context — which is both faster and better than decision-making routed through a bottleneck three levels removed from the information.

Implementation Tools

Ready-to-use templates for this Growth Factor

XLSX **Decision Authority Map**
Columns: Decision Type, IC, Team Lead, Dept Head, VP, CEO

PDF **Three Pillars Poster**
Print for every conference room

PDF **Type 1 vs Type 2 Guide**
How much deliberation?

XLSX **Decision Bottleneck Audit**
Track every decision for 1 week

PDF **Disagree and Commit Guide**
Debate well, execute fully