CRITICAL THINKING · COMPETENCY: STRATEGIC THINKING

Think Before You Decide

The decision is rarely the hard part. Defining the problem is.

BY 5:30 PM TODAY

What you walk away with

Analyse before you answer

Separate the data you have from the story you added to it.

1

Surface the assumption

Find the untested belief sitting inside the brief you were handed.

2

Widen the options

Escape the yes/no frame that most decisions arrive in.

3

Think two quarters out

Follow a decision to the consequence nobody costed.

4

Name the trade-off

Say out loud what you are choosing not to do — and why that is acceptable.

5

HOW THE NEXT 150 MINUTES RUN

The session map

3:00	**Open**	An experiment you get one chance at
3:08	**Block A — See It Clearly**	Altitude · Signal vs noise · The Assumption Audit · Case
3:43	**Breakout 1**	The 11-Minute Problem — diagnose it
4:08	**Break**	5 minutes
4:13	**Block B — Choose It Well**	Options · Consequence · Doors · Ripple · Trade-offs · MERIT
4:48	**Breakout 2**	The Trade-Off Table — a simulation with a curveball
5:15	**Bring it together**	Your decision. Your commitment.

Cameras on. Breakout rooms of five, with named roles. There are no observers today.

Before anything else

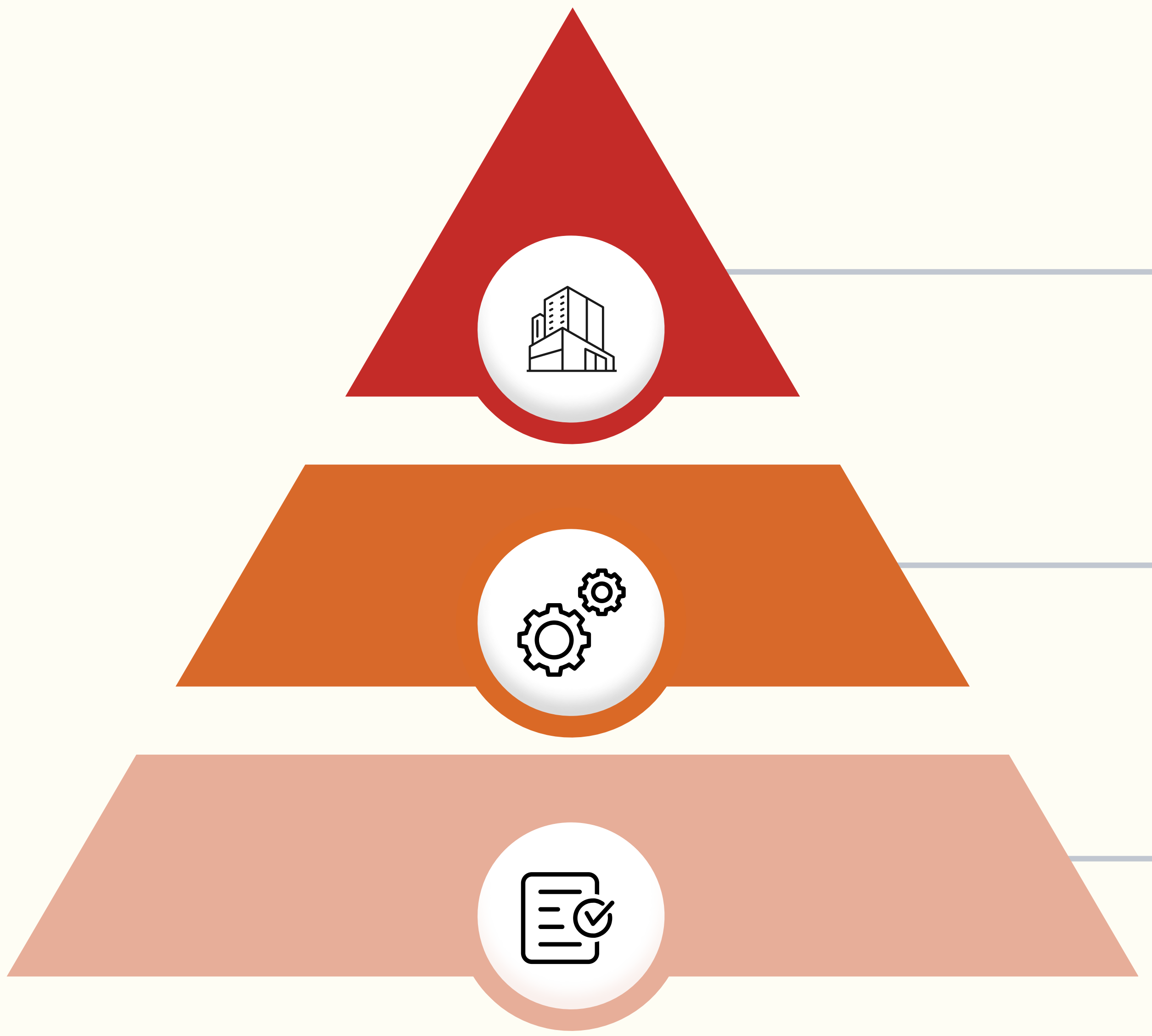
Count how many passes the players in white make.

Say nothing until I ask. No spoilers in chat.

TOOL 01

The Three Altitudes

Every decision can be examined from three heights.
Notice which one you naturally operate at.



ENTERPRISE

Does this serve Catalyst — across brands, functions and quarters?

This is the differentiator.

FUNCTION

Does this serve my team's goal?

Better. Most new managers stop here.

TASK

Is this being done correctly?

Necessary. Not sufficient.

TOOL 03 · THE CORE TOOL OF THIS SESSION

The Assumption Audit

Every brief you receive contains three kinds of sentence. They almost always get treated as one kind.

FACT

Observable, verifiable, sourced.

"Repeat-contact rate is 27%."

THE TEST

Where can I see this?

INFERENCE

A conclusion drawn from facts.

"Handle time is up because the team is new."

THE TEST

What facts is this built on?

ASSUMPTION

Believed but never checked. Usually invisible.

"This is a training problem."

THE TEST

What would have to be true for this to hold?

79 DAYS

From launch to full reversal - after 200,000 taste tests said it would win.

Coca-Cola | 1985

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

The real story

1950s–1985	Coca-Cola’s market share slid from roughly 60% after the war to under 25%, as Pepsi’s sweeter taste kept winning head-to-head "Pepsi Challenge" comparisons on television.
1983–85	Coca-Cola spent two years and roughly $4 million running blind taste tests. Nearly 200,000 people took part. A sweeter reformulation beat both Pepsi and the original Coke — clearly, repeatedly.
23 Apr 1985	New Coke launched nationwide. The original formula was pulled from shelves the same day — no parallel run, no regional pilot.
Weeks later	The consumer hotline, which normally took about 400 calls a day, was taking up to 8,000. Roughly 40,000 letters arrived. By July, only 3 in 10 people said they liked the new taste.
11 Jul 1985	Original Coke returned as "Coca-Cola Classic" — 79 days after launch. It outsold New Coke within days and never looked back.

The taste tests were not flawed. They measured one sip. Nobody measured the habit.

THE LESSON WORTH THE MONEY

The test was not wrong. The question behind it was.

"Which tastes better?" is answerable in one sip.

"Which will they keep buying?" was never asked at all.

200,000 taste tests is not caution - it is confidence wearing the costume of caution.

More data answering the same narrow question does not surface a different question.

BREAKOUT ROOM · GROUPS OF FIVE

The 11-Minute Problem

Customer Care escalates: average handle time on post-purchase queries has gone from 7 to 11 minutes over eight weeks. CSAT is down 6 points. The Ops leader messages you:

"AHT is up — the new agents clearly need more training. Requesting budget for two additional trainers."

WHAT YOU DO

- Sort every statement in that message into Fact, Inference or Assumption.
- State the real problem in one sentence.
- Name the one piece of data you would get before tomorrow.

WHAT WE WANT BY THE END

One sentence that names the real problem - and the one question you would ask before walking into tomorrow's meeting.

Your Presenter reports both back in 90 seconds.

Full data pack and role cards are in your breakout doc — link is in the chat.

TOOL 05

The So-What Chain

Ask "so what?" three times after any decision, until you land on a human or financial consequence.

THE DECISION

Tighten the returns window from 60 days to 30.

SO WHAT?

Return rate falls. So does the cost of processing returns.

01

SO WHAT?

Customers who valued flexible returns buy less — or buy elsewhere.

02

SO WHAT?

Loyalty engagement drops in the highest-value segment. You traded a visible saving this quarter for an invisible revenue loss next year.

03

The first "so what" gets you the benefit you already knew about. The third gets you the cost nobody costed.

TOOL 07 · THIS IS WHAT ALIGNMENT ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

The Ripple Map

Before you commit, name the six seats around your decision — and what actually lands on each one.

01 **The customer**
Their real experience. Not your intent.

02 **The frontline / store**
New exceptions, new questions, new workload.

03 **Technology / Digital Ops**
Build cost and technical debt.

04 **Finance**
Cash timing - not only cost.

05 **HR / People**
Capability, capacity, morale.

06 **Another Catalyst brand**
The precedent you just set for them.

"If this goes ahead, who is the first person downstream whose Monday gets harder — and have I spoken to them?"

TOOL 08

A trade-off you cannot state is a trade-off you have not made

"We are choosing ________________, which means we are accepting ________________, and that is worth it because ________________."

Take 90 seconds. Complete the sentence in chat for something you are carrying right now.

If you cannot fill the second blank, you have not made a decision.

You have made a wish.

THE THING YOU TAKE AWAY

MERIT

Five questions. Any decision.

M

Meaning

What problem are we actually solving - and whose goal does it serve?

E

Evidence

What do we know versus believe?
What is the one missing number?

R

Reversibility

One-way door or two-way?
How fast and how cheaply can we undo it?

I

Impact

Who is downstream - which function, which customer, which quarter?

T

Trade-offs

What are we choosing not to do - and is that acceptable?

RUN IT THROUGH THE TOOLS

This is what all eight tools look like when someone actually uses them

MEANING

They redefined the problem. Different problem, different solution.

EVIDENCE

They had the same showrooming data as everyone else. They read it differently.

TRADE-OFF

Margin now, in exchange for the visit staying with them. Stated out loud.

SO-WHAT CHAIN

Price match → purchase completes in store → store becomes a fulfilment node → the fixed cost becomes the differentiator.

REVERSIBILITY

Price matching was reversible. The store-as-asset bet was not — so it got the harder scrutiny.

BEFORE YOU GO INTO THE ROOM

Your eight tools, in one place

Three Altitudes 01
Task, Function, Enterprise

Signal vs Noise 02
Data, pattern, insight, decision

Assumption Audit 03
Fact, inference, assumption

Option Thirding 04
Escape the yes / no frame

So-What Chain 05
Ask it three times

Doors 06
One-way, or two-way

Ripple Map 07
Who feels this downstream

Trade-Off Ledger 08
Say the cost out loud

Use as many of these as the problem needs. Nobody is checking off boxes.

You do not need a bigger title to think bigger.

You need the habit of asking one more question than the room expects.

Let's Stay Connected