KETTEI

The decision as a governable object

ONE-PAGE SUMMARY · GARETH HOLEBROOK

Organisations make consequential decisions with care, then stop governing each decision on the day it is signed. The programme has an owner and the budget has an owner. The decision that authorised both rarely has one. What would have to stay true for it to remain valid, what would end it and what depends on it are rarely written down, so when the world moves the decision has no way to expire. It persists until stopping costs more than continuing.

In 30 years inside technology organisations I have watched this in 2 forms. Decisions are slow to make, and once made hard to reverse, even the ones that were reversible on the day. Escalation of commitment does the rest, and the research is direct on the remedy: stopping conditions set in advance. The public record shows the same absence across aviation, banking, defence and technology. At Boeing the founding decision to build the 737 MAX as a derivative was not revisited until regulators asked, after 2 crashes. Silicon Valley Bank was supervised, had 31 open supervisory findings, and staked itself on an unhedged assumption that rates would stay low, with no condition written for when that assumption failed. Meta's Reality Labs had an owner with full authority and a bet that widened without a boundary. The British Army's Ajax programme had a named owner with a tenth of a week to give it. Toyota after the Tōhoku earthquake shows the mechanisms present, and the difference in outcome.

Kettei treats each consequential decision as a governable object, defined by 7 properties set before it goes live. In practice that means a named owner for its continuing validity, the assumptions it stands on written down, and the conditions under which it ends fixed while stopping is still cheap. A trigger forces a conversation about the decision. An abort criterion forces an ending. When an upstream decision changes, the decisions that depend on it are told.

It runs on paper. One page per endeavour, a trigger register and a decision log, an estimated 9 to 11 hours to set up and a design ceiling of 20 minutes a week inside a meeting you already hold. It applies to the 5 to 10 steering decisions per endeavour that are hard to reverse, coupled to others, durable, consequential or built on contestable assumptions. Operational decisions sit outside it.

It will not prevent bad decisions. A decision governed to the letter can still be wrong. What it reliably produces is a record, a named owner and a forced conversation on a clock, with the ending conditions agreed while judgement was clear. The individual pieces have prior art, credited in the full briefing. The contribution is making the set mandatory, connected and independent of any tool.

The full briefing has the cases, definitions and references. The essays are at kettei.substack.com, and my third book, *Kettei: The Discipline of Governed Intent*, is in draft on Leanpub at leanpub.com/kettei-dogi.