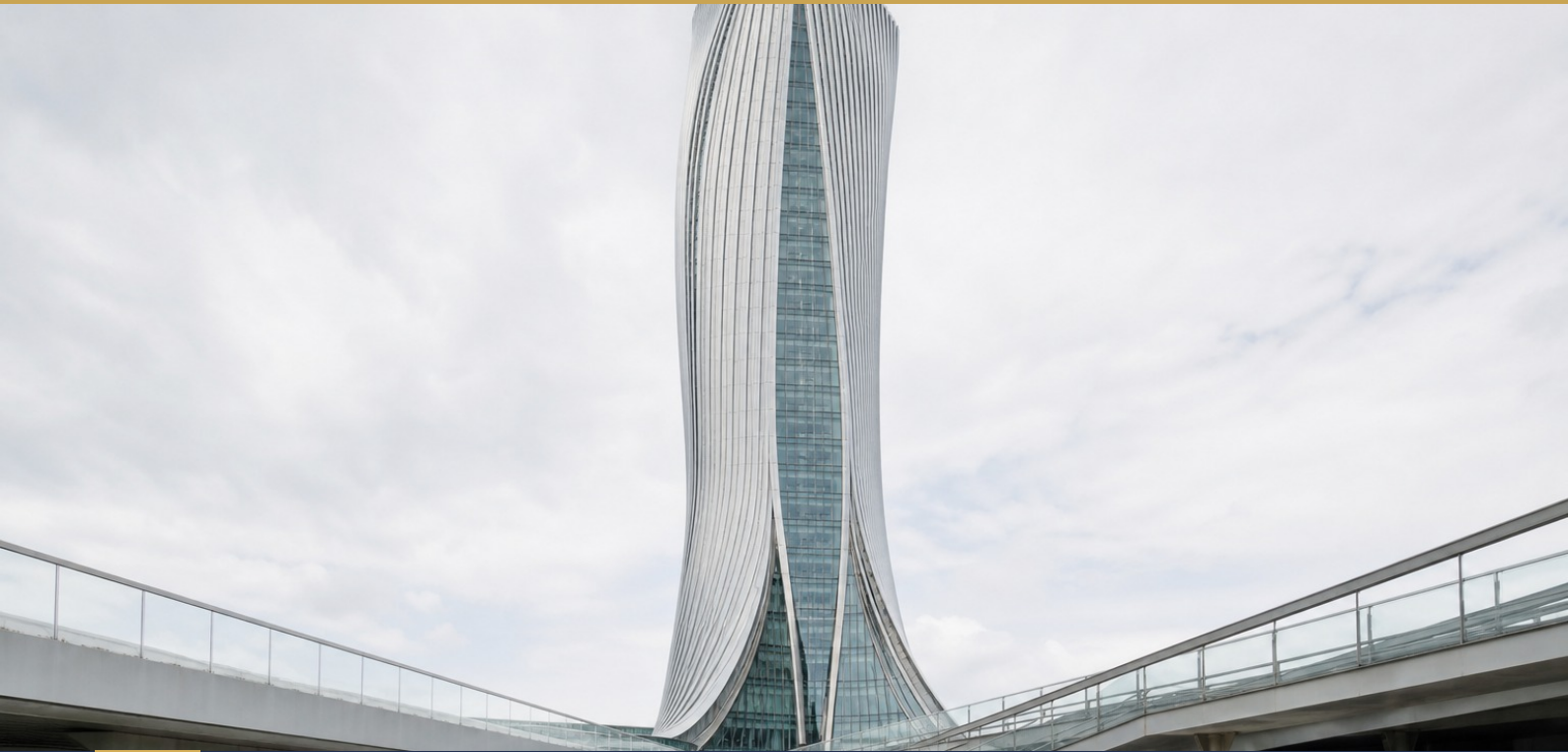




BEYOND THE DASHBOARD

Redesign Governance Around Decisions

A Practitioner's Perspective on Redesigning Governance for Decision-Making

Redesign Governance Around Decisions

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The Reporting Reflex

Governance in most organisations has become a synonym for reporting. Boards receive dashboards. Steering committees review RAG statuses. Assurance functions produce reports on reports. The entire apparatus exists to create the appearance of oversight without the substance of it. This is not governance — it is theatre, and it is time to say so plainly.

The prevailing model treats governance as an assurance layer: a mechanism for monitoring what is happening and reporting it upward. The assumption is that if the right information reaches the right people at the right time, good decisions will follow. This assumption is wrong. Information does not produce decisions. Decision architecture produces decisions. And decision architecture is precisely what most governance structures lack.

The Orthodoxy Is Broken

The governance orthodoxy that has dominated large organisations for the past decade rests on a simple premise: control through visibility. Build a reporting hierarchy. Ensure every programme and project produces regular status updates. Consolidate those updates into dashboards. Present the dashboards to senior leaders. Trust that the leaders will intervene when the dashboards demand it.

The premise fails at every link in the chain. Delivery teams produce status reports that reflect what they want the governance layer to see, not what is actually happening — because the incentive structure punishes honesty. Consolidation strips context and nuance, reducing complex delivery realities to a single colour. Senior leaders receive the dashboards but lack the time, the expertise, or the decision framework to act on them. And so the dashboards accumulate, the governance meetings convene, and the decisions that need to be made are deferred, delegated, or ignored.

The fundamental error is treating governance as a reporting problem. It is a decision problem. The question is not "do we know what is happening?" but "are we making the right decisions fast enough?"

This is not a marginal failure. It is a systemic one. The governance structures that most organisations have built are optimised for a function — reporting — that does not produce the outcome they need — timely, well-informed decisions. The structures must be torn down and rebuilt around the outcome that matters.

Decision Architecture: What It Means

Decision architecture is governance redesigned around the decisions that must be made, not the information that might be reported. It starts from a different question: what are the critical decisions in this programme, this portfolio, this transformation — and who needs to make them, with what information, by when, and with what authority?

This inversion changes everything:

- Decision rights replace reporting lines. Instead of defining who reports to whom, governance defines who decides what. Each decision has an owner, a deadline, and a defined set of inputs. The governance structure exists to ensure decisions are made, not to ensure reports are produced.
- Information serves decisions, not audiences. Instead of producing reports for every stakeholder who might want one, the governance framework identifies the specific information required for each decision and delivers it — and only it — to the decision-maker. The volume of reporting drops dramatically. Its relevance increases.
- Escalation becomes a decision pathway, not a reporting pathway. In the reporting model, escalation means sending a problem upward and hoping someone acts on it. In a decision architecture, escalation means transferring a specific decision to a specific authority with a specific deadline. The problem does not float — it lands.
- Governance forums become decision forums. Steering committees exist to make decisions, not to receive updates. Every agenda item is framed as a decision to be made, with the information, options, and recommendation provided in advance. If no decision is required, the item does not appear.

Why This Requires Courage

The reporting model persists not because it works but because it is comfortable. It distributes accountability so thinly that no individual bears the weight of a bad decision. It creates the appearance of rigour without requiring the substance of it. It allows leaders to claim oversight without exercising judgement.

Decision architecture is uncomfortable by design. It names the decision-maker. It sets a deadline. It forces a choice between defined options. It creates accountability that is specific, personal, and unavoidable. Leaders who have spent their careers in the reporting model — who have built their authority on being informed rather than being decisive — will resist it. They should be overruled.

The organisations that are navigating complexity successfully — managing multi-year transformations, adapting to regulatory change, delivering technology modernisation at pace — are not the ones with the most comprehensive reporting. They are the ones where decisions are made quickly, by people with the authority and the information to make them well, within a structure that makes decision-making the explicit purpose of governance rather than an accidental by-product of it.

The Challenge

This is a manifesto, not a methodology. The specific design of a decision architecture will vary by organisation, by sector, by the nature and scale of the work being governed. But the principle is universal: governance must be redesigned as a decision-making engine, not maintained as a reporting machine.

The reporting reflex is deep. It is embedded in organisational culture, in the training of programme managers, in the expectations of boards, in the design of governance frameworks and standards. Overcoming it requires leaders who are willing to say that the current model is broken — not underperforming, not in need of refinement, but fundamentally misconceived — and to replace it with something that does what governance is supposed to do: ensure that the right decisions are made, by the right people, at the right time.

The alternative is another decade of governance theatre: dashboards nobody acts on, steering committees that steer nothing, and assurance that assures no one. The choice should not be difficult.