

Retrospective Decision Mapping

Using past decisions to prepare future leaders

Purpose Reconstruct how a consequential decision unfolded so a leadership group can identify the judgment, relationships, information, authority, and operating practices that need to be carried forward. Use a decision that is complete enough to examine and important enough to reveal how leadership actually works.

1. Build the map

Phase or stage	How did the opportunity or issue evolve? What were its principal stages?
Decision or question	What was being explored, recommended, approved, rejected, or deferred at each point?
Involvement & information	Who participated? Which analysis, experience, data, or relationships mattered?
Understood outcome	What did participants believe had been decided, and what authority followed?
Uncertainty / ambiguity	What remained unclear about scope, risk, conditions, authority, or next steps?

2. Run the exercise

- **Select a consequential decision**
Choose one that is relevant to the responsibilities a future leader may assume.
- **Establish a neutral chronology**
Ask one or two informed participants to describe the major phases before interpretation begins.
- **Record one item per card**
Capture events, questions, information, interpretations, and outcomes in the appropriate columns.
- **Test the working picture**
Invite corrections and identify where participants understood the same moment differently.
- **Convert the history into requirements**
Ask what the next comparable decision—and the leadership transition—should require.

3. Extract the succession implications

- What judgment did the current leader contribute, and how can it be made more explicit?
- Which information, experience, and relationships were decisive?
- Which decisions could the future leader begin owning now, and within what limits?
- What should trigger consultation, escalation, or approval?
- How should recommendations, conditions, and final decisions be confirmed?
- Which future decisions could provide supervised practice for the next leader?

What this produces

A working decision map, greater clarity about authority boundaries, knowledge-transfer priorities, and specific experiences through which a future leader can build judgment.

Facilitator note

Treat the map as a provisional reconstruction rather than a verdict on the past. Differences in memory are useful data. Some ambiguity is inherent; decide what should be accepted, reduced, or explicitly managed.