

DECISION SHADOW

How unclear ownership turns small questions into ongoing time theft

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Decision Shadow happens when a decision sounds like it was made, but nothing was actually locked in.

The conversation ends, but the decision doesn't.

No clear owner. No final call. No visible close.

The result is quiet hesitation, repeated check-ins, and work that stalls or gets reworked later.

EST. IMPACT: ≈ 30–60 minutes

(often more if your role touches multiple teams)

THE FIX

Every time a decision is made (even a small one), **lock three things** before you move on:

- 1) **Owner:** Who is responsible for the next action? (One name.)
- 2) **Next Step:** What specifically happens next? (One sentence.)
- 3) **Deadline:** When will it be done or reviewed? (A date or time.)

If you can't get those three, the decision isn't real yet. It's a **discussion**. Treat it that way and stop doing "pre-work" that might get reversed.

"Just so I'm clear: owns the next step, what is it, and by when?"

ADDITIONAL NOTES (MAKE IT STICK)

- **Kill the "reply-all fog."** If a thread has multiple voices, end with one line naming the owner and next step. Don't assume the group will magically self-assign responsibility.
- **Watch for fake closure phrases:** "Sounds good," "Let's circle back," "We should," "Keep me posted." Those are Decision Shadow generators. Convert them into Owner + Next Step + Deadline.
- Use a "Decision Receipt" message after any verbal decision: "Recap: [Owner] will [Next Step] by [Deadline.]. That one sentence prevents drift.
- If you don't get the owners, don't carry the shadow. Your job is to clarify the handoff, not babysit the outcome. Clarify it once, then move on.