
The Governance Readiness *Map.*

*Is your operating model enabling
motion — or quietly blocking it?*

A decision-rights and guardrails audit for executives
pressure-testing whether their governance is designed for
responsible acceleration, or retrofitted in the wake of
adoption.

— THROTTLE, NOT BRAKE

Governance is not the opposite of speed. It's the *shape* of it.

Most organizations discover governance the way drivers discover brakes — after a near-miss. That governance is almost always defensive, written under pressure to contain harm rather than enable motion.

Designed governance works differently. It clarifies decision rights *before* they're contested, sets guardrails that match the organization's risk appetite, and defines the escalation paths that let speed stay safe enough to sustain. It is a throttle: a way to modulate motion, not prevent it.

RETROFITTED GOVERNANCE

The Brake.

Written in response to close calls. Defensive in tone, ambiguous in ownership, inconsistent across functions. Teams route around it; exceptions become the norm. Slows the organization without making it safer.

DESIGNED GOVERNANCE

The Throttle.

Written before it's needed. Decision rights explicit. Guardrails proportioned to actual risk. Escalation paths short and known. Enables leaders to accelerate *because* the structure can carry the speed.

This diagnostic measures whether your governance is designed — or whether it's quietly becoming a brake.

— SCORE ACROSS FOUR DIMENSIONS

For each statement, circle the number that best reflects your organization today. **1 = rarely true, 5 = consistently true.** Answer for the organization you actually operate — not the one you describe externally.

01 Decision Rights

WHO DECIDES · WHO'S CONSULTED

For any AI-related decision of material impact, the owner is unambiguous and known before the decision comes up.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

We distinguish between decisions that require consensus and those that require a single decider with clear input.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

When a decision is escalated, we agree on the criteria — not only the decider.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

02 Guardrails & Risk Appetite

WHAT'S BOUNDED · WHAT'S OPEN

Our guardrails are defined in terms of risk tolerance — not as blanket restrictions that assume the worst-case.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

Leaders can articulate what types of AI use are pre-approved, which require review, and which are prohibited — and why.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

Our guardrails were set before adoption — not retrofitted after an incident.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

— DIMENSIONS 3 & 4

03 Escalation & Exception Handling

HOW EDGE CASES MOVE

When an AI use case falls outside our current guardrails, we have a known, fast path to a decision — not a committee queue.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

Exceptions are logged, reviewed, and used to refine the guardrails — not treated as one-off workarounds.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

Teams trust the escalation path enough to use it — rather than routing around it.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

04 Accountability & Review

OWNERSHIP OVER TIME

Every deployed AI system has a named business owner — not just a technical owner — responsible for outcomes.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

We review AI systems on a set cadence — including a disciplined decision about whether to sustain, revise, or sunset.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

When outcomes degrade, we have the accountability structure to act on it — without a political cost to naming it.

RARELY ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ALWAYS

TOTAL YOUR SCORE

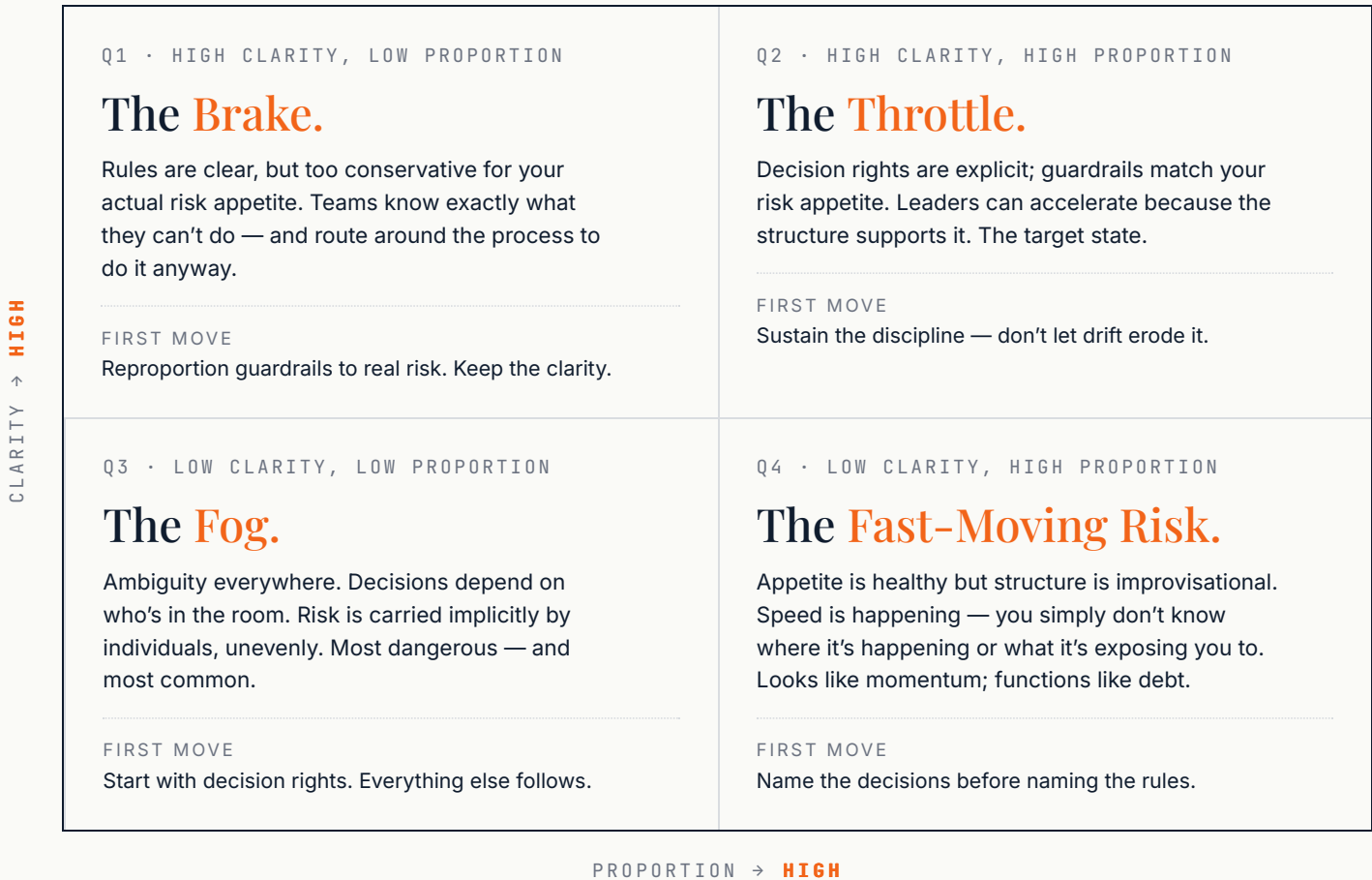
Add all circled numbers → out of 60

/ 60

— WHERE YOUR GOVERNANCE SITS

Plot your organization on the readiness map.

Two axes: how *clear* your decision rights and guardrails are, and how *proportioned* they are to your actual risk appetite. Four quadrants, one position — and a different first move from each.



How to use your score: Scores 48–60 indicate Q2 (Throttle). 34–47 typically sit in Q1 or Q4 depending on whether your constraint is clarity or proportion. Below 34, the honest read is Q3 — and the highest-leverage work is clarifying a handful of decisions rather than writing a policy.

— WHERE DESIGN BEGINS

Four leverage points, in order of payoff.

Every governance design starts with one of four moves. Do them in sequence — trying to sequence them in parallel is the most common failure mode.

MOVE 01

Name six decisions.

Not policies. Actual decisions that have come up in the last ninety days. Identify the decider, the consulted, the escalation threshold — in writing, in under a page.

MOVE 02

Right-size the guardrails.

Walk through three real use cases. Are the current limits protecting you from the risk you actually carry — or from a theoretical one? Adjust accordingly.

MOVE 03

Shorten the escalation path.

Most exceptions die in queues. Define a single named path from edge case to decision, with a committed response window. If the path takes longer than the opportunity, it isn't governance — it's friction.

MOVE 04

Assign business owners.

Every deployed system gets a named business owner accountable for outcomes — not a technical proxy. Set a cadence for sustain/revise/sunset. Treat it as a portfolio, not a collection.

— IF THE MAP IS UNCLEAR

That clarity is the work.

The most valuable output of a governance review isn't a policy document. It's a set of named decisions, owners, and thresholds — specific enough that your team can test them against reality. That's where we start.

BOOK A DISCOVERY CALL

A 30-minute, no-pitch conversation about where your governance is actually sitting.

We'll walk through your readiness map, the patterns we've seen in organizations with similar scores, and the single move that would raise your quadrant the fastest. You leave with a point of view, whether you engage us or not.

SCHEDULE calendly.com/charlie-northlinestrategy/discovery-call

EMAIL contact@northlinestrategy.co

DIRECT 952 · 900 · 1216

ABOUT NORTHLINE STRATEGY

Northline Strategy helps executive leaders design AI strategy, governance structures, and organizational systems that enable responsible acceleration — with clarity, alignment, and resilience. We are pro-design, not anti-speed.

Governance is a throttle, not a brake.

— Northline Strategy