THE WORKSHOP

Decision Tables

Capture a tangled business rule as a grid of conditions and outcomes so every combination has a defined answer and every answer has a reason.

DURATION

90

min

GROUP SIZE

—

people

WHAT YOU BRING

Bring the decision-maker, an erasable whiteboard, and a specific rule worth enumerating; no pre-work required.

WHAT YOU LEAVE WITH

- A completed conditions-and-outcomes grid for one decision
- Flagged policy gaps, each with an owner
- A ready-made set of test cases, one per column
- A spreadsheet transcription shared with participants

WHO TO INVITE

- **Facilitator.** Draws the grid, drives combinations, stops the expert from redesigning the rule mid-capture.
- **Domain expert.** The person who actually makes this call today; their reflexes are what the grid makes explicit.
- **One or two developers.** Ask 'what about…' until combinations run out; scar tissue from past bugs sharpens the questions.
- **Tester (if available).** Thinks in edge cases; finds the cells the developers missed.
- **Second domain expert (optional).** If two experts disagree, bring both — the table surfaces the disagreement as a finding.

USE WHEN

A rule has multiple conditions that interact and 'it depends' keeps recurring

Developers have asked the same question and got different answers

Edge-case bugs keep arriving for a policy, pricing, or routing rule

An SRE runbook's decisions depend on which alerts fire together

AVOID WHEN

The rule is one if/else dressed up to look complex

Each condition has an independent effect and a bullet list suffices

You are trying to invent a rule that does not yet exist

Stakeholders in the room want to change the rule, not capture it

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How the session runs

Phase 1 — Frame the decision, draw the grid (10 min)

Write the decision at the top as a question and draw an empty grid with conditions above, outcomes below. Set the contract: every column is one combination, and no combination will be left to surprise us.

Phase 2 — Identify the conditions (15 min)

Ask what factors the answer depends on and list each as a row with its possible values. Bucket continuous values using the expert's thresholds and watch for hidden or dependent conditions.

Phase 3 — Identify the outcomes (10 min)

Enumerate the possible answers the rule can produce, not specific combinations. Ensure there is a defensive outcome for impossible cases, because software will find them at 2am.

Phase 4 — Fill the columns (30 min)

Start with the most common case and vary one condition at a time, writing the expert's answer in each column. Capture inconsistencies as findings rather than smoothing them over.

Phase 5 — Find the gaps (15 min)

Count the columns against the theoretical maximum and hunt down the missing combinations. Mark each gap as a policy decision or a defensive case, and flag who needs to resolve it.

Phase 6 — Wrap-up, owners, next steps (10 min)

Photograph the table, assign owners to each flagged gap, and confirm who transcribes the grid into a spreadsheet. Close with a clear list of policy decisions that need to leave the room.