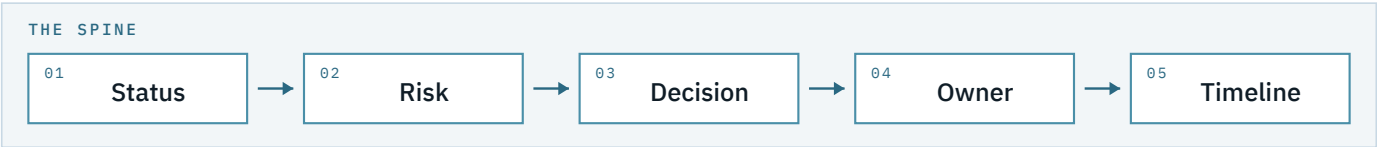


The Five Gates

An operating discipline for project reviews that end in decisions, not discussion.



LAYER ONE

Structure

- 01 Fix the sequence of every discussion
- Every item follows the spine. A missing step keeps the item open.
- 02 Classify status on four levels
- Green, Watch, Alert, Critical. Watch catches risk while it is cheap.
- 03 Separate three stages of progress
- Aligned is not Approved. Approved is not Executed.
- 04 Maintain three core logs
- Decision Log, Risk Register, Action Tracker. Always current.

LAYER TWO

Language

- 05 Replace vague status with defined terms
- Not "almost done" but "pending [specific item]".
- 06 Ask binary questions
- Approved, yes or no? What blocks it? Who owns it? By when?
- 07 Report both sides of reality
- Every achievement is reported with its open risk.
- 08 Diagnose systems, not people
- Fix the process first, then address individuals.

LAYER THREE

Action

- 09 Name an owner at the moment of decision
- An individual, a precise scope and a fixed date. Never a team.
- 10 Always define a parallel path
- When the primary route is blocked, the alternative is defined at once.

THE CLOSING RULE

Before any meeting closes, confirm all five gates.

☐ Status is clear

☐ Risk is defined

☐ Decision taken, or next step defined

☐ Owner is assigned

☐ Timeline is fixed

If any gate is open, the meeting is not over.

STATUS LEVELS

GREEN	WATCH	ALERT	CRITICAL
On track	Risk emerging	Delay likely	Action required

STAGES OF PROGRESS

ALIGNED	APPROVED	EXECUTED
Discussion complete	Decision taken	Work completed

LANGUAGE: AVOID / USE INSTEAD

Work is ongoing	Execution in progress (X% complete)
We are trying	Action initiated; outcome by [date]
Almost done	Pending [specific item]
Issue exists	Item is at risk

THE THREE CORE LOGS

01 Decision Log	What was decided, by whom, on what basis
02 Risk Register	What can go wrong, and the response
03 Action Tracker	Who is doing what, and by when

HOW TO APPLY

- 1 Rebuild the agenda
- Restructure every review item to follow the spine, in order.
- 2 Add two columns
- Tag each item in the tracker with a status level and a stage of progress.
- 3 Close on the gates
- Read the five gates aloud for any item still open before the meeting ends.
- 4 Audit the logs
- Review the Decision Log and Risk Register monthly, not only when challenged.

Status without risk is reassurance. Risk without a decision is anxiety. A decision without an owner is intention. An owner without a timeline is hope.