

Why Your Team Works Hard But Still Moves Slowly (and How to Fix It)

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Key Takeaways

- One of the biggest differences between businesses that keep momentum and those that struggle to move forward is the speed at which they make decisions.
- Slow decisions don't come from a lack of effort, but from unclear ownership. When people don't know whether a decision belongs to them, they hesitate.
- This hesitation slows down the entire business. Having one clear decision owner can reset the rhythm of your entire organization.

As a leader, you'll feel it well before you understand it. It shows up in different forms, but usually it starts with progress slowing down. Projects stall and decisions take longer than they should. Everyone truly works hard, but everything moves with an increasing amount of friction.

It feels like the team is trying, but something, somewhere, is still holding the work back.

When this happens, most leaders blame the slowdown on "effort" or a "lack of motivation." They assume people are either distracted or overloaded. They also assume that their team needs stronger time management or better focus. The real cause, though, is much simpler.

Decisions slow down when people aren't clear on who decides what.

Related: Want to Scale? Streamline Your Decision-Making Process in 3 Steps

When ownership is unclear, decisions will stall

When ownership is unclear, even the most routine decisions bounce between people. One team member wants to move something forward, but they hesitate. They check with another person who also hesitates. Then that person checks with a manager. The manager, meanwhile, asks someone else for input.

No one is clear or sure where the authority sits, so decisions continue to sit.

This hesitation looks extremely harmless in the moment, and it often sounds like one or more of the following:

- *"Let me check with them first."*
- *"I'm not sure this is my call."*
- *"Should we run this by someone else?"*
- *"Let's discuss it in the next meeting."*

Each sentence may seem small on the surface, but together they slow your entire business.

A story that reveals the pattern

I remember a founder I supported who went through this exact experience.

Their team was incredibly smart and also committed. They had

good systems, met often and worked hard. But despite all this, decisions continued to drag. Every delay slowed growth, so understandably, they wanted the team to move quickly. They just couldn't understand why simple decisions turned into long discussions.

Here's the fix we implemented.

We first mapped how decisions flowed, and it soon became clear that no one, not a single person, knew who owned the key calls. The reason the team kept checking with each other was that they didn't want to overstep.

The result was that decisions bounced around until the founder stepped in. The team wasn't slow, but they were certainly unsure.

Once we named the pattern and clarified ownership, everything changed. Decisions moved faster, and people felt more confident.

Work regained momentum.

Related: Does Your Business Feel Stuck? Here's the Mindset Shift That Will Move It Forward.

Why do teams fall into this pattern?

This pattern shows up in every growing organization.

Leaders assume slow decisions come from a lack of effort or commitment, when in reality, slow decisions come from a lack of certainty. When people don't know or aren't sure whether a decision belongs to them, they naturally hesitate. That simple hesitation repeats across the team and eventually slows the entire business.

It's a fact that as companies grow, decision rights often get

blurred. A team that may have once worked closely together now has new roles, new layers and often, new responsibilities. What used to be obvious becomes uncertain, and no one notices the shift until everything takes longer and they're impacted.

The uncertainty creates hidden costs that many leaders don't see immediately.

- Projects take longer than originally planned
- Work piles up between stages
- Leaders become default decision-makers for far too many issues
- Teams gradually lose confidence in their ability to act
- Momentum fades in the most critical moments

By the time the slowdown becomes painful or visible, the leak has already been active for weeks and maybe even months.

Why slow decisions feel “normal”

Most teams I've supported don't see this as an execution leak. They see it as normal and assume the friction is just part of their growth. They assume the business will always run this way and that the answer is more effort.

But the truth is different. Slow decisions aren't a sign of growth, but actually a sign that people need clarity.

Without clear decision ownership, even small choices become group discussions. When that happens (and it often does), teams start to rely on meetings to compensate for uncertainty. Leaders end up involved in far more decisions than they should, and people wait for approvals that may not be necessary.

Interestingly, the organization adapts to the leak without realizing it, and they move more slowly, think more slowly and act more slowly.

This becomes the new normal, and no one questions it until the cost becomes impossible to ignore anymore.

The small shift that changes everything

Here's a simple way to break the pattern.

1. Select just one important decision that keeps slowing down.
2. Name the person who owns that decision from start to finish.
3. Make the ownership clear, simple and direct.
4. Tell the owner they can make the call without waiting for approval unless the decision affects something specific and predefined.

This may feel small, but it'll shift your entire system.

Once one decision flows cleanly, others begin to follow. People start to gain confidence, and they see that decisions don't have to bounce between people. Best of all, they learn that clarity creates speed.

You don't need a complex system to fix this.

You need one clear rule:

If a decision belongs to you, make it. If it affects someone else's area, bring them in early, not late.

Teams feel lighter when they're clear about how decisions work

in their organization, and leaders feel less pressure. Work moves with more rhythm, and momentum returns.

Related: What Leaders Must Understand About Decision-Making in the Age of AI

Slow decisions – a common execution leak

Slow decisions are one of the five execution leaks that show up in organizations at every stage of growth.

Each leak slows progress in a different way, but this one is often the first to appear. If you're a leader who can relate to this, then here's your opportunity to fix it. I know from my work with organizations of varying sizes around the globe that leaders who fix this leak early protect their team from unnecessary friction and give their business room to move faster and grow.

As momentum returns, people feel more capable and stop waiting and start acting. They also naturally bring more energy to their work as they regain confidence. They'll feel the difference long before the results show up on a dashboard.

The interesting thing about speed is that it isn't created by pressure or effort but by clarity.

When your people know what they can decide and where their work fits, they'll move faster without working harder. That's the shift you need as a leader if you want your team to grow with confidence instead of strain.

If your team works hard but still feels slow, the issue likely isn't effort but **an execution leak**. Once you see it, you can fix it. And once you fix it, everything else moves with more ease.

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