RISE INSIGHTS / LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

BEFORE YOU SAY YES TO AI

A decision guide for leaders who want the benefits and need to own the consequences



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ASK BETTER QUESTIONS. MAKE CLEARER DECISIONS.

RISE ACADEMY

A NOTE TO THE READER

03

Approval creates a responsibility

An AI proposal often arrives with an impressive demonstration, a familiar problem and a promise of less work. Leadership must decide whether the organisation can use it well, support it over time and respond when the result is wrong.

This book is for leaders in companies, NGOs and public institutions. It follows the questions that turn an attractive demonstration into an informed decision: the purpose, the people affected, the information involved, the review arrangements and the evidence needed before expansion.

The examples are fictional and the decision methods are practical recommendations. Use the book to prepare a better conversation with your team, board or supplier. The companion AI Constitution Workbook for NGOs provides space for a facilitated team exercise.

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Ask better questions. Make clearer decisions.

RISE ACADEMY / Training and research, Innovative Solutions
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01 / DEFINE THE CHANGE

Approve a use with a clear boundary

The same product can support a routine task or influence a consequential decision.

Describe the work in one sentence

State who will use the system, for which task, with which information and for whom. "AI for our service desk" leaves the important choices open. "Staff will draft replies from an approved public FAQ and review each reply before sending" describes a use people can assess.

Identify what changes from the current process. Does the system suggest wording, recommend an action, rank people or act directly? Each change affects the authority being delegated and the evidence leadership should request.

Make exclusions explicit

A public-information assistant might be permitted to explain office hours and document requirements. Questions about a person's eligibility or a sensitive case may need a staff response through an authorised route. Put those boundaries in the operational design and staff instructions.

Name the owner of the use and the person who can stop it. Agree what would require a fresh decision: a different data source, a new audience, a connection to an internal system or a change from drafting to automatic sending.

Keep the original purpose visible

Staff may discover additional uses after launch. Treat those as proposals to assess. A tool approved for public text does not carry blanket permission to handle confidential records or make decisions about individuals.

> A BOUNDED APPROVAL
>
> A municipality tests an assistant that answers questions from approved public notices. It cannot access resident records or decide whether an application qualifies. A staff contact handles unresolved questions. The service owner reviews the published information weekly.

A clear approval names the purpose, inputs, authority and limits.

02 / FOLLOW THE WORKFLOW

Risk can grow between the handoffs

A small error can become more consequential as other people act on it.

Trace one answer to its effect

Imagine an assistant summarises a service policy. It omits a condition. A staff member turns the summary into a standard reply. A resident relies on that reply and misses a deadline. The original error travelled through a workflow that gave it increasing authority.

Walk through the actual path: source, generated output, staff use and the person affected. At each handoff, ask what could be lost, added or misunderstood. Then identify the control and the person responsible for applying it.

Consider uneven consequences

An unclear answer may be a minor inconvenience for someone with time and transport. It may be a serious barrier for someone travelling far, relying on assistance or unable to return during office hours. Include people who understand these situations in the assessment.

Review the service in the languages and formats people use. Good performance in a short English demonstration does not establish how the same process will work with Arabic, incomplete questions or unusual cases.

THE WORKFLOW

01	02	03	04
Source policy	AI answer	Staff action	Person affected

Map the risks in your own process

Ask about a leadership session that follows one real AI use from its inputs to its effect on people.

DISCUSS A READINESS SESSION →

03 / SET THE DATA BOUNDARY

Permission needs to cover the actual use

Knowing that information is available does not settle whether it can enter an AI system.

Identify the minimum required input

Ask the process owner to show which information the task genuinely needs. An assistant answering public questions may need only approved guidance. A proposal-writing exercise may work with fictional figures. Narrow inputs can make the process easier to govern and review.

Separate public material, internal information and sensitive records. The organisation should decide which categories may enter which approved tools and accounts. Staff need examples they recognise and a clear contact when the category is uncertain.

Follow the information beyond the screen

Ask where inputs and outputs are stored, who can access them, how long they are retained and what the supplier may do with them. Include connected services and contractors. Check the terms and settings for the exact service and account being proposed.

A supplier's broad statement about privacy is a starting point for questions. The relevant commitments should be clear enough for the responsible procurement, security and data specialists to assess.

Use the right expertise

If the use involves sensitive case information, health records, children or consequential decisions, involve the relevant specialists early. Their assessment may change the proposed inputs, access arrangements or whether the use should proceed at all.

A QUESTION THAT IMPROVES THE PROPOSAL

"Show us the least information the system needs to perform the approved task, and the path that information takes after staff submit it." A clear answer exposes dependencies that a product demonstration may leave invisible.



RISE / LEADERSHIP

Define the data boundary in practical terms that staff and suppliers can follow.

04 / ASK THE SUPPLIER

A demonstration is the beginning of the evidence

Ask the supplier to connect the product's claims to your proposed use.

Request relevant performance evidence

Ask what has been tested, on which tasks, in which languages and under which conditions. Find out what the system does when information is missing or the request falls outside its intended scope. Request examples of failure as well as successful answers.

Use representative material your organisation is permitted to share. Include an outdated source, an ambiguous question and a request that should go to a person. Decide the expected behaviour before viewing the result.

Clarify control and change

Who can change the source content, system instructions and permissions? How are product changes communicated? What records can you access after an incident? Ask how support, suspension and exit would work in practice.

Have the responsible specialists examine contractual and technical claims. References to certifications or general safeguards do not establish that the proposed workflow meets your particular needs.

FROM A CLAIM TO A USEFUL QUESTION

Supplier claim	Question to investigate
"Accurate answers"	On which tasks, languages and failure cases?
"Human control"	Who can intervene, and before which action?
"Private data"	Which terms, settings and access arrangements apply?
"Easy integration"	What can the connection read, change or send?

Use the answers to guide specialist review and your own testing.

Request evidence that matches the task, the users and the operating conditions.

05 / MAKE HUMAN REVIEW WORK

A named person needs real control

Review depends on capability, information, time and authority.

Give the reviewer what the task requires

A reviewer needs to understand the subject and see the evidence behind the output. A service officer checking a reply should have the current policy and a clear route to the policy owner. An unexplained score may require a different process entirely.

Plan the workload. If one person is expected to approve hundreds of outputs without time to inspect them, the control may become a formality. Estimate review effort during the pilot and resource it before expansion.

Allow rejection and escalation

The reviewer should be able to amend, hold or reject an output before it affects someone. Define when the issue moves to a specialist or a senior decision owner. Make that route practical during normal working hours and service disruptions.

Check the incentives around the role. A target focused entirely on speed can undermine careful review. Ask staff whether they feel able to challenge the system and whether their corrections lead to process improvements.

Test the arrangement

During a controlled exercise, include a plausible but unsupported answer. Observe whether the reviewer detects it, knows what to do and can prevent release. Use the result to improve the process. A documented role becomes credible when it works in practice.

> FOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE REVIEW ROLE
>
> Can this person recognise a meaningful error? Can they see the relevant source? Do they have time to check? Can they stop the result from being used? If an answer is unclear, the review arrangement needs more work.

Build review around the decisions a person must be able to change.

06 / TEST BEFORE LIVE USE

Let a pilot answer a decision

Choose the evidence you need before the team becomes invested in the result.

Test beside the existing process

A shadow trial produces outputs for comparison while the established process continues to determine the live result. Where appropriate and authorised, this lets the team inspect the proposed use before people depend on it.

Include ordinary questions, missing information, conflicting sources and requests outside the approved scope. Check the relevant languages and access needs.

Set decision criteria in advance

Define unacceptable errors, the required quality and the review effort you can support. A small pilot can reveal problems; it cannot rule out rare failures.

Record what you did not test. If the trial covers only public notices, say so. Evidence from that trial should not be used to justify access to resident records or automated eligibility decisions.

ILLUSTRATIVE PILOT DECISION RULES

Observation	Response
Incorrect service condition	Hold release; investigate source and review.
Question outside approved scope	Route to the designated staff contact.
Reviewer cannot sustain the workload	Reduce scope or resource the review.
Useful output within tested limits	Consider controlled use with monitoring.

The owner should set criteria appropriate to the actual consequences and context.

Turn a proposal into a testable plan

Ask about an AI readiness review or a facilitated pilot-design session for your leadership and operational team.

DISCUSS YOUR AI PROPOSAL →

07 / SUPPORT PEOPLE AFFECTED

People need a route to question the outcome

An explanation is useful when it helps someone understand and act.

Explain the role AI plays

Choose a clear explanation suited to the setting. A person using an automated information assistant should know what it can answer and how to reach staff. Where AI influences a consequential decision, the explanation should make its role understandable within the decision process.

Avoid suggesting that the system owns the decision. Staff should be able to identify who is responsible for the service or outcome and how an error can be raised. The organisation needs a process for responding to that request.

Make the challenge route usable

Consider whether the person has internet access, time, language support and enough information to explain the problem. A form hidden behind several pages may exist on paper while remaining difficult to use.

A review request should reach someone with the relevant authority and evidence. Where appropriate, that person should reconsider the outcome through a process that does not simply repeat the original automated result.

Learn from questions and complaints

Look for repeated confusion, inaccessible instructions or errors affecting a particular group. Bring these patterns into the monitoring process and record what changes. Keep personal details protected while ensuring the responsible team sees the issue.

A SERVICE-DESIGN QUESTION

If a resident says, "The assistant told me I could submit this document, but the office refused it," who investigates, what evidence can they inspect and how will the resident receive a useful response? Agree this before launch.



RISE / LEADERSHIP

Accountability should be visible to the people who rely on the service.

08 / BUDGET FOR THE SERVICE

The subscription is one part of the cost

Useful AI needs people, information and ongoing care.

Estimate setup and recurring work

Include source preparation, access configuration, specialist assessment, integration, testing and staff learning. Then estimate the continuing work: review, source updates, support, monitoring and incident handling. These tasks may draw on people who already have full responsibilities.

Ask how the system behaves when the approved information changes. Someone must update the source, check the result and remove obsolete material. A service that answers yesterday's policy clearly can still create avoidable problems.

Describe the benefit honestly

Define whether the goal is staff capacity, better quality, faster response or reduced spending. These outcomes need different measures. A reduction in drafting time may create useful capacity without changing the organisation's cash costs.

Use conservative assumptions and show uncertainty. Estimate how much suitable work the system will actually handle, how much review it requires and how often a person will take over. A benefit that depends on perfect answers deserves further scrutiny.

Plan for interruption and exit

Keep a workable fallback for service outages or unacceptable performance. Understand how to retrieve the information and records you need if the supplier changes terms or the organisation ends the service. Assign an owner to the transition.

> THE BUSINESS-CASE QUESTION
>
> "After we include review, maintenance and support, what useful capacity does this create, and who has agreed to provide the continuing work?"

KEEP THE PARTS VISIBLE

01	02	03
Setup	People & review	Ongoing operation

Fund the conditions that make the benefit possible.

09 / KEEP A DECISION RECORD

Make the reasoning easy to find later

A concise record helps the organisation remember what it actually approved.

Record the decision and its conditions

Keep the purpose, owner, approved inputs, system permissions and intended users together. Add the evidence reviewed, known limitations, unresolved questions and the reasons for proceeding, revising or stopping. Store the record where responsible colleagues can access it.

Record the conditions of approval. A tool may be cleared only for a particular task, account, source set or trial period. Without those details, a limited decision can be remembered as permission to use the product everywhere.

Give changes a review trigger

A new data category, language, audience or system connection can change the assessment. So can a pattern of complaints, an incident or a supplier update. Decide who checks these changes and when leadership needs to reconsider the use.

Keep operational records proportionate and protected. The need to understand a decision does not justify keeping every personal detail indefinitely. Agree retention and access arrangements with the people responsible for information governance.

Connect the record to action

At a scheduled review, compare what was approved with what staff actually do. Ask whether the controls still work and whether the benefit remains worthwhile. An accurate inventory is valuable when it supports a decision someone is prepared to make.

A CONCISE DECISION NOTE

"Approved for a four-week staff-only trial using public guidance. No personal records or automatic sending. Service manager owns review; unresolved questions go to the policy lead. Reassess before public access or any new system connection."

Keep the approval, evidence and review trigger in the same place.

10 / MAKE THE DECISION

Choose the next step the evidence supports

A useful decision can be to proceed, revise the proposal or pause it.

Proceed within the tested boundary

A go-ahead decision should name the permitted use, the owner and the conditions that must remain in place. Confirm that the data arrangements, review capacity, monitoring and fallback are ready. Set the next review date before expanding the service.

Revise a specific weakness

When the problem is addressable, say what must change and what evidence will be needed. Narrowing the task, improving sources or changing permissions may produce a better proposal. Assign someone to return with the revised version.

Pause when essential conditions are missing

Missing authority, unreviewable outputs, unresolved data arrangements or a service with no workable response to error can justify a pause. Explain the reason clearly so the team understands what would need to be resolved.

Leadership does not need to predict every possible outcome. It does need a credible basis for the choice, people able to act when concerns arise and a process for reconsidering the decision. That is a practical foundation for responsible adoption.

A sound decision explains what can happen next, under whose responsibility and why.

Bring one real decision to the table

Work with Tony Bader to assess an AI use, clarify decision rights and shape a practical adoption plan for your organisation.

PLAN A LEADERSHIP SESSION →

SOURCES & READING NOTES

Evidence & foundations



These primary sources provide broader foundations. The examples and decision aids in this book are original practical guidance; they do not establish legal compliance or certify readiness.

01

NIST / 2023

AI Risk Management Framework 1.0

NIST AI 100-1. A voluntary framework organised around Govern, Map, Measure and Manage. It supports a continuing approach to AI risk management.

READ THE ORIGINAL SOURCE →

02

NIST / 2024

Generative Artificial Intelligence Profile

NIST AI 600-1. A companion resource addressing risks and suggested actions for generative AI.

READ THE ORIGINAL SOURCE →

03

OECD / AMENDED 2024

Recommendation of the Council on Artificial Intelligence

OECD/LEGAL/0449. Includes principles on human rights, transparency, robustness and accountability, with attention to people affected by AI.

READ THE ORIGINAL SOURCE →

04

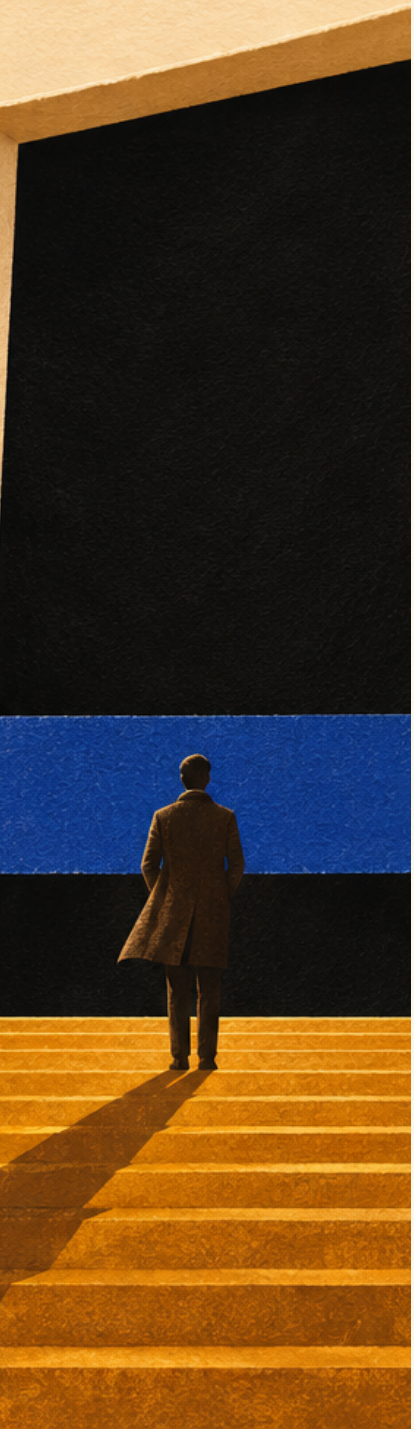
ICRC / 2024

Building a responsible humanitarian approach

The ICRC's policy on artificial intelligence. A sector-specific example of connecting AI use with institutional mission and human-centred practice.

READ THE ORIGINAL SOURCE →

Published by Rise Academy, the training and research division of Innovative Solutions. This book offers practical learning and discussion. Adapt the guidance to your organisation and operating context.



TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Make the decision. Own the process.

Bring the AI proposal your team is considering, the people it will affect and the questions that remain unresolved. We can work through the purpose, safeguards and responsibilities that a credible decision needs.

Leadership & board sessions

Build a shared understanding of AI decisions and responsibilities.

Readiness & governance guidance

Clarify boundaries, review roles and the evidence needed to proceed.

Practical team workshops

Translate principles into decisions, scenarios and everyday procedures.

Dr. Tony Bader

AI governance and digital transformation expert, researcher and speaker. His work connects responsible AI adoption, communication and organisational capacity building.

START A CONVERSATION

badertony.com

Mention this book and the AI use your organisation is considering.