

Beyond the Empty Chair

Introducing DACIP: The 5-Whos of Decision-Making

Transforming customer symbols into structured safeguards.

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The Legend of the Empty Chair

The Story

According to early Amazon executive Bill Price, Jeff Bezos famously left one chair empty in executive meetings to represent the customer—the most important person not in the room.

The Intent

It served as a powerful symbol of customer obsession, reminding the team of who they were ultimately building for.

The Reality

When decisions get made, the customer is rarely in the building, the room, or the chair.

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The Limit of a Symbol





The Blind Spot

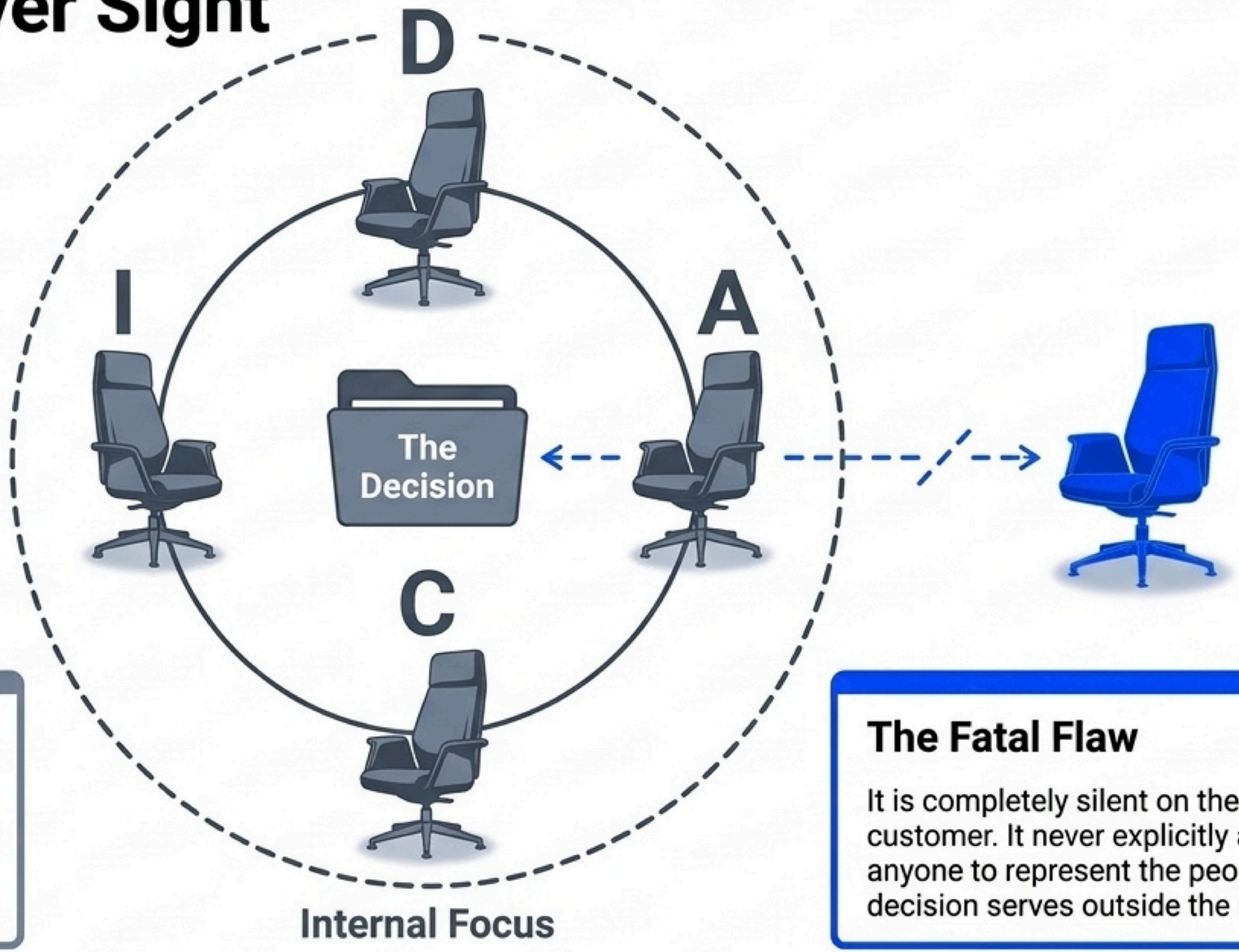
An empty chair simply reflects a room's own assumptions. Participants imagine the absent customer values exactly what they already value.

The Consequence

Teams experience Stakeholder Blindness. Decisions execute perfectly on an operational level but fail their market purpose because choices are framed only around the most visible internal people.

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DACI: Speed Over Sight



The Strengths of DACI

Assigns one named Approver to prevent stalling in committee. Keeps decisions moving with incredible speed.

The Fatal Flaw

It is completely silent on the customer. It never explicitly asks anyone to represent the people a decision serves outside the room.

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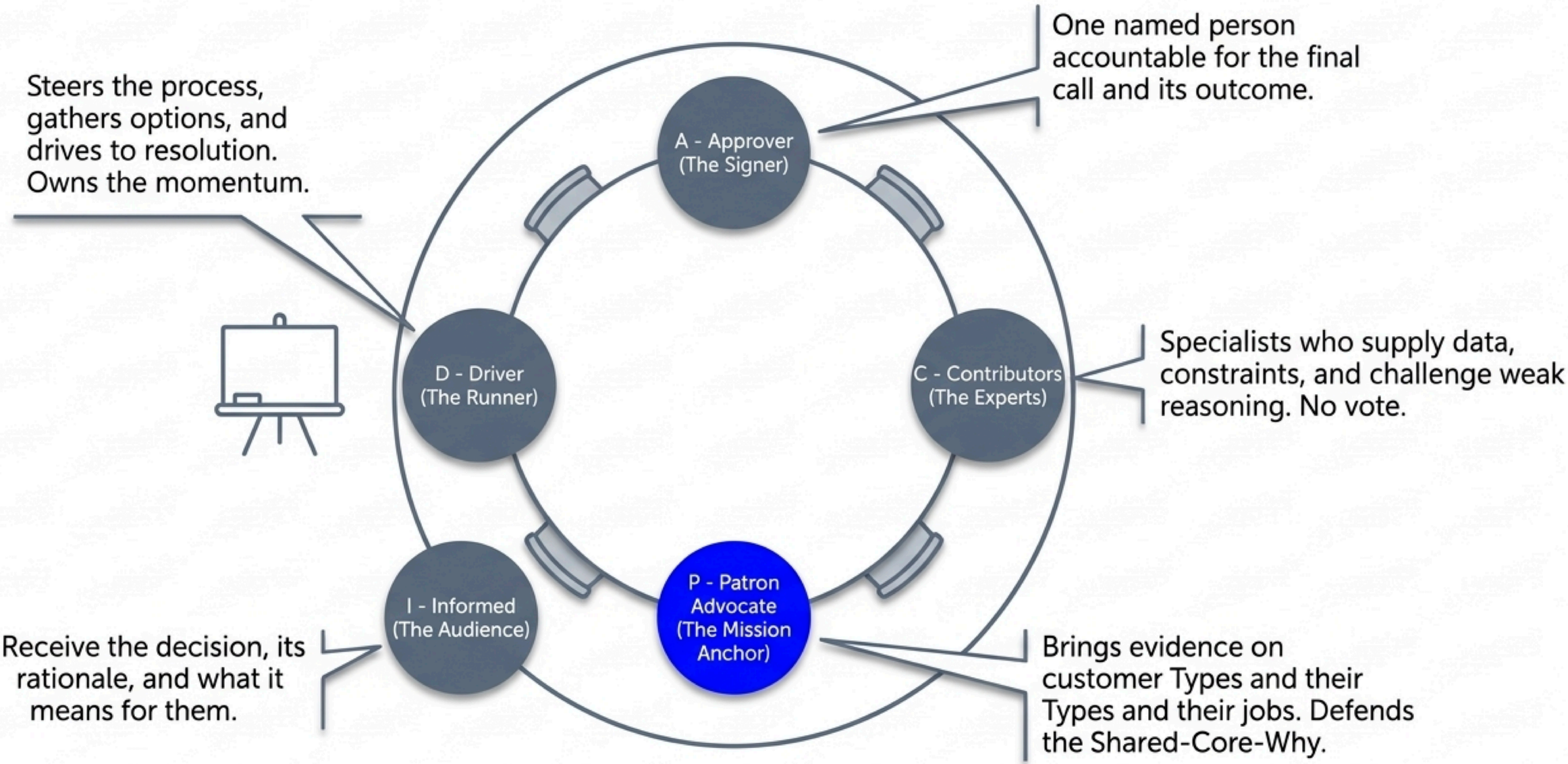
Enter DACIP: The 5-Whos



The Concept	DACIP (pronounced DAY-sip) takes the 5-Whos of curiosity and applies them to decision-making.
The Intervention	It keeps DACI's four roles and explicitly adds a critical fifth: the **Patron Advocate**.
The Goal	Fill the empty chair with a **real person** armed with **hard evidence**, ensuring short-term internal goals do not crowd out the organization's Shared-Core-Why.

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The Decision Orbit: The 5 Roles of DACIP



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Why Not Just the Product Owner?



The Conflict

In practice, the Product Owner is often the Driver. They own the roadmap, the timeline, and the pressure to ship.

The Result

Customer advocacy ends up competing with project momentum inside one person's head.

The DACIP Rule

A Product Owner can be the Patron Advocate—but on consequential decisions, if they are Driving, someone else must take the Patron chair. You cannot own both the timeline and the challenge right.

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Arming the Chair: Riding the Train at Intuit



Jobs to Be Done

Module 1

The Practice

Intuit required every employee to dial into live customer support calls daily as a silent listener.

Module 2

The Insight

Hearing a customer struggle firsthand is infinitely more powerful than reading a summarized report. It naturally exposes what the customer is actually trying to accomplish in their specific circumstance.

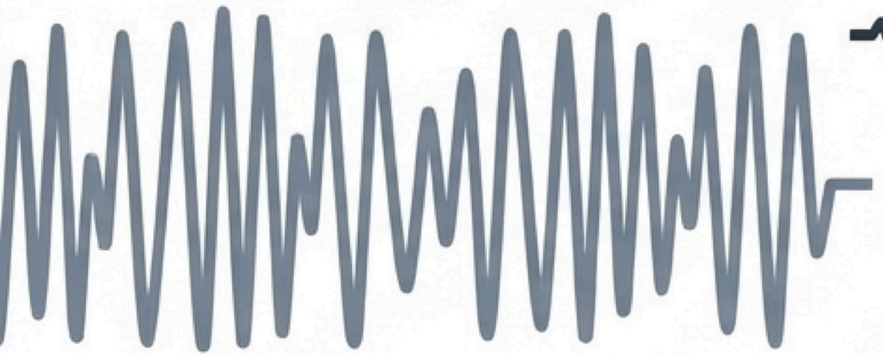
Module 3

The Limitation

Random listening reveals what is common (like forgotten passwords), but repeat exposure yields diminishing returns for catching fatal outliers.

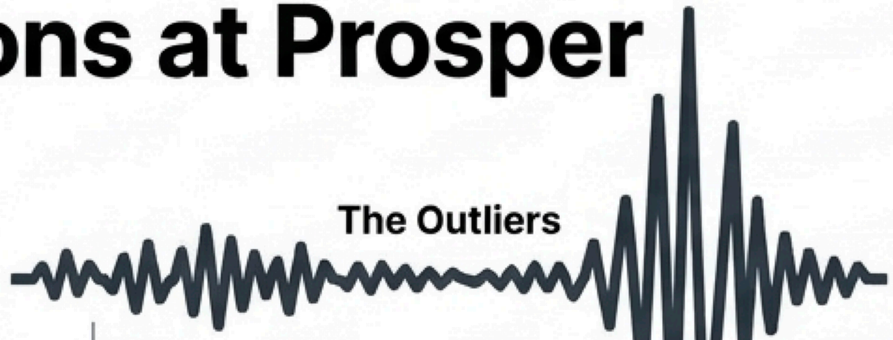
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Elevating the Evidence: Monday Sessions at Prosper



The Common

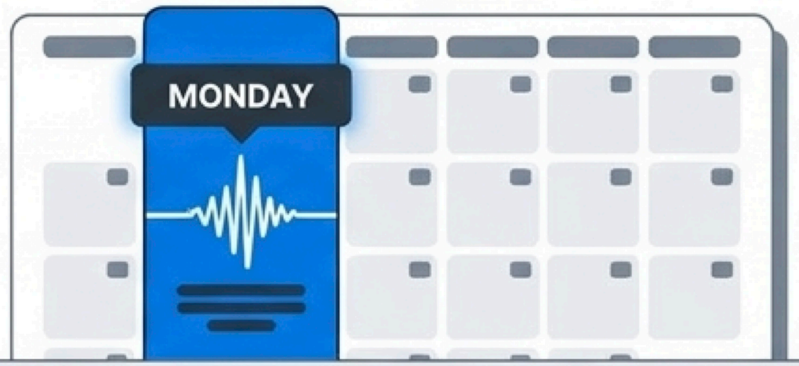
Grounding the team in everyday friction.

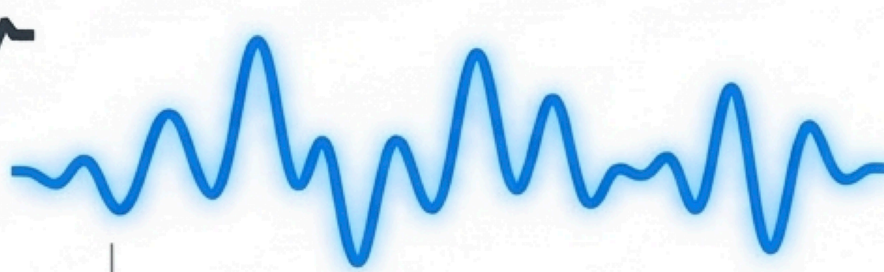


The Outliers

Uncovering total blockers that random sampling misses.

The Weekly Ritual





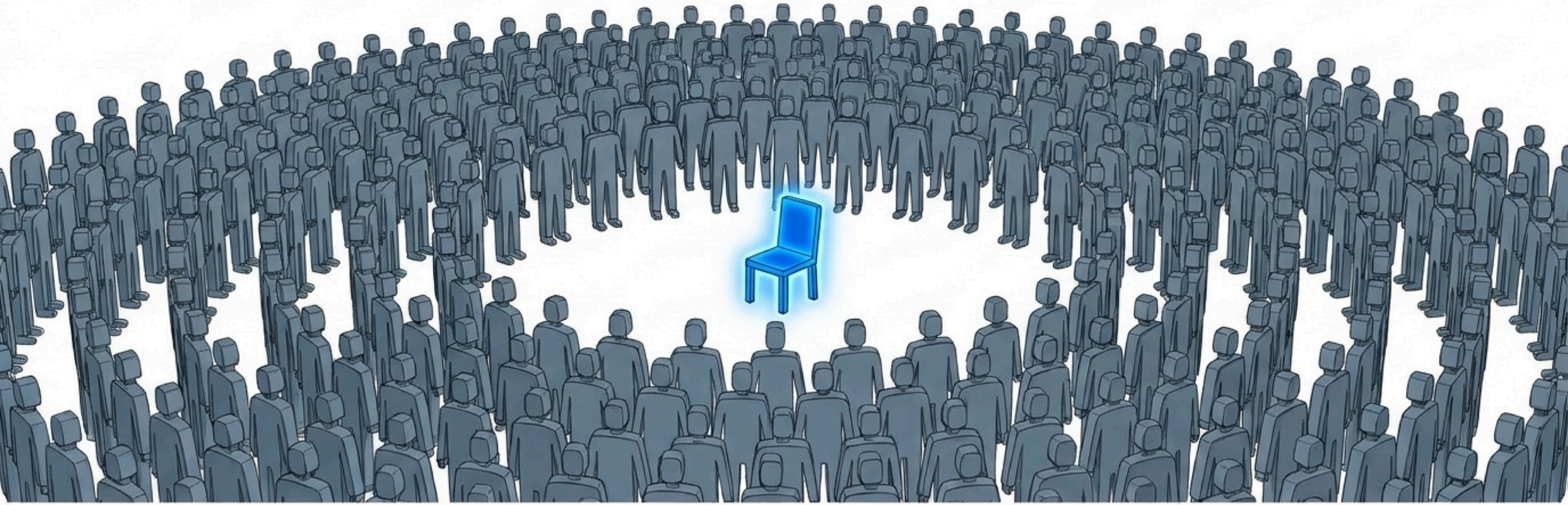
The Praise

Highlighting rare moments of success, showing the team exactly what they need to protect.

At Prosper Marketplace, leaders actively curated and listened to these specific signals together every Monday to move beyond random sampling into strategic insight.

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When Everyone Owns the Chair, No One Does



The Cultural Trap

Organizations rightly believe keeping customers in mind is everyone's responsibility.

The Hard Truth

In a high-stakes decision, "everyone's responsibility" functions exactly like an empty chair. The evidence is in the building, but no one in particular is accountable for putting it on the table.

The DACIP Solution

Explicit roles hold up under pressure. The Patron Advocate is the named individual responsible for taking gathered evidence and injecting it directly into the decision process.

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Gemini Notebook

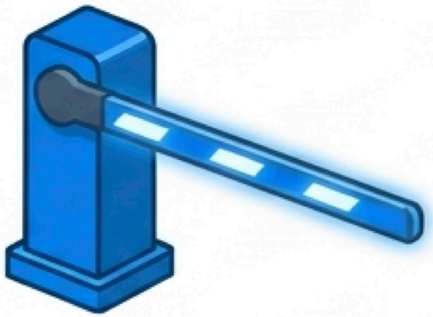
The Patron Advocate in Action



The Patron Impact Statement

A brief assessment generated before

1. Which customer Types and Jobs to Be Done are affected?
2. What friction or unintended consequences might this introduce?
3. How does this connect to our Shared-Core-Why?



The Mission Breach Checkpoint

A defined right to formally challenge a recommendation.

Note: It is not a second Approver or an unlimited veto. The Approver still decides. But accepting a material mission compromise becomes a conscious, documented choice, not an accident.

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The Stakes: Amazon's Two-Sided Coin

Mission Alignment: Warning Customers (2003)

- **Scenario:** Amazon built a feature warning customers if they already owned an item, slightly reducing immediate sales.
- **The Why:** Helping customers decide well builds trust. The decision connected perfectly to their Shared-Core-Why.

Mission Breach: The Prime Iliad (2023 FTC Allegations)

- **Scenario:** Amazon allegedly introduced massive friction into the Prime cancellation process to protect retention numbers.
- **The Failure:** Retention metrics began measuring difficulty, not loyalty. A Patron Advocate with standing could have used a Mission Breach Checkpoint to force an explicit choice about this tradeoff.

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Scaling DACIP (Without the Bureaucracy)

Level 1: Routine Decisions
(Small, reversible)

Action: The Patron perspective is just a verbal question: "Does this serve the people we are trying to help?" No extra meetings.

Level 2: Consequential Decisions
(Real tradeoffs, customer impact)

Action: Explicitly name a Patron Advocate. Write a short Patron Impact Statement before the decision is finalized.

Level 3: Mission-Critical Decisions
(Can reshape trust or direction)

Action: Formally designate the Patron Advocate. Require explicit escalation rights (Mission Breach Checkpoint) and outline what evidence would justify a reversal.

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The Strategic Advantage: DACI vs. DACIP

	Traditional DACI	The DACIP Framework
Primary Optimization	Speed and internal clarity.	Speed, clarity, and external market alignment.
Customer Representation	Passive (relies on culture or memory).	Active (a named, accountable role).
Use of Evidence	Vulnerable to the room's assumptions.	Mandates direct listening data and Jobs to Be Done.
Primary Failure Mode	Stakeholder Blindness (Executing perfectly on the wrong thing).	Deliberate Compromise (Tradeoffs are allowed, but fully visible).

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Symbols don’t make decisions. People do.



An empty chair is a reminder. But a named Patron Advocate armed with evidence is a safeguard.

For your next consequential decision, ask: Who is sitting in the Patron’s chair, and what evidence did they bring?

Turn intentions into tested experience.

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