

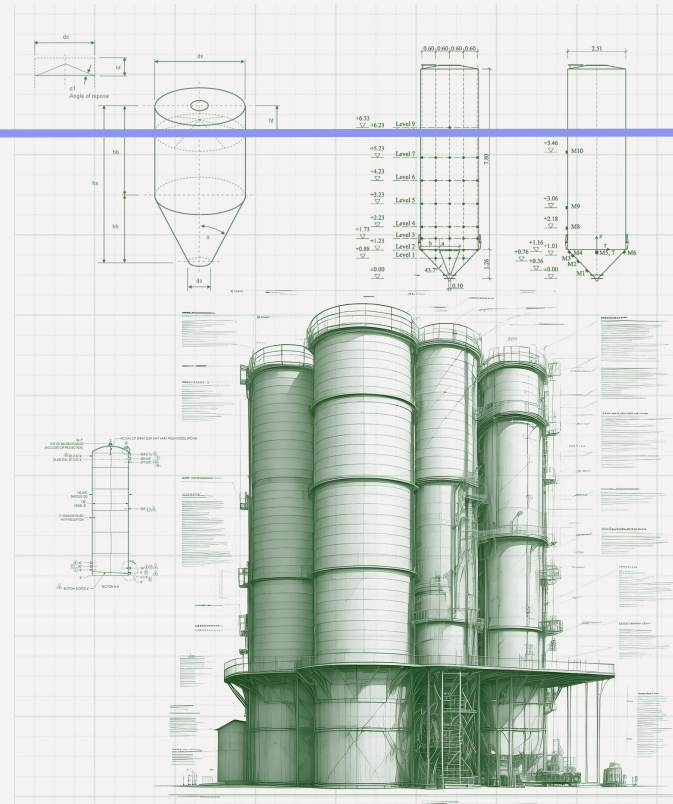
DARO

Diagnostic Framework

Many organizations invest in data and technology initiatives, but have difficulty understanding why they succeed in some environments and stall in others.

Across organizations, data and technology challenges rarely stem from the technology itself. Instead, they tend to reflect recurring organizational constraints around who has authority to act, what incentives shape behaviour, how evidence influences decisions, and whether learning accumulates over time.

This diagnostic framework highlights four areas where organizations tend to mistake structural challenges for ones related to data and technology, and the common signs of that misdiagnosis.



DARO is a consulting firm for the social sector, working at the intersection of strategy, data, technology, and learning.



Decision Ownership

Q1. When a tool or system isn't delivering the expected value, who has the authority to change course? Do they actually use it?

Q2. Are decisions about technology and data made by the people who feel the consequences, or by those who control funding or approval?

Q3. When priorities conflict (mission, compliance, speed), who resolves the tradeoff, and how explicit is that process?

Unclear Decision Authority

If many questions feel hard to answer, this often signals **diffuse or ambiguous decision making**. In these environments, technology struggles to adapt because no one is clearly empowered to make tradeoffs when reality changes.

This often shows up as:

- Striving for consensus to make changes
- Group decisions are unclear; no one knows who calls the next meeting, or who decides when there's been enough consultation
- The team leading a new digital initiative can't tell other teams what to do or they don't have insight into what other teams do
- Decision-making cadences are too tied to management meetings
- Lots of good ideas that never become more concrete



Incentives

Q1. What behaviors are rewarded when new technology is introduced and which ones quietly increase personal or organizational risk?

Q2. When a pilot or innovation struggles, is it treated as a learning signal or a reputational failure?

Q3. Who bears the downside if something goes wrong? Is it the team using the tool, leadership, or no one at all?

Learning is Risky

If pilots are treated as successes on paper but struggles are avoided or hidden, it often reflects **incentive misalignment**. When learning carries personal or organizational risk, people rationally default to workarounds rather than adapting something to work better.

This often shows up as:

- Teams quietly working around tools rather than admitting they aren't working
- Pilots reported as successes even when adoption is low
- Innovation framed as "extra work" rather than part of the job
- Metrics optimized to demonstrate progress rather than improve outcomes
- People using the word "just" when describing complex fixes ("we just need the other team to...")

Evidence and Interpretation

Q1. When new data or insights emerge, where do they go next, and where do they tend to stall?

Q2. What happens when evidence contradicts a leadership preference or funding commitment?

Q3. Is there a regular moment where evidence is explicitly discussed as an input to decisions?

Evidence Without Decision Leverage

If evidence is produced but rarely shifts decisions, the issue is **often not a lack of data**. More often, people collect data on what they think they should have evidence on or what's convenient, not what they need to make informed decisions. This leaves organizations swimming in data with little room for course correction.

This often shows up as:

- Dashboards are reviewed regularly but decisions rarely change
- Teams collect data because they are expected to, not because it informs choices
- Evidence is treated as reporting rather than an input to strategy
- When evidence challenges assumptions, it is quietly deprioritized
- People say the data they need is "too hard to collect," so decisions default to instinct



Institutional Memory and Learning

Q1. When an initiative ends or a grant cycle closes, what actually happens to the lessons learned?

Q2. When a new project begins, how often does the team revisit what has already been tried before?

Q3. What happens when key people leave — does the system still make sense to those who remain?

Learning Doesn't Accumulate Over Time

If tools stall after launch or depend heavily on a few individuals, this often signals a breakdown in institutional memory. Insights from pilots, grants, or new systems rarely accumulate over time. As people move on or priorities shift, organizations end up rediscovering the same challenges repeatedly.

This shows up as:

- The same “pilot” being run every few years under a different name
- Teams asking for data or analysis that already exists but no one can find
- Tools that made sense during launch but no longer reflect how the organization actually works
- New staff inheriting systems they don't understand but feel unable to change
- Workarounds and shadow systems emerging because the original logic is forgotten

Explore More



When technology advances faster than decision systems, friction is inevitable. Diagnostics can determine where that friction is actually coming from in your work.

Using this Diagnostic

Share this resource. You can use these diagnostic questions to:

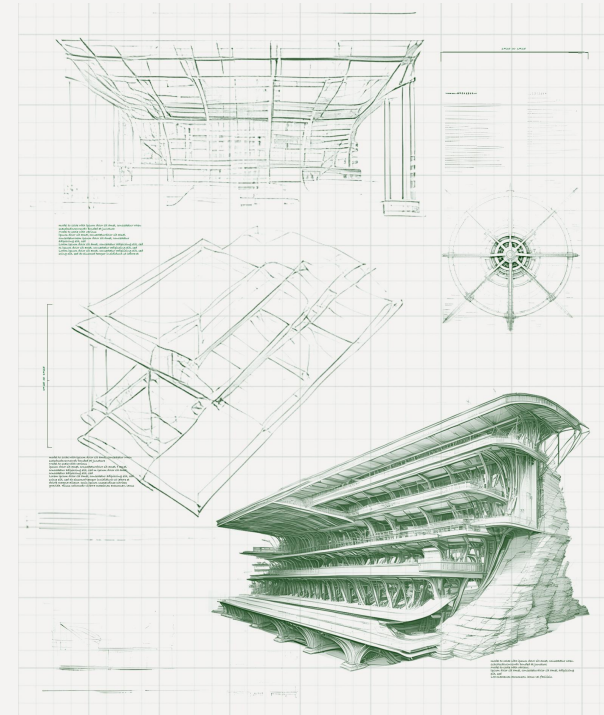
- Start internal conversations
- Clarify tradeoffs
- Distinguish structural constraints from situational ones

The goal is to surface patterns that are often implicit:

- Where decision rights are unclear
- Where incentives are misaligned
- Where governance lags behind the ambitions of your project
- Where learning doesn't change behavior



We're always open to discussing what your conversation surfaced and what to do next. Visit wearedaro.com/diagnostic to learn more.



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