RemoteHeR · Module 2 · Decision game

MODULE 2 DECISION GAME

The message you cannot unsend



A restructure has been decided. You choose who hears what, in which order, on which channel — and read what each person does next.

Before you start

You are the HR officer for Norvia, a distributed company of 90 people. Yesterday the board decided that the customer support team — eleven people across four countries — will move from four locations to one, and three roles will go.

You have until Friday. Nobody outside the board knows.

There are no right answers scored here and nothing is graded. Every choice leads to a consequence and then to the next decision, and the point of the game is the consequences. Play it once making the choices you would actually make. Then play it again and take a different route — the second run is where most people learn something.

Decision 1 · Monday morning — where do you start?

The board minute lands in your inbox at 08:12. It is three lines long and says the decision is final. The support team lead, Rui, does not know yet. Neither does anyone else.

What is your first move?

Choice	What happens	Verdict
A. Tell Rui first, on a call, before anything is written down	Rui takes it badly and then takes it seriously. He spends forty minutes telling you which three roles the board has probably picked and why two of them are wrong — including that one of the people is on a fixed-term contract that ends in six weeks anyway, which nobody at board level knew. You now have information the board did not have, and a manager who is inside the process rather than reading	good

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	about it.	
B. Draft the all-team announcement first, so it is ready	You write a good announcement. At 11:40 Rui walks into a support team call still not knowing, and someone asks him about a rumour. He says he has not heard anything, which is true and sounds like a lie. By the time you send the announcement on Wednesday, the team has had two days to decide that management knew and said nothing. The announcement is now competing with a story it cannot beat.	bad
C. Ask the board for the reasoning behind the three roles before telling anyone	Reasonable, and it costs you a day. The board chair replies Tuesday afternoon with two sentences. Meanwhile Rui has heard nothing and the finance director has mentioned the restructure to one person in passing. You have gained a little clarity and lost control of the sequence.	mixed

Decision 2 · Tuesday — the message from Marta

Marta is one of the eleven. She has been at Norvia six years and is the person everyone in support asks when they do not know something.

At 09:30 she messages you directly: "Is something happening with our team? People are asking me and I don't know what to say."

She is not one of the three.

Choice	What happens	Verdict
A. "I can't say anything yet, but I will come to you before the announcement."	She replies with one word: "Okay." She does not push, and she does not tell people you confirmed anything. What you have actually done is buy three days of quiet and put a promise on record. Note the shape of it: you told her the truth about what you could not say, and gave her a specific thing you would do instead. That is why it worked.	good
B. "Nothing to worry about at the moment."	This is not true and she will find out on Friday that it was not true.	bad

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	She is the person eleven people go to. On Friday afternoon she becomes the person eleven people go to who was told nothing was happening. You do not get her back this year.	
C. Do not reply until you have something to say	Silence from HR to a direct question reads as confirmation. By Wednesday the team has concluded that something is happening and that you would not deny it. They are right, which is the uncomfortable part. But you have taught them that you do not answer, and next time they will not ask you — they will ask each other.	bad

Decision 3 · Wednesday — the channel

The three affected people need to be told individually before Friday. Two are in Portugal, one is in Estonia, and none of them are in the same country as you.

How do you deliver it?

Choice	What happens	Verdict
A. A video call each, with Rui present, followed by the written letter within the hour	Three uncomfortable calls, and all three are told by a person who can hear how they take it. The written letter following within the hour matters more than it looks: after news like this nobody retains what was said, and everyone needs something they can re-read at midnight. Rui being there means they hear it from their manager as well as from HR, which is what they will remember.	good
B. A carefully written letter by email to each, offering a call afterwards	The letter is well written. One person reads it on her phone in a supermarket car park, alone, and has nobody to ask the obvious question of for four hours. Writing first is efficient and it moves the hardest moment out of your day and into theirs. The rule is not about kindness in the abstract: news that changes someone's life is delivered by a person, and confirmed in writing afterwards.	bad
C. One call with all three together, then individual letters	It saves you two conversations and it costs each of them the ability to react.	bad

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	They now have to receive the worst professional news of their year while two colleagues watch, and none of them can ask the question they actually want to ask. Two of the three say almost nothing on the call and email you separately that evening.	

Decision 4 · Wednesday afternoon — the sentence

You are writing what you will open the first call with. Rui has sent you a draft opening:

"Thanks for jumping on. I know this is a strange time of year and I really appreciate everything you've done this quarter — you've been brilliant. There's been a lot going on at board level and unfortunately, following a review of how the team is structured…"

What do you do with it?

Choice	What happens	Verdict
A. Cut it to: "I have difficult news and I want to give it to you straight away. Your role is at risk in a restructure."	She knows what is happening in nine seconds instead of ninety. Everything Rui wrote is true and kindly meant, and every word of it delays the moment she can start processing. Waiting for the point is worse than the point. The warmth is not deleted — it comes after, when she can actually hear it.	good
B. Keep it — the appreciation is genuine and softens the blow	She spends the first ninety seconds working out what is coming while being told she is brilliant. By the time the news arrives she has already guessed it, and the praise has been retrospectively converted into the thing that came before bad news. Next time Rui opens a call with appreciation, she will brace.	bad
C. Keep the appreciation but move it to the end	Better, and the instinct is right. Watch what happens to it at the end, though: after news like this, whatever you say last is barely heard. If the appreciation matters, it needs to be its own conversation on another day, not a closing line on this one.	mixed

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Decision 5 · Thursday — the leak

At 16:50 on Thursday, someone posts in the company-wide chat channel:

"Is it true support is being cut? Asking for a friend"

Eleven people are in that channel. Your announcement goes out tomorrow at 10:00. The three individual conversations happened this morning.

Choice	What happens	Verdict
A. Post within the hour: confirm a change is being announced tomorrow morning, and say nothing more	It is not a satisfying message and it is the right one. It confirms the thing that is already believed, stops the speculation escalating overnight, and does not disclose anything about individuals. The three people affected already know, which is the only reason this is safe to send. Notice that the order you chose on Wednesday is what made Thursday survivable.	good
B. Delete the message and ask the poster not to speculate	The message reappears in three private chats within twenty minutes, now with the added detail that HR deleted it. You have not stopped the conversation. You have moved it somewhere you cannot see and given it a better story.	bad
C. Say nothing — it is sixteen hours until the announcement	Sixteen hours is one evening, and the evening is where a rumour becomes a version of events. By 10:00 on Friday your announcement is not landing on an empty page. It is being read against a story that formed overnight and that you had no part in writing.	bad

Decision 6 · Friday, 10:04 — after the announcement

The announcement has gone out. It was clear, it named what was changing and what was not, and it said what happens next.

Marta messages you: "Thank you for telling me you'd come to me first. You did. I know that wasn't easy."

And then, four minutes later, from someone in a different team entirely: "So is this happening to us next?"

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Choice	What happens	Verdict
A. Answer honestly: say what you know, say what you do not, and say when you would tell them	"There is nothing planned for your team that I know about. If that changes you will hear it from me and not from a chat channel." That is a complete answer, it is true, and it is the only one that holds if something does change later. You have also just written the sentence that makes the next restructure survivable.	good
B. "There are no plans to restructure any other team."	You do not actually know that, and in fourteen months you may be the person announcing that it was not true. A reassurance you cannot guarantee is a debt. It is comfortable to give and expensive to be held to, and the person holding you to it will quote it back word for word.	bad
C. "I can't comment on other teams."	Technically defensible, and it reads as a yes. When HR declines to answer a question about whether something is happening, most people conclude that it is. You have given no information and created a lot of it.	bad

Ending · The order held

You told people in an order that protected them, used a voice for news that changed someone's life, and promised only what you could keep. Notice which single decision made Thursday survivable. Then play again and take a route you rejected.

Ending · Some of it held

Some of your choices protected people and some handed the story to someone else. Look back at the first choice that went badly: almost every later problem in this game grows from something reaching the wrong person first.

Ending · The story got there first

By Friday the announcement was competing with a version of events you had no part in writing. That is a common result on a first run, and it is the reason the game exists. Play it again and change only the order.

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Debrief

Five things this week actually turned on, and none of them was how well anything was written.

Order. Who hears what, in which sequence. Almost every avoidable problem in this game came from something reaching the wrong person first.

Channel. News that changes someone's life is delivered by a person and confirmed in writing. Everything else is better in writing, because writing can be re-read.

What you promise. "I will come to you before the announcement" is worth more than any reassurance, because you can keep it.

Silence is an answer. Not replying to a direct question is read as confirmation, and it teaches people to stop asking you.

What you cannot guarantee. A reassurance about the future is a debt somebody will collect.

My decision log

What I chose on my first play, and what happened

What I changed on a second play, and why

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