The Choice is Yours. Or is it?

Tactics for making difficult decisions

So let me share a story about a *bad* decision I made.

While I'm telling you this story, think about a bad decision you've made.

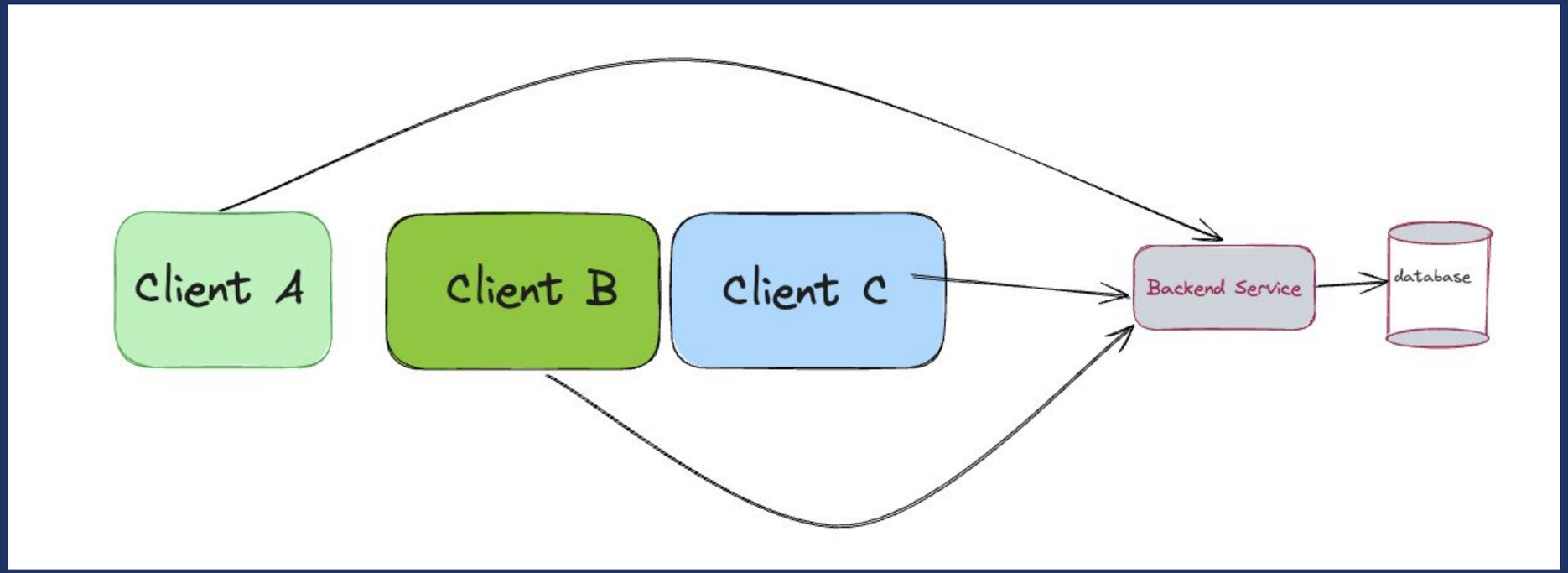
Because a lot of our framework for decision making is based on where we've been burned vs where we've been successful, its good to reflect.

Let's set the stage. I created a new platform team, gifted a good amount of code from our peer teams....

Including code bases that filtered content in so many ways and so many locations in the system architecture.

Our first goal as a new platform team was to consolidate the filtering logic into one shared framework.

so the team was taking awhile to make a decision as to how we could create a singular shared framework for filtering, so i made a decision one casual monday morning to write a doc!



No biggie right?

No biggie right?

Uh no. The way I went about this decision was really bad.

This decision, for this particular team, at this particular time, was wrong.

And it wasn't about the technical merit.
There was a high social cost, that I paid.
Years later, I still think how I went about this decision.

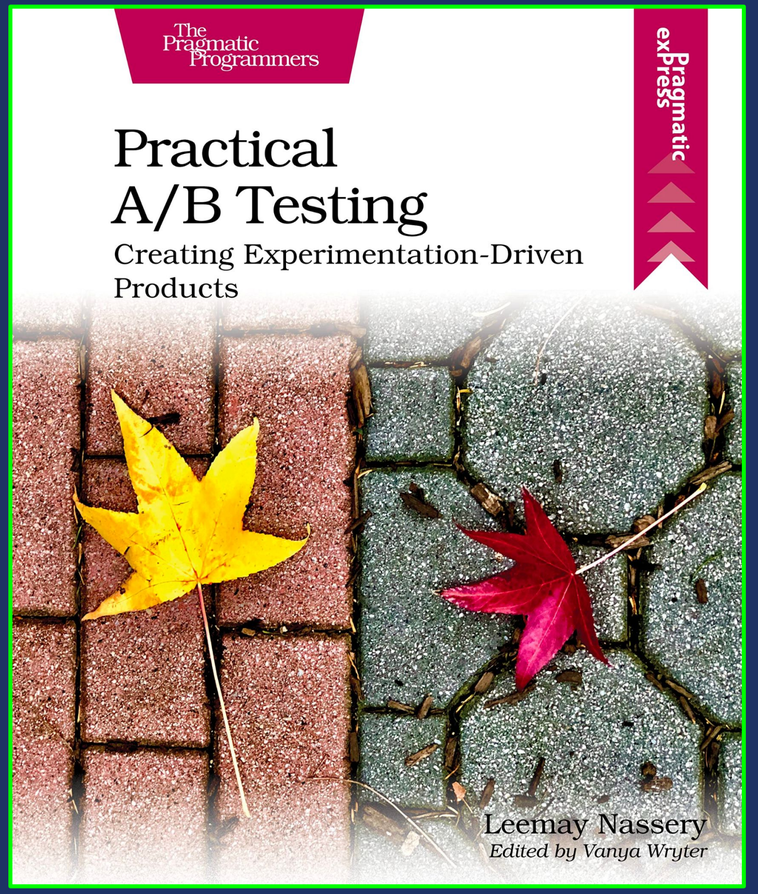
Making a “good” decision is so contextual.

It’s influenced by who, when, where, how.

In this talk we want to help **you** with your **strategy** for making impactful decisions as leaders of projects and teams.

Leemay Nassery

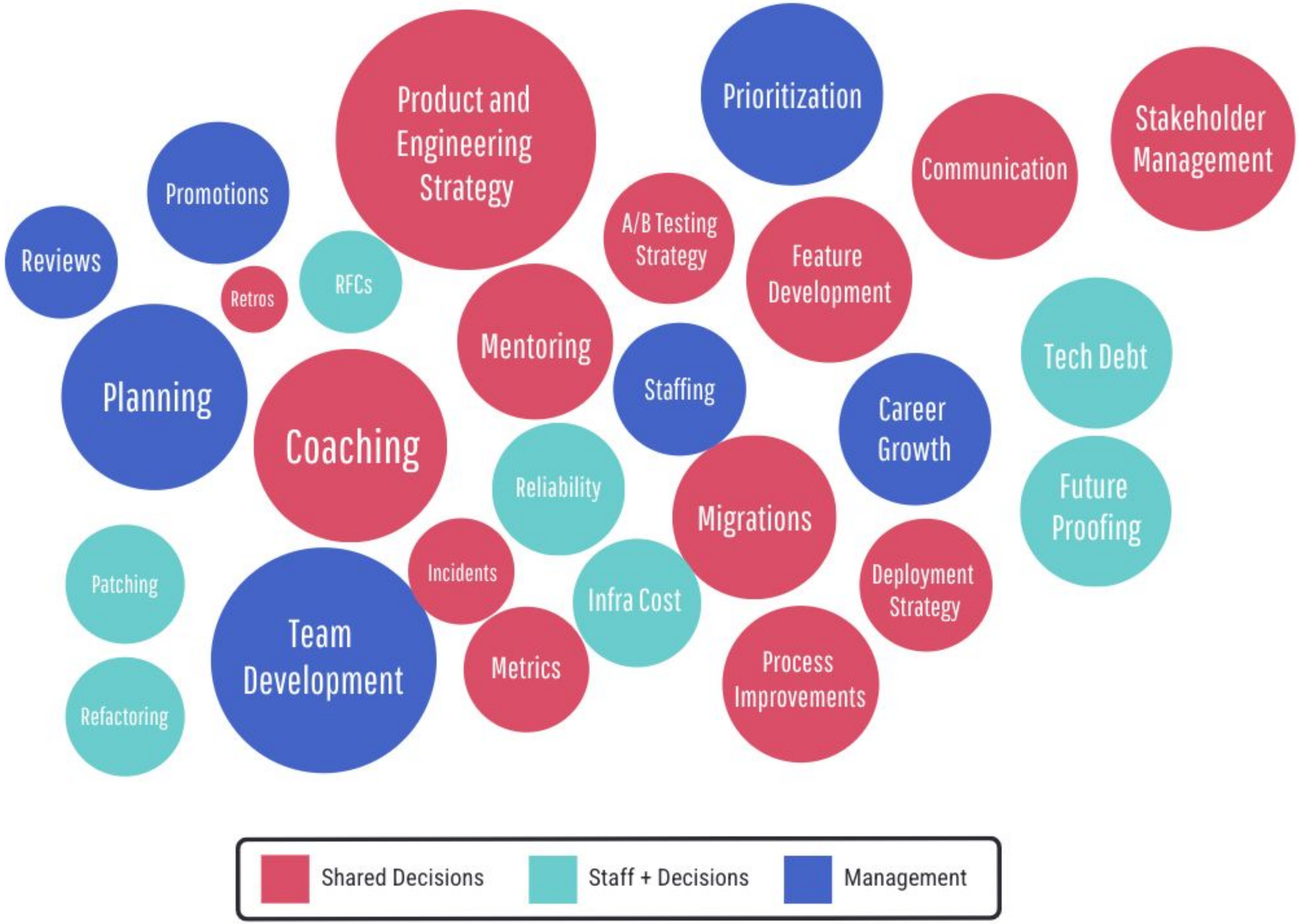
Senior Engineering Manager
Author of Practical A/B Testing

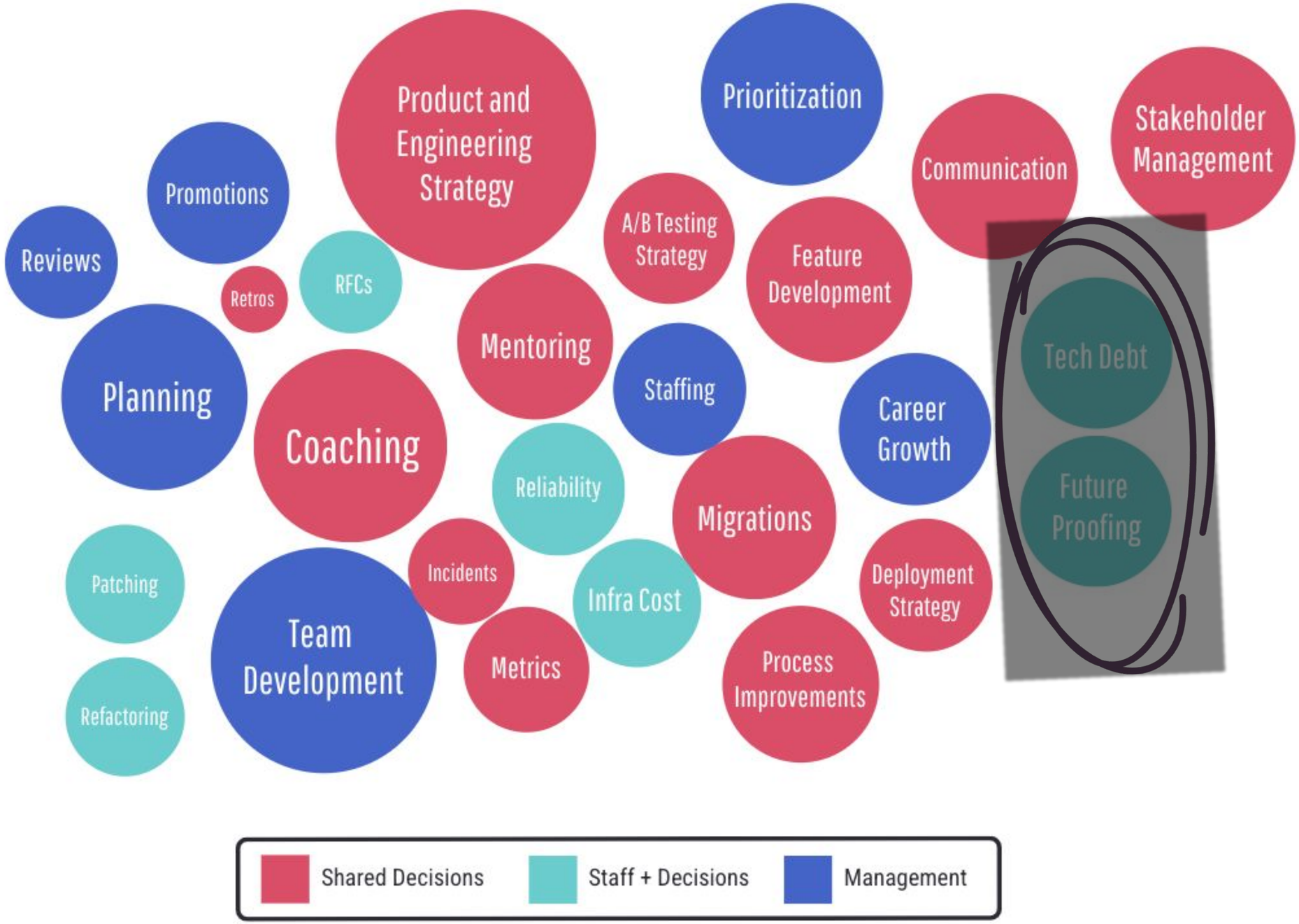


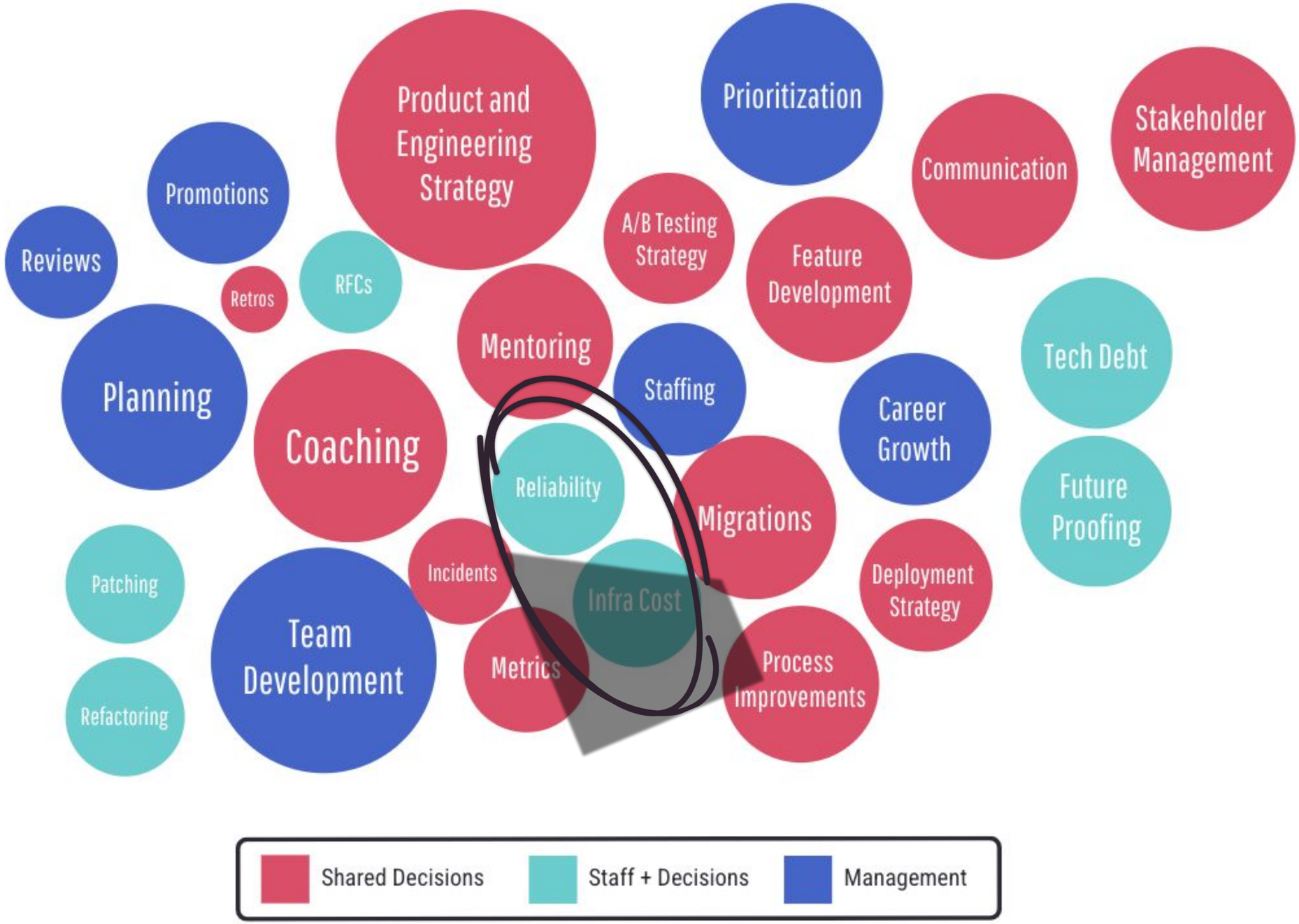
Emily Samuels

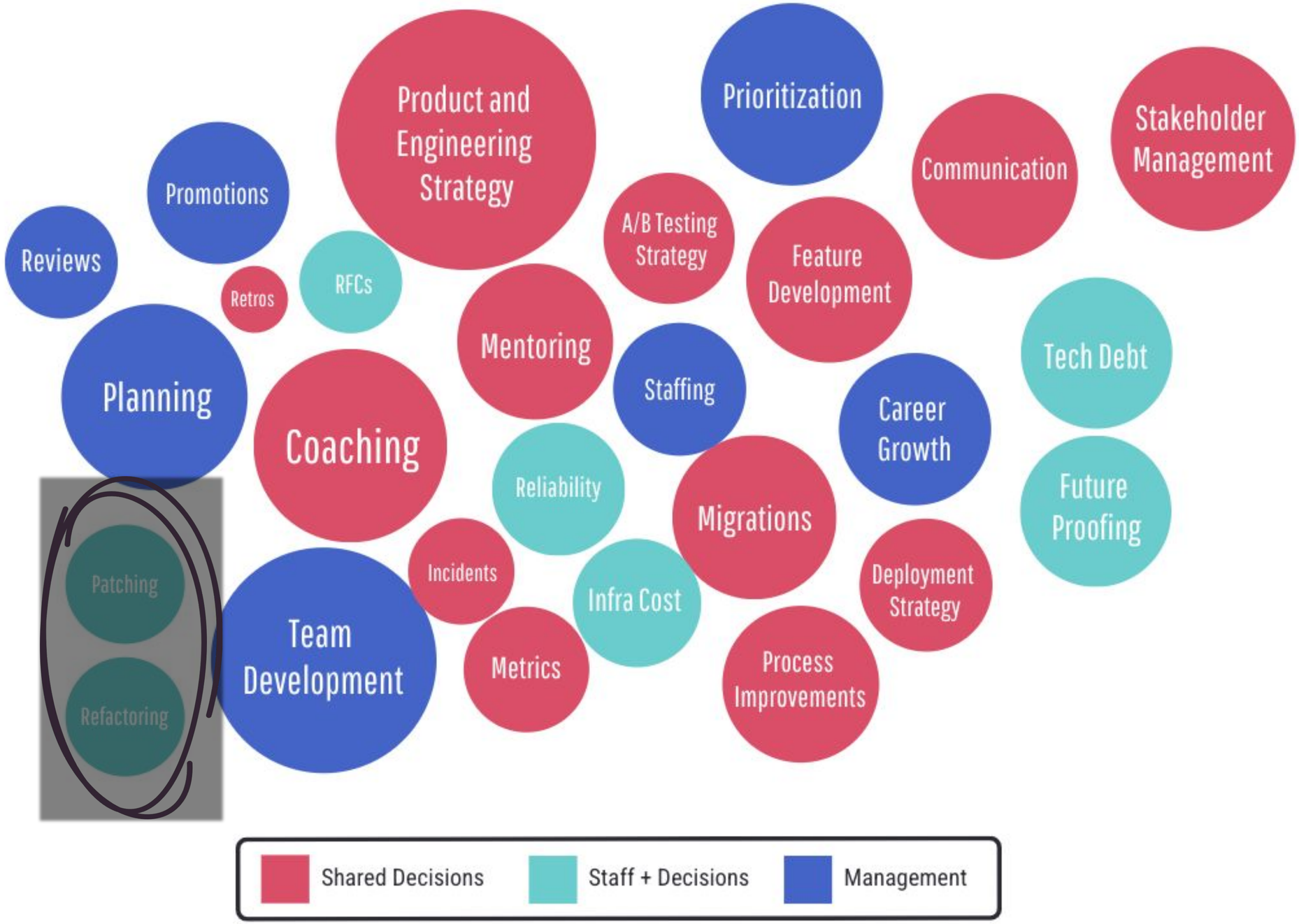
Senior Staff Engineer

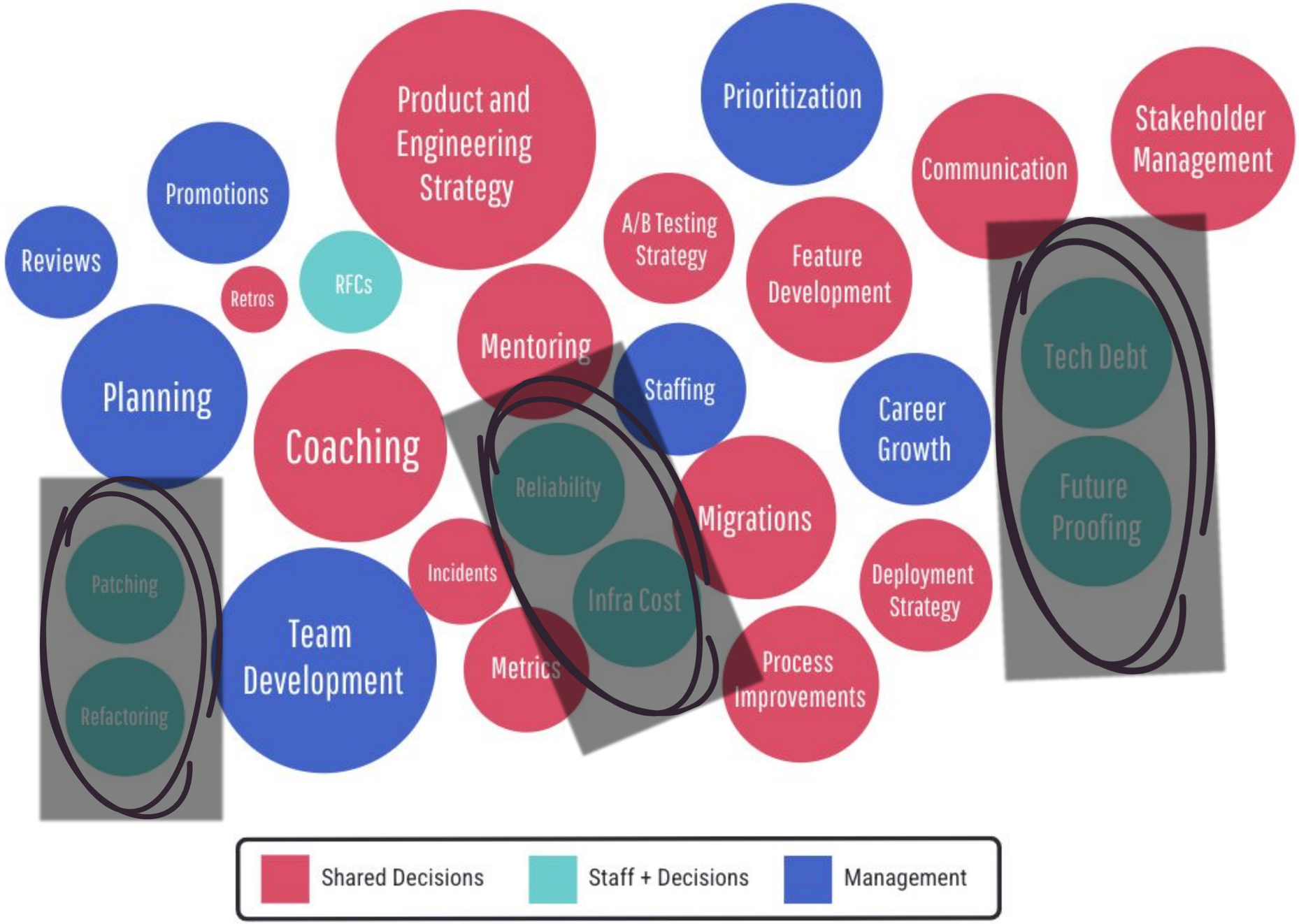
Different types of decisions


Product and Engineering Strategy
Prioritization
Stakeholder Management
Communication
Promotions
Reviews
A/B Testing Strategy
Feature Development
RFCs
Retros
Mentoring
Tech Debt
Planning
Coaching
Staffing
Career Growth
Reliability
Migrations
Future Proofing
Patching
Incidents
Infra Cost
Deployment Strategy
Team Development
Metrics
Process Improvements
Refactoring
Shared Decisions
Staff + Decisions
Management


Product and Engineering Strategy
Prioritization
Stakeholder Management
Communication
Promotions
Reviews
A/B Testing Strategy
Feature Development
RFCs
Retros
Mentoring
Tech Debt
Planning
Coaching
Staffing
Career Growth
Reliability
Migrations
Future Proofing
Patching
Incidents
Infra Cost
Deployment Strategy
Team Development
Metrics
Process Improvements
Refactoring
Shared Decisions
Staff + Decisions
Management

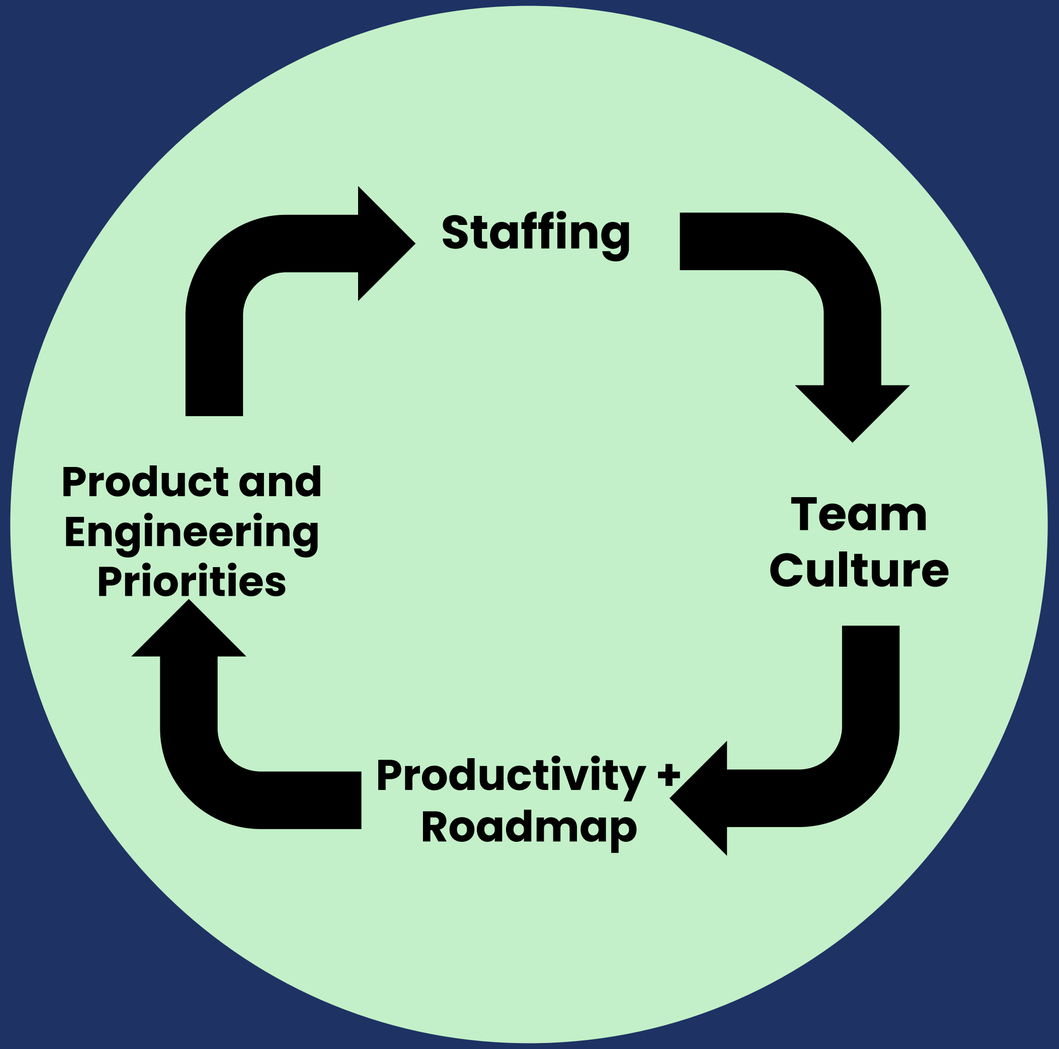

Product and Engineering Strategy
Prioritization
Stakeholder Management
Communication
Promotions
Reviews
A/B Testing Strategy
Feature Development
RFCs
Retros
Mentoring
Tech Debt
Planning
Staffing
Career Growth
Coaching
Reliability
Migrations
Future Proofing
Patching
Incidents
Infra Cost
Deployment Strategy
Team Development
Metrics
Process Improvements
Refactoring
Shared Decisions
Staff + Decisions
Management

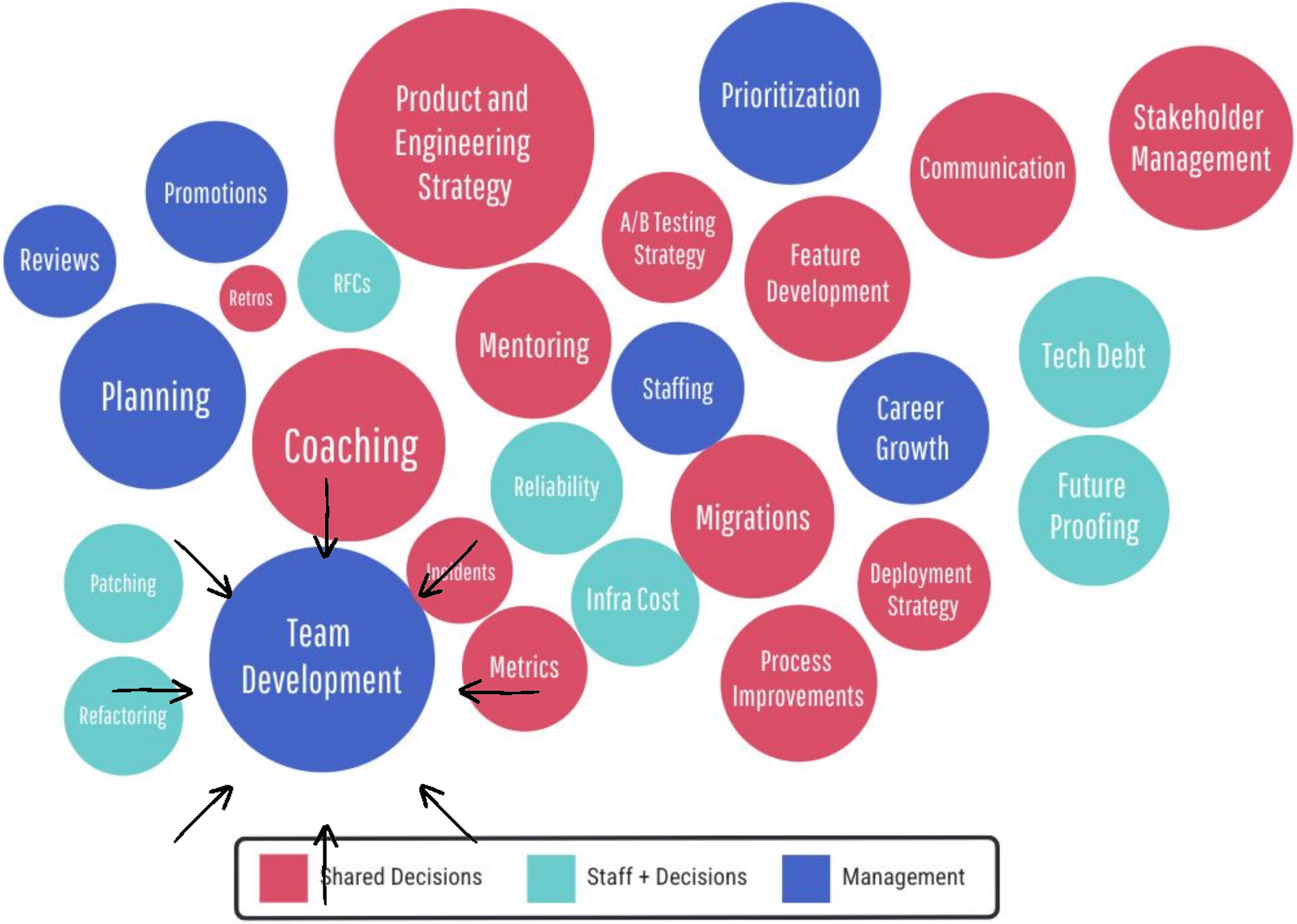

Product and Engineering Strategy
Prioritization
Stakeholder Management
Communication
Promotions
Reviews
A/B Testing Strategy
Feature Development
RFCs
Retros
Mentoring
Tech Debt
Planning
Staffing
Career Growth
Coaching
Reliability
Migrations
Future Proofing
Patching
Incidents
Infra Cost
Deployment Strategy
Team Development
Metrics
Process Improvements
Refactoring
Shared Decisions
Staff + Decisions
Management

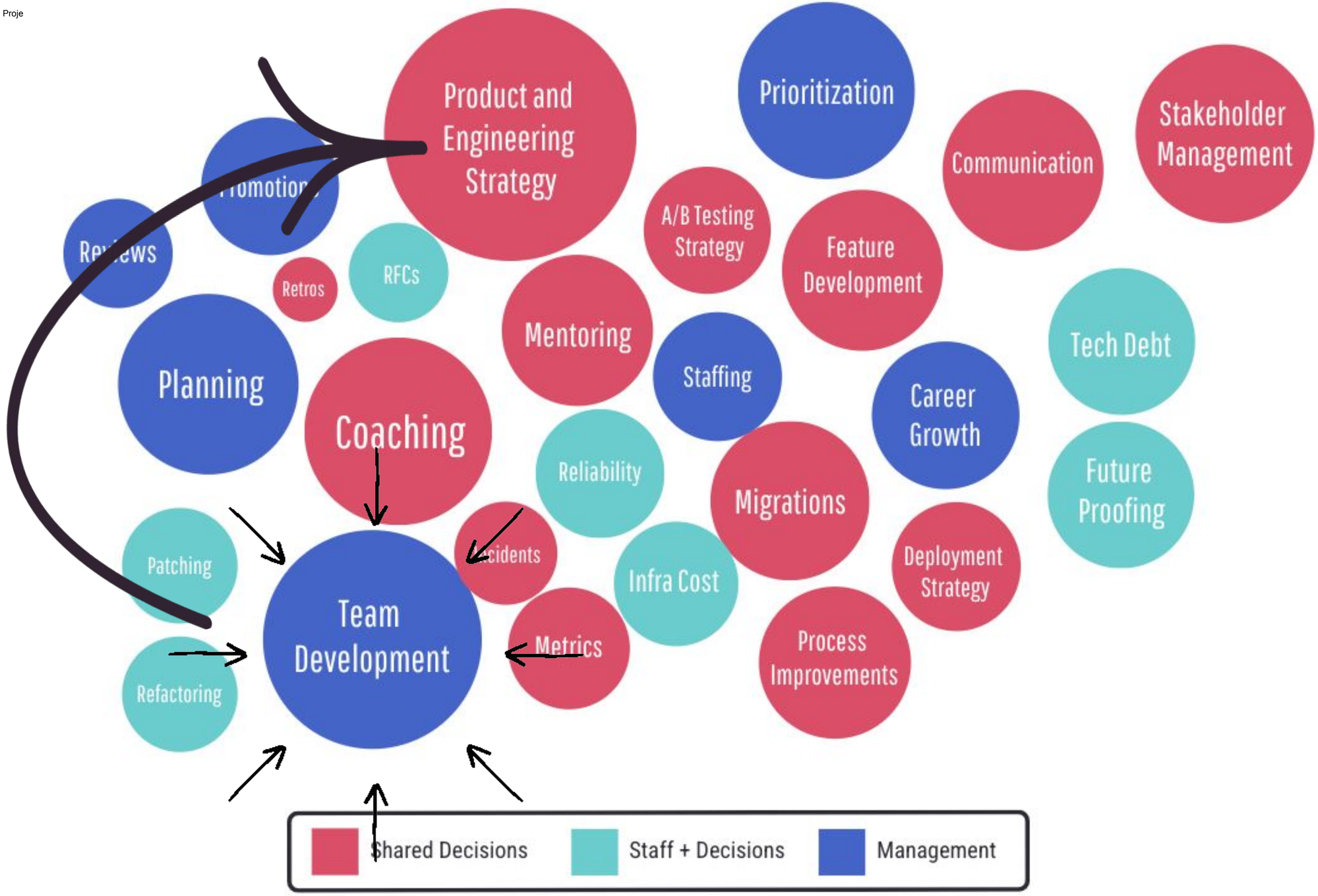

Product and Engineering Strategy
Prioritization
Stakeholder Management
Communication
Promotions
Reviews
Retros
RFCs
A/B Testing Strategy
Feature Development
Mentoring
Staffing
Planning
Coaching
Career Growth
Tech Debt
Future Proofing
Reliability
Migrations
Patching
Refactoring
Incidents
Infra Cost
Deployment Strategy
Team Development
Metrics
Process Improvements
Shared Decisions
Staff + Decisions
Management

From the management standpoint, many of our decisions are made to influence the overarching goal of serving the companies vision and mission.

We’re making many decisions that influence each other.




Product and Engineering Strategy
Prioritization
Stakeholder Management
Communication
Promotions
Reviews
Retros
RFCs
A/B Testing Strategy
Feature Development
Mentoring
Planning
Coaching
Staffing
Tech Debt
Career Growth
Reliability
Migrations
Future Proofing
Patching
Incidents
Infra Cost
Deployment Strategy
Team Development
Metrics
Process Improvements
Refactoring
Shared Decisions
Staff + Decisions
Management


Product and Engineering Strategy
Prioritization
Communication
Stakeholder Management
Promotion
Reviews
Retros
RFCs
A/B Testing Strategy
Feature Development
Mentoring
Staffing
Tech Debt
Planning
Coaching
Career Growth
Reliability
Migrations
Future Proofing
Patching
Incidents
Infra Cost
Deployment Strategy
Team Development
Metrics
Process Improvements
Refactoring
Shared Decisions
Staff + Decisions
Management

Tactics for making hard decisions

Some decisions are much harder to make.

Let’s go through some case studies and how we navigated them.

Hard Decision

Promoting a High-Potential Individual Despite Skepticism

Hard Decision

Promoting a High-Potential Individual Despite Skepticism

Tactic: the challenge here is addressing skepticism while focusing on the potential and qualities of the individual being promoted.

Emphasize coaching and take accountability.
Give your peers the confidence that you are investing in this person for XYZ reasons.

Hard Decision

Committing to a Controversial Product Feature Despite (many) Objections

Hard Decision

Committing to a Controversial Product Feature Despite (many) Objections

Tactic: address the reasoning for objection, while also painting an alternative view. whats the cost of trying something with the least amount of engineering effort?

Create a document to gain alignment.
Define clear metrics for what success looks like.
Time box the investment.
A/B Test.

Hard Decision

How to design, build, and drive adoption for a critical dataset

Hard Decision

How to design, build, and drive adoption for a critical dataset

Tactic: Prototype the design with mock data to get feedback

Hard Decision

How to design, build, and drive adoption for a critical dataset

Tactic: Prototype the design with mock data to get feedback

Lots of 1:1 meetings, group presentations, and write ups explaining the data. Influence leadership to set data adoption goals.

Hard Decision

Making company-wide decisions on what technologies to use

Hard Decision

Making company-wide decisions on what technologies to use

Tactic: Create a group of that represents various parts of the company to weigh in.

Hard Decision

Making company-wide decisions on what technologies to use

Tactic: Create a group of that represents various parts of the company to weigh in.

Be transparent and clear when communicating the decision.

Red flags to consider

Red Flag #1

Jumping to the complex solution first

Red Flag #1

Jumping to the complex solution first

Decision: Is there a more iterative path to get to your goal? Taking smaller steps help set your team up for success.

Red Flag #2

Deciding on the what **and** the how

Red Flag #2

Deciding on the what **and** the how

Decision: Help the team understand what to build but empower them to decide how to build i

Red flags indicating need for action

*signs that suggest you need to **MAKE** a decision and take action on.*

Red Flag #1

Engineers are rewriting similar documents throughout the project.

Red Flag #1

Engineers are rewriting similar documents throughout the project.

Decision that NEEDS to be made: The project *clearly* lacks organization. You need to assign a Lead Engineer to the project to reduce the chaos.

Red Flag #2

Team members aren’t using the correct terminology when describing specific domain constructs.

Red Flag #2

Team members aren’t using the correct terminology when describing specific domain constructs.

This indicates a lack of understanding of the project.

Decision that NEEDS to be made: You need to establish knowledge share or onboarding methods to mitigate implementation risks.

Red Flag #3

A team closes off their support slack channel and adds a workflow for tickets to be created when support is needed.

Red Flag #3

A team closes off their support slack channel and adds a workflow for tickets to be created when support is needed.

Decision that NEEDS to be made: The team may be overwhelmed with support requests, its time to revisit their system ownership, potentially reorg or add additional headcount to balance the load.

Deciding vs being informed

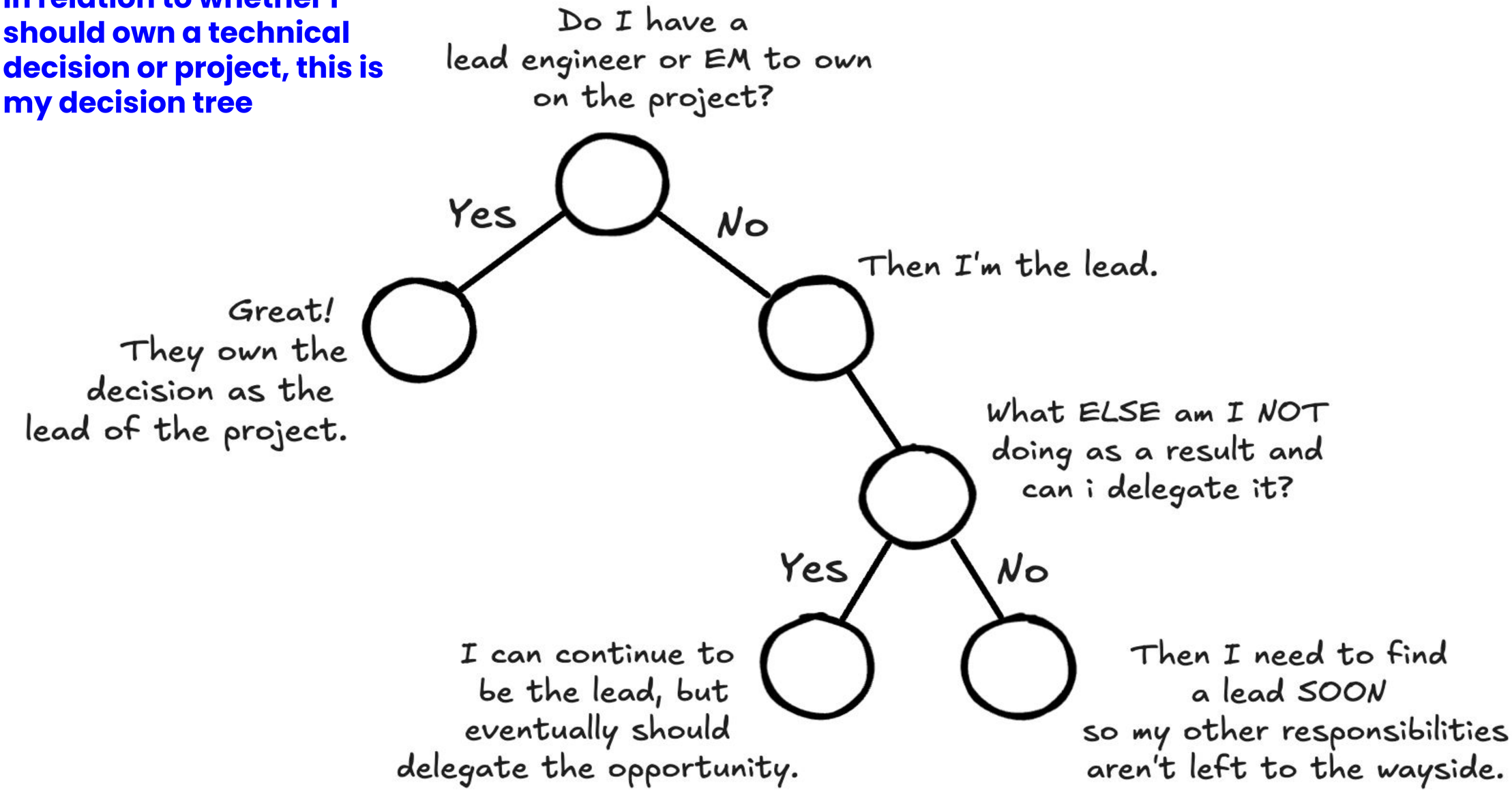
The most important thing we do as leads is make decisions.

But sometimes it's a better idea to just be informed (or slightly influence).

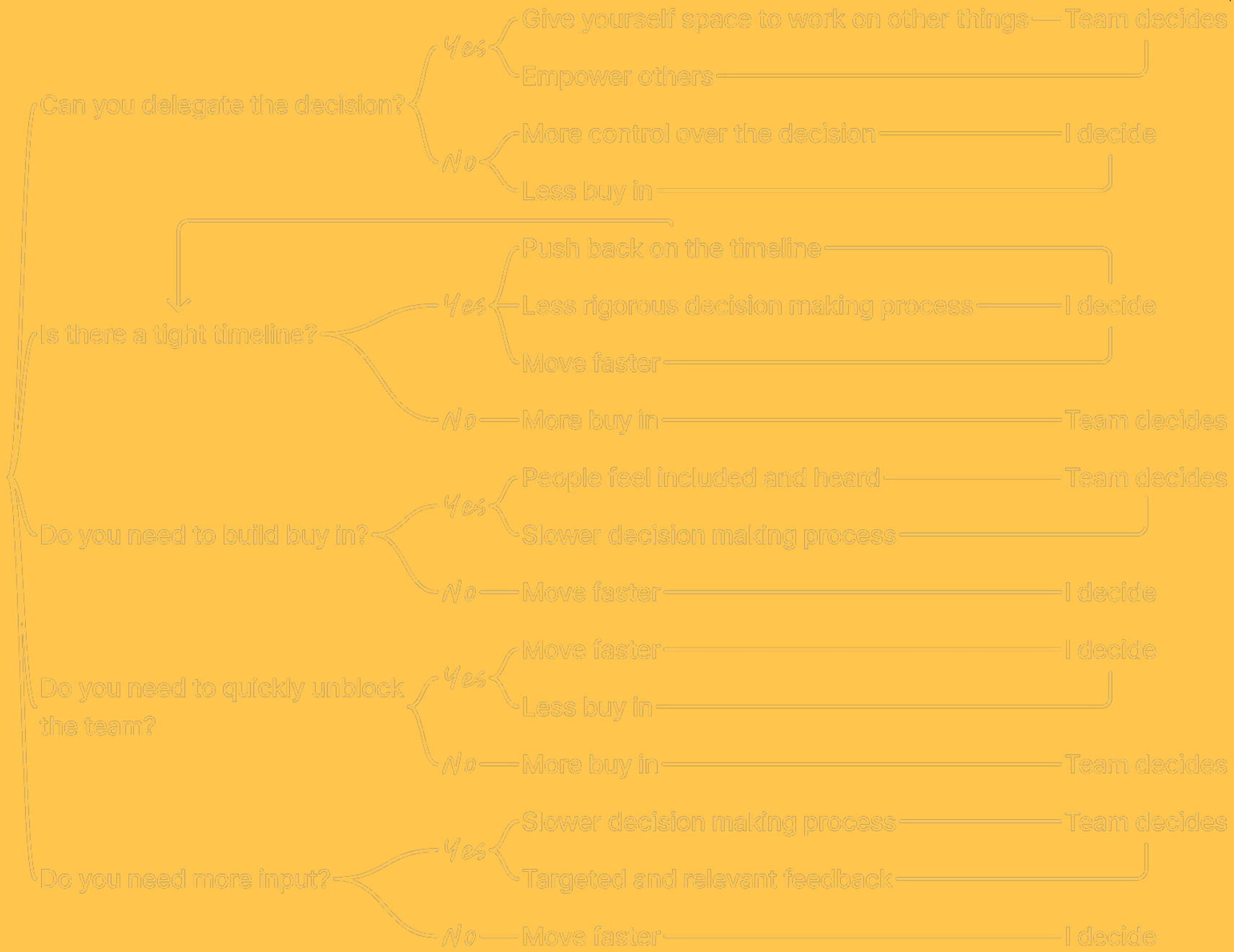
In management, our world is people

In management, our world is people – do we have the right individuals to build out our engineering and product strategy?

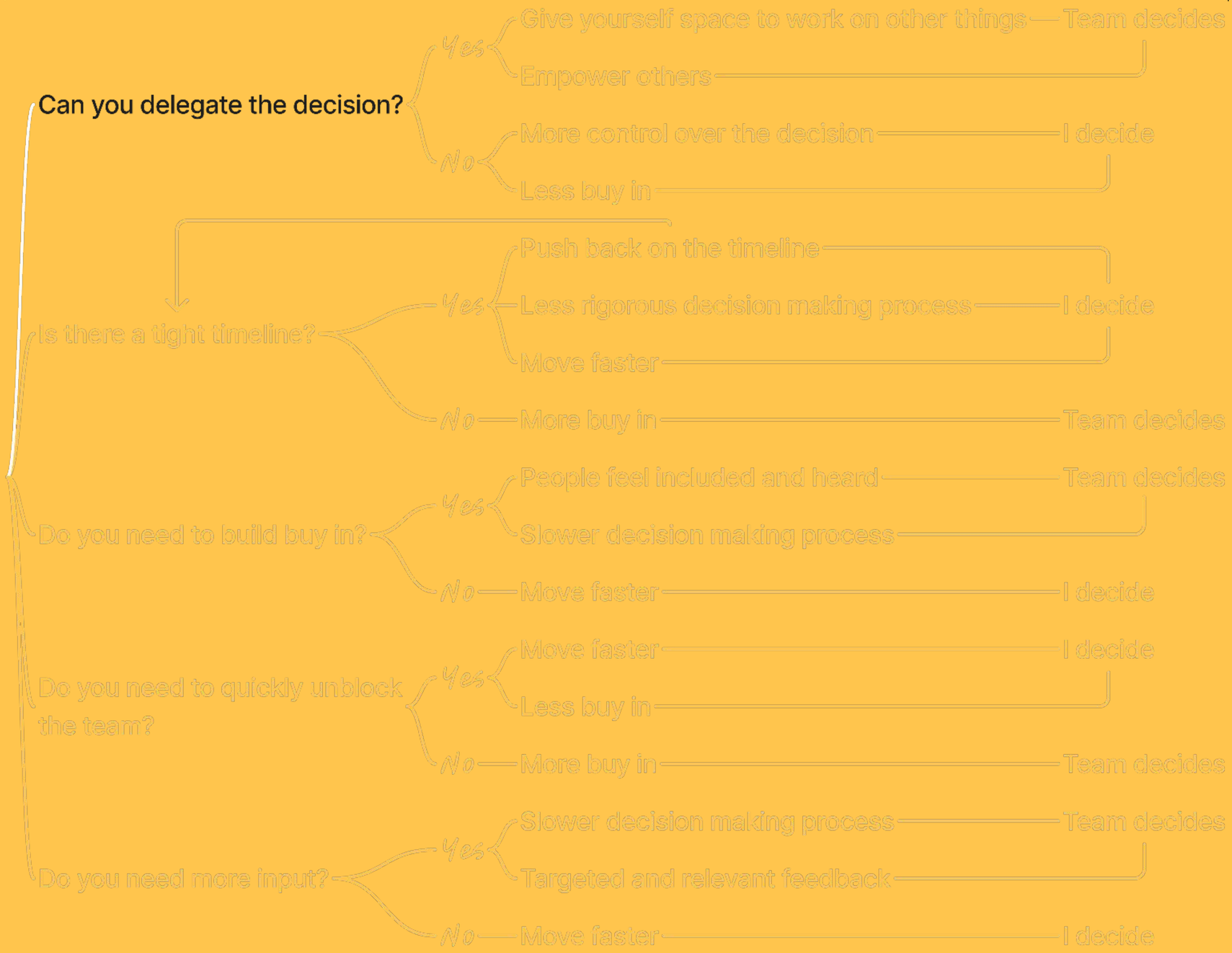
In relation to whether i should own a technical decision or project, this is my decision tree



A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

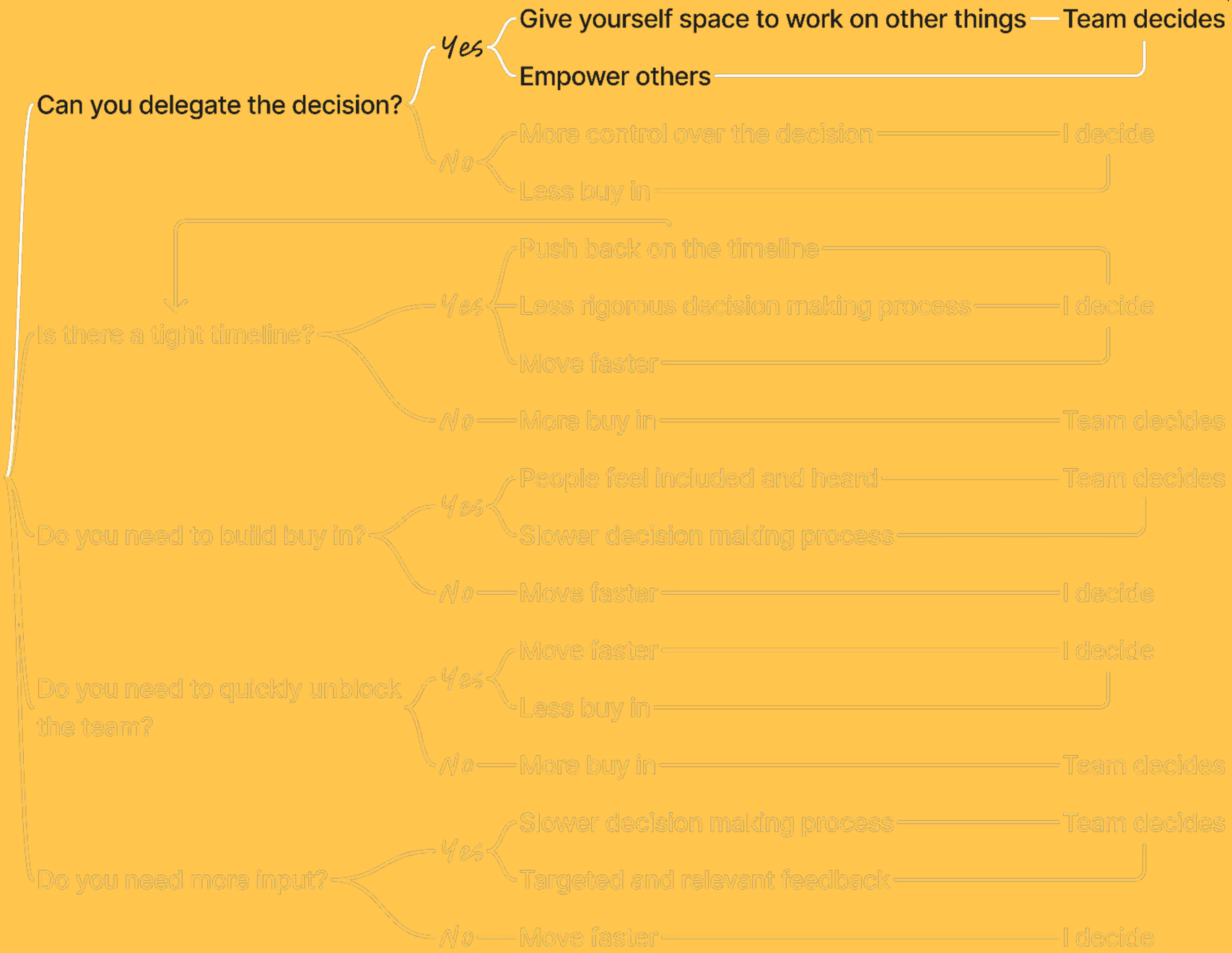


A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



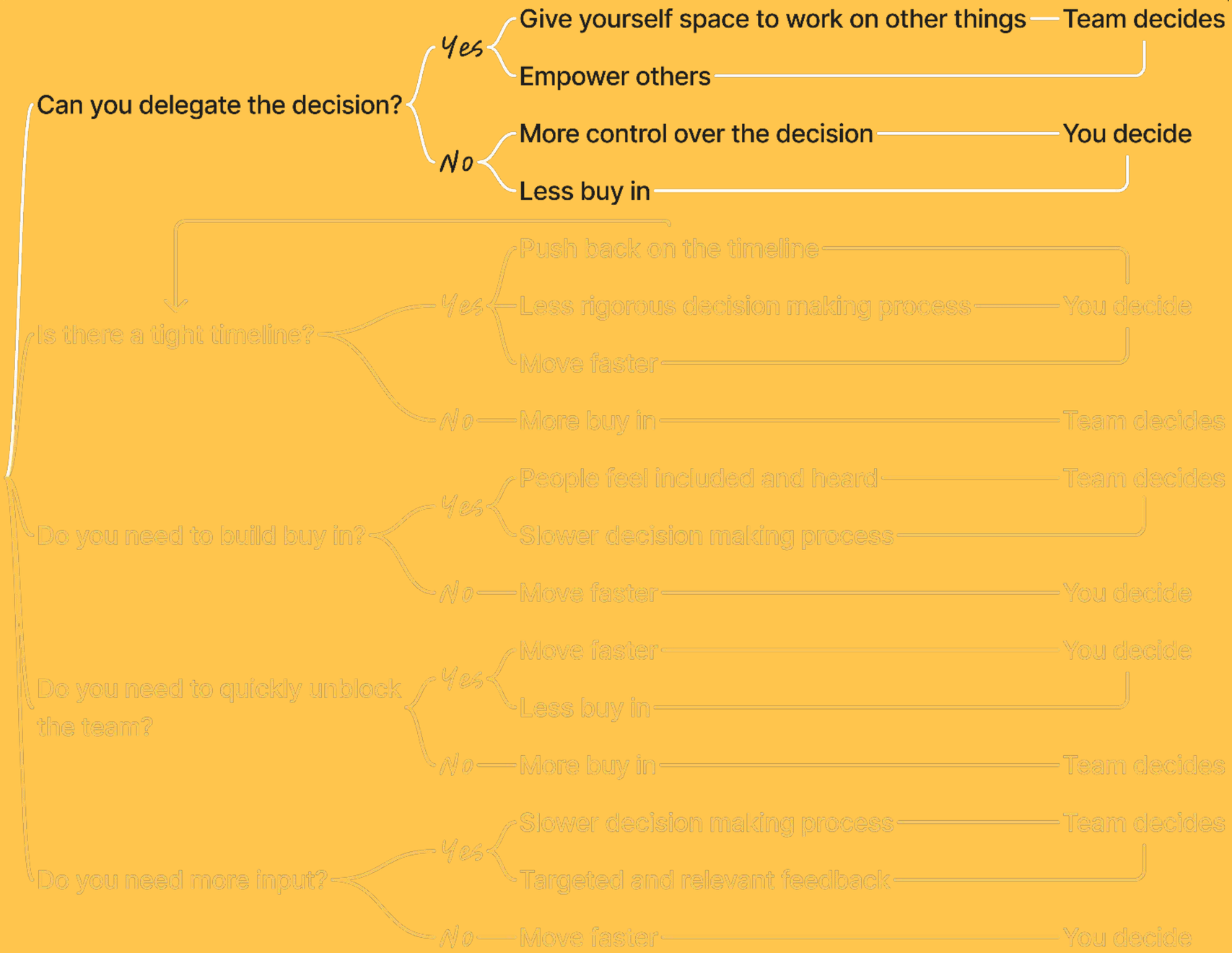
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



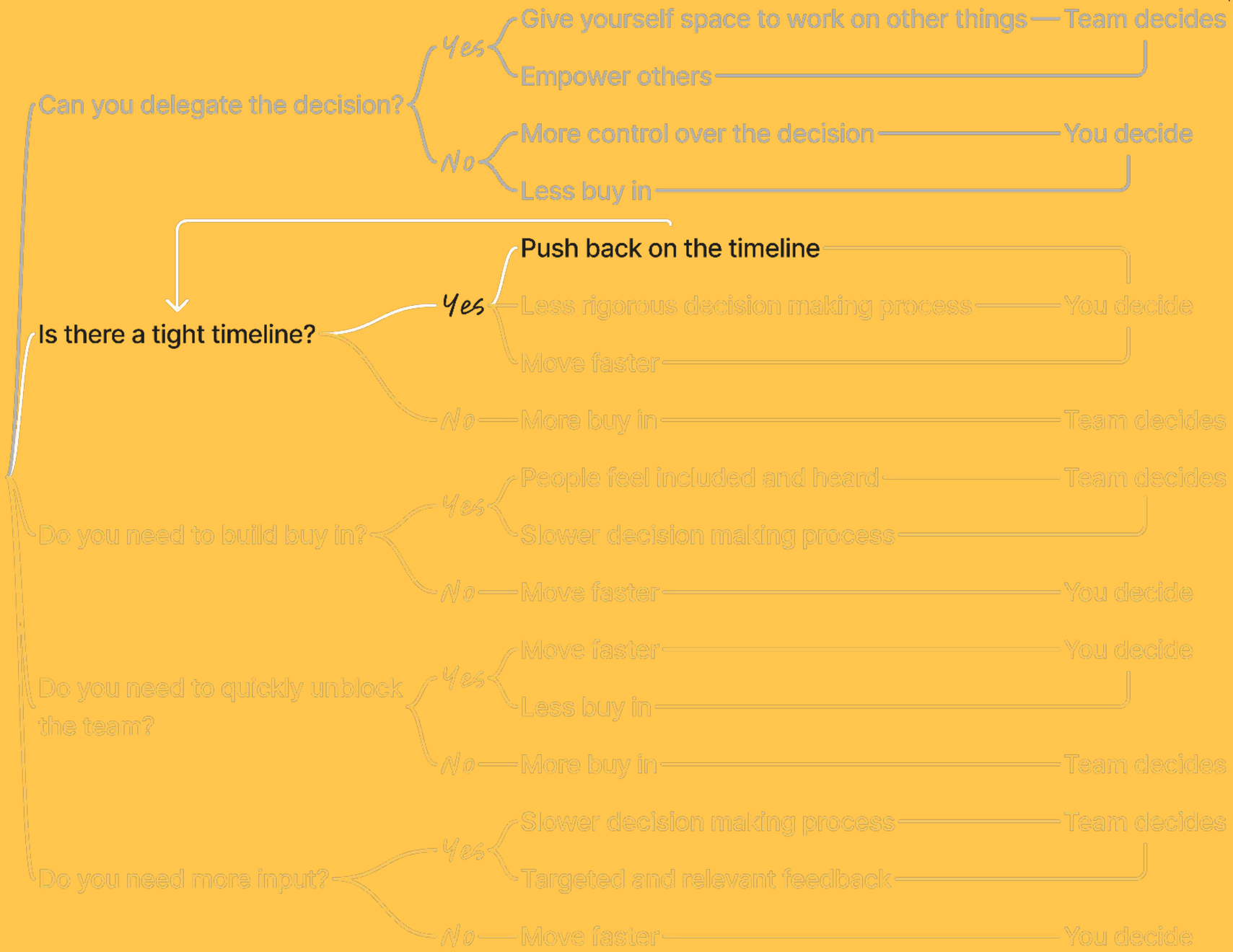
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

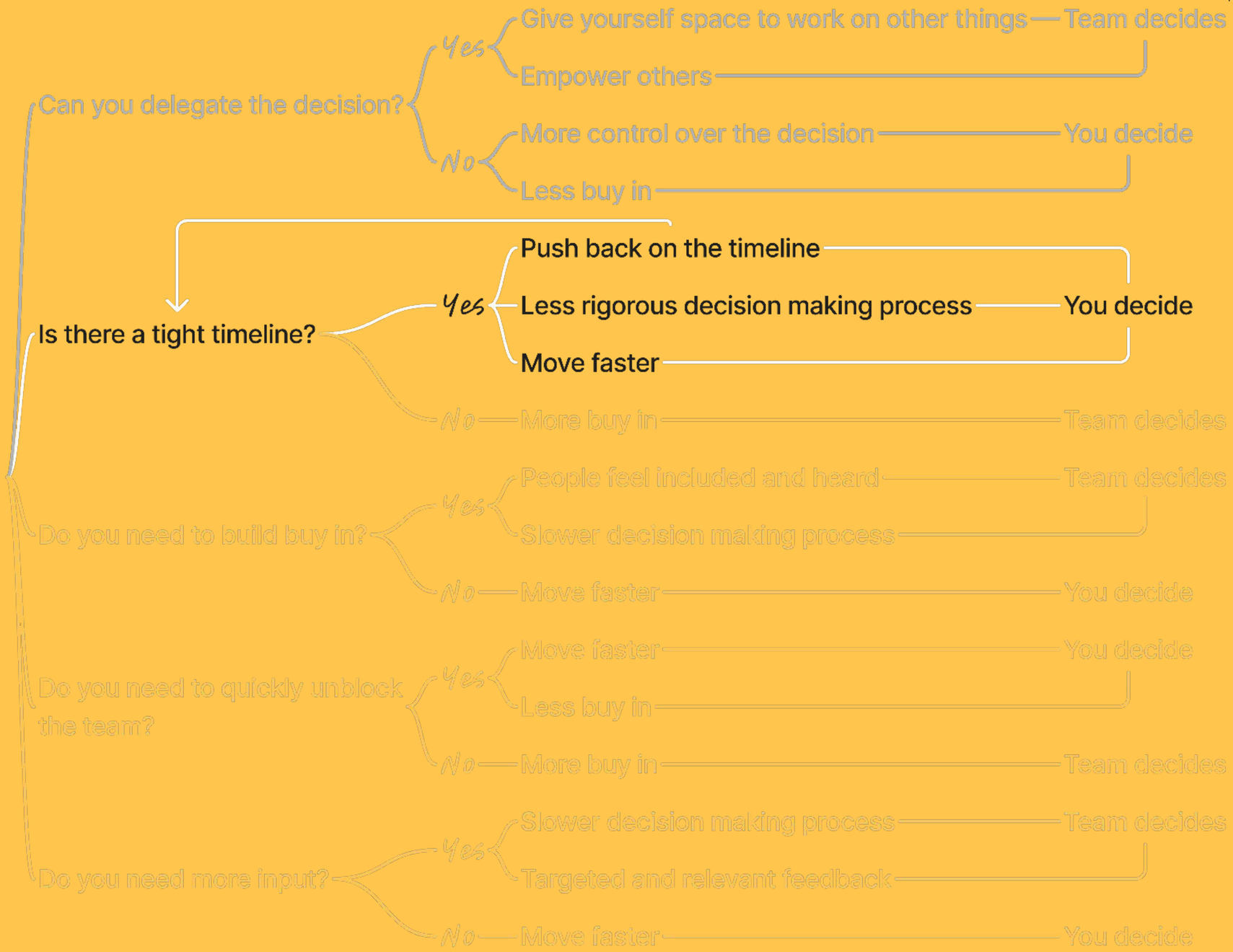


A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

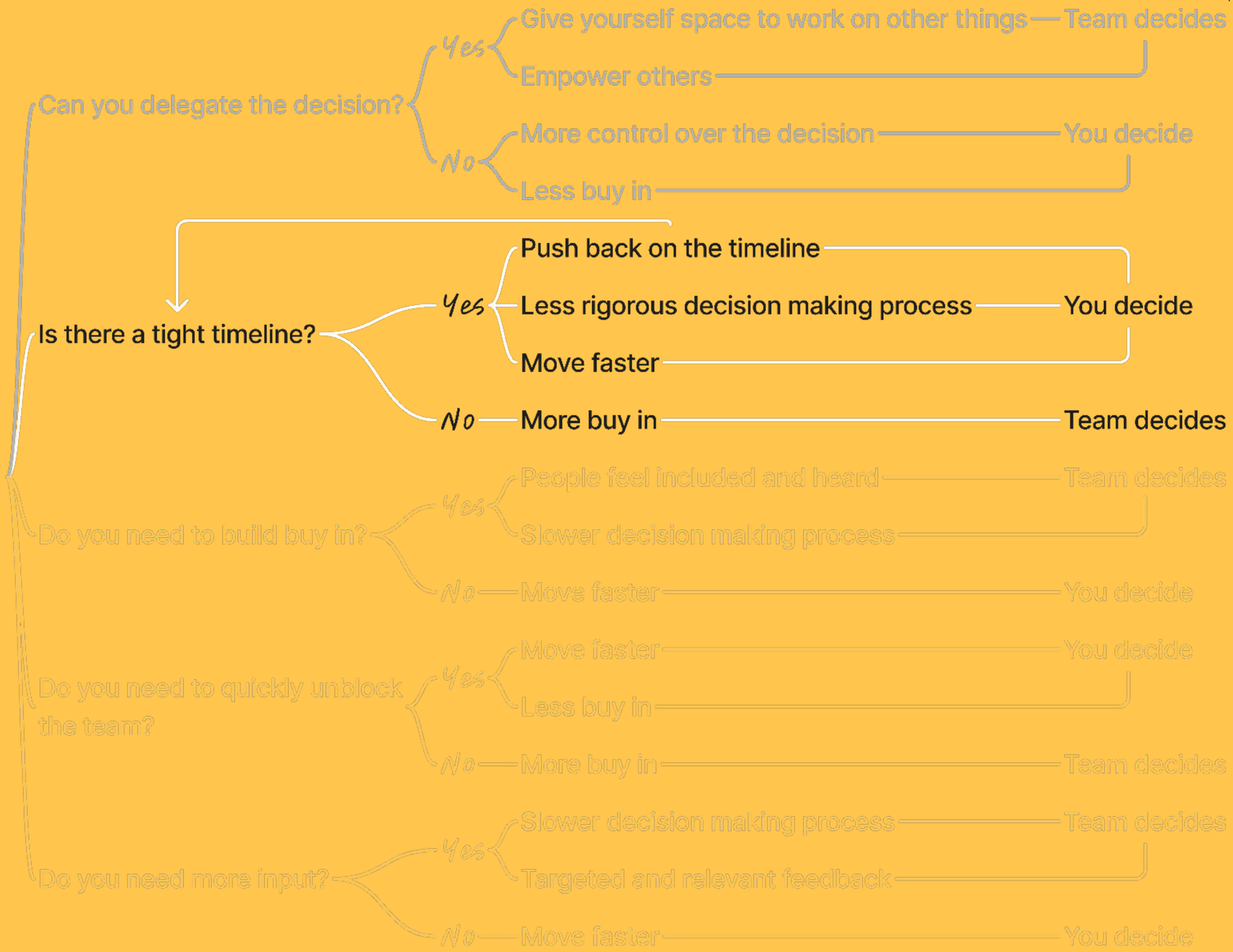
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



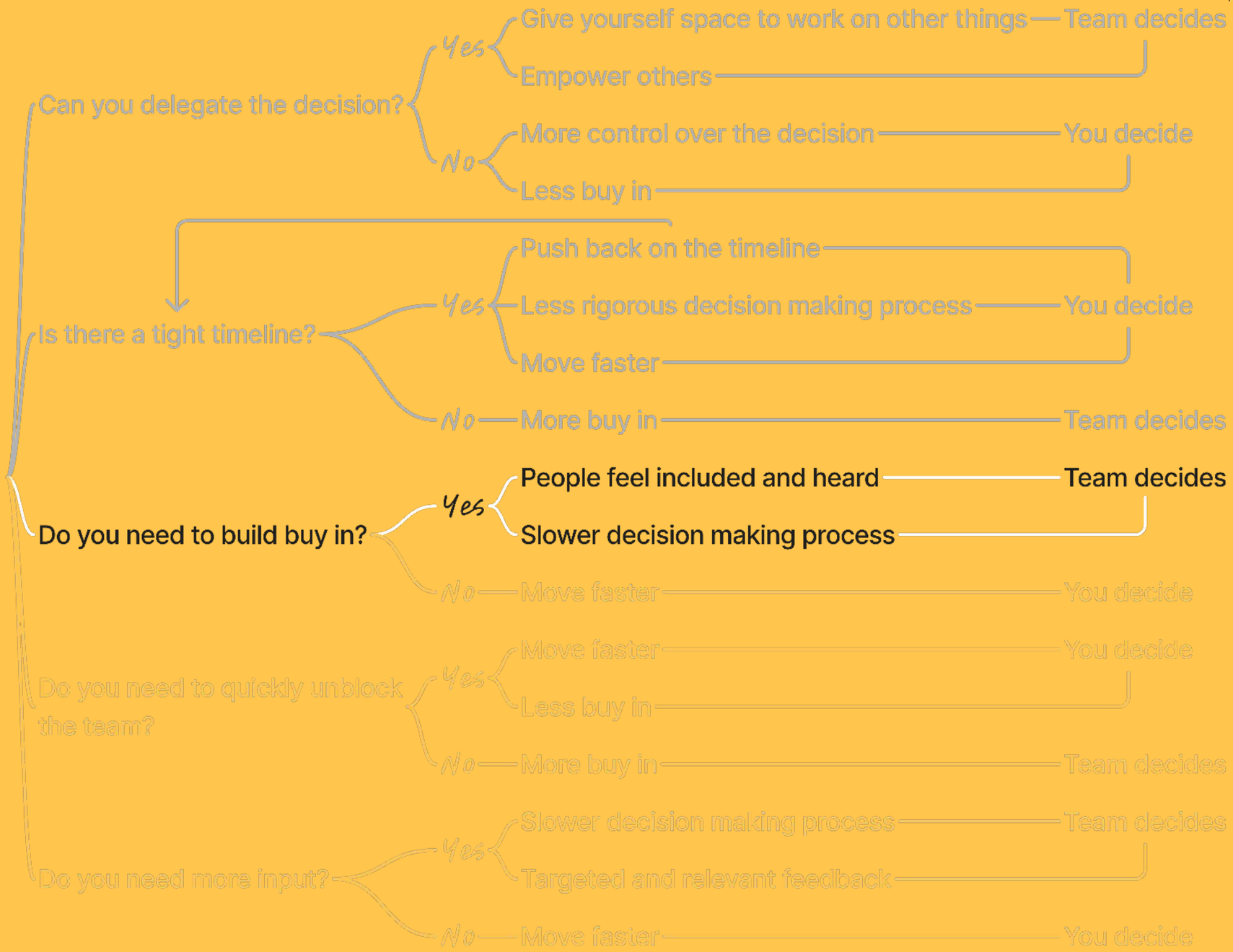
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



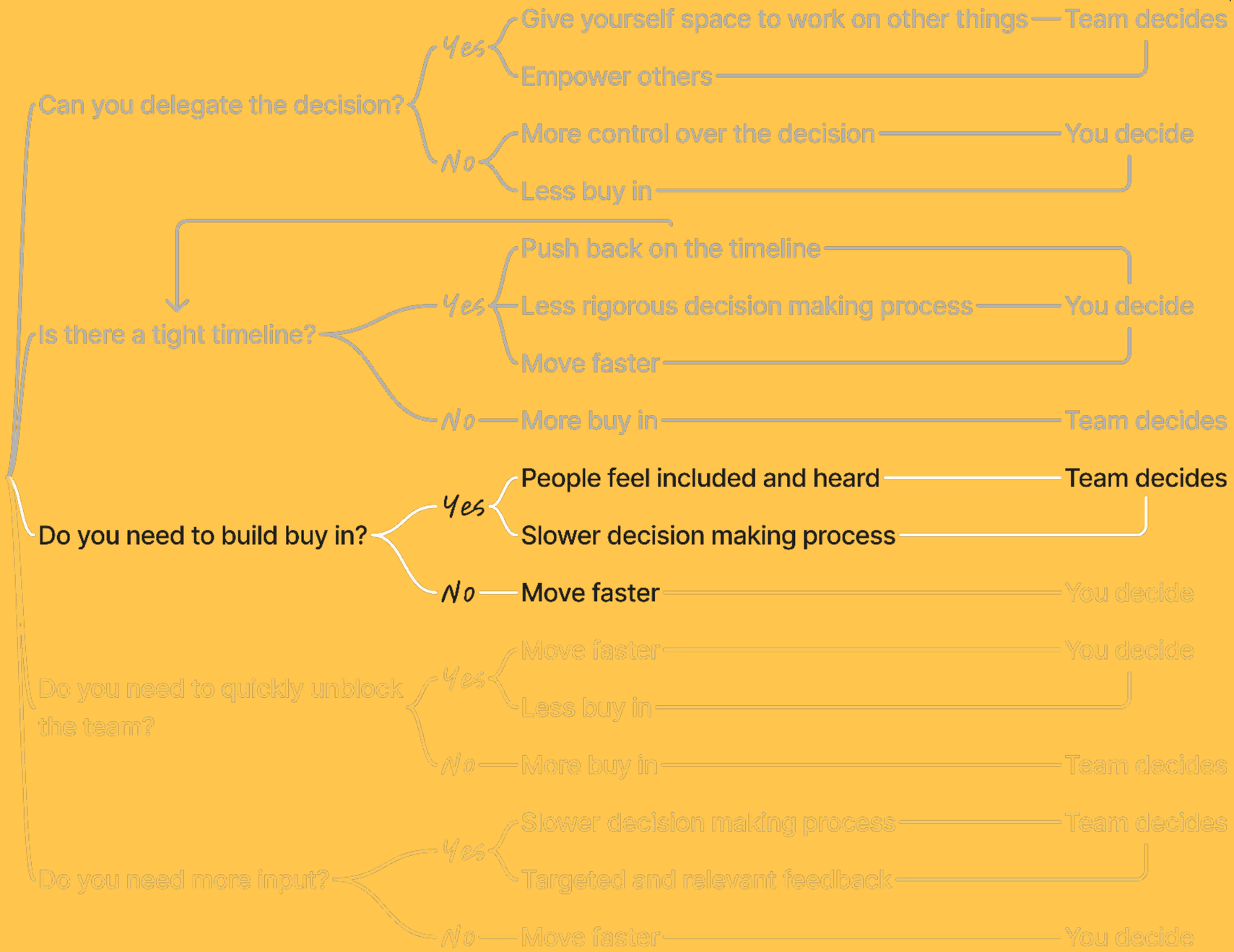
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

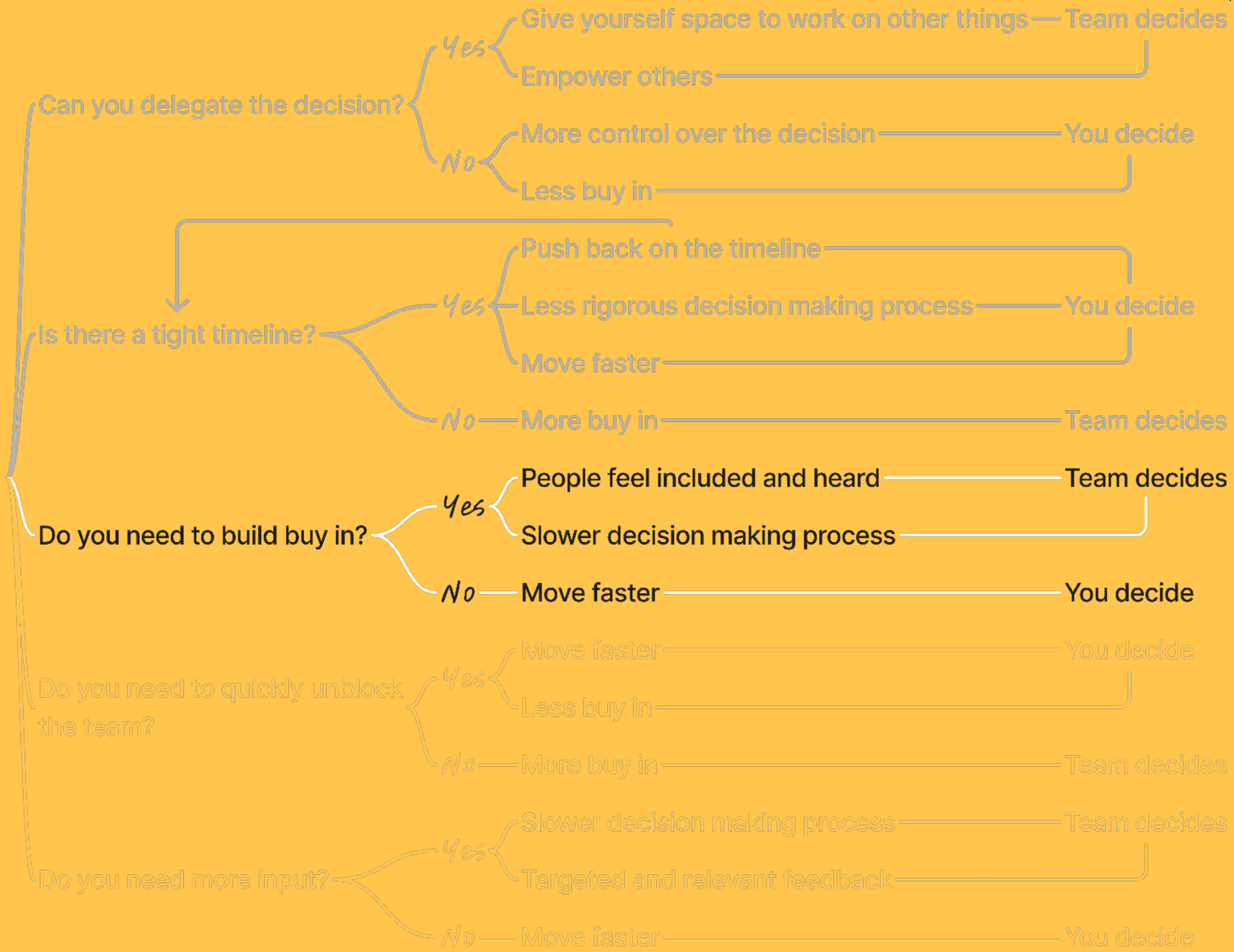
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

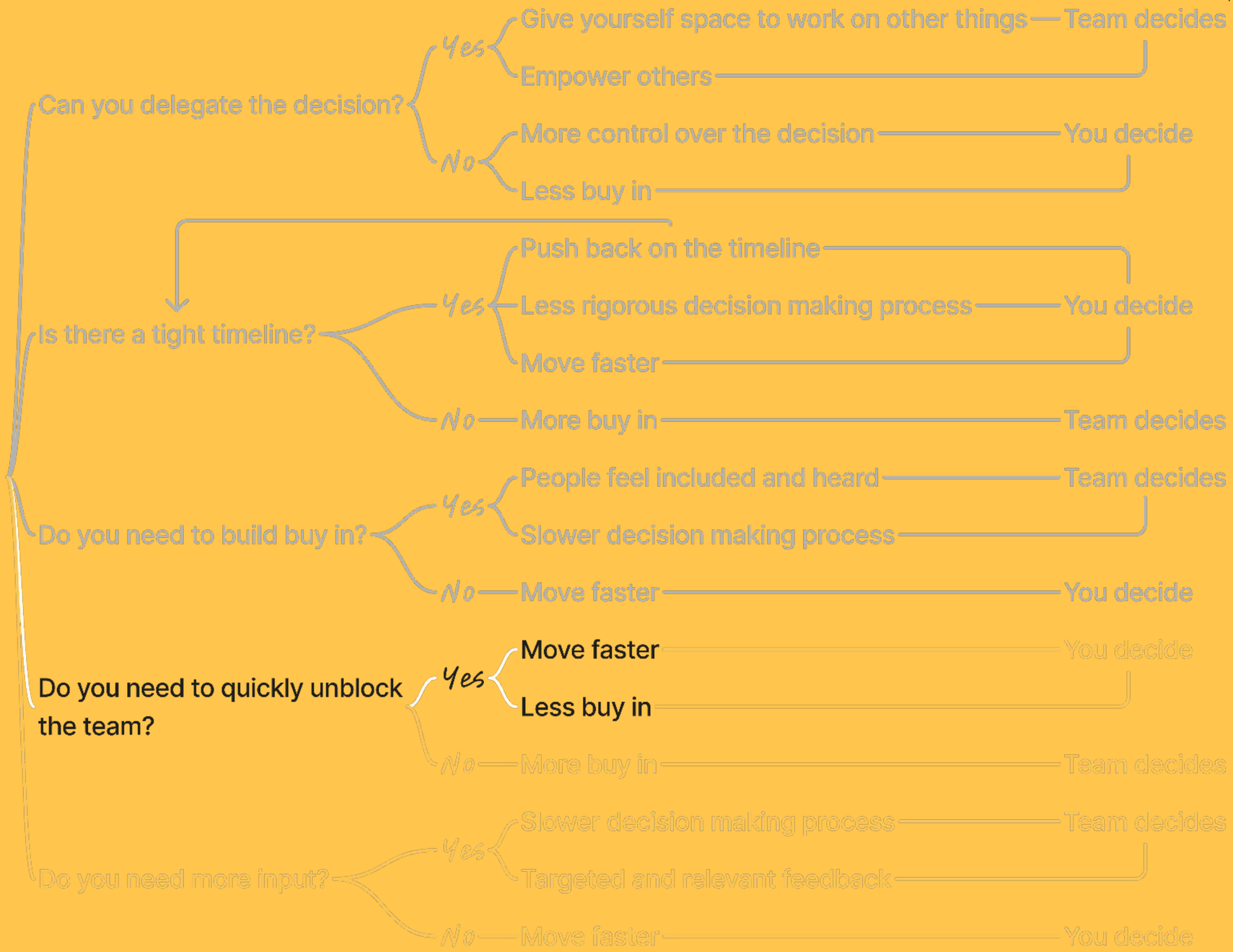


A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

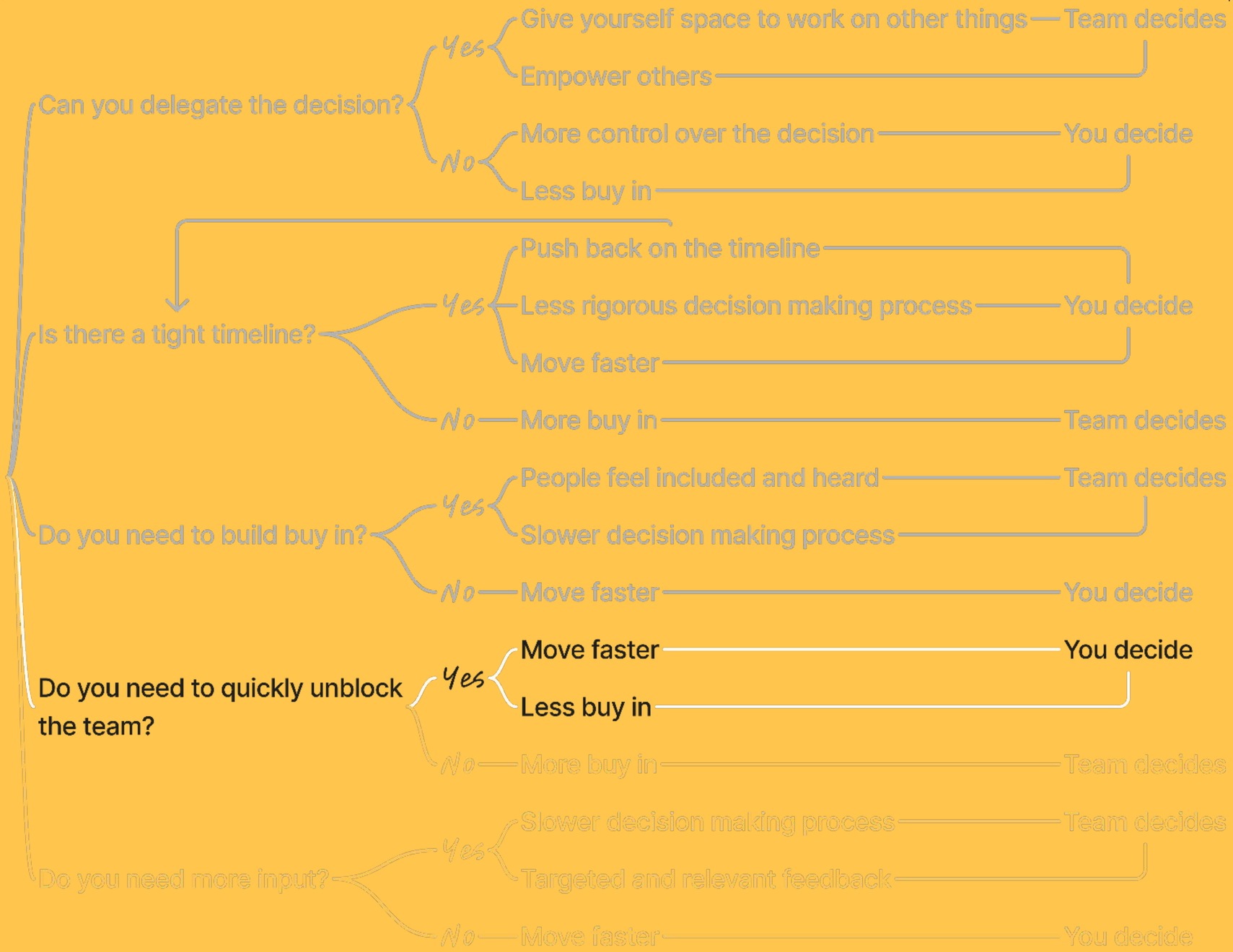


A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

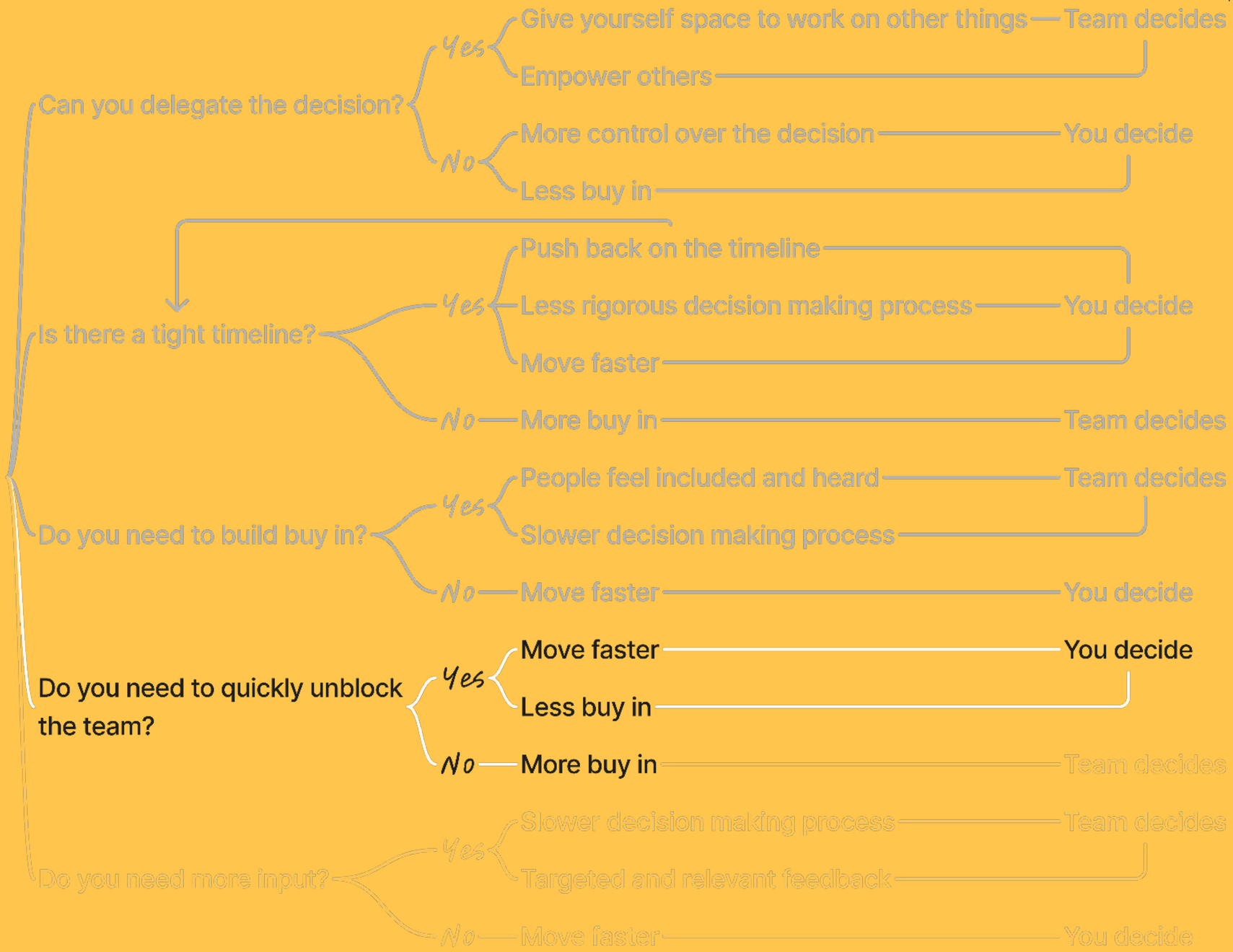
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



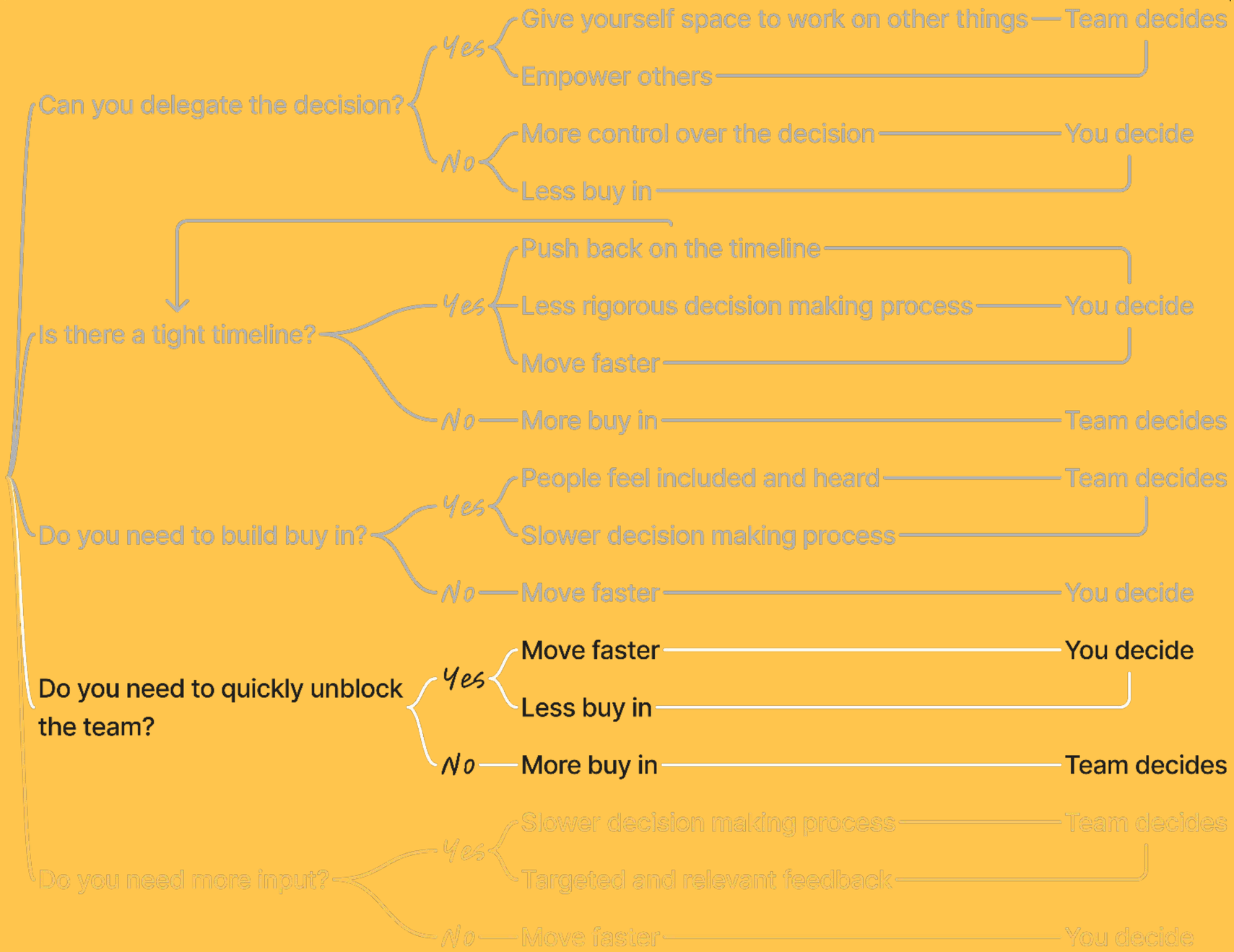
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



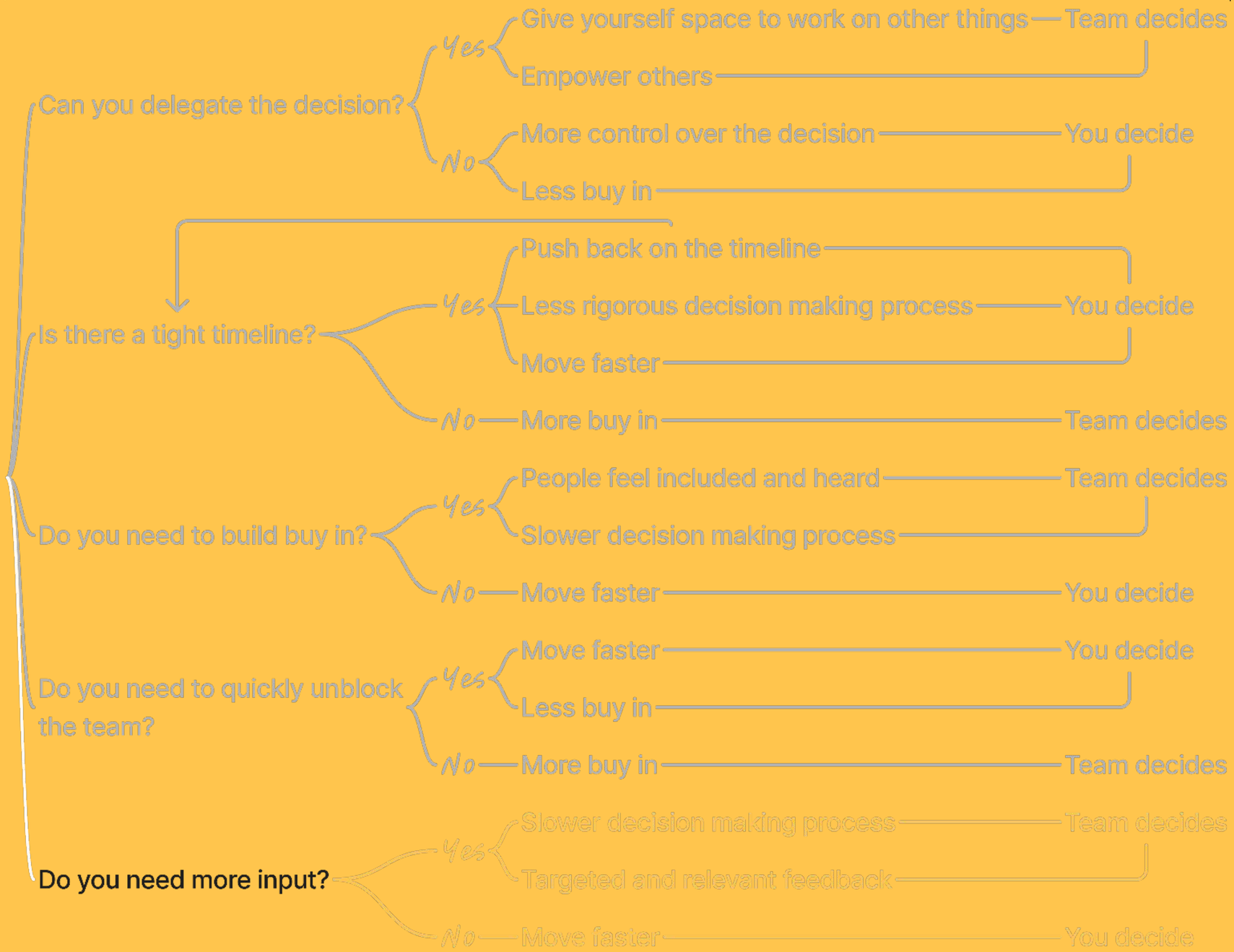
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



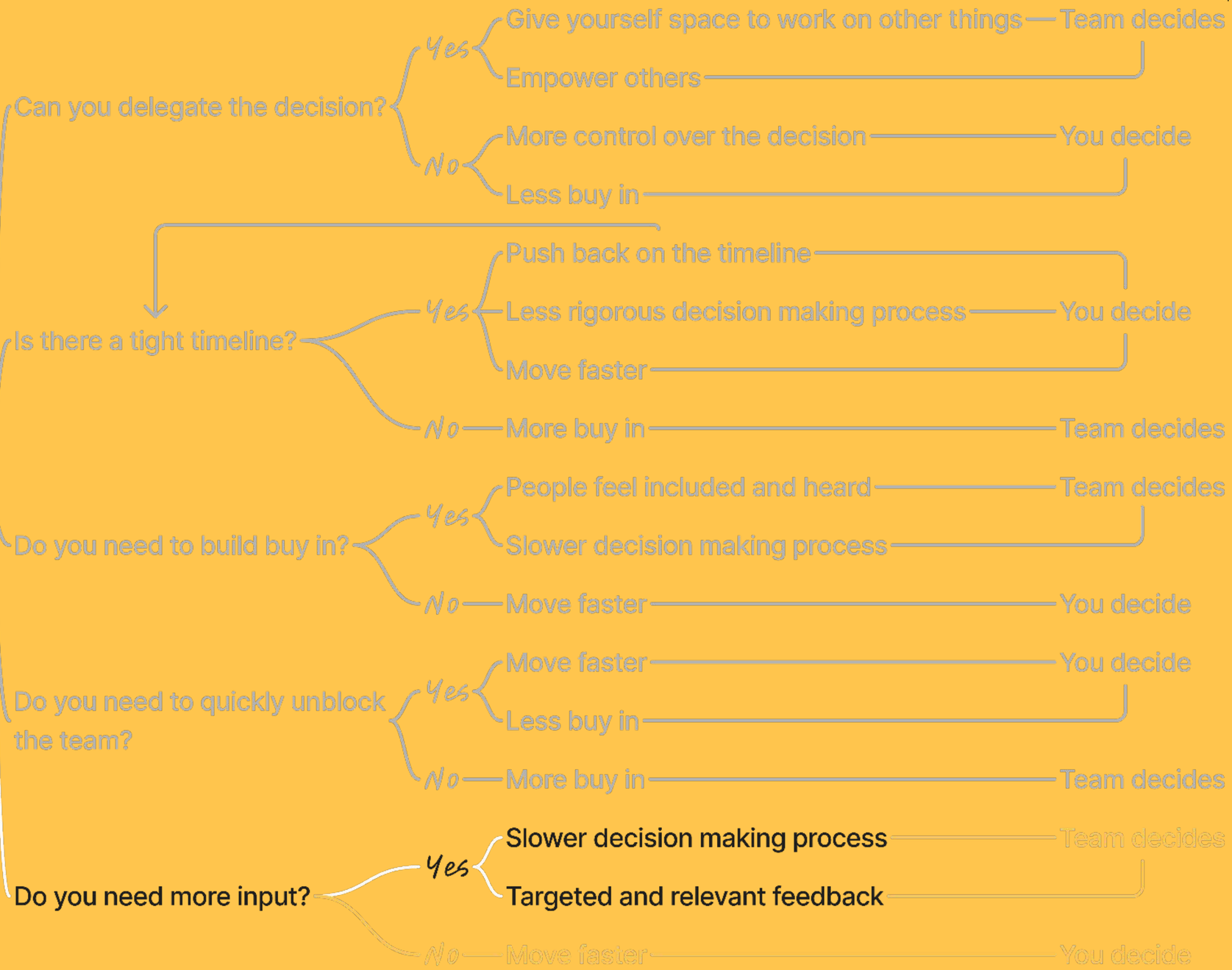
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



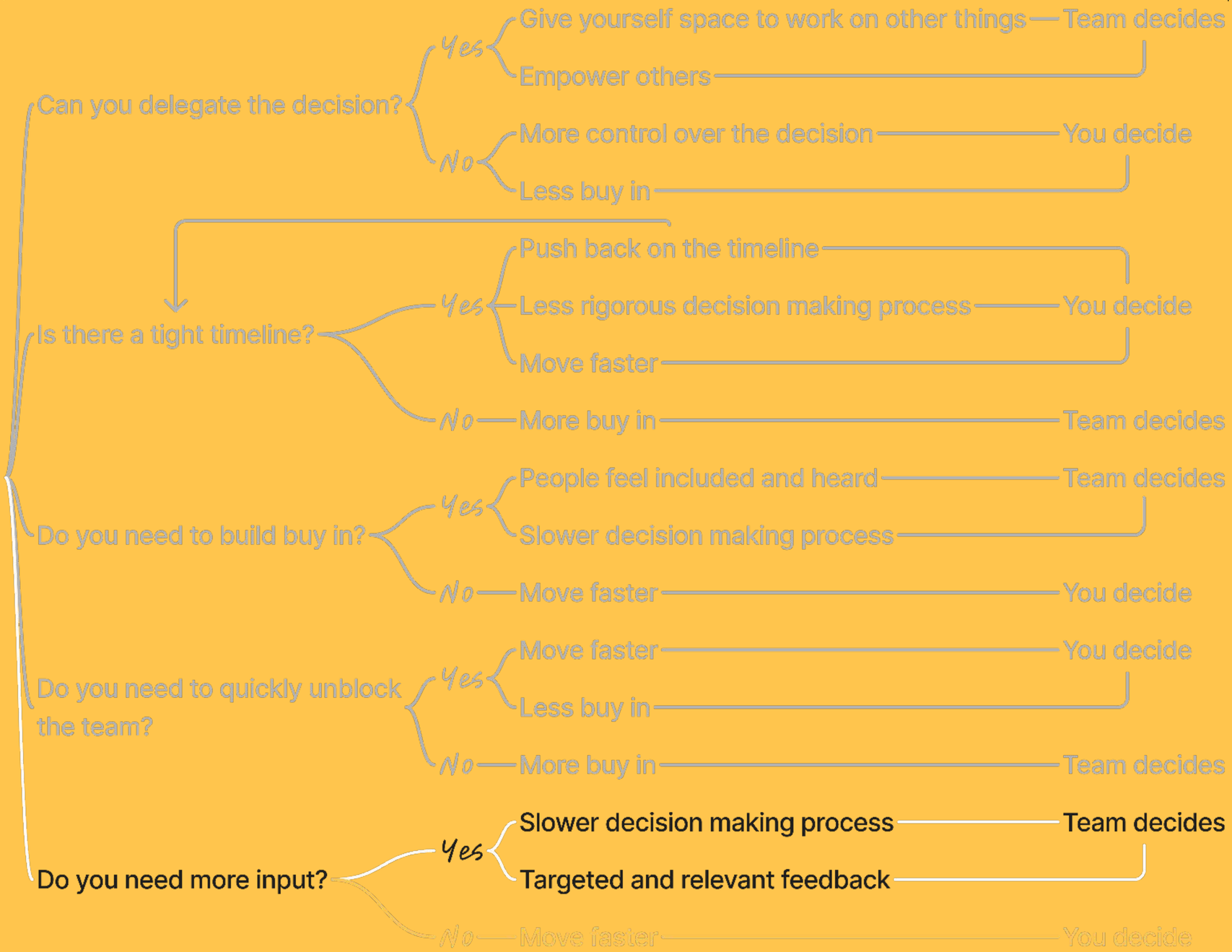
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



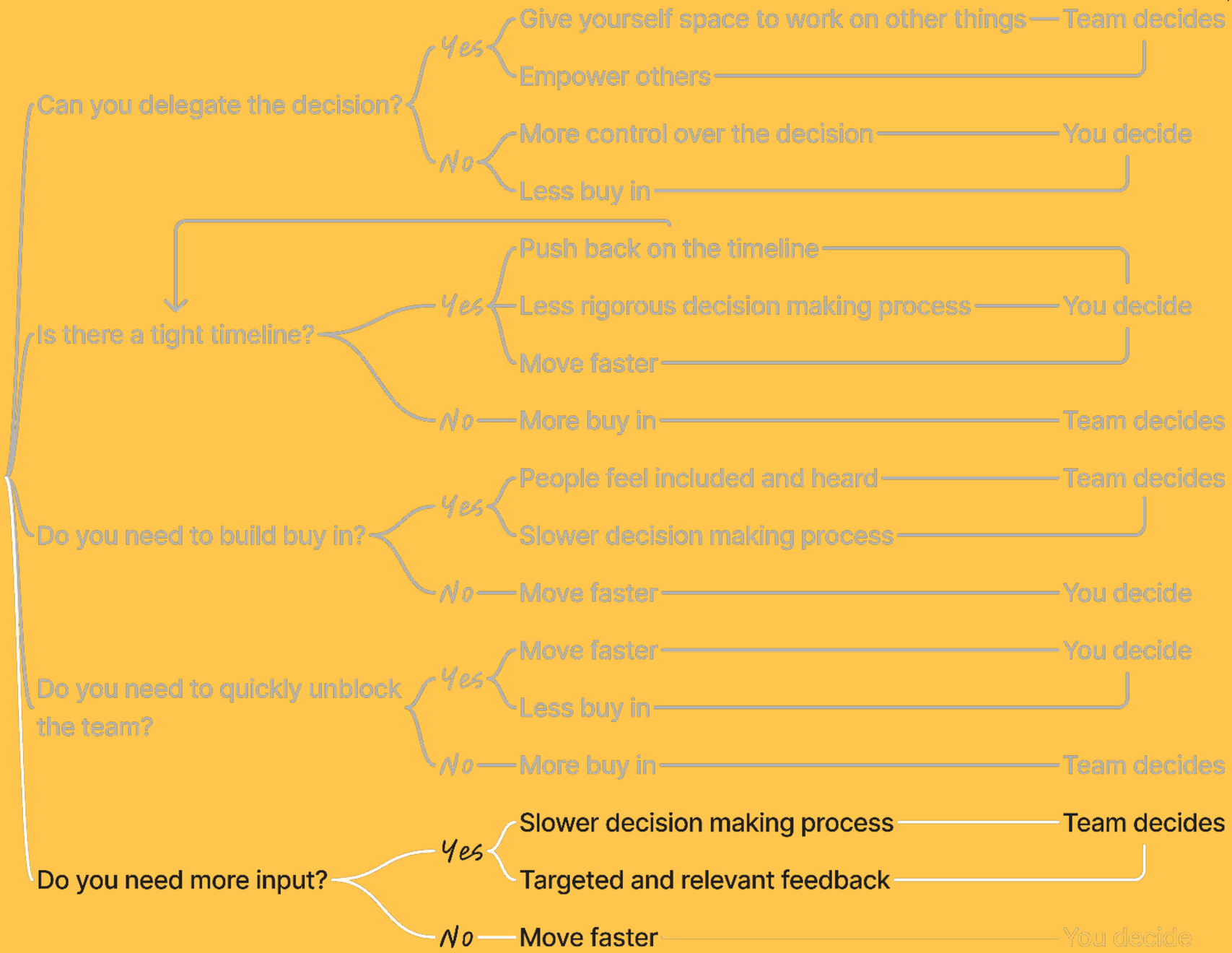
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



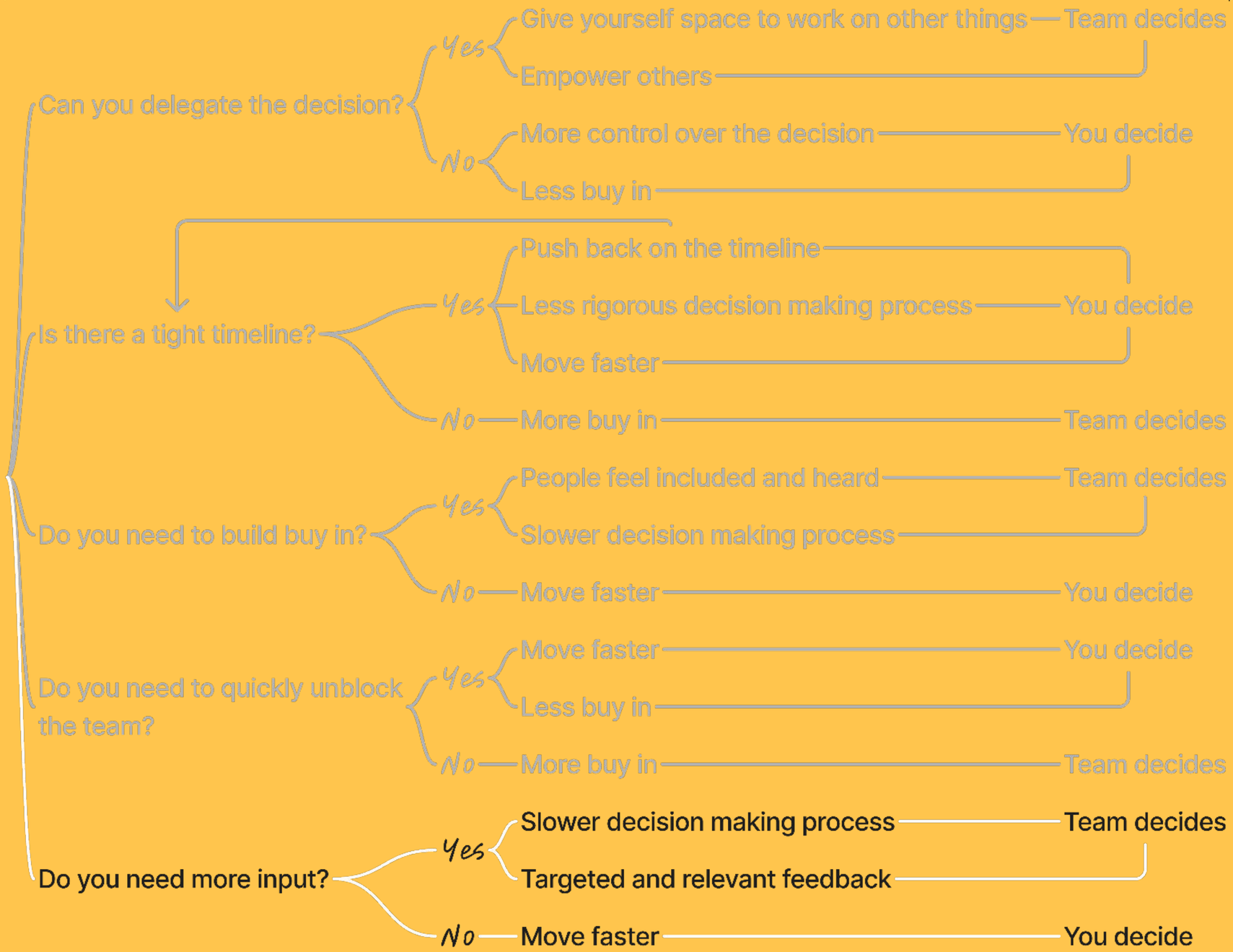
A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



A decision needs to be made. Who decides?



A decision needs to be made. Who decides?

Frameworks for Decision Making

Frameworks for decision making

Sometimes you need a formal process for decision making

Cultivate your inner circle

- Find experts in different disciplines to ask for advice
- Use these folks to bounce ideas off of in a low stakes setting

Final Takeaways

Your decisions reflect your culture and values

What message does this send to people?

You can “rollback” decisions

Changing a decision is a **powerful** demonstration of effective and principled leadership.

Think about the past, how often has a leader said they reflected on a past decision and need to revert the decision they made? It is so rare!

Taking accountability while also “fixing” it is **admirable.**

Sometimes there is no right or wrong answer

When you can, explain why you're making the decision

There will be cases where you can't explain (i.e. legal), so take advantage of the situations where you can be transparent.

It will build trust and make up for the situations when you can't explain your decision.

Hindsight is 20 / 20

You will never have all the information you want to make a decision.

Spotify®