

# Guide to using the Project Clarity Canvas

## Practical tool for build decisions

### Why this canvas exists

This canvas structures project evaluation before committing to build them. It's not a sales tool or justification tool. It's an evidence-based decision tool.

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### When to use it

Use this canvas when:

- A client proposes a new project
- An internal stakeholder requests a feature
- You're evaluating whether to accept an existing project
- You need to document why you rejected a project

Don't use this canvas for:

- Justifying decisions already made
  - Creating post-mortem documentation
  - Replacing conversations with stakeholders
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### How to complete it

Complete sections in order. Each section depends on the previous one.

#### Process:

1. Complete each section with precision
2. If a section cannot be completed, document why
3. Review the signals to observe in each section
4. Use the Decision section to synthesize

**Estimated time:** 30-60 minutes per project, depending on complexity.

**Participants:** Include whoever makes the final decision and whoever will execute the project. If the project involves multiple stakeholders, include them in the evaluation.

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### How to interpret signals

#### Healthy signals

- Problem defined with precision before the solution
- Success measurable with objective metrics
- Realistic and respected constraints
- Trade-offs identified and explicitly accepted
- Clear limits (non-objectives defined)
- Risks identified with mitigation plans
- Decision based on evidence

#### Alert signals

- Vague problem or solution defined before the problem
- Success not measurable or defined subjectively
- Toxic constraints (pressure for shortcuts, changes without adjustment)
- Trade-offs not recognized or promises without sacrifices
- Ambiguous limits or scope that grows without control
- Risks minimized without justification

- Decision based on commercial pressure, not evidence

**Practical rule:** If three or more alert signals are present, the project should not be built. If two alert signals are present, evaluate carefully before committing.

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### **When the answer is "Don't build"**

A well-founded "no" protects time, quality, and focus. Document the "no" using this canvas. Explain which sections could not be completed and why. This creates a clear record, avoids repeating the same evaluation, and allows communicating the decision in a structured way.

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### **What this canvas doesn't do**

This canvas doesn't guarantee project success, doesn't replace technical experience, doesn't eliminate the inherent uncertainty in software development, doesn't justify unfounded rejections, and doesn't create documentation to fulfill processes.

This canvas structures the evaluation. The final decision requires technical and commercial judgment.

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### **Closing**

Use this canvas consistently. Discipline in project evaluation reduces hidden costs and improves the quality of work you accept.

A clear project is built once. A project without clarity is built multiple times, poorly, until it finally works.

The clarity with which the problem, success, and limits are defined determines the outcome.