

One case, five moves ?

Challenger, 28 January 1986, read through PRISM

PRISM is a five-move check you run before a decision hardens. Four moves in sequence, one watching over all of them. Here it is on one launch decision, so you can see each move do its job.

The move	The question you ask	What happened at Challenger
P Problem Framing	<i>"Are we solving the right problem?"</i>	The room was asked the wrong question: "can you prove it will fail?" The standing engineering question had always been the other way round: "can you show it is safe to fly?"
R Research	<i>"What would prove me wrong?"</i>	The O-ring risk was in the record for years. The people holding the uncomfortable evidence argued against launching in the cold, the night before.
I Interpretation	<i>"What else could this mean?"</i>	The burden of proof flipped: instead of the hardware proving itself safe, the engineers were asked to prove it would fail, in conditions never flown before.
S Synthesis	<i>"What do all the pieces say together?"</i>	Cold temperatures, a known erosion problem, a schedule under pressure. Each piece got a local explanation. Nobody laid them on one table.
M Metacognition	<i>"How confident should I be, and what am I missing?"</i>	Confidence outran the evidence and nobody checked the process.

Seventy-three seconds after launch, seven people were lost. The Rogers Commission found the risk had been known for years. Chapter 12 of the book tells the launch decision in full.

Now try it on yours

Take a decision sitting on your desk right now. Run it through the five moves, one question each. Be honest. It is for your own thinking. If you want a guided version, the PRISM decision audit is at zafaralam.co.uk/prism-audit.

PRISM is a synthesis of tested parts, not a separately validated model.

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