

# THE DAREB TEST



## THE D-A-R-E-B LICENSE

Creative Commons Attribution–No Derivatives 4.0 International.

The D-A-R-E-B material remains the property of its author. It may be read, shared by link and referred to in your own words.

You cannot copy it, repackage it, sell it or present it as your own work. You also cannot change it and pass it on as if it were the original.

If you want to reuse it in a more direct way, you need permission. In short, it is open to read, but controlled in how it can be used.

© 2026 Russell Parrott - All Rights Reserved

<https://10.5281/zenodo.20109758>

## THE D-A-R-E-B TEST

D-A-R-E-B sets out what must be shown when a single decision is tested. It also makes clear how governance, responsibility and accountability fit together in practice.

It starts with a single decision. What was done, to whom and at what exact time.

This is the point of contact with the real world. Governance only matters if it can be traced to a specific outcome. Responsibility only matters if it can be linked to something that actually happened. Without a clear decision, there is nothing to govern, nothing to assign and nothing to account for.

It then moves to authority. This is the named person or body that allowed that outcome to happen at that time. This is where responsibility sits. Not in a process, not in a system, but with someone who had the power to allow that type of decision.

Governance creates the structure in which authority exists, but responsibility attaches to the holder of that authority in the specific case.

The record is where that authority is written down and can be produced. This is a core part of governance. It is the point at which intent becomes something that can be shown. If authority is not written down in a form that can be produced, then governance exists only as a claim. The record is what allows responsibility to be demonstrated rather than asserted.

Evidence then shows that the decision and its effect on the person actually happened. This is separate from governance design and separate from authority. It is about what was captured at the time.

Accountability depends on this. Without evidence, there is no way to confirm that the decision occurred as described or that it led to the outcome in question.

Finally, the basis explains why the decision was allowed at that moment. This is the rule, law or agreement that applied at the time. Governance sets these conditions in advance. Responsibility sits with those who act within them. Accountability tests whether the decision can be shown to have been permitted under those conditions when it was made.

Taken together, this sequence shows the relationship clearly. Governance sets the conditions: who may act, under what rules and how that is recorded. Responsibility sits with the named authority who is allowed to act within those conditions. Accountability is what happens when a decision is challenged and each element must be shown from records and evidence that already exist.

If any part is missing, the chain breaks. Governance cannot be shown, responsibility cannot be fixed to a person or accountability cannot be sustained under examination.

## WHAT D-A-R-E-B IS

DAREB is written for the moment when a decision is questioned and someone asks a simple question: can you show what happened in this case?

It is not about how to build AI systems or how to run governance programmes. It looks at something much narrower.

When a decision is challenged later, can the organisation show the decision, who allowed it, what records exist, what evidence survives and why the decision was allowed at the time?

Most governance material talks about structures, policies and oversight in general terms. DAREB starts somewhere else. It starts with one real outcome affecting one real person at one moment in time and asks whether the full chain behind that outcome can actually be shown.

For that reason, DAREB is mainly relevant to people who may later have to examine, defend or question a decision after the event. That includes boards, legal teams, insurers, regulators, investigators, auditors and public bodies.

The focus is not whether an organisation meant to act responsibly or whether governance existed on paper. The focus is whether one specific decision can be connected to a named authority, supported by records and evidence, and explained by a clear basis that existed at the time.

DAREB treats accountability as a question of proof. When explanation and assumption are stripped away, can the organisation still show what happened and who allowed it?

## HOW D-A-R-E-B IS USED

D-A-R-E-B is used by taking one real decision that has already happened and testing whether the full chain behind it can be shown.

It is not applied to systems in general terms. It does not score governance programmes or measure organisational maturity. It looks at one specific outcome affecting one specific person at one point in time.

The purpose is not to improve, certify or approve a system. The purpose is to see whether the decision can later be shown from records and evidence that already exist.

A regulator, court, insurer or investigator will usually examine one case, not governance in the abstract. D-A-R-E-B follows that same position. It asks whether the decision, the authority behind it, the records, the evidence and the basis for allowing it can all be demonstrated in that case.

If any part cannot be shown, the chain breaks at that point.

## WHAT D-A-R-E-B IS NOT

D-A-R-E-B is not a governance framework, audit, certification scheme or maturity model. It does not score organisations or rate the quality of their governance.

It is not a process to install, a programme to run or a control system to operate. It does not tell organisations how to design systems or what actions they should take.

It is also not a legal judgement about whether a decision was correct, fair or lawful.

D-A-R-E-B does one thing only. It tests whether a single decision can be shown from records and evidence that already exist.

## 16 QUESTIONS THAT TEST WHETHER A DECISION CAN ACTUALLY BE DEFENDED

Most governance frameworks ask whether the right structures are in place. This test asks something different. It asks whether a specific decision, in a specific case, can be defended using evidence that already exists.

That is the test that matters. Not whether oversight was intended or whether policies were written or whether the right people were involved in general terms. When a regulator, a court or an insurer examines an outcome, they fix on one case. They want to see the decision, the authority behind it, the record of both, the evidence that supports them and the basis on which the decision was permitted.

Five things. All of them tied to a single real event.

This test takes that structure and applies it directly. It does not ask about systems or frameworks in the abstract. It asks whether the elements needed to defend a decision are present in a case you can actually name.

Take one real outcome from the past twelve months and work through the sections below.

## DECISION

What was done, to whom and at what exact time. Not how the system works, but the specific outcome in one real case.

Y  N **Is there a record of the exact decision that was made in this case?**

Not a description of how the system works or a summary of the process that ran. The decision itself: what was determined, for whom and as a result of what.

Y  N **Can the direct effect on the person or outcome be shown from that record?**

A decision that cannot be connected to a defined consequence for a specific person is not yet fully described. The record needs to show what changed, not only that a process completed.

Y  N **Is the decision placed at a specific date and time in the record?**

Without a fixed point in time, the state of the system, the data and the authority that applied cannot be established. The timestamp is not a formality. It is the foundation for everything else.

## AUTHORITY

The named person or body that allowed that outcome to happen at that time. Authority must sit with someone identifiable, not with a system or a general role.

Y  N **Is there a named person or organisation whose authority permitted this decision to be made?**

Authority must be traceable to a person or body. A process does not carry authority. A system does not carry authority. The record needs to show who allowed this type of outcome to occur.

Y  N **Did that person or organisation hold the power to allow it at the time the decision was made?**

Authority must exist at the moment of the decision. A mandate that was assigned later or that had lapsed, does not support the decision that preceded it. The timing of authority matters as much as its existence.

Y  N **Did that authority extend to this specific type of decision?**

General authority to oversee a system is not the same as specific authority to permit the kind of outcome that occurred. The scope of the mandate needs to cover the case in question, not just the system that produced it.

## RECORD

Where that authority is written down and can be produced. If it is not written and available, it cannot be relied on.

Y  N **Is the authority written down in a document that can be produced?**

Authority that exists in practice but not in writing is not demonstrable. The record must be something that can be shown, not something that can only be described.

Y  N **Did that record exist before the decision was made?**

A document created after a challenge arises is a response, not a record. The authority needs to have been established and written down before the decision occurred, not in reaction to a question about it.

Y  N **Does that record clearly cover the situation this decision involved?**

A general governance document that could be interpreted to cover the case is not the same as a record that clearly applies to it. The closer the match between what the record says and what the decision involved, the stronger the position.

## EVIDENCE

What shows the decision and its effect on that person actually happened. This must come from what was captured at the time, not from later accounts.

Y  N **Is there evidence that the decision happened in the way it is now described?**

A consistent account of events is not the same as evidence. The record must show what happened, not simply reflect what someone says happened. The distinction becomes critical when an account is disputed.

Y  N **Is there evidence that connects the decision directly to the outcome for that person?**

The link between the decision and its effect on an individual must be demonstrable, not inferred. Where that link is missing from the record, it will need to be argued rather than shown.

Y  N **Was the evidence captured at or close to the time the decision and outcome occurred?**

Evidence created only after a challenge arises is not the same as evidence captured when events took place. The closer the evidence sits to the original decision and outcome, the less it depends on later reconstruction or explanation.

Y N

**Is that evidence independent of the organisation's own statement that it happened?**

Evidence that depends entirely on the organisation's own account of events carries limited weight under examination. Where independent evidence exists, it should be identified. Where it does not, that is itself a vulnerability in the position.

## BASIS

The specific rule, law or agreement that made that decision allowed at that moment. It must have been in place then, not formed afterwards.

 Y N

**Is there a recorded reason why this decision was permitted at the time it was made?**

A decision that can be shown to have occurred is not the same as a decision that can be shown to have been justified. The basis on which it was permitted must also be present in the record.

 Y N

**Which specific rule, law or agreement applied and is that identified in the record?**

A general reference to compliance or policy is not sufficient. The specific instrument that permitted the decision needs to be identified. If it cannot be named, the basis cannot be shown.

 Y N

**Was that basis in place before the decision was made, not identified or constructed after?**

A justification assembled after a challenge arises is an argument, not a basis. The rule, law or agreement that permitted the decision must have existed and applied at the moment the decision was made.

## OUTCOME

If you cannot answer every question using records and evidence that already exist, the decision cannot be shown. What is missing will not be filled by explanation, intention or later reconstruction. It will be treated as absent. In a real challenge, that is where scrutiny will focus and where conclusions will be drawn.

This test does not decide whether a decision was right, fair or lawful. It asks a narrower question: can the records and evidence needed to examine that decision actually be shown?

This does not measure how governance is described. It shows, in one case, whether it can be demonstrated.

It is not a tool to be adopted, run or scheduled. It does not ask to be used in cycles or built into a process. It defines a condition. In more complex automated systems, a final outcome may be shaped by many smaller decisions rather than one single event. Where those smaller decisions affect the outcome, each may need its own decision, authority, record, evidence and basis to be shown

separately. As the number of decisions that affect the outcome grows, the amount that may need to be shown grows with it.

For any single decision, either the five elements can be shown from records and evidence that already exist or they cannot. That is all it does. As more decisions shape the outcome, more may need to be separately shown.

## WHERE GOVERNANCE, RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY SIT

This test does not start with the Board; rather it starts with a single decision: what was done, to whom and at what time. Everything else follows from that.

Responsibility sits at the point where that decision was allowed. It belongs to the named person or body that had the authority to permit that outcome at that moment. It does not sit with a system. It does not sit with a process. It does not sit with a general role. It must be traceable to a name in that case.

Governance sits behind that point. It sets who is allowed to make decisions, what those decisions can cover, and what must be recorded when they are made. Governance is not the decision. It is the set of conditions that make the decision possible and, if required, showable.

Accountability sits across the whole chain. It is not assigned in advance. It is tested after the fact. It exists only if the decision, the authority, the record, the evidence and the basis can all be shown from material that already exists.

These three are often treated as separate. In practice, they only make sense together in one case.

- A decision occurs.
- Authority allows it.
- Governance defines that authority and how it is recorded.
- Evidence shows what happened.
- Basis shows why it was allowed.

If all of that can be shown, accountability holds. If any part is missing, it does not. The board is part of this, but not the centre of it. It sits within governance. It sets or approves the conditions under which authority is given and exercised. It does not replace the need to show who allowed a specific decision in a specific case.

- Governance sets the conditions.
- Responsibility sits with the named authority in the case.
- Accountability exists only where the full chain can be shown.

This test does not change those roles. It makes them visible.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Russell Parrott writes plain-English explanations of AI accountability focused on one question: what can be proven when a decision is challenged. His work treats accountability as an evidence problem. It looks at whether a specific outcome can be shown from records and evidence that already exist and whether that outcome can be linked to a named person with authority.

He does not advise organisations or design systems. His work defines the conditions required to show what happened and who was responsible, using only material that can be examined after the fact.

Contact: [parrott.russell@gmail.com](mailto:parrott.russell@gmail.com)

Public writing: <https://russellparrott.eu>

<https://10.5281/zenodo.20109758>