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Ideas, evidence and tools for better decisions.



100 WORKED APPLICATIONS / 8 DECISION TOOLS / GUIDED READING ROUTES

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Use this library to make a decision

Read selectively. Choose a current business decision, use the relevant summary, and complete its application before collecting another framework.

Each chapter connects a core argument, distinctive frameworks, practical lessons, cautions and reading companions to a completed application. Use the reading routes to choose a decision, then move between the explanation and the tool. Page numbers and links refer to this edition.

Three kinds of material

Material	How to read it
Source-book explanation	An independent summary of the book and edition named in the chapter. Read the original when the decision requires more depth.
Editorial application	A newly created example or tool that translates the idea into a decision. Hypothetical amounts, sample sizes and thresholds are labeled and are not book claims.
Later reference or update	A linked author, publisher or official source used to clarify a correction or current practice. Updates are separated from the historical edition.

Evidence before confidence

A completed worksheet is a starting point, not proof. Customer statements, observed behavior, payments and sustained use answer different questions. Record denominators, time windows, costs and unresolved uncertainty. A small sample can guide a next test without estimating an entire market reliably.

Choose thresholds before observing results. A missed criterion stays a missed criterion; a new explanation may justify a different test, not a retroactive pass. Match the strength of evidence to the cost and reversibility of the commitment.

Scope and source note

This is a revised independent companion to the source books, not an authorized edition of any of them. The publication year and chosen edition are listed beneath each title. Linked primary sources clarify selected frameworks, numerical claims and later developments. These independent summaries condense the originals and can omit nuance; read the full work when a decision needs greater depth. Finance and deal examples are simplified education, with assumptions stated; actual obligations depend on the arrangement and jurisdiction.



STARTING & VALIDATING

001 Running Lean

Ash Maurya / 2010 (2nd ed. 2012)



A repeatable, evidence-driven process for turning a risky first idea into a business model that customers actually pay for.

Idea / early revenue: validate a business-model assumption.

WHY IT MATTERS

Most startups fail by building something nobody needs, and they do it slowly and expensively. Maurya gives you a one-page way to write down your guesses, rank them by risk, and test them with real customers before you commit months of work. If you are about to build, hire or spend on launch, this book is a cheap way to find out whether you should.

THE CORE IDEA

Maurya starts from an uncomfortable premise: your first business plan is mostly guesses, and the job of an early founder is to replace guesses with facts as quickly as possible. He compresses the plan onto a single page called the Lean Canvas, with boxes for problem, customer segment, value proposition, solution, channels, revenue, costs, key metrics and unfair advantage. You call this Plan A, and you treat it as a set of hypotheses rather than a promise. The method is then a loop. Sort your risks into product, customer and market risk, design the smallest experiment that could prove you wrong, run it, and update the canvas. Testing moves through four stages: understand the problem, define the solution, validate it qualitatively, then verify it quantitatively. Early on that means conversations rather than code, and later a minimum product built to measure reactions. Progress is judged by validated learning and customer behaviour, not by features shipped or hours worked.

KEY LESSONS

1. Write Plan A on one page

Maurya argues that a long business plan is a poor tool when almost everything in it is unproven. Fill in the Lean Canvas in under an hour, even if every box is a guess, and write the problem and customer first. Keep each box short enough that a stranger can challenge it. The point is speed and honesty: a page you can revise weekly beats a document you defend for months. Done looks like a canvas that the whole team can read in two minutes, with the boxes you are least sure about clearly marked, so the next experiments are obvious.

2. Test the riskiest assumption first

Not every box on the canvas carries equal danger. Maurya sorts the risks in a plan into product, customer and market risk, and advises starting with small experiments that produce learning rather than building broadly. For most early ideas, the shakiest beliefs concern whether the problem is real and who has it. A founder who perfects pricing before confirming that anyone feels the problem is polishing the wrong thing. Ask of each assumption two questions: if this is false, does the whole model collapse, and how cheaply can I check it this week? Run the experiment that answers the most dangerous question for the least effort, then move down the list. Keep the ranking visible on a whiteboard so the team does not drift toward comfortable work.



3. Interview for problems, not for praise

The book treats customer interviews as a structured experiment. In a problem interview you describe the customer's world, ask them to rank their top problems, and learn how they cope today. You do not pitch. Maurya stresses that a good problem is one people already spend time or money on, so ask what they do now and what it costs them. Aim for roughly ten to fifteen conversations, look for patterns across them, and be wary of polite enthusiasm. If most interviewees cannot name the problem unprompted, rewrite the canvas instead of explaining harder. Write the questions you will ask before each call, and afterwards score every interview against them, so the answers can be compared.

4. Find the early adopters who hurt most

Maurya says to define your customer narrowly and start with early adopters, the people who feel the problem acutely and are already hunting for a fix. They are often cobbling together workarounds or paying for partial answers. Mainstream customers can wait. Write a precise description of this group, including where they gather and what they currently use, then recruit your interviews from it. A narrow segment makes your messaging sharper and your learning cleaner, because each result comes from people who resemble one another, so patterns show up faster. A useful test is whether you could introduce yourself to ten of them by name tomorrow; if you cannot, the segment is still too broad to learn from.

5. Design the solution only after the problem

Once the problem is confirmed, the solution interview shows customers a rough demo and watches their reaction. Maurya warns against designing a full product first. Sketch the minimum that addresses the top one to three problems, show it, and ask whether they would use it and what they would pay. Then separate what people say from what they do, by asking for a commitment such as a pilot, a deposit or an introduction. The deliverable is a short feature list tied to proven problems, with everything else deliberately postponed. Before the meeting, decide which feature you are prepared to cut, and watch which parts they ignore as well as which they praise.

6. Track actionable metrics, not vanity totals

After a minimum product exists, Maurya turns to measurement. He wants numbers that reflect real customer behaviour and can guide a decision, including a specific metric for judging product and market fit. Pick the stage of the customer journey that limits growth, define one number for it, set a target, and run one experiment at a time so you can attribute the change. He also suggests putting most effort, roughly four fifths, into improving what already exists rather than adding new features. Review the dashboard weekly. Avoid vanity totals that only grow; cohorts and rates show whether an experiment truly changed behaviour. Write the cause you suspect beside each change.

FRAMEWORKS TO KEEP

THE LEAN CANVAS

A one-page business model with nine boxes: problem, customer segments, unique value proposition, solution, channels, revenue streams, cost structure, key metrics and unfair advantage. Fill it in problem-first, in pencil, and list existing alternatives beside the problem. Use it as the living record of what you believe and what you have proven.

FOUR STAGES OF TESTING

Maurya's testing path has four stages: understand the problem, define the solution, validate the offer qualitatively with customers, then verify it quantitatively with real usage and metrics. Each stage has its own tests and exit criteria, and you do not invest in scale before the earlier stage passes.



COMPLETED APPLICATION

A validation ledger that earns the next investment

Hypothetical editorial application. A founder considers invoice-chasing software for solo physiotherapists. She has \$4,000 and six weeks. Before recruiting, she chooses three separate gates for this case: a recurring unpaid-invoice problem, payment for a manual pilot, and repeat use. These thresholds express her risk tolerance; they are not Maurya benchmarks.

Assumption	Test and result	Interpretation
Problem is frequent	12 of 15 owners describe chasing invoices last month; 9 already spend at least 2 hours monthly on it.	Problem evidence is promising within this recruited segment, not a population estimate.
Owners will pay \$40 monthly	Offer the same four-week paid manual pilot to 10 owners; 4 pay and 6 decline.	Pass the predeclared minimum of 3 paid pilots; record objections from all 6 decliners.
The outcome is useful	All 4 pilots receive an invoice-status report; 3 use it in each of the next 3 weeks.	Pass the chosen repeat-use gate of 3; investigate the fourth owner's existing workflow.
Customers will renew	Only 2 of 4 pay for month two; the chosen gate was 3 renewals.	Fail the renewal gate even though pilot revenue and interview enthusiasm looked encouraging.
Automation deserves investment	Estimated build cost is \$6,000, exceeding available cash.	Do not begin the production build on current evidence or funds.

What the result means

Continue one bounded manual test addressing the renewal objections; do not call the offer validated. Cap that test at \$400 and two weeks. If fewer than 3 of the next 5 paid customers renew at the unchanged price, stop this offer and revisit the problem or segment.

Use it in your business

Make five ledger rows for your own canvas. For each, record the exact assumption, dated evidence, a threshold chosen before testing, money at risk and the next investment it authorizes. A paid pilot cannot automatically clear the repeat-use gate.

YOUR ACTION PLAN

[] Fill in a Lean Canvas today

Spend sixty minutes writing all nine boxes, problem and customer first. Mark each box high, medium or low confidence. Done means a single page you could show a stranger.

[] List and rank your riskiest assumptions

Pull five to ten assumptions from the canvas, score each by impact if wrong and ease of testing, and pick the top one to attack this week.

[] Book ten to fifteen problem interviews

Recruit people matching your early adopter description, using communities or warm introductions. Prepare a short script about their current process and costs. Done is ten or more conversations logged in one shared sheet.

[] Summarise patterns and revise the canvas

After the interviews, count how many named the problem unprompted and how many pay for a workaround today. Update the canvas and decide whether to proceed, pivot the problem or stop.



[] Run solution interviews with a demo

Show a clickable mock-up or walkthrough to the most interested contacts. Ask for a concrete commitment such as a pilot or a deposit. Done is a count of real commitments, not compliments.

[] Set one metric and review weekly

Choose the funnel stage that limits growth, define one measurable target, and run one experiment per week. Record the result and the decision in a simple log.

THREE WAYS PEOPLE GET THIS WRONG

1. Treating interviews as sales pitches and leaving with warm words instead of facts. If you describe your solution before the customer has described their problem, you will hear agreement that costs them nothing and tells you nothing.
2. Filling in the canvas once and filing it away. The tool is only useful if you revise it after each experiment, otherwise it becomes the same stale plan on a smaller page.
3. Waiting until the product is polished before talking about price. Delaying that conversation postpones your hardest evidence and lets you build features for customers who would never have paid. Test it against real buyers early.

WATCH OUT

The book was written in the context of web and software products in the early 2010s, and the interview scripts and metrics assume you can reach customers directly and release small increments. It fits poorly for hardware, regulated products or markets with long sales cycles. Interviews can also mislead if you sample friendly people, and the structure can tempt founders to run endless small tests instead of making a decisive bet. The core of the approach has been widely adopted, but its evidence rests mostly on practitioner experience rather than controlled studies.

READ IT ALONGSIDE

The Lean Startup

Ries supplies the broader philosophy and vocabulary; Maurya turns it into a step-by-step operating procedure with templates, so the two read well in sequence.

The Mom Test

Fitzpatrick goes deeper on how to phrase customer conversations so you get truthful answers, which strengthens the interview stage that Maurya relies on.

ASK YOURSELF

1. Which box on my canvas am I most afraid to test, and why?
2. How many people have I spoken to who currently pay to solve this problem?
3. What specific result would convince me to stop or change direction?
4. Have I asked anyone for money or another real commitment yet?
5. Which one number would show that this week's experiment worked?

BEST FOR

First-time founders and product teams with an unproven idea who need a disciplined, low-cost way to find out what customers truly need.

THE VERDICT

A practical field manual for early validation; its canvas and interview method remain useful even where the examples feel dated.