

Assumption Collapse Playbook (Executive)

Version 1.1 — Board Aligned

Policy Owner: Executive Risk Committee

Review Cadence: Annual or upon material change

Purpose

Provide a decisive governance mechanism when foundational assumptions underlying Tier-1 systems become false, unprovable, or expired faster than normal review cycles.

Executive Principle

Systemic failure is driven primarily by expired assumptions, not missing controls. This playbook governs recognition, authority, and action at the moment assumptions collapse.

Load-Bearing Assumptions (LBAs)

An assumption is load-bearing if it supports multiple controls or decisions, cannot be continuously verified, and would materially impact Tier-1 systems if invalid.

Mandatory Governance Discipline

All Tier-1 domains must maintain an explicit, owned, time-bound LBA inventory. Undocumented assumptions constitute unmanaged executive risk.

Collapse Triggers

Immediate collapse is declared upon credible contradictory evidence, expiration, capability shifts, or loss of observability. Consensus or certainty is not required.

Authority Model

Pre-designated executives may immediately degrade services, disable exposure, preserve evidence, or override policy controls. Actions may be reversed; delay is prohibited.

Operational Response, Accountability, and Evidence

First 24-Hour Executive Actions

Name the collapsed assumption. Freeze dependent changes. Preserve evidence. Reduce exposure. Log authority used. Set reassessment deadline.

Explicit Prohibitions

Do not delay for vendor confirmation, debate likelihood over impact, add compensating controls without removing assumptions, or treat collapse as purely technical.

Re-Stabilization Criteria

Assumptions may only be reinstated with new evidence, reduced dependency, tighter expiration, and reaffirmed ownership. Otherwise they must be formally retired.

Success Metric

Reduced assumption count, shorter assumption lifetimes, fewer simultaneous control failures, and faster executive acknowledgment of reality.

Executive Attestation

By signing below, leadership affirms accountability for timely recognition of assumption failure and decisive action under uncertainty.

Role	Name	Signature	Date
CEO			
CISO			
CIO			
General Counsel			
Board Risk Chair			

Appendix — Regulatory & Audit Alignment (Reference)

Governance Alignment

- NIST SP 800-30 / 800-53 — Risk identification, assumption management, executive accountability
- ISO/IEC 27005 / 27001 — Risk treatment, continual improvement, decision traceability
- OECD Digital Security Risk Management — Reasonable foresight and proportional response
- EU AI Act / Emerging Tech Oversight — Time-bound executive decisions and assumption documentation

Defensibility Statement

This playbook demonstrates reasonable, good-faith governance by explicitly identifying when assumptions fail, who is authorized to act, how evidence is preserved, and how decisions are documented. It is designed to resist hindsight bias and support proportional regulatory assessment.