Toolkit Integrity Audit

10 competitive analysis mistakes — and the earliest repair route

Core rule: a downstream score, opportunity or memo can inherit an upstream defect, but it cannot cure one. Repair the first broken control, then recalculate dependent work.

This field guide complements the A64 article and workbook. It is a printable diagnostic reference, not an approval record and not a substitute for traceable evidence.

1. One-page audit card

Ask these controls in order. The first FAILURE PRESENT or UNKNOWN / VERIFY governs what happens next.

Order	Control	If it fails / remains unknown
1	One decision, one owner, one bounded request	RETURN TO DECISION DEFINITION
2	Comparable competitor roles	RETURN TO COMPETITOR QUALIFICATION
3	Unknown evidence stays unknown	RETURN TO EVIDENCE AUDIT
4	Provenance, freshness, wording and limitation	RETURN TO EVIDENCE AUDIT
5	Failed gates dominate totals	REPAIR TOOLKIT
6	Material disagreement stays visible	REPAIR TOOLKIT
7	Attractiveness != execution readiness	RETURN TO OPPORTUNITY MATRIX
8	Evidence belongs to the current decision/scope	RETURN TO EVIDENCE AUDIT
9	Memo preserves challenge, alternatives and reversal	RETURN TO EXECUTIVE MEMO
10	Frozen handoff, change log and reopen trigger	REPAIR TOOLKIT

Boundary: NO MATERIAL FAILURE DETECTED means only that these ten recorded checks did not reveal a material failure. It does not authenticate the evidence or approve the decision.

2. Why the earliest defect wins

A toolkit is a dependency chain. Later layers consume earlier decisions: competitor qualification depends on scope; evidence interpretation depends on the competitor/decision context; scores depend on evidence; opportunity prioritization depends on those outputs; the executive memo depends on everything before it.

That makes “how many mistakes?” the wrong primary question. A single scope failure can invalidate more downstream work than five later formatting defects.

Memorable rule

If the wrong competitor enters the scorecard, a perfect evidence table still describes the wrong comparison. If evidence is overclaimed, a correct formula only aggregates overclaiming. If both survive into the memo, concise writing makes the wrong conclusion easier to consume.

Do not average a blocking condition into a toolkit-health score. Preserve the state and route the repair.

3. The ten failure mechanisms

1 · Decision definition

One toolkit quietly answers several decisions

Signal: Scope changes between sheets.

Repair: Return to Decision Definition and freeze one decision contract.

2 · Competitor qualification

Different roles are scored as comparable

Signal: Providers, publishers, directories or substitutes share one benchmark.

Repair: Requalify the competitor universe before comparing.

3 · Evidence classification

Unknowns become neutral/average scores

Signal: Blank or unverified inputs become midpoint values or implied passes.

Repair: Keep UNKNOWN visible; return to Evidence Audit.

4 · Evidence governance

Evidence loses provenance, freshness or limitation

Signal: A material claim cannot be traced to source/date/permitted wording/limitation.

Repair: Restore the evidence record before recalculation.

5 · Aggregation

A total score overrides a failed gate

Signal: A high average survives a blocking control.

Repair: Make gates dominant; repair the toolkit.

3. The ten failure mechanisms (continued)

6 · Disagreement

Consensus averaging hides conflict

Signal: A mean replaces a material reviewer/evidence disagreement.

Repair: Record the conflict and evidence needed to resolve it.

7 · Opportunity

Attractiveness becomes readiness

Signal: Potential is treated as funded/ready despite capacity or dependency gaps.

Repair: Return to Opportunity Matrix.

8 · Evidence reuse

Evidence escapes its valid scope

Signal: A finding for one Decision ID is reused under another.

Repair: Relink or re-audit the evidence.

9 · Executive handoff

Memo removes uncertainty/alternative/reversal

Signal: Recommendation becomes more certain as it moves upward.

Repair: Return to Executive Decision Memo.

10 · Version control

No frozen handoff/change/reopen rule

Signal: Later edits can change the reviewed surface invisibly.

Repair: Freeze, log and define reopen triggers.

4. Worked example

Scenario: a team has a concise executive memo for a six-week pilot. It names an owner, cites evidence and includes a reversal condition. The memo looks excellent.

The audit starts upstream. Decision definition is CLEAR. Competitor qualification fails: a direct provider, an industry publisher and a software directory were ranked as if they represented the same competitive role.

The correct route is RETURN TO COMPETITOR QUALIFICATION, not “repair the memo.” Raw entity observations may remain useful, but the permitted comparison changes. Affected evidence relevance, scores, opportunity conclusions and the memo must then be recalculated.

Layer	What survives	What changes
Decision	Decision ID and owner	Nothing
Competitors	Raw observations	Role/qualification
Evidence	Source records	Relevance to corrected roles
Scores	Formula logic	Affected inputs/outputs
Memo	Template/boundary	Recommendation after recalculation

5. Portable handoff

Freeze the result another reviewer needs, not every intermediate worksheet.

- Audit ID
- Decision ID
- Reviewer
- As-of date
- Toolkit/version inspected
- Outcome
- Earliest check ID
- Stage
- Mistake
- Evidence/source
- Finding
- Owner
- Repair route
- Snapshot ID/date

If any current value later differs from the frozen record, the handoff should become DRIFTED and NOT READY. The workbook implements this as an exact-value comparison.

6. Sources and methodological limits

HM Treasury, The Green Book (2026). Transferable principle: options, evidence, risk/uncertainty, balanced judgement and monitoring/evaluation should remain visible to decision makers.

Center for Evidence-Based Management. Transferable principle: decision quality depends on critical thinking and the quality/context of evidence, not merely the presence of information.

Harvard Business School Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness. Competitive-strategy context: competition can be framed too narrowly when analysis considers only established rivals; substitutes, entrants, buyers and suppliers can also shape the competitive structure.

Google Search Central. Publication principle: content should be people-first, useful, original, transparent about authorship/process and satisfying for the intended audience.

SERPIFAI method boundary. The Earliest Invalid Assumption Rule and repair routes are a proprietary operating model. External sources do not validate a specific client outcome or an unstated toolkit result.

The browser diagnostic cannot authenticate what a user types. The workbook is a structured audit/handoff object, but native Microsoft Excel acceptance remains a separate direct test before installation.