

CHALLENGE AN N/A CONCLUSION WITHOUT STARTING A WAR

Do not challenge the cell. Challenge the architecture fact, activity, and responsibility model behind it.

PRACTITIONER POSITION

A useful N/A challenge tests whether the relevant activity, technology, data, or condition is genuinely absent; distinguishes non-applicability from outsourced or shared performance; identifies the evidence and owner behind the conclusion; and records the changes that would require the decision to be revisited.

THE FIELD PATTERN

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

A requirement is marked N/A because a hosted provider performs the visible service. The customer still configures access, approves changes, monitors output, and responds to failures. In another area, a technology truly is absent, but the only support is a spreadsheet note copied from last year. Both conclusions need fact-based review, but they do not need the same answer.

SIGNALS DETECTED

WHAT SHOULD MAKE YOU STOP

- The rationale is a provider name, product label, or inherited sentence rather than an observable fact.
- Customer-performed and shared activities disappear when a service is outsourced.
- The conclusion has no evidence source, owner, verification date, or change trigger.
- An N/A decision conflicts with diagrams, inventories, configurations, contracts, or control narratives.
- Reviewers debate the status before agreeing on the activity and architecture in question.

WHY IT MATTERS

THE COST OF LEAVING IT UNEXPLAINED

An N/A conclusion can be correct. The weakness appears when the status replaces the reasoning. Outsourcing an activity does not by itself describe which parts a provider performs, which parts the customer performs, or how responsibility is evidenced; equally, an activity or technology that is genuinely absent should not be forced into an artificial implementation story.

The goal is a durable conclusion that another reviewer can reconstruct from current facts. This playbook does not decide applicability for a specific entity and does not replace instructions from an assessor or

compliance-accepting entity.

QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS THAT EXPOSE THE WACK

- 01 What exact activity, technology, data, or condition is claimed to be absent or inapplicable?
- 02 Does a provider perform any part of the activity, and what customer or shared responsibilities remain?
- 03 What current evidence supports the conclusion, who owns it, and when was it verified?
- 04 Which architecture, service, data-flow, or responsibility change would trigger reconsideration?

THE CLUSTER OF WACK

FIND / MAP / EXPLAIN / REDUCE / PROVE

ESCAPE THE WACK

01 / FIND

Select one material N/A decision and collect its rationale, architecture, inventories, service records, responsibility map, and prior review history.

02 / MAP

Trace the underlying activity across customer, provider, and shared boundaries before discussing the final status.

03 / EXPLAIN

Write the conclusion as a fact-based rationale with evidence, owner, limitations, and explicit change triggers.

04 / REDUCE

Remove stale copied rationales and consolidate duplicate applicability records around one maintained decision.

05 / PROVE

Retain the dated rationale, corroborating evidence, reviewer disposition, and next review trigger with the assessment record.

THE FIELD LAW

THE LINE WORTH REMEMBERING

N/A IS THE END OF THE REASONING, NEVER THE BEGINNING.

Which N/A decision would be hardest for a new reviewer to reconstruct?

TECHNICAL GROUNDING

START WITH THE SOURCE MATERIAL

These references ground the practitioner interpretation. They do not turn the metaphor or method into official PCI DSS terminology.

- WACK-SOURCE-0001 / PCI DSS v4.0.1 / PCI Security Standards Council / [Open source](#)

- WACK-SOURCE-0002 / How is an entity's PCI DSS compliance impacted by using TPSPs? / PCI Security Standards Council / [Open source](#)

AUTHORITY CLASSIFICATION / PCI_SSC_SOURCE / PRACTITIONER_POSITION / PRACTITIONER_METHOD / AI_ASSISTED

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