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The limits of RACI—and a better way to make decisions

Today's ambiguous business environment requires that organizations consider new approaches to structuring decision-making roles.



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July 25, 2022 - Making and executing decisions is the lifeblood of organizations. The faster a company can enact high-quality choices, the more value it delivers. Yet, a [recent study](#) found 80 percent of organizations report struggles with decision making.

Many organizations attempt to clarify decision rights using RACI, which stands for the four roles stakeholders play: *responsible*, *accountable*, *consulted*, and *informed*. However, we've found RACI often makes things worse. Below, we outline four major pitfalls.

1. **No clear decider**

If told that you were *responsible* or *accountable* for a decision, would you get to make that decision? What if you were to be *consulted*? With RACI, too many stakeholders end up with a vote or veto. While it is often helpful to involve people in decisions, this only works when fewer people have a vote. Narrow down the list of decision makers.
2. **Poor orchestration of stakeholders**

When making a decision, when was the last time that you planned *who* would have *what* kind of input and *when*? RACI not only confuses *who* decides and *what* kind of input is required, but also *when* it is required. Bring stakeholders together to provide the right input at the right time, without breeding bureaucracy that diminishes decision quality. Consider key points of collaboration and coordination, then plan from there.
3. **Poor delegation practices**

With RACI, even when decisions are delegated to less senior colleagues (a great practice), they often do not feel empowered to make the final decision—let alone a recommendation—without the insurance of being backed by all *consulted* parties and having their superiors' support. In the end, the delegated decision is often escalated to the more senior party, wasting time and leaving many feeling disempowered.
4. **Ineffective meeting management**

Despite the number of “critical” meetings leaders attend, most executives are nonplussed at best when describing their experiences. Ineffective meeting management begets ineffective meetings—many agenda items fail to call out whether they require a decision, are up for discussion, or are simply to provide information. This lack of clarity associated with RACI often results in more meetings, more information, and more presentations.

Leaders should [take stock](#) of the most critical decisions, explicitly decide what to be involved in, then delegate the rest. To make this work, assign clear, accountable decision makers, then collectively agree on escalation protocols. Make sure if you do use the language of *responsible* and *accountable* that you clarify what it means.

It is critical organizations embed a few key behaviors when planning a meeting. First, clarify its [purpose](#): decision making (action), discussion (consideration/problem solving), or two-way information sharing (awareness). Decision meetings should have primarily, if not exclusively, decisions on the agenda. Also, remember that not every decision needs a meeting.

An alternative framework

To avoid these pitfalls, we recommend an alternative to RACI called DARE—standing for *deciders*, *advisors*, *recommenders*, and *execution stakeholders*.

Exhibit

D

The only one(s) with votes (in many cases, there is just one)

"CEO Mary decides the future org design for the company"

A

Influence the decision (often an outsized voice)

"CFO Sean, critical BU leaders Amit and Ivana, and COO Dinora weigh in on what option Mary should select"

R

Conduct analyses, explore alternatives, and illuminate pros and cons

"CHRO Robert leads a cross-functional team to identify options for Mary to choose from"

E

Implement the decision and therefore must be informed

"Daniela leads the transformation team that will determine the plan to shift to the new design"

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- Deciders: “We make the decisions”**
 - The only ones with votes; in many cases, there is just one
 - Determine whether other roles need to be in the room, how to interact with stakeholders, and whether a meeting is needed
- Advisors: “We have a voice in the discussion”**
 - Influence the decision (often an outsized voice)
 - Cannot delay a decision by demanding more data, analysis, or debate
- Recommenders: “We explore and identify the options”**
 - Conduct analyses, explore alternatives, and illuminate pros and cons
 - Offer multiple options with a perspective and invite others to debate
- Execution stakeholders: “We carry out the decisions”**
 - Implement the decision and therefore must be informed
 - Ask clarifying questions or spot challenges when the decision is being made

While counterintuitive, it can be helpful to involve more people in making a decision—but only when roles are clearly articulated. Give more people a voice, but fewer people a vote. And don't use RACI.

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