How to Clarify Roles, Decision Rights, and Accountability in a Growing Team

Service area:
Organizational Effectiveness



A client was promised a revised proposal by Friday.
On Monday, the client called to ask where it was.
Alex assumed Priya was sending it, because Priya had led the meeting.
Priya assumed Alex was sending it, because Alex usually handled proposals.
Both were capable and committed.
Neither owned the next step.

Missed handoffs like this are rarely about effort. They happen when roles, accountability, and decision authority have never been made explicit something that works in a very small team and becomes risky as it grows.

Illustrative example: the team members described are fictional.

Key takeaway:
Clear roles and decision rights prevent capable people from missing the next step.

Separate three questions

Clarity starts by recognizing that ‘who owns this?’ is actually three different questions:

- **Who does the work?**
- **Who is accountable for the outcome?**
- **Who has the authority to decide?**



These can be the same person, but often they are not. A coordinator may do the work, a manager may be accountable for the result, and the owner may hold the authority to approve a price. Confusion appears when people assume these answers without saying them out loud.

Key takeaway:

Separate work, accountability, and decision authority before assigning ownership.

Choose a workflow to clarify

Avoid starting with every role in the company. That approach produces large documents and little change.





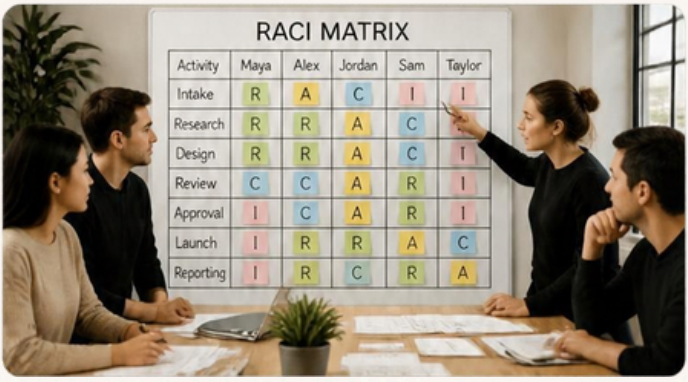
Instead, select one process with recurring confusion or delays—proposals, client onboarding, purchasing, scheduling—and clarify that first. A visible improvement in one workflow builds momentum for the next.

Key takeaway:
Start with one workflow where confusion or delays are recurring and visible.

Use RACI to discuss ownership

A RACI matrix is a simple way to structure the conversation. For each activity in the workflow, assign:

R	**R – Responsible:** does the work
A	**A – Accountable:** owns the outcome and makes sure it is done
C	**C – Consulted:** gives input before or during the work
I	**I – Informed:** is kept updated



Each activity should have one accountable owner, and at least one responsible person.

In smaller teams, the same person is often both accountable and responsible (A/R), which is perfectly appropriate.

The value is less in the finished chart and more in the discussion it creates. Disagreements about who is 'A' are exactly the gaps you need to resolve.

Key takeaway:
Use RACI to make ownership visible and turn disagreement into a useful conversation.

Document decision rights separately

A RACI assignment does not automatically grant approval authority.

Being accountable for a proposal does not necessarily mean you can approve a discount.



Decision-rights checklist

- what the person can decide
- limits, such as budget or timing
- required inputs before deciding
- escalation triggers that send the decision elsewhere

Key takeaway: Accountability describes the outcome; decision rights define what someone is allowed to decide.

Agree on handoffs and communication

Most missed handoffs occur in the space between roles.



A four-part handoff checklist

1. the required output
2. who receives it
3. the expected timing
4. which updates or exceptions must be communicated, and how

Example:
Alex sends the revised proposal within two business days after the meeting; Priya is informed when it is sent

→ A single line like this would have prevented the problem.

Key takeaway:
Define the output, recipient, timing, and communication rules for every handoff.

Validate and revisit

Walk through a realistic example with the team using the new clarity. Where people hesitate or disagree, adjust. Then revist periodically, especially after role changes, process changes, or a recurring missed handoff. Roles evolve as a business grows; the documentation should evolve with them.



1. Walk through a realistic example
2. Adjust where people hesitate or disagree
3. Revisit after change or a missed handoff

Key takeaway:
Test role clarity in real work and update it as the business changes.

Reader exercise

Pick one workflow and map it with these columns: activity, R, A, C, I, decision boundary, and completion standard.

Activity	R	A	C	I	Decision boundary	Completion standard



Review it with the people involved before treating it as final.

Key takeaway:
Review the ownership map with the people doing the work before it becomes the rule.

When to bring in support?

If ownership questions keep coming up, or your team is growing faster than its structure, AuofOnyx can help.



Contact AuofOnyx to discuss role clarity, communication, and practical accountability structures.

Key takeaway:
Clear ownership and practical accountability structures help growing teams work with confidence.

Source: Atlassian. "RACI Chart: What is it & How to Use." The Workstream.
Read the RACI responsibility guide: https://www.atlassian.com/work-management/project-management/raci-chart

Source: Atlassian Team Playbook. "DACI: A Decision-Making Framework."
Read the DACI decision-role framework: https://www.atlassian.com/team-playbook/plays/daci