



**RACI SOLUTIONS™**  
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## **RACI**solutions

### ***Teams that Work***

**RACI** creates collaboration, accountability  
and teamwork on your project teams.



By **Cassie Solomon**

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*“If Plan A fails, remember that you have 25 letters left.” Anonymous*

## **SECTION ONE**

### **Introduction to RACI**

**RACI** was first introduced in the 1950s but it is ideally suited for today’s business environment, which demands flexibility and adaptation in response to almost constant change. RACI was originally called by a more formal, academic name, the “Decision Rights Matrix,” and is also known as “Responsibility Charting.” The RACI tool is in wide use in companies as diverse as Proctor and Gamble, eBay, Amazon and the U.S. Department of Defense. It has been widely embraced by the software development industry and also by project managers worldwide. You can find downloadable articles at the Project Management Institute and across the web. I’m grateful to my teachers, Tom Gilmore and Larry Hirshhorn of CFAR, who have also taught it for many years at the Wharton School of Business.

RACI is simple, and yet very powerful, because it gives us a language to talk with one another in more precise ways about our roles. As the workplace becomes more fluid and more dominated by project work, and as our organizations become more matrixed, it is ever more important for us to have a crisper language to describe how we work together. Simply put, we have to wear many hats in today’s workplace, and RACI gives us a better way to describe our multi-project work lives.

Sounds pretty esoteric? Maybe, but take a look at the list of things that can go wrong when there is **role confusion** in a group. No fun—and all too common. While it is funny to listen to Abbott and Costello’s “Who’s on First?,” it is quite different when two coworkers are talking “past” one another, both with good intentions.

When people are confused about their role, they don’t work effectively.  
Sometimes they fight, but sometimes they just stop caring.



**Role confusion looks like this ...**

- Concern over who makes decisions
- Blaming others for not getting the job done
- Out of balance workloads
- Lack of action—a “not sure, so take no action” attitude
- Questions about “who does what”
- A “we-they” attitude
- Idle time
- Creation of and attention to non-essential work to fill time
- A reactive work environment
- Poor morale
- Unsure where you need to find an answer to a question

*Michael L. Smith and James Erwin (Role and Responsibility Charting, Project Management Institute)*

**Problems with teamwork are often role problems**

When things go wrong with our teamwork, our training, language and skills incline us to believe that the problem is with an individual. We might say, “If only they were more competent.” Or, “He’s not a team player.” But in our experience as consultants at The New Group and RACI Solutions, we find that, most of the problems that occur in organizations are actually located in the “seams” between people or between groups. This means that the problem is in the RELATIONSHIP between the two, rather than INSIDE one person or one group or another.

How you define the location of the problem turns out to be important, because it will determine how you go about fixing it. If you think the problem is inside an individual, you may recommend an assessment or training or a coach to change that person’s skills or



behavior. If you think that a problem is inside a particular group, you may send them away to do some team building. But if the problem is located BETWEEN two individuals or BETWEEN two groups, then these interventions won't work. Rather than an individual "fix," you may need a mediator to work with both sides of the equation. Rather than a team-building exercise with one group, you may need to hold a retreat with both groups in attendance and help them work together differently.

These interventions into RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN can be more difficult to pull off even if they are ultimately more successful. That's why the RACI tool is so welcome. It creates a **simple and neutral** language that people can use to discuss their different perspectives. It is a tool that often leads people into a negotiation. Once resolved, everyone can move forward again with clarity.

Using RACI gives you a chance to NEGOTIATE for what you want—how much responsibility, how much work, and how much decision-making authority.



## SECTION TWO

### Do you need RACI? Take the Role Confusion Quiz

For each question below, please assign one of the following numbers as a score:

**0** = This is rarely a problem

**1** = This happens with some frequency

**2** = This happens a great deal

When you are finished, add up your total score and see if you fall into the “green,” “yellow,” or “red” category.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Score</b>
1. There is concern about who makes decisions.	
2. Some team members blame others when things don't get done.	
3. Workloads feel out-of-balance, with some team members doing more than others.	
4. There is a “lack of action” problem, where team members are not sure who is responsible so they take no immediate action.	
5. There are questions among the team about “who does what.”	
6. There is a “We-They” attitude among some team members.	
7. Idle times alternate with times when there is too much to do.	
8. Team members resort to creating or attending to nonessential work.	
9. We work in a “reactive” rather than a “proactive” environment.	
10. There is poor morale among the team.	
11. There are multiple “stops” needed to find an answer to a question.	
12. There is duplication of work being done in different areas.	

**Score 0 - 6**      Green



**Score 7 - 14**      Yellow



**Score 15 - 22**      Red





## SECTION THREE

### RACI: The Basics

Let's start by looking at the basic building blocks of RACI, the codes:

<b>Responsibility</b> "R"	The individual(s) who actually completes the task, the action/implementation. Responsibility can be shared.
<b>Authorize</b> "A"	The individual who is ultimately responsible. Includes yes or no authority and veto power.
<b>Consult</b> "C"	The individual(s) or groups to be consulted prior to a final decision or action.
<b>Inform</b> "I"	The individual(s) or groups who are informed after the final decision has been made or action has been taken.

**Responsibility:** The "R" code is the important when you are trying to enhance ACCOUNTABILITY in the system. The person who holds the "R" is the one who will make sure that this piece of work gets done. It can mean that they will perform research and analysis and offer a recommendation to someone else. Their accountability is very specific: if nothing gets done, they are the responsible party. Though they may get help from others or delegate some or all of the work, they remain the "buck stops here" person if nothing happens.

**Authorize:** The "A" role holds the AUTHORITY in the system, and must approve a decision or determine if a particular task has been done well. This person is accountable for something quite different—their job is to exercise judgment in making the decision. The risk for them is simple: they can be wrong.

**Consult:** The "C" role is perhaps the hardest to understand. A person is given a "C" role if they have a particular knowledge or expertise to CONTRIBUTE to the decision or the task. One requirement of a "C" role is that it must be included BEFORE the decision is made and this is because if someone has a "C" it means that you believe their contribution is vitally important to reaching a quality decision. For this reason, try not to give a "C" to someone merely to get their "buy in" to a decision process. You are much better off giving a genuine "C" to a person or group that knows something you really want to understand before you proceed.

The best analogy I've found for this "C" role is that of seeking a second opinion from a physician when faced with a significant medical decision. The second opinion doctor is not obligated to do anything other than give high-quality advice; the decision whether or not to proceed with surgery or treatment remains with you. So the accountability for someone in the "C" role is to give you their best possible thinking—no more.

**Inform:** The "I" role is understood to be the weakest, because the person doesn't participate in the decision before it is made. You INFORM that person about the decision afterwards; the "I" role doesn't participate. Yet we have all been in situations where we have felt deeply offended because we learned about something in the wrong way—through the rumor mill or even by reading it in the newspaper! So



thinking carefully about who “needs to know” about actions and decisions is good stakeholder management.

### **What about collaboration, when more than one person has the “R”?**

With complex tasks, it’s inevitable that more than one person will need to collaborate to get the job done. The danger with this is that it can be like doubles playing tennis—the ball can go straight down the middle between the two players because each one is thinking, “Oh, that’s not my ball.” To avoid this problem you can designate one person as the “R Prime” or “R<sub>1</sub>” which means that in terms of accountability, this person is #1.

### **Can an activity or a decision have more than one “A”?**

RACI purists will tell you that you should assign only one “A” to a responsibility chart, but we generally find that in complex systems that’s not possible. The key point is that the more “A”s are attached to a decision, the longer it takes to move through the approval process. So reserve this situation for truly important matters—major change efforts or policy shifts—that warrant the time and energy involved. If relatively minor decisions have more than one “A” attached to them, ask yourself if you can streamline the decision or work to reduce their number.

### **Can you have more than one role?**

Yes, it is very common to have more than one role at a time. You can have the Authority (A) and the Responsibility (R) for a task if you do the work and also decide which course to take. You can also combine the Authority (A) and the Consultation (C) roles if you tell a subordinate, “Get my views of what is important (the C) and then bring your recommendation back to me for my approval.” It is less common but also possible for someone to keep the Consultation (C) role and the Inform (I) role when delegating a task, but give both the Responsibility (R) and the Authority (A) to a subordinate. In this case you would say, “Get my views of what is important here, but then go out and do the work and make the decision yourself. Inform me about what you’ve chosen to do.”



<b>Common Combinations</b>	<b>What does it mean?</b>
A/R	Someone does the work and also makes the decision.
A/C	Someone is consulted to get their views, and makes the ultimate decision about what to do.
C/I	Someone is consulted on the basis of their expertise, and they give advice. Then the work proceeds and the final decision is made. In the end, they will be informed about what happened, but their advice may or may not be followed.

## **SECTION FOUR**

### **Creating a RACI Matrix**

#### **1. Step One: Choose a focal activity or decision for your chart**

The first step is determining the decision or activity you want to “chart.” Since RACI is a simple tool, you can apply it to broad issues and very specific issues, so this step is a key thinking point. For example, do you want to create a chart for the entire on-boarding process, or just the part of it that the front line manager is responsible for? Each of these will yield very different charts, and you can do both.

Let’s start with a household example. Do you want to chart something very broad, like “housework,” or do you want to chart a narrower element, like “doing the laundry.”

#### **2. Step Two: Determine the activities or steps involved**

This is where the RACI method crosses paths with project planning. To create a chart, you need to think through the steps involved in the activity, or the steps of the decision process. For example, if you are charting the task, “doing the laundry” you might think of the following steps:

1. Bring clothes to the laundry room
2. Sort lights and darks
3. Pre-treat any clothes that are stained
4. Decide which products to use (detergent, bleach, softener)
5. Wash a load of laundry
6. Decide which clothes can go in the dryer and which clothes should drip-dry



7. Dry the laundry
8. Decide which things need to be ironed, if any
9. Iron clothes if necessary
10. Fold the laundry
11. Put the clothes away where they belong

Can you mix up decisions and activities? Steps #4 and #6 and #8 above are decisions, after all. Yes! You can mix them into the project plan as long as they are fairly simple and don't require a whole separate kind of thinking through.

### **Step Three: Determine stakeholders who will be involved**

This is where the RACI method crosses paths with stakeholder analysis, and it is a valuable thing to do for any project. Who needs to be involved? Who **thinks** they should be involved? Who am I forgetting? For a complex or high-stakes project, it pays to do some brainstorming about this step with a small group of people.

In our laundry example, let's say the stakeholders are: Mom, Dad, Son and Daughter. This is what the RACI chart we construct might look like.



### Roles of Participation

	Mom	Dad	Son	Daughter
1. Bring clothes to the laundry room				
2. Sort lights and darks				
3. Pre-treat clothes				
4. Decide products to use				
5. Wash a load				
6. Decide dryer or drip-dry				
7. Dry clothes				
8. Decide ironing				
9. Iron if necessary				
10. Fold laundry				
11. Put away clean clothes				

**Decisions or Activities**

In our simple example, you might not want to elaborate all these steps. You might decide instead that you want to chart a broader set of activities involving housework. If that's the case, you could collapse all the "laundry" steps above into a single line, called "Doing the laundry." Then it would be one among many other household tasks like "Doing the grocery shopping" or "Keeping kitchen floor clean."



#### **Step 4: Decide if you want to chart the “as is” or the “will be”**

Before you take the next step of filling in the RACI matrix with the codes (R,A,C,I) you need to make one more decision. Are you going to chart the “as is”—the way the world is working today? Or are you going to chart the “will be”—designing the world the way you would like it to be? Sometimes the answer is obvious: If you are doing a project plan for the future, obviously you are charting **prospective** roles. But it is also possible to chart the “as is” world to learn more about how a system is working today, which is what we will do in our laundry example. The fascinating thing that can happen when you do this is that you discover that different stakeholders have different ideas about how the roles in the system work; then you need a dialogue.

#### **Step 5: Fill in the RACI chart with roles of participation codes**

Take a moment and fill in the “laundry chart” above—hypothetically, of course. ☺  
This step can either be done alone or in a group. When you fill in the RACI chart alone, you are revealing the way that you see the roles working in the system. Remember that someone else might see it differently.

#### **Step 6: Negotiate how you see the roles and how others see them**

Sometimes it makes sense to do RACI in a more formal way, where individuals each fill in a RACI matrix separately and then compare notes. The value of doing this is that you learn how people’s perceptions differ.

Most of the time this step is collapsed into the step above—a group of people can sit around and talk about how to fill out the chart together. “Who has the R? Mary or Ben?” In the course of the discussion, they come to a common understanding.



**Let's take a look at the RACI chart we started above, to see what it looks like when the roles have been assigned.**

<b>Roles of Participation</b>					
	<b>Mom</b>	<b>Dad</b>	<b>Son</b>	<b>Daughter</b>	
<b>Decisions or Activities</b>	1. Bring clothes to the laundry room	R		R	
	2. Sort lights and darks	R			
	3. Pre-treat clothes	R			
	4. Decide products to use	A	R		
	5. Wash a load	R	R		
	6. Decide dryer or drip-dry	A			C
	7. Dry clothes	R	R		
	8. Decide ironing	A	C		
	9. Iron if necessary	R			
	10. Fold laundry			R	R
	11. Put away clean clothes			R	R

Notice that it's not necessary to have every cell in the matrix filled out.

Notice that it's not necessary to have an "A" on every line, except the ones where a decision is clearly involved, steps 4 and 6.

So, in the chart above, Mom and Dad share the work of doing the laundry, but only Mom does the ironing. The daughter—whose clothes may be more complicated than the son's—wants to be consulted on which clothes go into the dryer, and Dad wants to be consulted on whether his shirts get ironed. The son and the daughter both have responsibility to bring their clothes to the laundry room and to fold and put away the clean clothes.

This raises an important question: Do things always happen the way you plan them in the RACI session? No, of course not. To be effective, a RACI chart needs to be a living document that represents a team's agreement. To stick with our example, what happens if the son and daughter stop folding their laundry or putting it away? The RACI chart makes it much easier to hold them accountable, in a much more neutral way, by saying, "Hey, do you remember when



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we had that meeting about the laundry? Here's the RACI chart that we produced. You've got the "R" here for doing some of the laundry—don't forget."

## **Becoming a RACI Champion**

The RACI tool can be deceptively simple. But determining the steps of a major project can sometimes be just the first valuable step of applying it at work. Next, thinking through the various stakeholders who need to be involved—and how—can save a world of heartache down the line.

The more you use RACI and the more applications you find for it, the better and more proficient you become with the tool. Then it can become an even more powerful way to promote accountability and streamline decision-making at work.

For more information about how and where to use RACI, visit [www.RACISolutions.com](http://www.RACISolutions.com).