



DECISION TIME

Establishing clarity around decision rights—from the C-suite on down—gives high-performing organizations an edge.

By JulieAnn Weber

Having the right people make the right call within an organization hinges on a clearly defined decision rights system. Decision rights are the hallmark of a truly high-performing organization: They ensure each employee knows where to go for decisions, the criteria against which those decisions will be made, and the specific outcomes for which he or she is held accountable.

While decision rights are not the definitive means to establish a culture of accountability, they are—if done well—an important complement to defining roles and processes to create workability. Organizations that fail to establish and live by a well-defined decision rights system will likely fail to create a sense of ownership and clarity among the rank and file. That may mean innovation stalls and execution falters—and the organization falls behind.

To create a decision rights system, executives should:

- 1. Define mission-critical decisions.** Start at the highest level of the organization and map out the decisions that are sacrosanct—the ones that will impact the organization's long-term strategy, vision or values. These are the decision rights that reside with top leadership.
- 2. Let the rest go.** If an executive team spends a lot of time looking at decisions outside the company's strategic imperatives or mission-critical objectives, they are probably investing their time in the wrong places. Once decision rights have been set for the C-suite, executives should repeat the process in a cascading fashion down the levels of the organization.
- 3. Decide how you will decide.** What will the decision-making process look like? What are the forums in which you will discuss and make these decisions? How often will you meet? Who should be included in those meetings? How will decisions be communicated once made?
- 4. Seek out pain points.** A good way to identify gaps in the decision rights process is by examining where challenges lie in the organization. Is this because decisions are being stalled—either because no one or everyone is responsible or because each decision has to get pushed up?
- 5. Allow time for change.** Introducing a decision rights system means upending the status quo. It is not a change that will happen overnight. It needs time to breathe and become a part of an organization's DNA. It is OK if people make mistakes, as long as they are accountable for what they are doing or not doing.

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