

Connecting Authority Levels and Accountability



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Connecting Authority Levels and Accountability: part 4 of the 'Execution Excellence' series

FOCUS Management has produced a five part series on tackling the many challenges corporations face associated with strategic execution – the number one issue facing CEOs according to a recent study by the Harvard Business Review.

In Part 1, you were introduced to a disease called strategy “executionitis”, which can be deadly for an organization... it is certainly bad news for equity owners whose return on investment depends on its companies’ strategies being successfully and efficiently deployed. This article is about an effective antidote—clarity, alignment and commitment to:

- The strategic focus and direction
- Individual accountability

When you have lots of both, you get “Great Execution of What Matters Most” or execution excellence.



In [Part 2](#), we discussed clarity of strategic direction and in [Part 3](#) the importance of clarity of individual work. In this article we will discuss the third element to curing “executionitis” — authority.

Have you ever been held responsible for achieving a major objective and weren’t quite sure what decisions you could take? Or found yourself hitting roadblocks because you didn’t have the authority to take action? Well, how did you feel?

Responsibility without authority=frustration.

It’s not just individuals who would be frustrated in this situation, but often leaders become frustrated because they don’t understand why there are so many roadblocks to things getting done. Ultimately, it leads to disappointment for organizations.

The #1 blockage to strategy execution, according to an HBR Report is unclear actions AND decision making. The two go hand in hand. Too often people are asked to take actions that are not within their authority level. Consequently, they often hesitate, delay or procrastinate OR, worse yet, take no action.

Getting clarity on authority levels can improve progress towards success dramatically. When we speak of authority in the context of execution excellence, we’re not talking about authority over others or who reports to whom. We are talking about the authority invested in the position to make decisions or to take action. Here are some examples:

- to authorize expenditures up to \$5000 within the approved budget and advise your manager after the fact

- to change the production schedule for new products without checking with marketing
- to recommend to HR the hiring of new staff
- to approve changes in the product brochure after input is sought from the stakeholders defined in the approved process

In some cases when authority is unclear, assertive individuals may 'make things happen' by making decisions which are not theirs to make. When this behavior becomes the norm, internal conflicts can and do surface.

So how do we fix this dilemma?

First, we suggest defining what authority is required to achieve results, and to use these four authority levels to help bring clarity:

AUTHORITY LEVEL I

You have the authority to act WITHOUT any contact with your team leader prior to the decision/action. Communication with your team leader, after the decision/action is taken, is for information only.

AUTHORITY LEVEL II

You have the authority to act but MUST notify your team leader immediately AFTER the action is taken.

AUTHORITY LEVEL III

You have the authority to act but MUST notify your team leader BEFORE action is taken.

AUTHORITY LEVEL IV

You have the authority to analyze and make recommendations to your team leader for approval.

Level 1 is the one with the most authority power. To borrow from Nike "Just do it", or from Captain Picard "Make it so".

Level 4 only permits recommendations. Someone else has the power to decide.

Here's an example of how a discussion on authority levels can add another layer of clarity to an individual's role.

What are the expected Results	What is the metric? How will success be measured?	What is the target/objective?	What is the authority level?
New Product Sales	% of total sales	12% by end of Q-3	To adjust price within the guidelines set by marketing. Any deviations must be approved by the product marketing manager
Job Candidates	% positions filled by promise dates	80%	To post jobs on any commercial site To participate in approved job fairs

Getting these notions clear between line positions (sales, engineering and operations) and staff positions (IT, HR and Finance) can save a lot of wasted energy and silo making. Getting it clear within all functions accelerates getting stuff done that matters. It is not so much about right or wrong, it is about clarity. When it's clear, the only thing that is left is delivery. Getting it done – and that's what execution excellence is all about.