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The Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM)

Assigning Responsibilities for Deliverables to Roles

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Introduction

Among the many tools used to manage a project, the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM) stands out. It is especially useful to projects that cross-functional boundaries. Once established, it is usually a very stable representation of the project, often changing less than the project plan. Even on a small project, the RAM can improve everyone’s understanding of each participant’s role.

Background

The Responsibility Assignment Matrix goes by several names. It is sometimes called “Accountability Matrix,” or “Roles and Responsibilities Table,” or “RACI Chart” (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed). One type of RAM is identified as a RACI Chart in *The PMBOK® Guide*.

The Responsibility Assignment Matrix answers the question “Who will be accountable for each of the project’s major deliverables?” (And later, for lower-level work-packages and activity-deliverables.)

The Responsibility Assignment Matrix will:

- Clearly define, for each deliverable, the responsibilities of everyone involved.
- Assign accountability for every deliverable in a project.
- Clarify some of the communications between project roles.
- Accelerate some of the decisions made within a project.

The Responsibility Assignment Matrix usually begins as a high-level Cross-Functional Responsibility Assignment Matrix that, for each major deliverable, identifies responsibilities of the departments and functions that will be involved in a project. Responsibilities for the major deliverables of the project are classified by who is “accountable,” “performing,” “signing-off,” and “communicating.”

The Cross-Functional Responsibility Assignment Matrix is usually drafted early in the project as the stakeholders are being identified. Users of the RAM should participate in its development and validation. Later, after the project plan has detailed the lower-level activity-deliverables of the project, the matrix becomes more refined. An Activity-

Level Responsibility Assignment Matrix shows the more detailed responsibilities of individuals involved in the project. Sometimes a full RAM combines the high-level and low-level deliverables and roles in one integrated table.

Format of the Responsibility Assignment Matrix

The Responsibility Assignment Matrix is a table. At the beginning of the project, a high-level, Cross-Functional Responsibility Assignment Matrix will list major project deliverables down the rows and the different departmental roles or major functional roles across the columns.

Cross-Functional Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM)							
Function, Dept, Role							
Project Unit	A	B	C	D	E	F	...
Major Del. 1	A	C		P		P	
Major Del. 2	S	A		P	C	P	
Major Del. 3	C		P	A	S	C	
Major Del. 4	C		C	C	A	P	P
Major Del. 5	S		C	C	C	A	

Responsibilities:
A: Accountable
P: Performing
S: Signing-off
C: Communicating

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Figure 1. Sample Cross-Functional Responsibility Assignment Matrix

For each deliverable listed in the table, you can specify which role has the "A"ccountable responsibility, any other "P"erforming responsibility(s), the "S"igning-off responsibility(s), and the "C"ommunicating responsibility(s), and enter "A", "P", "S", or "C" in the cells of the table.

Some details on four common responsibilities:

Accountable. This responsibility is for the individual who is ultimately accountable for the deliverable and is responsible for seeing that all the other responsibilities are fulfilled. This person is accountable for important decisions made while creating the deliverable and may do some or all of the performing. Exactly one Accountable responsibility should be assigned for each deliverable.

Performing. This responsibility is assigned to the other individuals who perform some of the activity, who do some of the work. A deliverable can have several individuals assigned a Performing responsibility.

Signing-off. Sometimes, the person who must approve the completed work is different than the person Accountable for the work. The Signing-off responsibility is often assigned to the user of the work's result. This responsibility is especially useful when a deliverable is to be made by one function and used by another.

Communicating. This responsibility is assigned to those who need to be communicating about the deliverable. This responsibility is especially useful for ensuring communication across functional boundaries.

Note: You may put more than one letter in a cell and you may invent additional letters for additional responsibilities as you find them necessary.

Developing an Activity-Level Responsibility Assignment Matrix

As you fill in the Activity-Level Responsibility Assignment Matrix, ask yourself:

- Does each activity-deliverable have exactly one Accountable responsibility, so that accountability is clear and decisions can be made quickly?
- Is accountability placed at the lowest-possible level within the project so that decisions can be made at that level? Many activity-deliverables should have a single "A," with no "S" and no "P".
- Does each role with Accountable responsibility have the authority within the organization to make the required decisions?

		Individual Role						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	...
Project Unit	Activity-Del. 1	A					C	
	Activity-Del. 2	C	A		P			
	Activity-Del. 3	C	A	P	S			
	Activity-Del. 4	S	C		A		P	
	Activity-Del. 5	C				A		
	Responsibilities: A: Accountable P: Performing S: Signing-off C: Communicating							

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Figure 2. Sample Activity-Level Responsibility Assignment Matrix

- If only one role has all the performing responsibility (this responsibility would be represented by an “A” for Accountable), is this single role able to do all of the work, or will there be delays due to concentrating too much effort within one role?
- When Performing is split among two or more roles, is the work clearly defined so that the efforts are coordinated and the communication is clear?
- Is every Signing-off responsibility and every Communicating responsibility critically necessary?
- Will too many Signing-off responsibilities delay the completion of the activity-deliverable?
- Will too many Communicating responsibilities tangle the project in unnecessary communications?
- If a role has *only* Signing-off, or *only* Communicating responsibility and has no Performing, Accountable, or Monitoring responsibility, is it necessary?
- Does a missing responsibility indicate that the current project is not yet fully understood?
- Does the project need to be analyzed further to uncover additional responsibilities?
- Once the responsibilities are defined for the project, have the deliverables, roles and responsibilities been clearly communicated to every participant?

Full Responsibility Assignment Matrix

Combined Roles	A	a	b	B	c	d	...
Project Unit							
Major Del. I	M			C			
Activity-Del. 1		A					
Activity-Del. 2	C		A			P	
Major Del. II	S			M			
Activity-Del. 3		P	A		C		
Activity-Del. 4		C			A		
Activity-Del. 5	C					A	

Responsibilities:

A: Accountable

M: Monitoring delegated accountability

P: Performing

S: Signing-off

C: Communicating

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Figure 3. Sample Combined Activity-Level Responsibility Assignment Matrix

Make the transition to the Activity-Level Responsibility Assignment Matrix by delegating accountability for activity-deliverables

As a major project deliverable is broken down into its component activity-deliverables, the question of who is responsible, who has the “big A,” can be confused. As a functional manager delegates the responsibility for an activity-deliverable to an individual, that individual assumes the “A” for the delegated activity. If some portion of a major deliverable is not delegated, the functional manager retains an “A” for that activity. If a functional manager completely delegates the activity-deliverable, then the functional manager’s only remaining responsibility will be an “M” for monitoring. Monitoring is a special form of accountability.

The project manager has at least an “M” for monitoring every activity in the project, for the entire project RAM. Because this responsibility covers every deliverable in the project, the PM is not usually included on the RAM; the ultimate PM responsibility is assumed. The project manager may appear if he or she has an individual “A” for any deliverable that was not fully delegated to others. Because the project manager’s primary role is monitoring the project he or she should not, in general, be responsible for performing very much of the day-to-day work.

Conclusion

The Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM) can be a very useful tool to the average project manager. It encourages early articulation of cross-functional responsibilities. It remains relatively stable throughout the project. It details how the individual activities will be handled. The fully integrated RAM will show how the work has been delegated and who holds the individual accountability as well as who holds the monitoring accountability for each and every deliverable in the project.

About the Author

John M. (Jack) Nevison, PMP is the author of six books and numerous articles on computing and management. During the course of his business career, Nevison has built and sold two businesses, managed projects, managed project managers, and served as both an internal and external consultant to Fortune 100 companies. He is past president of the Mass Bay Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI®), a past president of the Greater Boston Chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), and a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dartmouth.

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