WHY USING "RACI" AT TASK LEVEL CAN CAUSE CONFUSION RATHER THAN ADD VALUE

You can describe a process in different ways and for different reasons. If the aim is to communicate how the process should be carried out, you need to describe:

-   what is done
-   how it is done
-   who does it
-   who else is involved.

A flowchart can be used to show the first three, a deployment flowchart the fourth.

The **RACI** methodology (traditionally: **Responsible** / **Accountable** / **Consulted** / **Informed**) allows you to identify how different roles are involved, and so consolidate what would be perhaps 3 or 4 apparently distinct steps into one task on a deployment flowchart.

Three of the terms are well understood: "**Responsible**" for a task = "*you do it or ensure that it is done*", "**Consulted**" = "*you are asked for an opinion*", and "**Informed**" = "*you are given information after a decision or action has been taken*".

DEFINITIONS OF "ACCOUNTABLE"

The problem lies in the definition and use of "**Accountable**".

There are a number of dictionary and other "expert" definitions of "**Responsible**" and "**Accountable**", and some even define one in terms of the other. At least four European languages use the same word for the two terms. The Internet reveals different interpretations of the two terms, and these are then further compounded by contradictory examples.

A Variety of Definitions

"**Accountable**" = the person or role…

> -   "*ultimately **responsible** for the task delegated to the **Responsible** person*"
>
> -   "*ultimately **accountable** and has Yes / No / Veto*"
>
> -   "*to whom the **Responsible** person is **Accountable** - who must sign off (Approve) work before it is effective*"
>
> -   for whom "*the buck stops here*"
>
> -   "*who will be held **accountable** for any outcomes of a decision, or results of a job. Who will ensure that the job is completed satisfactorily. Who will take **responsibility** if things go wrong. Who will stand behind any decisions that are taken, regardless of the results. In a project environment, this would be the Senior Executive or Manager who takes ultimate **responsibility** (sponsorship) of the project.*"
>
> -   "*(only one) who ultimately needs to ensure the work is done and who takes the blame if the work is not done (the person with final sign-off).*"
>
> -   "*(also Approver or final Approving authority) ultimately **accountable** for the correct and thorough completion of the deliverable or task, and the one to whom the **Responsible** person reports. In other words, an **A** must sign off (Approve) on work that **R** provides. There must be only one **A** specified for each task or deliverable.*"

Examples

"Determine risk management alignment":

CEO= **A**   CFO= **R/A**   Business Senior Mgt = **R/A**

"Approve the tariff invoice and sign the Invoice Coding Slip"

Asset Manager = **A**   UK Finance Manager = **A**   Administrator = **R**

mandos
S O F T W A R E

"Approve list of suppliers"

Contract Holder = **R** / **A**   Contract Review Board = **R** / **A**

"Plan activities for changing a process"

Line Facilitator = **A**   Setter = **A**   (no-one) = **R**

THE PROBLEM

Some of these definitions, and the way they are used, allow more than one person to be "**Responsible**" for a task (so if it is not done, it will not be not clear "who is to blame"). Some examples even have more than one "**Accountable**" role for a task (so "the buck stops there, and there, and …").

Some mention a "task", but others talk more generally of a "job", "work" and even a "project".

If an approval or sign-off of a task is required (and it is not, in many cases), it should be shown as a distinct task (and thus should have someone "**Responsible**" for the approval). [To communicate how a task should be carried out, it is essential to specify who has to take action.]

These definitions and use of "**Accountable**" also fail to recognise the difference between:

i)   a description of the functional reporting and departmental management view of an organisation

ii)   the routine "doing" of a specific task when a process is followed.

The former recognises what needs to be organised and controlled within a department, and the latter reflects the "process view" of operations, whereby certain steps have to be followed to achieve an objective each time a "trigger" event happens.

In a number of examples, the **Accountable** role is apparently not involved in doing anything - it seems that they do not have any routine involvement unless something goes wrong and there is a "need" to find someone to blame.

The confusion caused by the wide variety of definitions, and the inconsistent ways they are applied, is bad enough. But it is compounded by the way in which differing objectives are mixed:

i)   to communicate how a process should be carried out (who does what)

ii)   to analyse work allocation and management within a department (who reports to whom).

THE SOLUTION

The methodology applied in our AUTHOR software uses the RACI convention but defines "**A**" to mean "**Assists**" (or "S" for "Supports") at task level to avoid any confusion with "**Accountable**" and to make it easier to describe how work is actually done.

The Process Owner is **Accountable** for the successful operation of the overall process - he is answerable for performance (he takes the credit if it works, and has to sort it out if it doesn't). But he does not need to be involved in the day-to-day "doing" (and is not, in many of the examples).

There is as much need for someone to be **Accountable** for the running of a department as for the successful operation of a process – but this does not need to be shown for each task in a process definition.

There is a clear distinction between i) performing a task and ii) ensuring that it can be performed properly (by ensuring clear instructions, appropriate staffing and the provision of adequate resources).

A version of "RACI" can be useful for both, but only if used thoughtfully and if the meaning and use of "**A**" is appropriate.