

FOR AN APPROVAL CHAIN WITH REAL STEPS IN IT

The Challenger Matrix

A RACI with four changes. It exists because the ordinary version tells you who was involved, and involvement is not the thing that failed.

By Erin Glover, SHRM-SCP — an HR director with thirteen years in-house, now advising owner-run businesses. Use this when the chain has more than three steps, or when the thing going out is expensive to take back. **If the answer is everyone, the answer is no one.**

THE ORDINARY RACI, BRIEFLY

R

Responsible

Does the work. Can be several people.

A

Accountable

Answers for the outcome. Exactly one.

C

Consulted

Asked before the decision. Two-way.

I

Informed

Told after. One-way, no reply expected.

THE FOUR CHANGES

1 One Accountable. Not one per team — one.

Every step gets exactly one name in the A column. Not a department, not a title, not two people who both said yes in the meeting. A person who would say "that was mine" if you asked them in the parking lot.

The test: if you can't write a first and last name, the step isn't ready to move.

2 Everyone Consulted is owed a written answer.

This is the change that does the most work. If you ask someone for their view, the Accountable person owes them a sentence back — what we did with it, or why we didn't. Not a meeting, not a nod. Written, and short.

I have been the person who raised something, was told it would be mentioned, and watched the phrasing stick. Nothing came back. So I stopped raising it — not because I stopped noticing, but because I knew I wasn't going to change the outcome. That is what an unanswered concern costs you: not that one issue, but every issue that person sees afterward.

Being consulted and being heard are two different things. The difference is whether somebody is accountable for responding to you.

3 Name a challenger, and it isn't an approver.

One person per step whose job is to argue the other side. Not to sign — to object. Pick somebody who sees it differently than the people who made it, and who loses nothing by saying so. Where you can, pick from outside the team that built it.

The more approvers you add, the less personally accountable any one of them feels. Twelve signatures is not twelve reviews. It's twelve people assuming that if something were glaringly wrong, somebody else would have caught it.

Ask them the only question that matters: what's the version of this that ends up on the news?

4 A rule about when they arrive.

Write the date the challenger is brought in, and write it early enough that the answer can still change something. A challenger brought in the day before launch is not a challenger — that's a witness.

My rule: while it is still cheap to change your mind. Before the deposit, before the print run, before the sample becomes a purchase order.

*An approval process without one accountable name isn't an approval process.
Those are signatures with no owner.*

One row per step in the chain. The first row is filled in as an example — cross it out and start below it.

POINT OF NO RETURN

Before you call it approved

- Every row has **exactly one** name under Accountable — not zero, not two.
- No row lists a department or a title where a person belongs.
- Every challenger is someone who did not help build the thing.
- Every challenger date sits **before** the point of no return.
- Every concern raised has a written answer and a date beside it.
- Nobody in the Consulted column is still waiting on you.
- The Accountable person knows they are the Accountable person.
- If two people own it, you have named which categories are whose.

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There's a fillable version. The workbook at gloverco.ai/library does this checking for you — it flags any step without exactly one Accountable, and it won't let a concern close without a written response. Same six columns, same rules, no email required.