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WORKSHEET EXCERPT
Chapter 4

**Making
Decisions
That Matter
in Higher
Education**

**A Practical Toolkit for
College and University
Leaders**

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4.5. Decision Role & Authority Map – Personal

Assessment

Clarifying How Your Personal Authority, Responsibility, and Accountability Actually Function

Purpose

In higher education, decision friction often arises from ambiguity about who decides, who advises, and who is held responsible afterward. This worksheet helps leaders map the gap between their own **formal authority**, **informal influence**, and **perceived accountability**.

Section 1: Your Formal Decision Authority

List the decisions you are formally authorized to make by role, policy, or governance document. Name the decision types, not individual issues.

Examples might include program approval, personnel actions, budget allocations, policy interpretation, or emergency actions.

Authority source (check all that apply):

- Board policy
- Institutional bylaws
- Faculty handbook
- Administrative policy
- Delegated authority
- Custom or situational authority

Section 2: Decisions You Influence but Do Not Decide

List decisions where your role carries significant influence, but not final authority. For each, note where the final authority formally resides:

Reflection

Where does influence without authority create tension, delay, or reputational risk?

Section 3: Decisions You Are Held Accountable For Without Clear Authority

Identify decisions for which you are expected to answer publicly or internally, but where authority is unclear, shared, or dispersed.

What creates this misalignment?

- Governance ambiguity
- Cultural expectations
- Historical precedent
- Leadership transition
- Crisis conditions

Describe the most consequential example:

Section 4: Consultation vs Decision Reality

Where does consultation routinely expand beyond what is necessary for sound judgment?

- Committees that function as de facto decision-makers
- Input requested after decisions are effectively set
- Participation added to avoid conflict rather than improve quality
- Consultation timelines that exceed decision urgency

Describe one recurring pattern:

What risk does this create?

- Delayed action
- Diluted accountability
- Stakeholder mistrust
- Leadership fatigue

Section 5: Escalation and Boundary Clarity

When a decision cannot be resolved at its current level, what happens?

- A clear escalation path exists
- Escalation is informal or ad hoc
- Issues stall rather than escalate
- Decisions are deferred or reframed

Describe how escalation currently works in practice:

Section 6: Authority Alignment Check

Review your responses above and assess:

- Authority and accountability are generally aligned
- Authority is clear, but accountability is diffuse
- Accountability is clear, but authority is constrained
- Both authority and accountability are unclear

What is the most important misalignment to address?

Section 7: Leadership Commitment

To strengthen decision discipline, I am willing to:

- Name authority explicitly earlier in the process
- Bound consultation more deliberately
- Document decision rights and rationale
- Accept disagreement without reopening authority
- Redesign decision processes that no longer fit the context

DECISION REMINDER

**When authority is unclear, risk does
not disappear. It disperses.**

