# RACIng to role confusion

Complex processes and projects tend to involve many parties with different roles, responsibilities, and authorities for relevant activities and decisions. RACI is a common tool for mapping the contributions of each party by assigning them to one of four roles for each identified task. RACIs can clarify roles within structured hierarchies but, for complex collaborations and multi-party governance, they can make mutual obligations as clear as mud.

There is often a need to clarify who has what role in a project or process, especially when something has changed. Even simple processes can be confusing when established roles change because of an organisational restructure, or when new initiatives create new responsibilities. Sometimes, even without major changes, collaboration can devolve into turf war.

It can be helpful to have a 'map' that explains who has what role, and the rights and obligations of each party. A RACI matrix defines who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed for each deliverable of a project or step in a process. A key feature of a RACI matrix is that only one person or role can be Accountable for each activity. It is a flexible and widely used tool that seems conceptually simple.

RACI dates to the 1950s when vertical management structures were common and 'scientific management' likened workers to cogs in a machine. But RACI is a poor fit for complex collaborations and decisions that are common in publicly funded organisations.

Some RACI terms are interchangeable in everyday use, which can be confusing. It is hard to conceive of a role as Accountable but not Responsible, for example. The Consulted and Informed roles are passive, without authority or agency, and RACI is silent on the variable weight of these contributions: is being Consulted merely a courtesy, or must the advice be considered, or followed? Alternatives to RACI, like RASI, RATSI, RAPID, DACI, and CLAM, have proliferated without adequately clarifying roles and responsibilities.
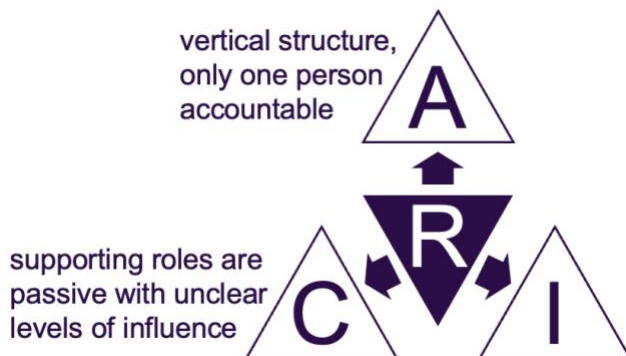
EDCRAM is a more sophisticated, but still simple, tool for mapping complex interactions in terms of actions and obligations rather than passively defined roles:

- **E**xecute – do the work and ensure the output or outcome is delivered

- **D**ecide – decide what to do

- **C**ollaborate – help to do the work and have a say in shaping actions and decisions

- **R**atify – endorse or veto key decisions

- **A**dvise – contribute information or expertise that will be considered, but may be overruled

- **M**onitor – take an interest in the outcome

EDCRAM is easy to understand and apply. Each term has a distinct, plain-English meaning that clearly differentiates roles. Roles defined by concrete actions tend to make more intuitive sense than abstract labels.

EDCRAM also recognises the complex and shared governance arrangements, and varying degrees of influence, that are common in publicly funded organisations. Roles are defined by obligations to the project or process, rather than obligations of the project or process to the role. Even peripheral roles, like Advise or Monitor, are active rather than passive like the RACI equivalents to be consulted or informed.

Role confusion can quickly get complex processes or projects into deep water. Choose a responsibility matrix to clarify, rather than muddy, those waters.