

Project Management Roles, Responsibilities, and Handoffs: Overview



- Role clarity and clean handoffs drive speed, accountability, and cross-functional trust



- Course scope: who does what, when ownership transfers, and how dropped work is prevented



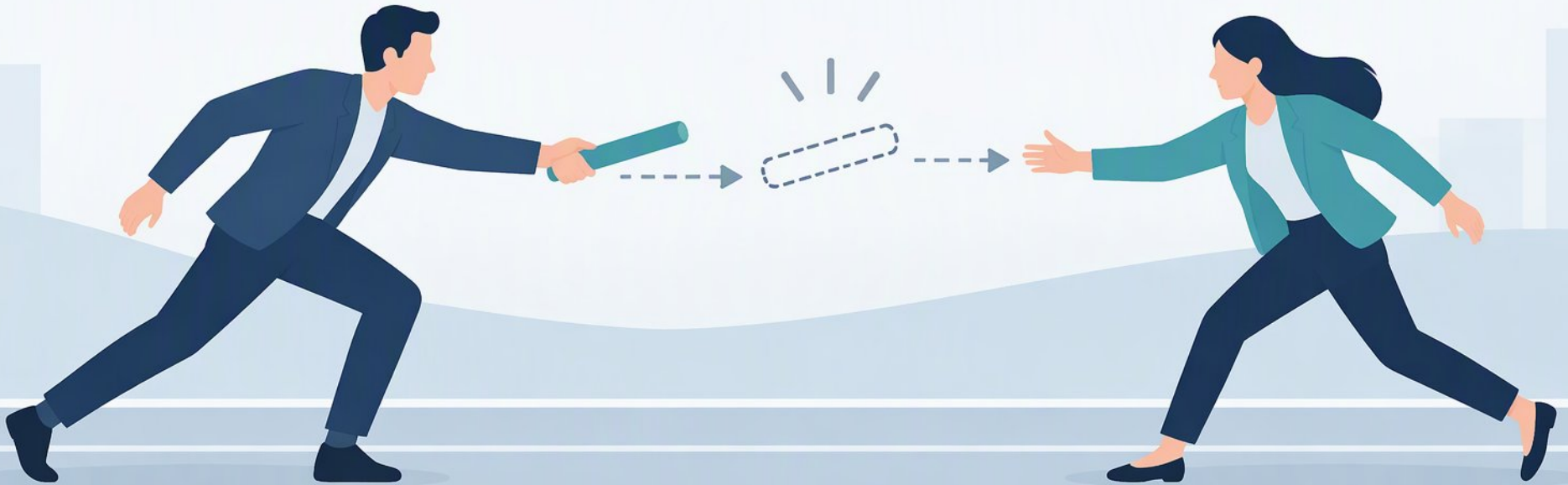
- Common failures: unclear RACI, silent handoffs, late escalations, duplicated effort



- Tailored for project coordinators, PMO members, and cross-functional team leads



Why Handoffs and Ownership Break: The Execution Gap



- Execution failures usually stem from unclear ownership, decision rights, interfaces, and measures



- Silent handoffs: work changes hands without explicit acceptance — silence is not acceptance



- Completion, acceptance, and handover are distinct events decided by different parties



- The 'handoff tax': wait time, rework rate, and decision latency are measurable interface symptoms

Core Concepts: Roles, Responsibilities, and Decision Rights

- Roles: who someone is; responsibilities: what they own
- Tasks: discrete actions; decision rights: who has the final call
- Approval authority sits with one Accountable owner per deliverable
- Common roles: sponsor, PM, coordinator, PMO, workstream lead, functional owner
- PMO model — directive, supportive, controlling — shapes who owns what
- Role map: ownership, consultation, and approval paths at deliverable level



Common Project Roles



sponsor



PM



coordinator



PMO

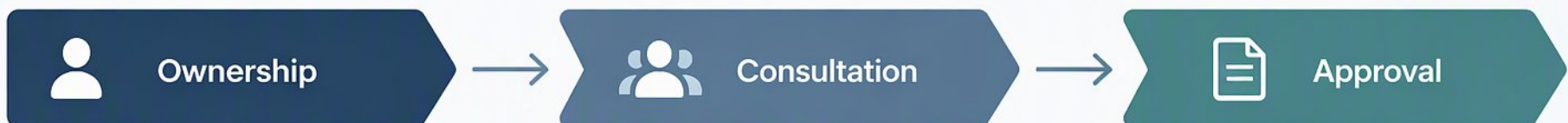


workstream
lead



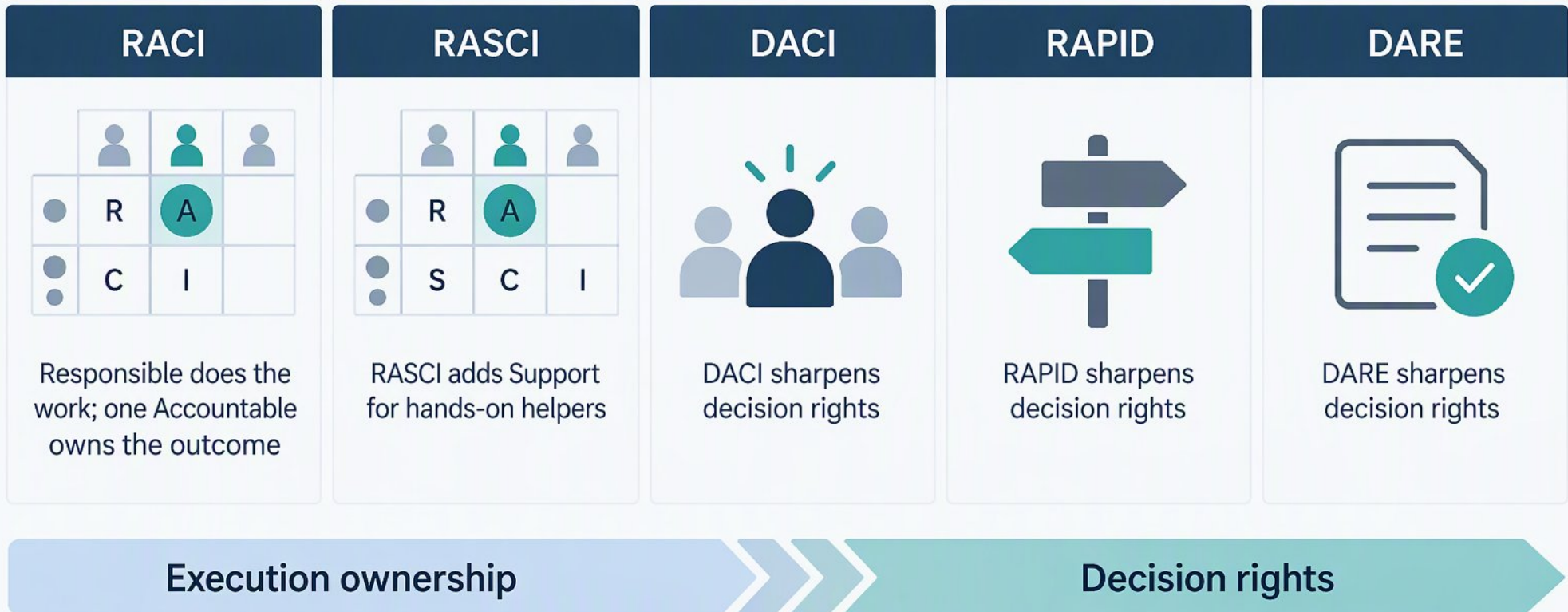
functional
owner

Role Map at Deliverable Level



RACI and Its Variants: Choosing the Right Matrix

- RACI: Responsible does the work; one Accountable owns the outcome
- Consulted gives two-way input before action; Informed gets one-way updates after
- RASCI adds Support for hands-on helpers; DACI, RAPID, DARE sharpen decision rights
- Use RACI for execution ownership; decision frameworks for go/no-go, budget, priorities
- Match matrix to project complexity and the confusion you are solving



Writing Responsibilities That Actually Stick

From vague to clear. From confusion to ownership.

Vague

"Support the project."



Specific, Observable, Outcome-Based

"Develop and deliver the project plan to align the team and enable on-time execution."



Make statements specific, observable, outcome-based, led by action verbs



Use roles for durable templates, names for live working matrices



Build the matrix with the people in it before locking



Embed responsibilities in charters, one-pagers, and operating norms

Granularity Options

Program (Phase Level)



Deliverable Rows



Task Level
(Only Where Contested)

Default granularity: 8–20 deliverable rows; phase level for programs

Task level only where ownership is genuinely contested



— CLEAR RESPONSIBILITIES STRONGER OUTCOMES —

RACI Anti-Patterns and How to Repair a Broken Matrix



- Classic pitfalls: multiple or zero A owners, bloated C/I columns, one person R on nearly everything



- Horizontal audit: exactly one A per row; split rows with three or more Rs



- Vertical audit: flag all-C columns and overloaded Rs; spot gatekeepers and decision bottlenecks



- Keep it alive: review at phase and staffing changes; log date, owner, reason



- One A per task, every time — responsibility can be shared, accountability cannot

Horizontal audit

	R	A	C	I
	R	A	C	I
	R	A	C	I
	R	R	C	I
	R	A	C	I
	R	A	C	I

Vertical audit



From common pitfalls to a clear, workable RACI

Handoff Mechanics Across the Project Lifecycle



Four handoff types: phase gates, workstream-to-workstream, vendor-to-client, project-to-BAU



Standard package: scope, status, decisions, risks, dependencies, open actions, artifacts, access, acceptance criteria



Handover is a transition period, not a date — plan mini-handovers and dry runs early



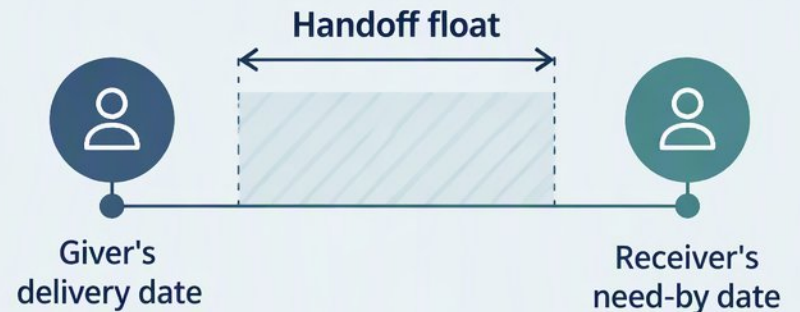
Cross-team handoffs carry two dates: giver's delivery date and receiver's need-by date



The gap between those dates is handoff float — track it, don't assume it

Handoff Float

The gap between the giver's delivery date and the receiver's need-by date.



Handoff Readiness Review and Acceptance

Clear preparation.
Shared accountability.
A successful handoff.



Readiness areas:
scope, artifacts,
ownership, risks,
acceptance — each
with a pass condition



Name one
accountable receiver
plus a backup
before the handoff
meeting



A shared inbox
gets notifications;
it cannot own
outcomes



Receiver responds:
accept, accept with
exceptions, or reject —
silence is never
acceptance



Add a follow-up
checkpoint and
a defined support
window (typically
30 days)

Handoff to Ongoing Support

PEOPLE.
PROCESS.
PROGRESS.

Communication Protocols and Escalation Paths



One source of truth: who says what, to whom, when, and through which channel



Separate update types: routine updates, decision requests, risk alerts, and escalations



Escalate only after local resolution fails — within two workdays



Escalate the problem, not the person; keep it factual and businesslike



Inform your manager and the other party before escalating



Leaders reward early raises and protect good-faith escalators



Routine updates



Decision requests



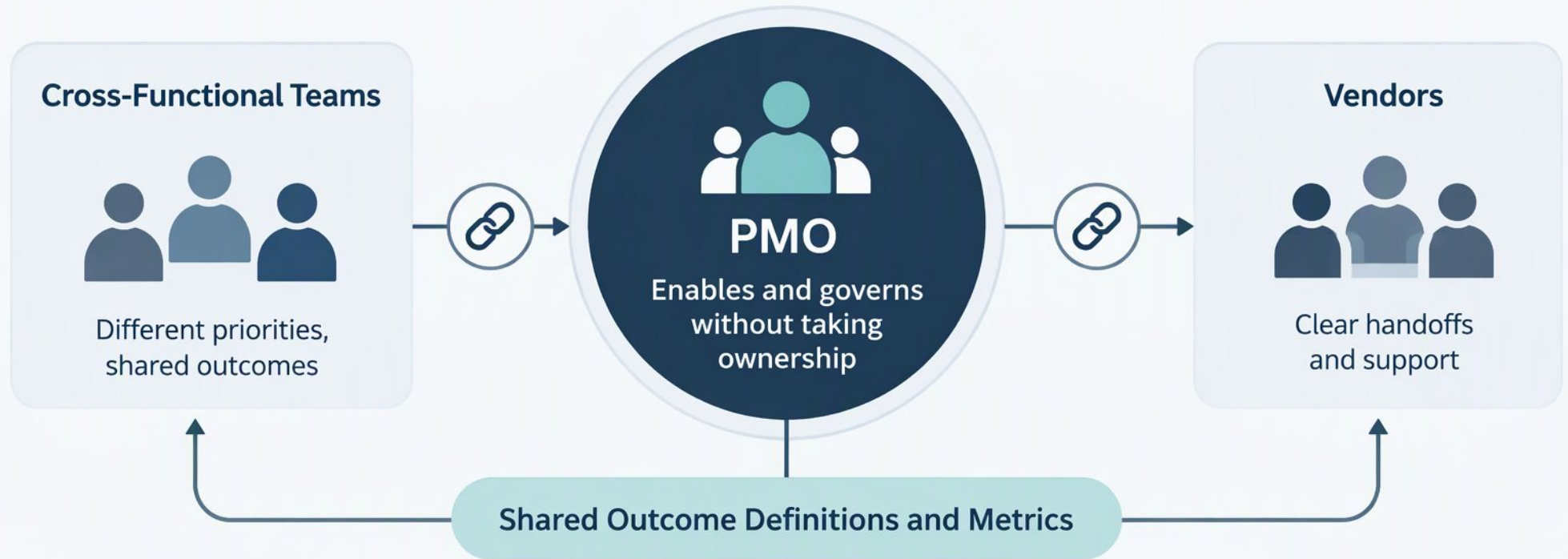
Risk alerts



Escalations



PMO, Cross-Functional, and Vendor Collaboration Patterns



PMO enables and governs **without taking ownership**: standardize templates, define gates, coach role clarity



Align functions with different priorities using shared outcome definitions and metrics



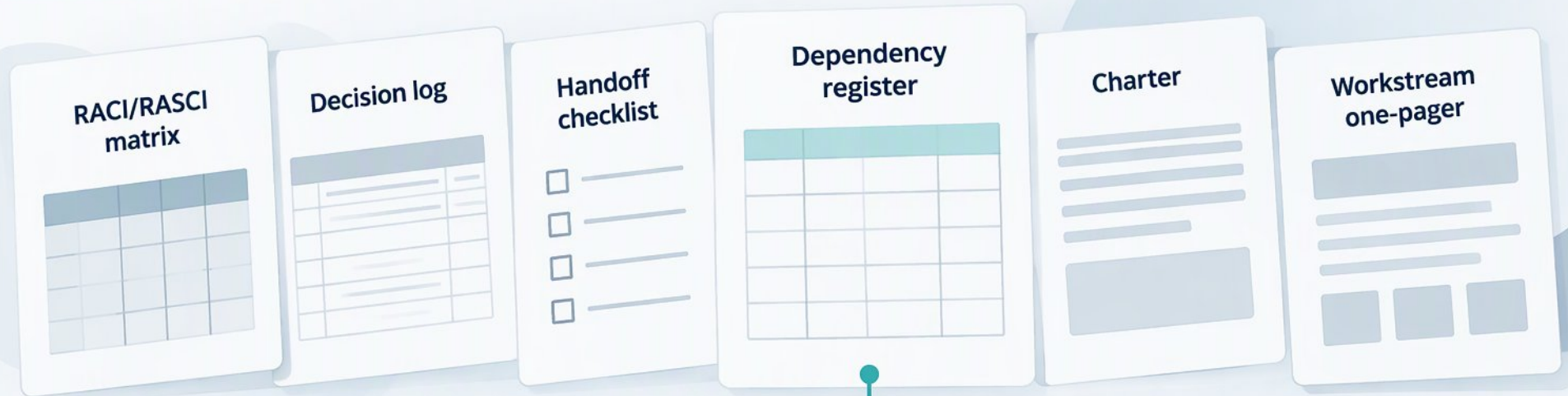
Vendor handoffs need explicit decision rights, acceptance criteria, and support arrangements



Build psychological safety so handoffs and escalations surface early, not late

Toolkit: Templates and Measures for Role Clarity

CLEAR ROLES
SMOOTHER HANDOFFS
STRONGER OUTCOMES



Dependency register fields:

giver

receiver

giver date

receiver
need-by date

float

last confirmed

status



Core artifacts:

RACI/RASCI matrix, decision log, handoff checklist, dependency register, charter, workstream one-pager



Lightweight measures:

wait time between teams, rework rate, decision latency, time from blocker to resolution



Standardize the minimum viable set and keep it current – resist building matrices the team will not use

Common Failure Modes and Risk Controls

Identify what can go wrong — and put the right controls in place.

Common Failure Modes



Role ambiguity and orphaned tasks leave work with no answerable owner



Silent handoffs and unconfirmed acceptance cause post-launch chaos and unfunded support



Decision bottlenecks, escalation avoidance, duplicated effort, and over-consultation stall delivery



Risk Controls

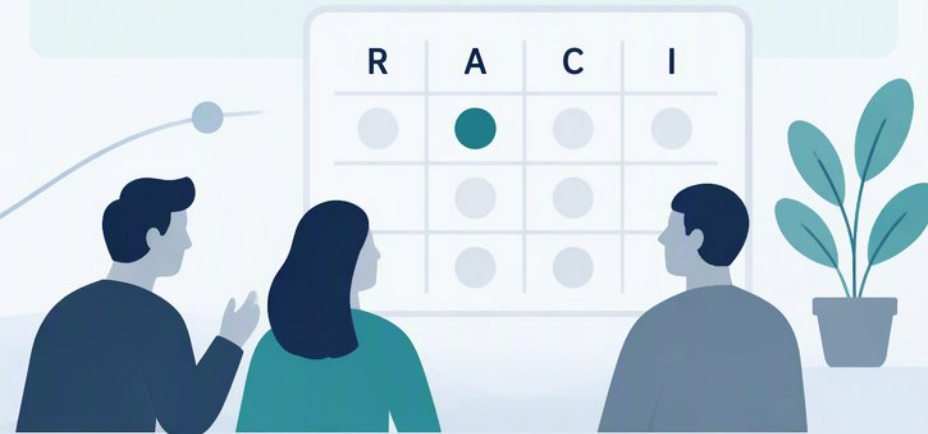


Controls: milestone role reviews, handoff sign-offs, dependency tracking



Escalation registers and audit checkpoints keep ownership visible and current

Clear ownership.
Smoother handoffs.
Stronger delivery.



Practical Strategies and Mini-Case Exercise



- **OODI method:** map Outcomes, Owners, Decisions, and Interfaces for any new initiative



- **Role-mapping workshop:** list 6–10 deliverables, assign one Accountable per row



- **Audit the matrix** horizontally and vertically, then agree on changes with the team



- **Mini-case:** cross-functional launch with unclear ownership and a delayed transition



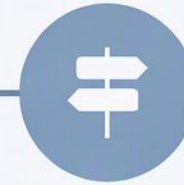
- **Facilitated exercise:** draft a RACI and handoff checklist, then debrief the hardest accountability call



Outcomes



Owners



Decisions



Interfaces



Action Plan and Next Steps

Clear Roles
Smoother Handoffs
Stronger Teams



Personal

- Personal plan: one role-clarity fix and one handoff fix in 30 days



PMO

- PMO: standardize templates, define handoff gates, track handoff quality metrics



Team leads

- Team leads: clarify decision rights, publish escalation thresholds, de-stigmatize escalation



Build communities of practice

- Build communities of practice to share lessons and coach continuously



Key takeaways

- Key takeaways: name one owner, confirm acceptance, keep matrices alive



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