



Org Chart vs. Real Decision System Mapping Worksheet

Map how decisions actually travel — the hidden approvers, override points, and bottlenecks the org chart doesn't show.

WHAT THIS HELPS YOU DO

Use this worksheet to draw the real decision system next to the official org chart — exposing hidden approvers, dotted-line power, and bottlenecks — and to repair the most expensive mismatches deliberately.

WHEN TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

- When the org chart says one thing and everyone behaves otherwise
- When new hires take months to learn 'how things really work'
- After a reorganization that changed reporting but not behavior
- When a long-tenured employee's informal power outranks managers
- Before succession, sale, or leadership transition exposes the gap

WHAT THIS DOCUMENT HELPS PREVENT

- Managers discovering they're figureheads at their worst possible moment
- Hidden approvers stalling decisions no one knows to route to them
- Reorgs that redraw boxes while the shadow system keeps governing
- Institutional knowledge hoarding masquerading as helpfulness
- Succession plans built on a chart nobody actually follows

Faulkner HR Solutions focuses on the system behind the people problem. This tool is designed to help employers slow down the decision, identify the risk, and create proof before the issue becomes a claim, complaint, turnover event, or credibility problem.

BEFORE YOU START: READINESS CHECKLIST

Gather the following before working through this document. Incomplete inputs are one of the most common reasons employer decisions fail under later scrutiny.

Have it	Input	Notes / location
☐	Employee name and role	



Have it	Input	Notes / location
☐	Date of incident, request, or separation	
☐	Supervisor involved	
☐	Policy or handbook section that applies	
☐	Prior documentation on file	
☐	Pay records, if applicable	
☐	Relevant emails, texts, notes, or complaints	
☐	Decision-maker name	
☐	Deadline, if applicable	



DECISION SYSTEM MAP

Trace real decisions, not theory. Pick recent examples and follow them step by step — where they went, who touched them, where they waited. The map is the pattern across traces.

Part 1 — The Official Story

Attach or sketch the current org chart (date it)	
Per the chart: who approves hires, spending, schedule changes, customer exceptions?	
When was the chart last updated, and by whom?	

Part 2 — Decision Tracing

Trace 4-6 recent, real decisions from request to final answer. Include at least one that went badly or slowly.

Decision traced	Official path (per chart)	Actual path (who really touched it)	Where it waited / died

Part 3 — Hidden Approver Inventory

Person	Formal role	Informal power (what stalls without their blessing)	Source (tenure, expertise, relationship, gatekeeping)

Part 4 — Override and Bypass Points

Found	Pattern	Who / where
☐	Staff who skip their manager and go straight to the top (and it works)	



Found	Pattern	Who / where
☐	Decisions reversed after 'a word with' someone outside the chain	
☐	A gatekeeper whose absence stops processes they don't officially own	
☐	Committees or meetings where decisions are officially made after being actually made elsewhere	
☐	Approval steps everyone quietly skips because they add nothing	

Part 5 — Mismatch Assessment

For each mismatch between chart and reality, decide honestly which one is wrong.

Mismatch	Reality is better (update the chart)	Chart is better (change the behavior)	Priority

Part 6 — Repair Actions

Action	Type (formalize / redirect / retire / document)	Owner	Date

Role	Name / signature	Date
Mapped by		
Reviewed with leadership		

STOP AND REVIEW BEFORE ACTING

If any statement below is true, pause. Get the decision reviewed by HR, counsel, or Faulkner HR Solutions before you act.



- ☐ A manager on the chart approves nothing in any trace you ran.
- ☐ One untitled person appears in every trace — and every vacation outage.
- ☐ New employees are formally onboarded to the chart, then informally re-onboarded to reality by coworkers.
- ☐ The shadow system depends entirely on people within five years of retirement.
- ☐ Leadership is planning succession or sale using the official chart alone.

MINIMUM DOCUMENTATION STANDARD

Before this file is closed, the employer should be able to answer every question below and point to where the proof lives.

Question	Your answer / where the proof is stored
What happened?	
When did it happen?	
Who observed or reported it?	
What policy, standard, deadline, or expectation applies?	
What decision was made?	
Who had authority to make the decision?	
What alternatives were considered?	
What risk was reviewed?	
What follow-up is required?	
Where is the proof stored?	

COMMON MISTAKES

1. Punishing the informal system instead of learning why work routes around the formal one.
2. Updating the chart and calling the mismatch fixed while behavior continues unchanged.
3. Treating hidden approvers as villains — most are filling a vacuum the design created.
4. Mapping once and letting the map rot; decision systems drift continuously.
5. Running the exercise secretly, guaranteeing defensive answers when traces get asked about.
6. Ignoring the knowledge-transfer bomb: shadow systems retire without notice.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Execute Part 6 in order of the mismatch priorities: formalize the informal paths that work better, redirect the bypasses that don't, retire the approval steps nobody needs, and document what only the shadow system knows. Re-trace two decisions each quarter to keep the map honest.



Before you terminate, deduct, discipline, classify, or respond, get the decision reviewed.

Call 210.446.8730 or email thomas@faulknerhrsolutions.info.



If the same people problem keeps repeating, the issue is probably upstream. Faulkner HR Solutions helps employers find the system failure before they blame the wrong thing.

Need help applying this to a real workplace decision?

Faulkner HR Solutions helps Texas employers, nonprofits, municipalities, and growing businesses fix the people systems behind recurring workplace problems.

If this document raised a risk flag, do not guess your way through the next step.

Call: 210.446.8730

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Website: faulknerhrsolutions.info

DISCLAIMER

This resource is provided for general employer education and planning purposes. It is not legal advice and does not create an attorney-client relationship. Employment laws, agency guidance, and local requirements may change. Employers should review the facts of each situation before acting and consult appropriate HR or legal counsel when needed.