BARYONS

DELEGATION

AN EXECUTIVE BRIEF FOR FOUNDER-CEOS AND OWNER-OPERATORS

The delegation gap

Why decisions keep returning to the CEO, and how shared decision rules help managers decide, clarify or escalate.

Delegation | Decision rules | Escalation

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Delegated work, returned decisions.

Growing companies delegate more each year, yet some decisions keep finding their way back to the CEO. The usual reason has less to do with capability than with rules: which priority wins, who owns the call, and when a question truly merits escalation.

75%

OF HR LEADERS SAY MANAGERS ARE OVERWHELMED BY THE EXPANSION OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES (2024)[1]

69%

OF HR LEADERS SAY LEADERS AND MANAGERS ARE NOT EQUIPPED TO LEAD CHANGE (2024)[1]

Gartner found 75% of HR leaders say managers are overwhelmed by the expansion of their responsibilities.[1] The survey asked HR leaders across many organizations, most larger than a typical founder-led company. It still describes a pressure that appears at any size: as managers take on more, unclear decisions are the first thing they send back up. In a founder-led company those questions tend to land in one place.

When decisions return, the cost is easy to miss. The CEO answers quickly, the work moves, and the same question comes back next week from someone else. Delegation reduces the load on a CEO when managers share the rules behind the decisions as well as the authority to make them. The useful question is which decisions could stay local with a clearer rule.

WHAT THIS BRIEF COVERS

1. **Why delegated decisions return.** The mechanism, and why it appears.
2. **A hypothetical example.** One principle, two managers, two decision rules.
3. **A five-minute delegation check.** Five questions for the next leadership meeting.
4. **Where Baryons fits.** What it adds to delegation, and the limits of what it does.

A QUESTION TO TAKE INTO THE NEXT LEADERSHIP MEETING

Which decision landed back on your desk last week that someone else could have made with better context?

Why delegated decisions come back

Delegation fails when decision rules stay implicit.

When a CEO delegates, the authority is usually explicit and the rules are not. The CEO knows which priority wins, which risks are acceptable and what is worth escalating. Managers have to infer those rules, and when they cannot, the safest move is to ask. A capable manager who asks is usually being careful, which is a good instinct pointed at a missing rule.

WHY DECISIONS RETURN

- **Ownership is unclear.** A decision sits between two managers, so both send it up rather than step on each other.
- **Priorities collide.** Managers know the priorities but not which one wins, so a conflict between them becomes a CEO question.
- **The escalation point is undefined.** Without an agreed threshold, careful managers escalate early and confident ones escalate late.
- **Answers stay case by case.** Each quick answer settles one decision but does not become a rule, so the next case starts from zero.

WHY IT HAPPENS IN WELL-RUN COMPANIES

Founder-CEOs are usually fast, accessible decision makers. That accessibility is a strength in a small company. As the company grows, it also makes asking the CEO the easiest path, even for decisions a manager could make.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

A meta-analysis of team cognition found that shared understanding of the work explains differences in team performance beyond motivation and behavior.[2]

Gartner found 69% of HR leaders say leaders and managers are not equipped to lead change.[1] The figure covers change in general and organizations of many sizes. In a growing company, every new priority or reorganization is a small change that managers have to lead, and every rule left unstated is one more question that travels upward to the person who already has the least spare time.

The goal is a shared rule for decide, clarify or escalate, so fewer questions need the CEO at all.

03 · HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE

One principle, two decision rules

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE. NOT A BARYONS CUSTOMER.

Principle: put the customer first

A 120-person logistics services company has grown fast. The founder-CEO has delegated client operations to two managers and still spends hours a week on approvals.

Both managers hear the same principle: put the customer first. One promises a client an exception on delivery terms. The other protects the delivery schedule for every client. Both have good reasons, and both escalate when the other team objects.

The CEO settles it in five minutes. Two weeks later, a similar case arrives from a third manager. Neither manager was wrong, and neither was the CEO. The rule simply lived in one head.

What the example shows. Both managers were capable and acted in good faith. They were working from different decision rules, and nobody had written down which one the company intended.

04 · EXECUTIVE CHECKS

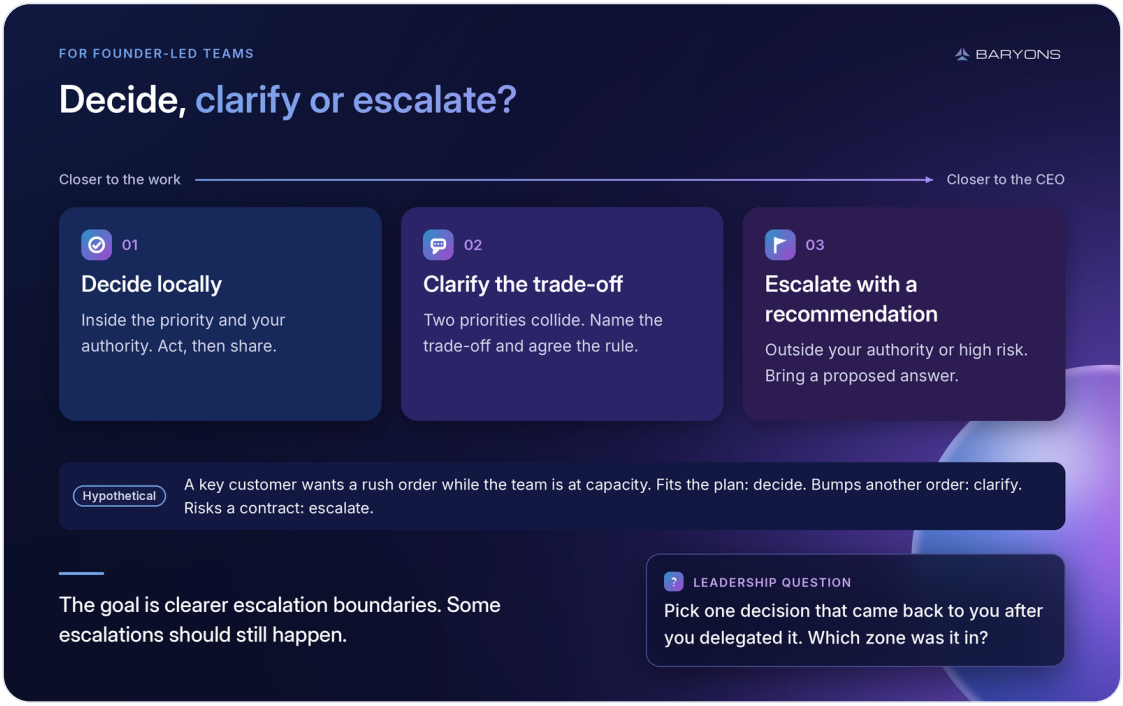
A five-minute delegation check

Pick one decision that came back to you after it had been delegated. Each question takes a minute, and the answers help separate an ownership problem from a clarity or coaching need.

1. **Was it clear who owned the decision?** If two people could reasonably claim it, the fix is ownership rather than skill.
2. **Did everyone know which priority took precedence?** If not, the decision came back to settle a priority conflict.
3. **Was the point for escalation agreed?** If not, the manager had to guess, and asking was the safe guess.
4. **What context would have let them decide?** Ask the manager directly, then give that context once rather than case by case.
5. **Can you write the rule in one line?** Phrase it as decide, clarify or escalate, so the next similar case stays with the manager.

What Baryons contributes to delegation

Baryons complements the way a CEO already leads. It does not replace managers' judgment, leadership meetings or coaching. It gives managers a private place to work through a call before making it, and gives the CEO an aggregate read on the themes that keep coming up.



Decide, clarify or escalate? Illustrative.

- **Private guidance before the call.** People get private guidance grounded in approved company priorities, in conversations of a few minutes by phone or web, to work a decision through before making it. Each person's conversation stays theirs.
- **Built for ownership.** Organizations work best when people own their work and trust their own judgment. Baryons is designed around those two conditions, which research ties closely to motivation and performance.
- **Aggregate signal for leaders.** Each week, Team Resonance returns the patterns across a team, with no names in any section, including where friction sits, so a CEO can see which rules need stating.
- **No new system.** No new meeting and no integration project. Deployment is a participant list and a phone number. Baryons does not need access to email, meetings or task systems.

What this brief does not claim

- The Gartner figures describe HR leaders' views across many organizations, mostly larger ones. They do not show that any one company has this gap.
- The example is hypothetical. It is not a Baryons customer, and its details are invented to show the mechanism.
- Research on shared understanding shows a link with team performance. It does not show that any one practice or tool will change results in a given company.
- Baryons does not replace managers or the CEO's judgment. Leaders never receive individual scores or conversations.

A NEXT STEP

Pick one decision that came back to you last week.

Run the first three questions on it with the manager involved. If the rule was clear, you have your confirmation. The point is a clearer rule rather than a judgment about the manager. If it was not, and a focused discussion about that one decision would be useful, we would be glad to have it at baryons.com.

SOURCES

References

1 **Gartner Survey Finds Leader and Manager Development Tops HR Leaders' List of 2025 Priorities for Third Consecutive Year.** Gartner, press release (survey of HR leaders, July 2024), October 15, 2024. https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2024-10-15-gartner-survey-finds-leader-and-manager-development-tops-hrleaders-list

2 DeChurch, L. A., and Mesmer-Magnus, J. R.. **The cognitive underpinnings of effective teamwork: a meta-analysis.** Journal of Applied Psychology, 95(1), 32-53, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017328

Team Resonance is a Baryons feature.