

# Sample Diagnostic

**Diagnostic Code:** D-2025-C2

**Methodology:** Structural Pattern Matching / Cross-Model Inference

**Subject:** Coordination Failure Post-Reorganisation

**Scope:** Mid-Sized NGO (45 FTE, Decentralised Model)

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## 1. Case Summary

A 45-person NGO decentralised decision-making in early 2023 to reduce bottlenecks and increase agility. Eighteen months later, the organisation reports duplicate decisions, decision voids, upward escalation despite formal autonomy, accountability gaps, exclusion complaints, increased meeting frequency, slower delivery, and rising interpersonal conflict.

Leadership attributes this to adjustment pain. Teams describe a coordination vacuum. Some managers have informally begun recentralising, creating internal friction. The request is for structural diagnosis only.

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## 2. Core Observation

The symptom cluster is coherent: it describes a system where **decision rights were distributed without a corresponding distribution of decision visibility**.

Autonomy was granted, but the mechanisms that allow autonomous units to stay aligned—shared context, clear boundaries, known interfaces—were not installed. The result is not decentralisation but **fragmentation**.

**Escalation despite autonomy** is particularly diagnostic. It suggests teams have authority in name but lack either the information or the confidence to exercise it. This points to missing feedback loops, not missing permission.

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### 3. Likely Failure Modes

Two primary patterns emerge:

#### A. Boundary ambiguity

Decision domains were not clearly delineated. Teams either overlap (duplicate decisions) or leave gaps (decisions not made at all). Autonomy was granted by domain, but domain edges were not defined.

#### B. Context starvation

Autonomous units cannot coordinate if they don't know what others are deciding or planning. In the absence of passive coordination mechanisms (decision visibility, shared planning rhythms), people default to active synchronisation—hence more meetings, not fewer.

#### Secondary pattern:

- **Accountability without closure:** When outcomes are distributed but ownership is unclear, failure becomes orphaned. This creates risk aversion and upward escalation.

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### 4. System Flow (Current-State Model)

[Decision Need Emerges]

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[Who owns this?] ← Ambiguous boundary

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[Team A decides] ← No visibility to Team B

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[Team B decides independently] ← Duplicate decision

OR

[Nobody decides] ← Decision void

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[Escalation to leadership] ← Default response to uncertainty

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[Meeting to clarify] ← Compensation mechanism

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[Outcome ambiguous / ownership diffuse]

### Current state (likely):

- Decision rights: formally distributed
- Decision visibility: absent
- Boundaries: implicit, contested
- Escalation: high, despite formal autonomy
- Coordination: active (meetings), not passive (infrastructure)

### Result:

- Agility did not increase
  - Bottlenecks shifted but did not disappear
  - Cognitive load increased
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## 5. Misalignment Patterns

Leadership's "adjustment pain" framing assumes the structure is sound and time will resolve friction. The team's "nobody knows what others are doing" framing implies the structure lacks a critical coordination layer.

Both may be partially correct: the architecture may be conceptually viable, but it was **implemented without the infrastructure that makes it functional**.

The informal recentralisation appears to be a compensatory move — a system attempting to stabilise itself under ambiguous boundaries.

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## 6. Structural Levers

(Not prescriptions – recurring mechanisms that typically reduce fragmentation under similar conditions.)

- **Decision visibility registry:** Lightweight mechanism for making decisions visible across teams without requiring approval
  - **Boundary agreements:** Explicit contracts between teams about who owns what, and where handoffs occur
  - **Escalation criteria:** Clear conditions under which escalation is appropriate—so autonomy has defined edges rather than being a vague expectation
  - **Coordination roles:** Not hierarchy, but explicit cross-cutting responsibility for maintaining coherence (e.g., someone who can say "Team A and Team B are both working on X")
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## 7. Open Questions

### For leadership:

- Were decision boundaries explicitly mapped during the reorganisation, or was autonomy granted by domain without defining domain edges?
- What coordination infrastructure existed before decentralisation—and was any of it preserved?
- If managers are recentralising, which specific failure types are prompting it?
- Does current organisational culture reward speed of decision or quality of coordination?

### For teams:

- Which decision types routinely fall between teams, and why?
  - At what point does it become clear that a decision affects multiple teams?
  - What prevents early visibility of cross-team dependencies?
  - Which decisions feel "safe" to make autonomously, and which do not?
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## 8. Conceptual Stability Check

Decentralisation is not inherently unstable, but it is **infrastructure-intensive**. The current friction is consistent with a model that removed central control without replacing it with distributed coordination mechanisms.

The question is not whether decentralisation or centralisation is "better"—both can function well or poorly depending on implementation. The question is whether the organisation is willing to build the connective systems that make the chosen model functional.

### Key insight:

Autonomy without visibility creates islands. Visibility without autonomy creates bottlenecks. The current state appears to have autonomy without visibility.

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## 9. Closing Note

The bottleneck is not inside the teams' capacity to decide, but at the **interfaces** between teams where decisions interact. Until those interfaces have explicit coordination mechanisms—not necessarily hierarchy, but structure—friction will persist regardless of whether the organisation moves toward centralisation or remains decentralised.

This diagnostic maps structural dynamics. It does not assign responsibility or prescribe interventions.

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**End of note.**