


UNITED WISDOM

# Assigning a task without authority: the hidden contradiction

Freedom and Action

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# Assigning a task without authority: the hidden contradiction

## Epigraph

> *so far-forth as is in their Commission, but no farther.*

— Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan XVI, excerpt

## What this article is about

Someone receives a task and a deadline, but every decision on which the result depends requires separate approval. The other person does not respond, time passes, and responsibility for completion is still called the executor’s personal obligation. It is easy to speak of insufficient initiative. Initiative, however, needs an area of permitted action. Where that area is undefined, the demand for independence contains a hidden contradiction.

We examine it through a hypothetical neighbourhood reading festival. Missing authority, missing information and unwillingness to act need to be distinguished. Clarifying authority does not permit using another person’s resources without agreement. A bounded decision can be transferred, retained by an available decision maker, or the promised result can change. Hobbes’s historical account of representation and the Gospel image of service offer different grounds for questions about responsibility. They replace neither contemporary law nor employment dispute procedures. The article’s practical argument concerns ordinary agreements: relating expected action to what someone is actually permitted to decide.

## I. Independence without an area of choice

Consider a hypothetical situation. Dmitry is asked to assemble a neighbourhood reading festival programme. He contacts guests, suggests session times and prepares descriptions. The coordinator retains final invitations, schedule changes and all travel expenses. This alone is not contradictory: an assistant can prepare options for someone else to decide. Dmitry is also told, however, that the programme must be fully confirmed by Friday and every delay is now his responsibility. The coordinator leaves and replies once every few days. Confirmation requires actions the executor does not control.

Dmitry can show initiative within the available area: collect replies, identify a time conflict and suggest a change. Diligence alone cannot turn a suggestion into a confirmed invitation. The first step is to identify the dependence between the expected result and a necessary decision.



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If a guest needs a travel reimbursement promise Dmitry cannot make, that is a concrete boundary. General encouragement to be resourceful does not remove it. The assigner may retain the expense decision, but should account for it in the deadline rather than attribute the entire delay to someone awaiting an answer.

This differs from demanding all power over the event. Confirming one session may require only an agreed time and a modest expense within a stated limit. Dmitry need not alter the festival’s concept, cancel others’ agreements or use unlimited funds. Intelligible independence fits the undertaking. If a request for one decision receives “You just want to be in charge,” discussion shifts from a work condition to a judgement of motive. It can return to a particular action: what needs confirmation, who may confirm it, and when that decision will be available.

## II. Missing authority differs from missing knowledge

Authority concerns whether someone may act on behalf of the shared undertaking. Knowledge concerns a different question: whether the appropriate action is understood. Dmitry may be permitted to rearrange sessions without knowing that one guest leaves earlier. He needs information, rather than additional power. Conversely, he may know a suitable time but be unable to confirm it. Mixing these deficits can produce an unhelpful response. A detailed instruction does not replace permission; broad permission cannot make an unknown agreement known or justify accidentally breaking it.

A third case exists: information is available and the decision permitted, but Dmitry does not take the accepted step. Invoking missing authority can then conveniently explain his own delay. Every pause should not be declared unfair to the executor in advance. A particular action needs a check of its actual barrier. One person awaits an expense decision; another has not sent an agreed email; another doubts a description’s accuracy and needs a check. All three look like an unfinished programme, but require different next actions and different responsibility discussions.

A brief dependency record can avoid a global argument about independence. Dmitry might say that two guests are willing to participate, both await time confirmation, and one also awaits a travel decision. He separately notes that descriptions are ready and independent of the budget. The coordinator can see what remains with them. The recipient should not exaggerate the threat: a problem with one session does not make the entire festival impossible. An accurately stated limit prevents a request for authority from becoming a general ultimatum or a way to return every piece of work.

## III. Representing someone requires knowing the limit

In Leviathan XVI, Hobbes distinguishes a representative actor from the person who owns the represented action, with authority bounded by the commission. This is historical representation and covenant theory within a wider political argument, rather than current employment or contract law. Its neighbouring account of commanded natural-law violations is not adopted as moral immunity for an executor. Our narrower question concerns Dmitry speaking for the festival: listeners should understand which promise he can confirm and which he merely proposes for approval.

A guest may reasonably hear an invitation as final if Dmitry never identifies its provisional status. The coordinator's internal agreement with the assistant is unknown to the external participant. A decision's limit therefore needs to be intelligible to someone relying on it. Dmitry can say that the time is proposed and awaits approval, or that it is already secured in an authorised schedule. The entire organisational history need not be explained; false certainty should simply be avoided. Good intentions cannot remove the cost to someone changing plans on the basis of a promise.

The coordinator also needs to make authority visible where it is used. If Dmitry may confirm sessions within limits, but the coordinator repeatedly cancels his words before guests without explaining changed conditions, that authority remains unreliable. An accepted decision can be reconsidered, but reconsideration needs a stated reason and information for those affected. Otherwise, the executor is made responsible for a promise whose reliability the assigner changes arbitrarily. An independent role exists beyond an internal conversation: it needs consistent expression within the undertaking and relations with participants.

## IV. A decision's boundary can be stated concretely

Instead of "Decide yourself," particular areas can be agreed. Dmitry confirms sessions within two selected time windows, accepts duration changes within a stated range, and proposes expenses exceeding the limit. The coordinator retains additional venues and new partnerships. Such an agreement enables independent work while retaining what the assigner genuinely needs to decide. The numbers are hypothetical choices for the participants; this article establishes no ideal budget or window count. What matters is that the boundary precedes action and relates to the result, rather than appearing afterwards as grounds for complaint.

A boundary should include rejecting an option outside the conditions. If Dmitry can invite only after approval but cannot tell a guest that a requested time is unavailable, he becomes a carrier of every wish. Decision means choosing among permissible options, sometimes recognising that none fits. The coordinator can ask that an important guest be retained and an exceptional case returned. That creates a separate dependency needing an answer. Endless forwarding

without the ability to settle even ordinary questions creates the appearance of an independent role while all its decisions remain above.

Decisions requiring renewed discussion because conditions changed can be identified separately. A guest proposes a format needing additional equipment never agreed before. Dmitry need not assume earlier permission automatically covers it. He reports the difference between the original and proposed arrangement. The coordinator decides whether to accept expansion; the executor identifies a feasible deadline. Bounded authority is not necessarily a deficient version of total power. It can fit a particular undertaking when both parties know its limits and do not silently demand a result of a different scale.

## V. A retained decision requires availability

The coordinator may retain expense or final schedule decisions. Their participation then remains part of execution. The route for a question and response time need definition before Dmitry can promise final confirmation. “Ask when necessary” is insufficient if messages remain unread until next week. Availability relates an answer to when someone needs it. An optional programme embellishment can wait; choosing a guest’s only available time cannot always wait without changing whether the session is possible. The same communication arrangement may not fit both dependencies.

If an answer will not arrive in time, the parties can agree a safe ordinary fallback: retain a provisional time without confirmation, omit an unconfirmed session from print, or refer the question to another named participant. The fallback itself needs agreement. An approaching deadline does not automatically grant it. A clear fallback allows action without repeatedly testing availability. It guarantees no successful outcome: the programme may shrink. A smaller confirmed programme differs from a complete one containing promises nobody was entitled to make and nobody is prepared to fulfil.

A dependent decision’s deadline should be discussed before the final deadline. Friday printing may require Wednesday confirmations and earlier travel answers. This is ordinary reasoning about action order, rather than a universal schedule. Dmitry can show which next step becomes unavailable after a delay. The coordinator considers both response convenience and the consequences of retaining a decision. Sometimes transferring one narrow question makes more sense than remaining constantly available. Sometimes the choice’s importance justifies waiting and moving the overall deadline. Either decision requires explicit acceptance of its cost.

## VI. Unauthorised expansion creates another contradiction

When the coordinator is silent, Dmitry may find it easier to confirm travel himself, expecting the small expense to be approved later. The guest will already change plans on the basis of the promise while the decision remains unresolved. Missing authority explains difficulty, but does not permit hiding it behind apparent readiness. Paying personally is a separate proposal that should be identified, rather than silently represented as a festival decision. His willingness does not require others to accept the resulting conditions or make that arrangement a future norm.

Boundaries are not always clear. The coordinator once said Dmitry could handle minor matters, then prohibited every purchase. Uncertainty should be addressed through a particular question, preferably before action. Dmitry can identify alternatives and ask whether this choice falls within the assigned scope. Without an answer, confirmed permission should be distinguished from an assumption. This matters especially where others incur costs or make public promises. A confident tone cannot replace grounds; it merely makes uncertainty less visible to someone unfamiliar with the internal agreement.

If an excessive promise has already been made, the immediate step is to correct the affected person’s understanding. Dmitry explains what remains unapproved and seeks a decision. The coordinator may accept the undertaking, suggest another condition or acknowledge that the promise is unavailable. No absence of harm can be promised: the guest may have declined another invitation. Further silence, however, extends the time spent acting on false grounds. Organisers need to review authority, but an external participant should not await that review’s conclusion to learn the invitation’s actual status and reconsider plans.

## VII. Authority should serve the undertaking, rather than an image

In Matthew 20:20–28, a request for honoured places leads to teaching about service among disciples. Its foundation is Christian: the passage ends with the Son of man and ransom. It is not turned here into an organisational decision rule. It prompts a separate editorial question about why authority is retained or requested. Dmitry needs to confirm a permissible invitation, rather than acquire a symbol of superiority. The coordinator may need to preserve programme coherence, but being called the principal organiser should not obscure making necessary decisions available to the undertaking.

Control can be retained out of care for people, funds and earlier promises. Refusing a decision’s transfer does not itself establish vanity, just as requesting authority does not establish a wish for superiority. The limit’s relation to the undertaking is more useful to examine. If two times remain reserved for existing guests, Dmitry gains an intelligible boundary. If every decision must pass through the principal person simply because of their

position, the dependency’s cost needs discussion. Inferring motive from one sign would be hasty and would not confirm the programme.

Serving a shared undertaking does not require the executor to accommodate every delay. The coordinator may care about the festival yet wrongly expect Dmitry to compensate for unavailable decisions overnight. Dmitry may wish to help yet be unable to accept this new scope. The question returns to promises proportionate to conditions. An event’s value does not make every request acceptable; a role’s importance does not release its holder from answering. Care appears in the arrangement of participation: enabling accepted work, rather than merely demanding loyalty through the removal of another person’s uncertainty.

## VIII. Changing the result can be more honest

If a necessary decision can neither be transferred nor obtained in time, the initial result becomes unavailable under its original conditions. Dmitry can prepare a provisional programme identifying unconfirmed sessions. It cannot, however, be advertised as final. Another option is retaining confirmed sessions and adding others later if possible. Reduction is not automatically the executor’s decision; he proposes it to the person responsible for the overall plan. An option for discussion should remain distinct from a promise to the audience. Otherwise, new wording merely conceals the same missing authority.

A deadline change also affects people already relying on the event. Friday cannot simply become Monday if printers, guests and the venue arranged work differently. The coordinator considers connected promises and informs affected participants. Dmitry identifies what can finish once an answer arrives. This is not a search for a costless ideal: fewer sessions, a later announcement or additional work may remain. Honest agreement selects an available cost openly, rather than retaining an attractive deadline and shifting its consequences onto someone lacking the necessary decision.

Sometimes the outcome is declining one part. Dmitry can collect information and prepare descriptions without promising a final programme while confirmation remains unavailable. The limit should be expressed before others rely on acceptance. If he has already promised more, the agreement needs explicit updating with its reason. Declining unsupported responsibility differs from refusing all participation. It also does not release him from accessible actions already accepted. Discussion can retain useful work and remove what depends on an absent decision without turning incompatible conditions into judgements of personal loyalty.

## IX. Reviewing delay preserves separate actions

After the festival, one session may have been cancelled because an answer arrived late, another because Dmitry never sent an email. A shared failure does not justify assigning both causes to one person. Available messages can reconstruct when dependence arose, when a question was asked, when an obstacle became known and which available action was omitted. This need not become a large investigation. It needs only enough detail to improve the next agreement. Unknown facts should remain unknown, rather than be replaced with convenient assumptions about carelessness or control.

Missing authority can coexist with an executor’s mistake. Dmitry could not approve the expense, but might have reported the waiting earlier. The coordinator is responsible for an unavailable decision; Dmitry for a late report, if reporting was both possible and intelligibly required. A single cause completely exonerating one person need not be sought. Several actions can contribute differently to one outcome. Precision allows acknowledging one’s mistake without accepting an unfairly enlarged accusation. It also allows the assigner to acknowledge delay without denying another person’s omitted step.

The next agreement can repair the identified dependency: Dmitry receives bounded expense authority, while venue changes remain with the coordinator under a response deadline. The whole festival structure need not change. If the same problem recurs everywhere, a broader reconsideration may be needed. The decision follows the problem’s actual extent, rather than a desire for a universal lesson from one episode. A clear arrangement cannot guarantee no delays. It makes the next participation’s conditions more intelligible and helps distinguish available action, missing decisions and new unforeseen cases earlier.

## X. Responsibility needs an accessible object

Responsibility becomes substantive when an accepted action and its conditions can be named. Dmitry is responsible for sending agreed invitations, accurate descriptions and significant obstacle reports. Final expense approval remains with the person retaining it. The distinction does not diminish the shared undertaking’s seriousness. It shows where each participant is needed for the audience promise to have grounds. Unlimited responsibility loses connection with a particular action and becomes a demand to escape any situation, including one created by another person withholding a necessary decision.

Decision authority does not remove ethical boundaries. An available budget cannot justify misleading a guest about venue access; an organiser’s role cannot justify humiliating a helper for asking. Historical representation theory does not remove the capacity to assess one’s action. Here authority concerns an undertaking’s agreement, while the acceptability of means remains a separate question. This matters for recipient and assigner alike. Neither “On my

behalf" nor willingness to help should make a doubtful action automatically innocent or obligatory.

The practical response restores correspondence. The expected result must depend either on decisions available to the executor or on named, timely participation by others. Without that correspondence, authority, participation or the promise needs changing. The choice may be inconvenient and require abandoning the desired scale. It returns discussion to genuinely possible and accepted action. The recipient can be responsible for their part without pretending to possess withheld authority. The assigner can retain an important decision while accepting the cost of continued participation that accompanies it.

## What this means in practice

Name one result you are asked to answer for and one decision necessary to achieve it. Describe the dependence concretely: an invitation needs a confirmed time, and choosing that time requires the person retaining it. Separately check missing information and actions already available to you. Unknown conditions, absent authority and your own delay should not become one explanation.

Offer three arrangements. Transfer a narrow decision with clear limits; retain it with the assigner under an agreed response route and deadline; or change the result or deadline while accounting for external promises. Do not demand all power if one bounded question suffices. The assigner may choose another arrangement, but it needs to preserve a real route to the result being accepted.

While authority remains unclear, identify proposals as provisional to external participants. Do not promise someone else's payment or changed conditions merely because a deadline approaches. If an excessive promise was made, tell the affected person exactly what remains unconfirmed and seek a decision. Do not postpone that information until the internal review concludes.

Keep a brief record: accepted action, available decision, remaining dependence, response deadline and agreed fallback. Afterwards, examine another person's delay separately from your own omitted action. Improve the next agreement at the identified point. This is an editorial practice for ordinary shared undertakings; legal authority or a formal employment dispute requires a separate appropriate basis.

## Key quotation

> *let him be your minister*

— Matthew 20:26, final excerpt; King James Version

## Connections between traditions

Hobbes, Leviathan XVI — representation and action have commission limits within historical covenant theory.

Matthew 20:20–28 — greatness among disciples is considered through service and its Christian foundation.

Editorial bridge — authority is examined through its relation to a particular undertaking and accepted obligations.

Boundary — Hobbes’s political theory and Gospel service do not form one management doctrine.

Practical distinction — authority does not remove ethical judgement of one’s own action.

## Primary sources

1. Thomas Hobbes. Leviathan XVI. Wikisource transcription of the 1651 text with historical spelling. Selected continuous opening argument on persons, representation and commission read, web lines 105–116. Epigraph ends the argument at line 112. The neighbouring position on commanded natural-law violations is not adopted as moral immunity for an executor. Exact scanned print imprint was not independently checked.

2. Matthew 20:20–28. King James Version, BibleGateway. Selected continuous passage read; key quotation ends 20:26. Its Christian foundation and concluding service and ransom context are retained. Exact print imprint of the electronic text is not independently established.

Russian quotations are United Wisdom translations of the named English texts. Rights outside USA remain unverified; no worldwide unrestricted licence is asserted. Full sources are neither imported nor vectorised. This article determines neither modern law nor management efficacy.

## Tags

authority, task, responsibility, delegation, decision, limit, assignment, independence, initiative, approval, availability, deadline, dependence, information, promise, representation, participants, resources, budget, confirmation, service, power, ethical judgement, Hobbes, Leviathan, Matthew, festival, communication, cooperation, honesty, practical ethics

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