

Worked Example: A Disputed Decision

Illustrative scenario. The people, organization, records, and events below are invented for teaching. This example demonstrates a decision process, not a proven outcome.

The situation

On Tuesday morning, Jordan, a project lead, receives an email from a colleague, Alex, copied to their director. Alex says Jordan changed a supplier requirement without consulting the team and caused a delivery delay. The director asks for an account by 3 p.m.

Jordan's first impulse is to reply to everyone with a list of Alex's mistakes. Instead, Jordan checks the records. A meeting note records discussion of the proposed change but does not record approval. A later email shows Jordan instructed the supplier to proceed. The supplier's update reports a delay but does not identify its cause.

Jordan remembers Alex agreeing in the meeting. That recollection is not confirmed by the note. Jordan also suspects Alex is trying to shift blame. There is no evidence of that motive.

The immediate task is to give the director an accurate account and identify what needs checking. Jordan must separate responsibility for issuing the instruction from the unresolved questions of authorization and delay. A private clarification may help, but it cannot replace the response the director requested.

How to read the completed brief

The brief distinguishes three things:

- **A record from an interpretation.** Discussion is documented; approval is not. Neither the missing approval nor Jordan's recollection settles what was agreed.
- **Accountability from premature blame.** Jordan acknowledges sending the instruction while checking whether it caused the delay.
- **Clarification from avoidance.** Jordan seeks Alex's evidence and still responds to the director by the deadline, marking unresolved points.

A possible opening to Alex is: "The meeting note records discussion, but I cannot find documented approval. I sent the supplier instruction afterward. What records are you relying on for the approval history and the cause of the delay?"

This wording invites evidence without conceding an unsupported causal claim or accusing Alex of bad faith. If the exchange becomes unproductive, Jordan can stop it and ask the director to resolve the disputed facts.

What happens after the decision?

No reconciliation or favorable judgment is assumed. The director may identify a mistake by Jordan, Alex, both, or neither. Update the account when evidence changes it, correct any misleading statement to its original recipients, and record who will clarify the approval process. The useful result is an account that can be checked and a specific next action.

Completed Decision Brief

Decision owner: Jordan, project lead

Date: Tuesday, Week 1

Decision needed by: Tuesday, 3 p.m., the director's response deadline

1. Define the decision

What must I decide?

How should I respond to the allegation and establish the facts without escalating the personal dispute?

What outcome am I trying to achieve?

Give the director a checkable account, acknowledge my actions, and identify what requires investigation or correction.

2. Examine the situation

What facts can I verify?

Alex's email alleges an unauthorized change caused a delay. The note records discussion, not approval. I sent the supplier instruction. The supplier reports a delay but gives no cause. The director requires an account today.

What am I assuming, and what remains unknown?

I remember agreement but lack confirmation. Alex's motive is unknown. Approval authority, any missing records, and the cause of the delay need checking.

What limits my options?

I must meet the deadline. I can explain my actions and provide records; I cannot determine another person's intent or settle disputed authority myself.

3. Compare realistic options

Option	Main benefit	Main risk or tradeoff
A. Reply immediately with a rebuttal	Responds quickly to the allegation	May turn uncertain recollections into claims
B. Check records; clarify; send factual account	Supports an accountable response	Some questions may remain open at 3 p.m.
C. Ask director to lead fact-finding now	Provides oversight of disputed facts	Requires director time before direct clarification

4. Test the preferred option

Preferred option: B; use C if direct clarification is unproductive.

Test	My assessment
Right	Acknowledge my instruction, represent Alex's claim fairly, and correct my account if evidence contradicts it.
Smart	Check approval records and the supplier's explanation. Separate the delay from claims about its cause.
Sustainable	Keep a concise record and seek a clear approval process rather than continue personal exchanges.

If the deadline prevents full verification, report the gaps and proposed follow-up.

5. Commit to a next step

My decision and main reason:

Send a factual timeline with records and open questions. It addresses the allegation without treating memory or suspected motives as proof.

First action: Check approval records, ask Alex for supporting evidence, and request the supplier's explanation. **By when:** Begin by noon; report by 3 p.m.

Who needs to know or act?

Director and Alex receive the account. The director resolves disputed authority and assigns follow-up. The supplier answers the cause question.

6. Set the review point

What new evidence or change would make me reconsider?

A missing approval record, a supplier explanation contradicting my account, or an exchange that prevents useful clarification.

Review date: Wednesday, Week 1, noon; sooner if material evidence arrives.

Judge the reasoning using what was knowable at the time. A good process cannot guarantee a good outcome.