

The Accountable Leader

Developing Effective Leadership Through Managerial Accountability

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Accountability is crucial for organizations. Lack of accountability leads to excessive costs, de-motivation, dissatisfaction and low performance.

Organizations need distributed accountability or distributed leadership. Authority and accountability are closely related.

A common mistake is to believe that teamwork involves automatically shared accountability. It is in fact the team leader who is personally accountable for the team results.

An individual has to commit to the purpose and goals of the organization in a pro-active and conscious way.

10 Key Management Accountabilities.

1. Who is in the team; negotiating, managing and being accountable for the budget of the team.
2. Distributing jobs and setting deadlines.
3. Securing commitment and providing with means and tools.
4. Giving feedback, appraisal meetings and ratings, agreeing upon training and development needs.
5. Ensure that all members meet their obligations.
6. Providing solutions.
7. Making change happen.
8. Communication and decision channel with peers and colleagues.
9. Achieving the required results;
10. Setting deadlines and establishing goals.

10 Indicators of Unsound Accountability.

1. Unclear purpose and priorities.
2. Lack of timely and appropriate decisions.
3. Duplication of work.
4. Ineffective meetings.
5. Long and excessive working hours.
6. Interfering in team member's decision space.
7. Too many organization steps which slow down decisions.
8. Generation of unnecessary jobs.
9. Loss of good people.
10. Perception of capability problem by top management.

Organizing for Accountability.

Building accountable organizations is the challenge. People need clearly defines their accountability, they have to know what they are rewarded for and how to set and calibrate these rewards. They need the means to achieve their objectives and the clarity on the consequences for not completing tasks and assignments.

A few reasons why organizations lack clear accountability: unclear purpose, wrong strategy, roles not linked to strategy, poor organization design, negative company culture, lack of performance measures, lack of consequences for action.

Leaders and Leadership Development.

Leadership at all levels is required. But evaluating that leadership is a difficult task.

Companies are using a system of grades and ranks often linked with a certain status. This is contributing to ineffective structures and bureaucracy. A desire for status can work against recognition for work well done.

Grading systems should focus on the job and not on the jobholder. Evaluation today is focusing on the job as it exists and not whether it should exist or whether it is adding value to other jobs.

Holding Leaders to Account: Leadership by Design.

There are 3 key principles of Decision Making Accountability (DMA):

1. There is a hierarchy of discrete levels of increasing complexity.
2. For any assigned ob, the balance of major tasks falls into a single leadership level.
3. Each accountability level above the front line requires one and only one layer of management.

Seven elements determine whether a job adds value:

1. Nature of work: core reason for the job.
2. Resource complexity.
3. Problem-solving: the type of thinking required to solve problems.
4. Change: managing change to building a new competitive advantage.
5. Internal collaboration: lateral interaction with peers.
6. External interaction: collaboration with consumers, customers and suppliers.
7. Task horizon: timescale for activities.

Held to Account at the Front Line.

In this chapter the author clarifies what the seven elements exactly mean for people in the front line (First level of accountability)

1. Nature of work: output or outcome are specified in advance and cannot be changed without agreement of higher level. Guidelines and well defined processes ensure consistency and effectiveness.
2. Resource complexity: resources are restricted to those required to the required output. No authority or accountability for decisions on outputs
3. Problem-solving: concrete, real-world problem which are familiar and recurrent.
4. Change: jobholders merely respond to changes.
5. Internal collaboration: with colleagues at the same level. Acting as channel of information.
6. External interaction: with specified customers or suppliers with regular contacts.
Key decisions made as a result of previous experience.
7. Task horizon: seconds or minutes when unskilled or semi-skilled work.

Supervisors play a key role but their role tends to be surrounded with uncertainty and a lack of clarity.

Managing the Front Line.

This is the second level of accountability.

1. Nature of work: contains element of judgment. Judgment based on experience and professional training.
2. Resource complexity: when there is a team at level one, people at the second level are accountable for setting objectives, delegating, training, managing performance.
3. Problem-solving: number of solutions are possible, so the leader needs gathering facts, diagnosis and deciding on the appropriate solution.
4. Change: limited to changing operating guidelines and procedures.
5. Internal collaboration: with colleagues at same level but not necessarily within the same function.

6. External interaction: depends on the organization if people at this level have external duties.
7. Task horizon: three to six months

Managing the Managers.

Third level of accountability.

1. Nature of work: delivery of planned performance.
2. Resource complexity: not yet accountable for changing the fundamental dispositions of the resources at their disposal. Accountable for identification of potential managers and their appointment to level 2.
3. Problem-solving: identifying patterns, seeing implications and shortcomings of current practices.
4. Change: continuous improvement processes.
5. Internal collaboration: working across disciplines and functions in order to improve performance of their unit.
6. External interaction: involve often negotiation of agreements. Mostly reactive.
7. Task horizon: involved in the delivery of the annual plan. Looks across individual plans and budgets to ensure that unit meets targets.

Managing on a Global Stage.

Level 4 of accountability.

1. Nature of work: more strategic. Identify resource gaps and constraints.
2. Resource complexity: accountable for identifying new opportunities and resolving gaps in know-how, technology, systems and services.
3. Problem-solving: abstract and conceptual analysis and assess potential solutions.
4. Change: fundamental realignment of assets and resources.
5. Internal collaboration: network of peers.
6. External interaction: Pro-active by influencing and shaping the external environment.
7. Task horizon: up to two years for operational work, up to fifteen years for strategy.

Organizational Design Accountability and Leadership in Practice

Three variables define the successful development of leaders at all levels in the organization:

- Role with clear accountability;
- Right number of layers in the organization;
- Right degree competence for each job.

Critical is not to ignore the link between effective organizational design and successful leadership development. Leaders cannot function in a sort of accountability vacuum.



Organizations have to think on the implications for leadership development of the difference between operational and strategic work.

It is important to move individuals outside their comfort zone but not outside their learning zone through: changing accountability level, change to another function, change in types of experiences, change from line to support or change of country.

Seven tips for building an effective leadership development program:

1. Identify levels of accountability.
2. Identify line and support jobs.
3. Plan the move to a healthier organization.
4. Establish a set of differentiation behaviors.
5. Establish a valid evaluation system.
6. Assign competent people to value-adding roles.
7. Identify key career and learning tracks.

Brain Dive then describes a case study: a leadership scheme for school principals.

The book ends with 20 key ideas for an accountable leader: