

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Partners In Leadership® **Workplace Accountability Study**



Accountability: The Low-Hanging Fruit for Optimizing
Individual and Organizational Performance

The Landmark, Multi-Year Study Involving Over 40,000 Participants



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Purpose of the Study

The notion of personal and organizational accountability has emerged in the last two decades as a clear theme for optimizing organizational effectiveness in today's fast-paced, ever changing environment. The topic of accountability is becoming more prominent on the lists of values, core competencies, key success factors and performance management outcomes in organizations across the globe. Over this same period of time, the topic has emerged in business literature as a legitimate area for organizational improvement and leadership development.

This study aims to understand the impact of the attitudes and actions associated with workplace accountability on the ability of individuals, teams, and organizations to fulfill their purpose, achieve their mission, and deliver expected results. This study looks at both accountable and non-accountable behavior and attitudes and their impact on organizational performance. This Workplace Accountability Study is the most comprehensive scientific study of its kind involving 40,000 respondents over multiple years, sampling from a wide variety of industries and job titles.

A Clear Theme

The study reveals that there is an accountability crisis in organizations today, and it is a crisis of epidemic proportions. The data overwhelmingly shows that the practice of accountability in the workplace has resulted in the view that accountability is something that happens to you when things go wrong, rather than something you do to yourself to ensure results. This punitive view of accountability sets in motion a clear pattern of behavior that significantly hampers the ability to execute directives and strategic objectives, deploy change and improvement initiatives, and successfully deliver on daily expected job outcomes. Further, the study suggests that improvements in workplace accountability at the individual, team and organizational level can yield significant improvements in performance and desired results in each of those areas. In fact, we surmise that accountability is the low-hanging fruit for optimizing organizational performance and accelerating organizational change efforts in today's organizations.

The data presented in this study clearly demonstrates that there is an epidemic of confusion around strategic initiatives in a majority of organizations, driving the need to have clearly defined Key Results that promote understanding, provide job role alignment, and reduce confusion.

This study further reveals that organizations are largely getting accountability wrong, and the price that leaders, teams, and organizations pay is significant:

1. Misalignment around key priorities and desired results.
2. Declining engagement levels in the workplace.
3. Ineffective execution of team and enterprise-wide initiatives.
4. Low levels of trust within the culture of the organization.
5. Problems with collaboration and cross-functional teamwork.
6. Low morale in every quarter of the organization.
7. High turnover due to confused expectations and poor management practices.

Key findings include:

- Accountability is incorrectly perceived as strictly consequential and almost entirely after-the-fact—80% of those surveyed say feedback is something that happens to them only when things go wrong or not at all (figure 3.17).
- The lack of clarity around key results led 70% of survey participants to indicate their organization's key results are in jeopardy or altogether doomed (figure 3.18).
- 85% of survey participants indicated they weren't even sure what their organizations are trying to achieve, a missed opportunity for creating alignment and focus (figure 2.2).
- The failure here is astounding—with 93% of those surveyed unable to align their work or take accountability for desired results (figure 2.4). Fully one-third feel their priorities change frequently, creating confusion (figure 2.6).
- The burden is on leaders, with 84% of those surveyed citing the way leaders behave as the single most important factor accountability influence in their organizations (figure 3.25). And yet just 15% of leaders have successfully clearly defined and broadly communicated key results (figure 2.2).
- When it comes to holding others accountable, 82% either try but fail or avoid it (figure 1.1).
- Additional best practices supporting positive accountability are not widely deployed. Just 20% of individuals constantly seek and offer feedback (figure 3.17). Just over one-third see due dates (or "by-whens") as real commitments (figure 1.15). Only a quarter solve problems and don't see that as someone else's job (figure 3.21).

Accountability Matters

This study clearly underscores the notions that personal and organizational accountability are misunderstood, misapplied, and largely missing in action when it comes to generating ownership, engagement, and personal investment, all to the detriment of the team and the entire organization. Many organizations are either missing a huge opportunity in leveraging accountability traits, or failing at it completely, leading to:

- Poor results, failed initiatives, missed targets, low morale, an environment without trust.
- Things getting worse, not better, without anyone knowing why.
- Further erosion as people ignore or pretend not to know about their accountability, deny their responsibility, blame others for their predicament, cite confusion as a reason for inaction, ask others to tell them what to do, or claim that they can't do it.
- Reluctant attitudes across teams and even the entire organization, hoping that uncomfortable situations will miraculously resolve themselves.

This study further suggests the growing need for organizations to better understand the benefits of making accountability central to the operations and culture of their organization.