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Creating the Accountable Organization

A Practical Guide to Improve Performance Execution

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

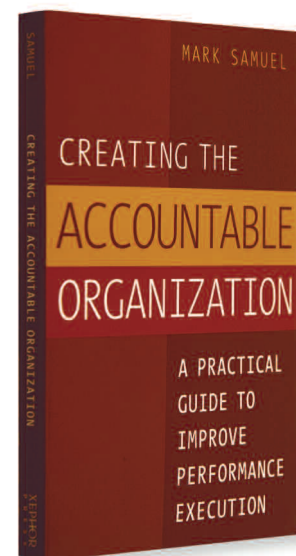
Creating the accountable organization means developing a culture where people at all levels of the organization can be counted on to keep their commitments and agreements. Author Mark Samuel describes strategies and techniques for increasing both individual and shared accountability. This includes within and between teams as well as between different departments.

The guidance offered is for leaders and change agents at any level within an organization who are ready to move to the next level of excellence and success.

Based on practical experience — more than 20 years of implementing change, research and learning from mistakes as well as successes — *Creating the Accountable Organization* challenges preconceived notions of leadership and accountability and shows readers how to lead a business so it remains effective, competitive and successful in the face of continual pressure to perform at higher levels. It also provides practical strategies and tools used by leading organizations in diverse industries to achieve breakthrough results.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to transform meaningless activities, such as ineffective meetings, overused task forces and never-ending restructuring, into meaningful actions.
- How to develop a culture where people at all levels of the organization can be counted on to keep their commitments and agreements.
- How to address nonperformers who survive at the expense of hard-working top performers.
- How to achieve what matters most to you and your company by understanding the principles and realities of accountability.



by Mark Samuel

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: CREATING THE ACCOUNTABLE ORGANIZATION

by Mark Samuel

The author: Mark Samuel is a leader in the Personal and Organizational Accountability Movement, firmly committed to inspiring excellence using the principles found in this book. He is president of IMPAQ, a California-based, worldwide consulting firm that teaches organizations how to thrive in the competitive 21st-century global marketplace.

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PART ONE: BREAK AWAY FROM OLD LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS

Unleash Ability Through Accountability

Personal accountability is a key driver for organizational accountability. However, organizational accountability goes beyond personal accountability.

Within your organization, you will find some managers and employees functioning at lower levels of accountability and others functioning at higher levels.

There are five levels of accountability:

Level 1: Entitlement. When an organization is plagued by an attitude of entitlement, employees are paid for showing up on the job regardless of performance. Convenience determines effort. Morale is low from the indifference that everyone has for his or her own performance and for each other's performance.

Level 2: Individual Accountability. Individual accountability is an improvement on entitlement. At this level, employees take responsibility for completing their own assignments based on their own job descriptions, without concern for the impact they may have on others. People are competitive with their teammates and support is minimal.

Level 3: Work Unit Accountability. Teams are another stage on the route to organizational accountability. At this stage, the success of the team is more important than any particular individual's success. Competition among team members is lower, but territorialism between teams is high. Teams address individual poor performance and behaviors that keep the team from being successful.

Level 4: Cross-Functional Accountability.

Business outcomes determine the makeup of the team to get the job done regardless of function. Decisions are made to include as many functions or departments as are affected. Achieving defined outcomes is more important than the success of any one team or individual. Coordination among teams and individuals is high. Territorialism doesn't exist and individual competition is minimal.

Level 5: Organizational Accountability. Business outcomes still drive performance and decision making, but they now include cross-divisional decisions, knowledge sharing and sharing of resources. All levels of the organization are accountable to each other, creating a "fluid" organization. Any person can act as the leader to

Increasing Organizational Accountability

Here are three principles for increasing organizational accountability:

1. Accountability increases one level at a time. It takes six months to a year to solidify each new level.

2. As levels of accountability increase, performance and behavioral expectations increase. As levels of accountability increase, it becomes less acceptable to accomplish individual performance goals without considering the effect on other people in the organization who need to accomplish their goals.

3. The further removed an individual is from the organization's current level of accountability, the greater the pressure will be for that person to leave the organization. This is true whether an individual's level of accountability is higher than or lower than that of the organization.



1-800-SUMMARY
service@summary.com

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Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor In Chief; Chris Lauer, Senior Editor; Chris Bienick, Graphic Designer

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any other person, regardless of position, when it is necessary for accomplishing business outcomes. ●

Create an Accountable Culture

You need only look at organizational breakdowns and failures to see that *culture* is anything but a “soft” issue. For example, when one organization lost its competitive edge because it didn’t release its new product in time to head off the competition, the issue was cultural, not technical. The organization had a culture of independence where people didn’t show up at meetings on time, people constantly checked their e-mail using Blackberries and some would leave the meetings before they were concluded. This resulted in a lack of decision making and not taking the action necessary to complete the new product line.

Culture: The Backbone of an Organization

The culture of an organization involves more than the style, attitude, communication and skill of its managers and employees. The reason it has been treated as a soft issue is that it seems to affect people and morale more than it affects business results. Consequently, we debate which culture is best — team-based, self-directed, empowered, diverse or something else — without reflecting on the primary purpose of any culture, which is to achieve the business outcomes.

An organization’s culture involves a *collective mindset* and the linkage between people in the form of *behavior patterns* that support the collective mindset. These behavior patterns between people represent “habits of performance execution” that result in business outcomes. Performance execution is comprised of *habits* that represent the automatic behavior demonstrated on a consistent basis in the organization.

Five Steps to Create Organizational Accountability

Developing a culture that produces breakthrough results involves more than changing behaviors or attitudes or adding new skills to the work force. It involves developing new habits of performance execution. Although it may take years to change all the bad habits of an organization, with focused attention and deliberate methodology, it only requires three to six months to change enough significant habits to achieve measurable impact on an organization’s desired business outcomes.

Step 1: Introduce a New Mindset. When any change is implemented in an organization, start by *clarifying the new mindset* in terms of expanding roles

and new responsibilities; *identifying how the relationships in the organization may be altered* based on the change and desired outcomes being accomplished; and, finally, *clarifying any new expectations* for improved performance or productivity as a result of the change you are implementing.

Step 2: Identify and Reverse Dysfunctional Habits of Performance Execution. The organization needs to identify the “bad” habits of performance execution that have kept it from achieving its previous desired outcomes. Once the dysfunctional habits have been identified, it is necessary to develop descriptions of the desired habits so that people can get a true sense of the ways of successful functioning in the organization.

Step 3: Measure the Effectiveness of the New Habits of Performance Execution. To successfully change a habit, you must *repeat* the new habit until it becomes *automatic* behavior. Although most organizations use measurement to evaluate results, the first purpose of measurement is *focus*. What you measure, you focus on.

For example, top athletes measure how much water they drink, the quantities and combinations of food they eat, and how much they sleep. This doesn’t evaluate their skill or performance as an athlete, but it does keep them focused on the aspects of performance execution that lead to top performance.

Step 4: Establish Recovery Systems Prior to Implementation. This is the most important step for ensuring sustained results. You must be prepared with a *recovery strategy* so that you can act when a crisis occurs, when you regress to old habits of behavior or when you discover that the new behavior isn’t working as well as desired.

Step 5: Recognize Results and People. Successful recognition involves recognizing the impact that eliminating dysfunctional habits had on the organization’s business outcomes. It also involves recognizing people’s efforts when appropriate and linking them to the actual improvements and progress made by the organization. ●

Three Traps of Ineffective Leadership

To develop accountable and effective organizations, you must follow the following guidelines: Focus on the desired outcome rather than on the process; create safety, not comfort; and focus on recovery, not on perfection.

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Beware of the three traps of ineffective leadership:

Trap #1: Seeking the perfect process and getting stuck in analysis paralysis.

Trap #2: The desired progress to achieve results comes to a halt because of disagreements regarding the purpose or direction of the goal or project.

Trap #3: Failing to hold people accountable when they are not achieving the outcome.

Benefits of Creating a Recovery System

Creating a recovery system is a way to stay in the game rather than forfeit the game altogether. Mistakes will occur and unexpected events will take place, but for the organization that has a recovery system in place, adjustments can be made swiftly and effectively to achieve the desired outcomes.

Recovery systems are the key to creating an environment of safety that leads to greater accountability. We can solve only those problems that we know about. Without an effective recovery system, problems remain hidden, conflicts remain unresolved and the resulting culture of nonperformance continues as the norm within the organization. ●

The Formula to Achieve Breakthroughs

Guiding people to action helps them move through their fear of change. Before people can be more accountable and take action to pursue a new direction, they must have a sense that, like the beginning skier, they are safe enough to risk action that catapults them out of their comfort zone. Otherwise, taking action in a new direction will feel punishing. Paradoxically, the only way for them to increase their level of safety is for them to be accountable and to take action. As our safety increases through taking action, so does our comfort.

Being safe to take risks does not mean that you feel no pain or discomfort. In a workplace of constant change and pressure to achieve greater results, people tend to respond either with discomfort and pain, or numbness and denial.

When an individual (or group) is in denial, there are three steps to facilitate taking accountability. The first step is to increase accountability by telling the truth about the situation. Once the truth is realized, people will tend to experience the pain or discomfort of the situation.

The second step is to increase safety for the person to experience his discomfort and to prepare for taking action by acknowledging his discomfort without judging him for being uncomfortable and by believing in him and encouraging him to take action.

The third step is providing the person in denial with guidance using specific steps for taking action. By taking action, the person builds his own “safety” and self-confidence to continue taking more accountability. ●

Leadership Roles That Produce Breakthrough Results

Success is more easily sustained when each level of an organization assumes accountability for its distinct role. Here’s how success happens when everyone works together:

1. *Senior managers* (catalysts for results and change) should lead and guide the organizational direction and the culture in response to external drivers. This includes translating external drivers into a clear strategic business plan and monitoring and guiding middle management in achieving operational priorities.

2. *Middle managers* (change agents) should guide the culture and operations to ensure effective linkages and the removal of unnecessary obstacles. This includes translating the strategic business plan into a strategic operations plan

Ten Ways to Create Safe Accountability in Your Organization

1. *Set clear and mutually agreed-upon expectations* with people with regard to both performance and behavior.

2. *Share information* openly and at appropriate times to avoid unnecessary surprises.

3. *Surface any conflict directly* with the person involved.

4. *Provide encouragement, guidance and other forms of support* to individuals who need to make a change.

5. *Focus on functional roles and processes* rather than position and power to accomplish outcomes.

6. *Support the development of people and systems* to respond to the needs of tomorrow and to avoid reacting only to crises.

7. *Monitor and measure the results* of each team and individual so that people know exactly where they stand.

8. *Do not allow people to perform or behave poorly* without making it clear that their performance or behavior is unacceptable.

9. *Follow up on commitments* so that people can depend on your words and your consistency.

10. *Let others know the care, appreciation and compassion you feel*, instead of holding back.

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by aligning efforts around the operational priorities.

3. *Employees* (customer activists) should be dedicated to improving their relationships with others and their performance as it impacts the customer as well as the organization. This includes identifying and meeting customer expectations and improving technical processes and individual performance to meet operational priorities.

Ultimately, your goal is to be accountable for your own actions and dedicated to your own improvement so that you can achieve your desired outcomes. With an accountable environment in place, the organization is able to recover quickly — through focus, involvement and dedication at all levels — from any dips in success that may occur. ●

PART TWO: SIX STRATEGIES FOR LEADING WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

Strategy #1: From Empty Platitudes to Clear Direction

The purpose of an effective vision statement is to provide a clear and meaningful direction, inspiring people to attain a new level of excellence. A vision statement represents the intention of the organization, department or team based on the aspirations, values and clear sense of purpose of the authors. When a vision is clear, it reads like an action-oriented story that provides clear accountability, expectations and outcomes that could be measured. The vision statement is your intention.

Creating a Clear Vision Statement

A vision statement needs substance. It must be stated so vividly as to be almost tangible.

A vision statement is characterized by four essential elements. It should be:

1. *Responsive*. It identifies the external drivers affecting the organization and how the organization needs to change in order to meet these challenges.
2. *Customer-driven*. It focuses on the organization's distinctiveness and how it wants to be perceived by its customers.
3. *Action-oriented*. It defines the internal environment that is required for the vision to become a reality.
4. *Practical*. It describes the contribution to the financial and long-term viability of the organization, its stockholders and the community at large.

Goals are necessary for translating the vision of the organization into meaningful and measurable performance

objectives. However, goals must always be subordinate to the *outcomes* described in the organization's vision.

Bottom Line: Accountability

A vision statement sets up accountability. That is its key purpose. As long as the direction remains vague or unclear, people don't have to be accountable for changing their behavior in order to be consistent with it.

Once the vision is clear, the challenge is developing priorities to ensure that you stay focused and clear on what you need to accomplish to be successful. ●

Strategy #2: Translating Clear Direction Into Non-Negotiable Priorities

A midsized biotechnical company went through the process of strategic planning. It approached strategic planning in a comprehensive manner involving an external consultant who helped the company analyze its industry and conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis.

After several months of careful analysis, senior managers identified the business outcomes and deliverables they were expecting. They identified 53 projects and carefully developed objectives and action plans for each.

After six months, the management team found that little progress had been made and that people were feeling overwhelmed and confused about the real priorities. Besides, as the business environment changed, the team had added new priorities and now were up to 65 priorities!

In just a few hours of working with senior management, another consultant firm identified the top 10 priorities and established meetings to track these 10. Within six months, the management team had completed 80 percent of their top 10 priorities and were making great progress on the other 20 percent.

Establishing the Top 10 Priorities

It is the role of executives and senior management to establish direction for an organization. Accordingly, it is important for them to be clear on the "non-negotiable" priorities that must be accomplished for the organization to progress and succeed. Based on strategic goals, managers must agree on the top priorities to ensure alignment and focus for the rest of the organization.

Leaders who have mastered accountability accomplish this role by having managers identify all the possible top priorities. Next, they narrow the list down to what is most

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important for the larger organization. This requires each manager to step outside of the box of his or her particular line of authority and to take responsibility for the success of the entire organization. Although the organization is accomplishing more than 10 priorities, the executive team (as a team) stays focused on the top 10 to ensure success.

Cross-Functional Accountability

Each of the top 10 priorities must have a project owner. However, the entire team of managers is accountable for the success of all 10 priorities. That means if any of the projects fail, it is the entire team that is held accountable.

The entire team monitors the progress of these top 10 priorities to make sure the project is on track, and acts as troubleshooters and problem solvers when issues surface that might prevent the success of the projects.

A team's purpose is to accomplish business outcomes in the most effective and efficient way possible. The way a team achieves its purpose is to ensure "shared accountability" is in place so that each person completes his or her commitments of performance and communication so that all the business priorities are accomplished. ●

Strategy #3: Execution: The Key to High Performance

Although ropes courses, experiential retreats and training programs can raise the awareness of working in teams and understanding the impact people have on each other, by themselves, they rarely change habits of performance execution.

Changing habits of performance execution to raise the level of team performance is achieved over time in a systematic way that is tracked and measured until the new habit becomes "the way things are done in this organization." The following three steps are used to improve performance execution:

Step 1: Develop a Team Vision of Excellence — a Stretch. Using the approach previously discussed, your team develops a vision statement representing the highest levels of excellence regarding your reputation with customers, your teamwork and your value to the organization.

Step 2: Develop Success Factors of Performance Execution. Once the vision is clear, the team identifies a list of Success Factors of performance execution, which describe in detail everything that the team will be doing to fulfill its vision.

Step 3: Prioritize Success Factor Improvement Goals. Once Success Factors of performance execution are agreed on by all team members, each team member

chooses the top three Success Factors he or she feels would have the biggest impact if improvement took place. As a result, the department agrees on three Success Factors that they turn into *improvement goals*. Team members develop action plans for improving each of the chosen Success Factors and agree to review progress at each of their team meetings. ●

Strategy #4: Proactive Recovery: The Secret to Accountable Performance Execution

What do top-performing basketball teams focus on when they practice? *Proactive recovery*. The coach sets up "what if" scenarios in which the team must deal with the unexpected. What happens when things break down? What happens when the team's outside shots aren't going in or when its star player gets hurt? The coach makes sure that the team practices its ability to *recover* when various breakdowns occur. Everyone develops the skills to respond to difficult situations, as well as the ability to mobilize the team to recover from breakdowns in the most effective manner.

The team with the fastest and most effective recovery will be the highest-performing team. Its members can respond both to crisis situations and to changes more effectively, because they are best-equipped with the *flexibility* required to continually adjust to change and unforeseen situations that take place.

The Five Stages of Recovery

When a problem surfaces, either a team can recover by surfacing the problem and responding as a seamless operation or drag out the problem by hiding and blaming others for mistakes. To create enough "safety" for people to admit mistakes, raise concerns and hold others accountable, it is useful to understand the five primary stages of proactive recovery. They are:

Stage 1: Self-Correction. First, you have to *become aware* that a problem exists. The fastest way to do that is for you to be aware of your own mistakes as soon as they occur.

Stage 2: Observation by Co-Worker. The next fastest route to recovery is to have a team member observe and point out the problem to the person who is responsible for it.

Stage 3: Coaching by Co-Worker. In an accountability-based organization, a team member will offer to provide guidance or coaching.

Stage 4: Coaching by Manager. Sometimes it is

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necessary for the manager to step in and offer his or her perspective, skills, encouragement, and the articulation of clear expectations and deadlines.

Stage 5: Corrective Action by Manager. If the problem continues, the leader needs to move into corrective action with the specific nonperforming team member to ensure that his or her performance improves and that he or she becomes a contributing team member. This corrective action process involves documentation as well as contact with human resources to ensure fairness both to the employee as well as to the employee's co-workers.

Ultimately, the goal is to create teams in which members have the safety to challenge each other in a supportive way and to surface and resolve conflict without getting stuck in hurt feelings, resentment or retaliation. Once teams know how to recover with grace, speed and a united focus, no crisis or change is too great to handle. ●

Strategy #5: Create a Plan for Change That Guarantees Results

Whether the change you are planning involves organizational restructuring, introducing new technology or implementing a culture change, there are certain steps that must be followed to ensure accountability during the change process. Including people in the change without following the steps to ensure accountability creates breakdowns that prevent success. In this case, you are setting people up for failure.

Creating a Plan

Here are nine steps to creating a plan that achieves results:

Step 1: Define a Clear Outcome. Prior to initiating a plan, it is important to have a clear picture of success.

Step 2: Determine Measurable Indicators for Success. The measurable indicators are necessary for acknowledging success afterward and assisting the “naysayers” to come into alignment with the change.

Step 3: Identify Success Factors of Performance Execution. It is important to have a clear idea of what needs to happen during the change effort in order to ensure success afterward.

Step 4: Set Milestones and Timing for Success. Milestones present a road map for accomplishing the plan and provide the means for tracking the results as progress is made.

Step 5: Recognize Challenges, Obstacles and Constraints. Too often, we wait to identify obstacles until implementation begins only to find that it is too late to deal with them.

Step 6: Take Actions to Achieve the Milestones. These actions must not only assist in achieving the first milestone, but they must also be proactive to address future milestones if appropriate.

Step 7: Develop a Recovery Process. Various types of breakdowns are identified and then a recovery plan is established that outlines what resources are needed and how they will be mobilized to get back on track.

Step 8: Assign Follow-Up Accountability. Once a plan has been documented, it is important to establish a regular follow-up system to ensure that each milestone is being completed on time as agreed.

Step 9: Evaluate Results and Recognize Who's Responsible. Once the implementation is complete, it is critical to measure the results in comparison with the desired outcomes. ●

Strategy #6: Communicate to Influence 'Nonbelievers'

When a *mindset change* is necessary for implementing a new organizational structure, new technology or new global processes and procedures, then making buy-in the purpose of communication can be a “death trap.” What makes a mind-set change different from other changes is that it requires you to view the project from a new perspective. When you are stuck in your old familiar perspective, you won't necessarily see the *value* of the new mind-set. You have to experience it to grasp its value.

It is only through experiencing the solutions that we will achieve breakthrough results and prevent the natural resistance associated with adopting the new mind-set. This is one of the great paradoxes of leadership.

Stop Selling Change

The term *buy-in* has always carried with it a notion of *selling*. A “sales-oriented” approach creates skepticism, misunderstanding and confusion about the solution once it is implemented. Often, people go through the motions of the change without really understanding why it is being made. Honest and open communication is at the core of accountability.

The following six steps provide a road map for presenting a change effort:

Step 1: Explain the Context for Change.

Ultimately, you want people to understand where the change is coming from and what direction it is supporting in terms of the vision of the organization.

Step 2: Present the Positives and Negatives of the Current Situation. It is important to list both

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the positive and negative attributes of the current situation, especially in context with the external drivers that need to be responded to and the vision of a better future.

Step 3: Present the Positives and Negatives of the Proposed Change. Be truthful and provide people with a clear comparison between the current situation and the change.

Step 4: Present the Strategy and Action Plan. Present the strategy and action plan for minimizing the challenges and costs of making the change. Let people know that the negatives of the change effort are temporary as compared to the negatives of the current situation, which are more permanent (because they have never been addressed).

Step 5: Elicit Involvement. For the negatives that still remain to be addressed, you will create task forces made up of volunteers from the group implementing the change.

Step 6: Offer the Final Choice. Give people a clear choice about participating in the change. This is where accountability is established. ●

Get Started: Your Next Steps to Achieve Breakthrough Results

You cannot create an accountable organization through a training program on personal accountability. Although this can help to make everyone aware of being accountable, it won't address the issues of performance execution that involve teams of people working together to define accountable practices and habits. Nor can you achieve an accountable organization by having managers create contracts with each other, because this won't address the issues that arise when someone breaks a contract and doesn't address lower levels in the organization.

If you want to develop an accountable organization, you must improve *personal* accountability, *team* accountability and *cross-functional* accountability.

Creating Organizational Accountability

There are six steps to creating organizational accountability:

Step 1: Clear Directions From Executives. They must be clear on the vision and business strategy for change based on external drivers, internal goals and values of the organization.

Step 2: Shared Accountability With Middle Management. Middle managers are the change agents

for creating an accountable organization. They must work together as a team of leaders, directing the organization from an operational standpoint.

Step 3: Personal Accountability for All Employees. Supervisors and employees at nonmanagerial levels must be introduced to accountability and gain clear understanding of the benefits to them and the organization in being accountable.

Step 4: Shared Accountability in Departments, Work Units and Project Teams. When these teams create a clear vision of excellence, followed by the Success Factors of performance that they commit to improving, performance and morale increase at lightning speed.

Step 5: Accountable Performance Management. Managers must have a system for managing performance that enables them to effectively diagnose the improvement needs for each direct report, prioritize the focus of improvement and develop effective “nondefensive” forms of communication to coach people.

Step 6: Measurement, Celebration and Renewal. Having a system to share bottom-line results so the entire organization can benefit from all its successes is necessary to solidify accountability.

Achieving Results

Organizations need to demonstrate accountability to achieve results. It is the core of employee satisfaction and high performance. Without organizational accountability, an organization cannot adapt to change effectively.

Whatever problems are solved by being more accountable, you will create new problems in their place. They will be “higher level” problems, and when those are resolved as you become more accountable, you will have new “even higher level” problems to resolve. The good news is that as you develop higher levels of accountability, you will be able to solve all of those problems and more — resulting in greater strength and much greater success. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Creating the Accountable Organization*, you'll also like:

1. ***A Leader's Legacy* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner.** Powerful essays for leaders to consider that cover significance, relationships, aspirations and courage.
2. ***The Leader of the Future 2* by Marshall Goldsmith and Frances Hesselbein.** For leaders who must be able to successfully adapt to the latest trends and marketplace opportunities.
3. ***The Starfish and the Spider* by Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom.** Two different organizational styles are discussed, centralized and decentralized. A smart business model contains parts of both.