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The Accountable Leader

Developing Effective Leadership Through Managerial Accountability

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

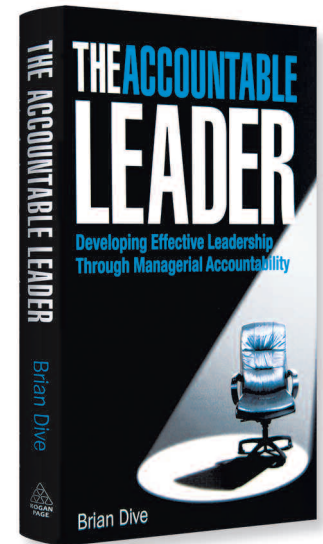
The Accountable Leader is centered around three themes — leadership, accountability and organizational structure. The book illustrates how the three concepts are related, and how accountability is at the heart of sound organizational architecture, which in turn is a pre-condition for truly effective leadership, leadership development and a rewarding career path.

The Accountable Leader is an explanation of how the structure of organizations has a profound impact on the ability of managerial leaders to perform their job effectively. It also describes how organization design has a huge impact on the individual well-being and happiness of those people earmarked for future promotion, so much so that talented staff may well leave an organization rather than suffer the effects of operating inside a poorly designed organization.

The Accountable Leader explores what it means for managers to be held to account at all levels in an organization. The author demonstrates that most leadership-related problems arise from the ineffectiveness of organizational structures that lack accountable jobs.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The 10 key management accountabilities
- Why organizations are so often lacking clear accountabilities
- How to develop leadership in an organization
- How the Decision Making Accountability (DMA) Solution Set provides the principles needed to address the accountability of leaders
- The Seven Elements of Decision Making Accountability
- How leaders are held accountable at the various Work Levels within an organization



by Brian Dive

CONTENTS

Accountable for Success

Page 2

Organizing for Accountability

Page 3

Holding Leaders to Account: Leadership by Design

Page 3

Held to Account at the Front Line

Page 4

Managing the Managers

Page 6

Leadership Development Schemes

Page 7

The Accountable Leader: 20 Key Ideas

Page 8

THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE ACCOUNTABLE LEADER

by Brian Dive

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For additional information on the author, go to <http://my.summary.com>.

Accountable for Success

Accountability is vital to organizations for many reasons. Lack of true accountability causes excessive cost, both economic and psychological; de-motivation in those who work for the organization; dissatisfaction in those served by it, and suboptimal performance in general.

Accountability can afford greater freedom for leadership, or deny and constrain the individual's ability to perform effectively. In this sense accountability can be positive or negative; both are important.

Negative accountability occurs when there is interference with or blocking of the free exercise of positive action. Positive accountability occurs when one is answerable to another for the provision of work; husbanding of resources; and the delivery of a service, product or set of results that can be measured in terms of quantity, quality, cost and time. Positive accountability should operate at all levels in organizations. This is distributed accountability or, indeed, distributed leadership.

Authority and accountability are closely related concepts. The exercise of relevant authority is a critical element of accountability.

Popular wisdom has it that teamwork involves shared accountability. But this is a common mistake. Teamwork is a shared endeavor, not shared accountability. A team is led by an individual who is personally accountable for the team results.

Accountability assumes a proactive and conscious commitment to the purpose of an organization by an individual. It also presupposes clarity, transparency and participation, which enable contribution to that purpose.

The 10 Key Management Accountabilities

A bona fide line manager must be accountable for

the following:

1. Deciding who comes into the team, negotiating and managing a budget for that team, and being held to account for its expenditure.
2. Deciding who will work where, in which jobs and when.
3. Securing employee commitment to attain the relevant goals and providing them with the means they need to deliver their goals.
4. Giving constructive feedback and deciding upon individuals' performance and appraisal ratings, agreeing on their training and development needs, and ensuring that these are acted upon.
5. Ensuring that the members of the team meet all their obligations and, if necessary, changing the goals, obligations or team members, as appropriate.
6. Providing solutions when confronted with problems. Accountability entails finding a new solution.
7. Making change happen.
8. Achieving results from peers and colleagues over whom the manager does not have direct control.
9. Achieving results with and through external agencies, such as consumers, customers, suppliers and shareholders.
10. Setting timelines and establishing goals, which then need to be achieved in terms of quality, quantity and service.

10 Indicators of Unsound Accountability — A Checklist for CEOs

There are several signs of faulty organization design:

- Unclear purpose and priorities
- A lack of timely and appropriate decisions



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Summary: THE ACCOUNTABLE LEADER

- Duplication of work
- Too many ineffective meetings
- A culture of long and excessive hours at work
- Managers working in their team members' decision space
- Multiple, small authorization steps, leading to “organizational treacle” that slows down decisions
- Quantitative grading systems that generate unnecessary jobs (and therefore structure) to provide administrative “promotions”
- Undue loss of good people
- Top management thinks there is a capability problem. ●

Organizing for Accountability

The challenge in the 21st century is to build accountable organizations: those in which the accountabilities of the individuals who work in them are clearly defined, differentiated, and understood in a way that is motivating and meaningful.

In an accountable organization people know what they will be rewarded for, and how those rewards are set and calibrated. They know they will be given the means to carry out the objectives they have agreed to. They also know what the consequences will be for not completing the tasks and assignments they have agreed to complete.

The majority of large organizations have too many layers and their average spans of management are too narrow. Organizations like this can be hell to work in.

Why Are Organizations So Often Lacking Clear Accountabilities?

There can be a number of reasons, the most notable of which are:

- Unclear direction or purpose
- Faulty strategy
- Key roles not linked to strategy
- Lack of understanding about accountability
- Poor organization design
- Negative company culture and history
- Genuine capability problems
- An obsession with continuous cost reduction
- Lack of feedback from the external environment
- Lack of performance measures
- Lack of consequences for action
- The adoption of management fads and fashions. ●

Leaders and Leadership Development

The focus here will not be on the CEO, but on leaders all the way from the front line up through the organization. It will be on distributed leadership, the leadership required at each level. Such leadership is the heart and soul of any successful organization, whatever its size and complexity.

Job Evaluation: Status, Grades and Ranks

If accountability is so important in leadership development, why then do so many companies and public agencies fail in this regard?

The answer is the historical use of a system of grades and ranks. While these started out being used primarily for job evaluation, almost unconsciously grades have come to drive organization design. Moreover, these structures often acquire a link with matters of status, and this contributes to ineffective structures, unwieldy bureaucracies and promotions that do not reflect substantial changes in responsibility.

Status is the position of an individual in relation to others. Unfortunately, a desire for status can work against recognition given for work done well, and prove the enemy of merit.

Grading systems aim to lay the foundations for a rational, fair and equitable system of pay or reward. The focus is on the job, not the jobholder. But the fundamental problem with job evaluation is it simply measures the job as it exists. It does not ask whether it *should* exist and, if so, whether it adds anything to other jobs around it.

Is a system of ranks the answer then? Well, not necessarily. There are shortcomings to a rank system not based upon clear levels of accountability. ●

Holding Leaders to Account: Leadership by Design

The Decision Making Accountability (DMA) Solution Set provides the principles that can guide organizational design and the empowerment of an organization's people.

DMA is the process of taking decisions in seven key decision-making zones called Elements that align with the purpose and strategy of the organization and add value to the work of others, while at the same time enabling the individual taking the decisions to learn and grow. The *Accountability Probe* plots what decisions people make and whether those decisions add value to the work of others. It reveals how many decision-making layers of management are required.

The 7 Elements of DMA

These Seven Elements are a touchstone for determining whether a job adds value, and they are a compass for determining the location of a job in the landscape of the organization.

1. Nature of Work. This first Element focuses on the core reason for the existence of a particular job and where it differs in essence from those below and above. This Element refers to what the organization expects and determines what the individuals should do — their roles. It defines the nature of their accountability for a distinct area of work.

2. Resource Complexity. This Element defines accountability for resources: people, technology, budgets, and know-how or knowledge. In the new “knowledge age,” know-how is rapidly becoming the critical resource.

3. Problem-solving. This Element is concerned with the type of thinking that is required to solve a particular problem or set of problems. This is where intellectual capability is taken into account; this is an important factor in the assessment of individuals’ ability to cope with the demands of increasing levels of accountability.

4. Change. The essence of strategic leadership is sensing and then ultimately managing change that leads to building a new competitive advantage. Change management is at the heart of modern management accountability. This demanding Element is concerned with accountability for driving innovation in its various forms.

5. Internal Collaboration. This Element refers to the lateral interaction or collaboration with peers within the organization to complete common tasks. It is this network that allows an individual to get the job done successfully.

6. External Interaction. This Element covers the need for collaboration outside the organization. The consumers, customers and suppliers are covered by this Element. Many jobs in a large multinational are accountable for achieving results in the external domain.

7. Task Horizon. Timescales drive large organizations. Most activities are framed by deadlines, which are usually subservient to the planning process. The accountability being assessed here is: “How long does it take to know whether the work covered in the first six Elements of the DMA Solution Set have been successfully completed?” A task horizon extends from minutes in some front-line jobs to many years at the higher work levels.

The Three Key Principles of DMA

1. All organized work falls into a hierarchy of discrete levels or strata of increasing complexity. At each successive level the objectives to be achieved, the complexity of work to be mastered, the changes to be managed and the decisions that therefore have to be taken become broader in nature.
2. For any assigned job, the balance of major tasks falls into a single leadership level. The balance of tasks comprises more than 50 percent of the burden of accountability.
3. Each accountability level above the front line requires one and only one layer of management. This is the golden rule of DMA.

The distinction between layers and levels is critical. A level refers to the decision-making zone or area in which a person is working. A layer of managerial leadership is a job on the spine of accountability in a hierarchy of increasing complexity. ●

Held to Account at the Front Line

Every day we encounter people working on the front line. They are invariably at the sharp end of customer service. What does a front-line worker do? What decision-making accountability do they have? We can find out by looking at the Seven Elements.

1. Nature of work. Work at Level 1 can be, and increasingly is, automated, like airline check-in processing, for example. The output or outcome is specified in advance, and it cannot be changed without the agreement of someone at a higher level. Work at Level 1 is often mapped out in guidelines or defined processes, which ensure maximum consistency and effectiveness.

2. Resource complexity. At Level 1, resources for jobs are restricted to the resources required to achieve the prescribed output. The person doing the job does not have the authority to change or make key decisions about those outputs, and is not accountable for decisions about those outputs.

3. Problem-solving. The problems faced at Level 1 are concrete, real-world problems that are familiar and recurrent. Usually there are guidelines to help employees at Level 1 to resolve these problems.

4. Change. Although jobholders at this level are not accountable for making changes outside guidelines, they are expected to respond to changes and, if the relevant schedule is not working, to seek improvements.

5. Internal collaboration. Front-line team members normally work closely with colleagues at the same level,

Summary: THE ACCOUNTABLE LEADER

in the same department and at a single location. Roles at this level require the employees to act, primarily, as channels of information. Decisions are taken at a higher level.

6. External interaction. External links and interfaces at this level are likely to be with specified customers or suppliers, within a framework for regular contact and liaison. The majority of key decisions will have been anticipated, often as a result of previous experience.

7. Task horizon. The results of unskilled and semi-skilled work are often evident within seconds or minutes. As the work becomes more complex, however, the timescale for successful completion becomes longer, stretching to hours, days and weeks. The task horizon for Level 1 is up to three months.

Challenges at the Front Line

Most people in most organizations are at Work Level 1. Many organizations, and trade unions, have hopelessly overcomplicated the division of work at Level 1.

Support is often to be found in an important role at the top of Level 1, often referred to as a supervisor. The supervisor exists to assist a manager in the first layer of the hierarchy — at Level 2 — to manage the department. Supervisor is a role that tends to be surrounded with uncertainty and a lack of clarity. Despite the challenges involved, however, supervisory leadership roles are vital components of good organizational structures. ●

Managing the Front Line

Here are the Seven Elements at the second level of accountability.

1. Nature of work. A job at this level always contains an element of judgement. This judgement is more than just common sense; it is derived from experience, and often from formal professional training. The jobholder is required to make assessments in new situations or individual cases using analysis, diagnosis and judgement, before deciding on what action to take. Level 2 may be the front line.

2. Resource complexity. Where they have a team of Work Level 1 staff reporting to them, jobholders at Level 2 will be accountable for setting objectives, for the recruitment and release of people, for delegating main duties and work, for training and development, and for managing performance.

3. Problem-solving. At Level 2, analysis and judgement are required. Even though in many cases problems will be discrete and non-routine, and the leader (from either experience or professional training at this level) will know that a number of solutions are possible —

some fact gathering and diagnosis will still be required to enable the appropriate solution to be found. The challenge here is to discover which solution is best applied in a particular case.

4. Change. Managerial leaders at Level 2 are expected to make changes to operating guidelines and procedures as appropriate, so that Level 1 staff can improve their performance. Jobholders are expected to find ways to use their specialist knowledge and experience to solve problems, to unclog systems, and to implement process and procedural improvements for those areas for which they are accountable.

5. Internal collaboration. At Level 2, managers work with colleagues at the same level, often, but not necessarily, within the same function or process at the same site; they could also cooperate with colleagues at different locations. To be successful in their own role, Level 2 managers have to learn how to get things done through colleagues to whom they cannot issue commands.

6. External interaction. If an individual has particular external duties at Level 2, these duties will generally involve acting as a first point of contact with bodies that the organization must cooperate with or serve, such as customers, suppliers, trade unions and so on. The shape of that interaction is likely to be largely influenced at the next level of accountability — Level 3.

7. Task horizon. In some industries, the time frame for the impact of major decisions to become apparent is generally from about three to six months. In other industries, the decisions of managers at Level 2 can generally be assessed within a year. The annual budget is the common overall framework for work at this level.

Most organizations seem to assume that the front line is invariably at Level 1, but there are certain situations where this is not the case. The most frequent example of a front line at Level 2 is where a professional entry requirement calls for Level 2 know-how and experience, and a competence to deal with recognized problems and to apply solutions in a manner requiring specific kinds of expertise — expertise that is often gained through study, training and experience.

Span of Control Guidelines

It is unwise to give rigid figures for optimal spans of control, or how many people should be managed by any one individual. It depends on a number of factors, such as the nature of the work and the technology used.

It is a good rule of thumb that any organization of at least 500 people with an average span of five or less is over-managed, and any organization in a country with a

Summary: THE ACCOUNTABLE LEADER

GDP of up to US\$100 billion with more than five layers of management is unhealthy.

Global companies have a median average span of control of eight across their entire business. Experience indicates that average spans in head offices tend to be lower. A target head office average span of five is both realistic and achievable. At present, most head offices seem to average closer to three. ●

Managing the Managers

Leaders at the third level of accountability are the backbone of a successful organization. They are the operational general managers who make sure things happen.

Work at Level 3 moves beyond leading one situation at a time, or diagnosing a single case, to balancing the needs and outcomes for a number of different individuals and sets of circumstances.

Here are the Seven Elements at the third level of accountability.

1. Nature of work. The key aspect of work at this level is the delivery of planned performance, while at the same time continuing to get better performance from the assets and resources year on year. The essence of Level 3 accountability is managing a sequence or flow of work tasks and events, which have to be managed as a whole, not as a series of unconnected events.

2. Resource complexity. Managers at Level 3 are not yet accountable for changing the fundamental disposition of the resources at their disposal. Resources have to be managed in the context of an integrated system, unit or head office department. Working at Level 3 often requires authoritative specialist knowledge. The Level 3 manager is accountable for the identification of potential managers and their appointment to Level 2.

3. Problem-solving. For the Level 3 manager, problem-solving involves identifying patterns in the actual performance of existing products, technology platforms and systems. Individuals at Level 3 manage a flow of interrelated problems that need to be prioritized and solved using the resources within the team. They are not accountable for strategy and policy but should see the implications and shortcomings of current practice and the need to shape different approaches going forward.

4. Change. The essence of Level 3 change is continuous improvement. Operational scientific change culminates in Level 3 innovation. It is important to distinguish between operational innovation, which occurs up to Level 3, and strategic innovation, which occurs at Level 4 and above.

5. Internal collaboration. Managers at Level 3 normally work across group disciplines, functions within a business, and sometimes a number of countries, in order to improve the performance of their unit or department or to improve the delivery of a process, operational system, study or project. Managerial leaders are accountable for their effectiveness in collaborating with peers.

6. External interaction. External contacts at Work Level 3 tend to be at a national level, in contrast to those at Level 2, which tend to be local or regional within a country. These interactions often involve negotiation of agreements. The response to the external world outside the organization is reactive. By contrast, at Level 4 the manager needs to be proactive.

7. Task horizon. Managers at Level 3 are very much involved in the delivery of the annual plan. A Level 3 manager adds value by looking across individual plans and budgets and ensuring that their contribution is such that the whole unit or department meets its time-related targets. These managers are also expected to make a significant contribution to the plans and activities of the following year.

There comes a point when an operational unit is too large to be run with only two layers of management. One should be very careful about designing units in excess of 1,000 at Level 3, unless the work is very routine and only needs minimal supervision or interference. ●

Managing on a Global Stage

The international dimension adds an additional facet of complexity. The following is a definition of the Seven Elements in relation to Level 4.

1. Nature of work. Jobs at this level are accountable for work that is more strategic than operational. At Level 4, the challenge is to identify resource gaps and constraints that adversely impact on performance and have them redressed. The person at Level 4 is accountable for the technical and professional input of the gap-assessment and suggested solution(s), and for their quality and accuracy.

2. Resource complexity. Level 4 managers are increasingly accountable for identifying new opportunities and resolving gaps in know-how, technology, the application of systems, the delivery of services, and the meeting of untapped or new needs.

3. Problem-solving. Abstract and conceptual analysis is required to identify problems and assess potential solutions involving new formulas, products, technology, systems or policies. This mental modeling process entails identifying the causes of patterns and linkages, perhaps first identified at Level 3, and devising the right solutions.

Summary: THE ACCOUNTABLE LEADER

4. Change. Change involves fundamental realignment of assets and resources. It is not just a modification of what exists; it is taking leadership in an industry, science or profession based on breakthrough, first-in-the-industry, best-in-class, trend-setting change.

5. Internal collaboration. In an international company the network of peers is likely to span a number of different countries. Internal networks in large international companies can be fraught with internal politics. Collaboration is never easy. International, strategic collaboration is one of the most challenging types of collaboration of all.

6. External interaction. The nature of the interaction with the environment is the key difference between work at operational and strategic levels. In the first three levels of accountability the response is reactive. At the strategic levels managers are expected to be proactive. Increasingly they are expected to influence and shape the external environment to the advantage of the organization, or at least mitigate the damage that might otherwise be done.

7. Task horizon. Generally, the time frame for operational work seems to be up to two years. For strategic levels of accountability, it seems to be up to about 15 years. ●

Organizational Design Accountability and Leadership in Practice

Three variables are critical for the successful development of leaders throughout an organization:

- A role with clear accountabilities.
- An organization structure with the right number of layers.
- An individual with the right degree of competence for the job.

Unfortunately, the first two factors are invariably ignored.

Talented individuals cannot contribute to their full capacity and potential in a cluttered, top-heavy organization that blurs accountability and stifles initiative. Yet, for some reason, the critical link between effective organization design and successful leadership development is often ignored. Leaders cannot be held to account in a vacuum.

The difference between operational work and strategic work and the implications for leadership development is critical. Identifying where this difference occurs in an organization is even more critical. But most leadership approaches do not focus on this vital division, largely because the clarity of the demarcating line is blurred by

administrative grading systems.

The Importance of Boundary Moves

A boundary move takes individuals outside their comfort zone but not outside their learning zone. The aim is to stretch and broaden the learning of the incumbent.

Boundary moves occur when job moves entail:

1. A change in accountability level.
2. A change to another function.
3. Changes in the type of experience for roles with the same title.
4. Change from line to support.
5. Change of country.

The Seven Steps for Building an Effective Leadership Development Program

1. Identify the levels of accountability.
2. Identify and define line and support jobs.
3. Plan the move to a healthy organization, if necessary.
4. Identify and establish a set of differentiating behaviors or competencies.
5. Construct a reliable and valid method for assessing individuals against their level of accountability.
6. Fill the value-adding roles with competent individuals.
7. Identify key career and learning tracks. ●

Leadership Development Schemes: How Can They Succeed?

The following case study shows how leaders can be identified and developed for future jobs in which they will be held to account.

There is strong anecdotal evidence that there is an acute shortage of school principals in a number of countries at present. Unlike private sector organizations, educational bodies are not noted for identifying leaders with potential and preparing them for leadership roles, such as principal of a school.

What are the key steps to identifying and developing these leaders — secondary school principals?

- Identify the accountabilities within a school.
- Identify and design the relevant boundary moves for leadership development.
- Adapt and apply a differentiating competency model (the DMA model).
- Design the assessment process — what to assess, how and why.

Summary: THE ACCOUNTABLE LEADER

This approach can be described as an assessment or a development program. It can be either or both.

The program is based on knowing the level of accountability of the job of a secondary school principal. Once that is known, then the six DMA Leadership Competencies come into play.

The four-step process was designed to look for consistent trends in the individual's leadership behavior. A summary judgment indicated whether the individual demonstrated potential to be a principal within "one, three or five years." Detailed comments are provided that could form the basis of an individual's development program, aimed at better equipping the person in question to become a principal. ●

The Accountable Leader: 20 Key Ideas

1. Everyone has a right to real work and a real job; a real job is one in which the person in that job is held to account.

2. An individual can only be held to account if the organization has clearly demarcated levels of accountability, or leadership levels.

3. The Decision Making Accountability (DMA) Solution Set maps how leaders are held to account throughout an organization.

4. The principles of DMA form the basis for effective organization design.

5. A program to assess potential leaders needs to rest on a sound foundation of clear accountabilities.

6. The DMA Solution Set provides that platform.

7. An administrative promotion occurs when an individual is moved to another grade at the same level of accountability.

8. Boundary moves occur when individuals are taken out of their comfort zone, but not beyond their learning zone.

9. A bureaucracy is an unhealthy organization that has lost contact with both its purpose and its customers.

10. An accountability level is justified when the leader in it makes decisions that members of the team cannot make, and that are different in substance and quality from those of the manager to whom that leader reports.

11. Only one layer of management is needed for each level of accountability above the front line.

12. Compression occurs when there are two or more layers of management at the same level of accountability, or two or more tiers of supervision at Level 1.

13. A good engineer might not be a good manager, because leadership behaviors are required in addition.

14. Values are badges of belonging — important for the life of an organization and contentment of the individual, but not indicators of potential leadership.

15. Outstanding performance at one level of accountability does not guarantee good performance at the next level.

16. Beware of accelerated development programs. Insufficient experience at Level 3 correlates with failure on promotion.

17. Potential leadership is best assessed by differentiating behaviors (competencies) linked to the Seven Elements of the levels of accountability.

18. A differentiating competency identifies those behaviors that help ensure that a person can perform effectively at the next level of accountability.

19. One must know where the operational-strategic divide occurs in the organization in order to devise an effective leadership development program.

20. Apply these two tests to your organization: Is the average span of control less than six? And, do any of the following apply?

- Revenues or costs up to US\$5 billion with six or more layers of management.
- Revenues or costs up to US\$15 billion with seven or more layers.
- Revenues or costs up to US\$45 billion with eight or more layers.
- Revenues or costs up to US\$150 billion with nine or more layers.
- An organization in a country with a GDP of up to US\$100 billion with more than five layers of management.

If the answer is "yes," then there are too many managers and they cannot be held to account clearly as leaders. In other words, your organization is over-managed and under-led. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Accountable Leader*, you'll also like:

1. **Transparency** by Warren Bennis, Daniel Goleman and James O'Toole. Digital technology makes transparency all but inevitable in this era. Three essays offer leaders practical advice on how to embrace it.
2. **Leaders at All Levels** by Ram Charan. Discusses the shortage of leaders prepared to face the complex business challenges of today and offers a solution via a new model of succession and leadership development.
3. **Winners Never Cheat** by Jon M. Huntsman. Business can return to the days when your word was your bond, a handshake was sacred and swarms of lawyers weren't needed to back it up. Find out how.