

**Aspects of Accountable Behavior;  
Inspiring Others to Accept Responsibility Through Leadership  
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Accountability is critical feature of leadership. Leaders design thinking frameworks that provide the group the opportunity to achieve sustainable results and design interventions to take them from where they are to where they want to be. The link between leadership and accountability and becomes one of helping the client and the group create an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility and the consequences of their behavior. It is about helping groups be answerable for their actions while at the same time being accountable as a leader.

If as a leader, you are to ensure that individuals and groups produce decisions and actions to maximize their potential, then helping group members be accountable for their actions and take responsibility for their results will be an effective approach to take. This paper examines the role of the individual and their affect on accountability within the group as well as the role of the leader in maximizing accountability amongst all group members.

Accountability has become a common theme in society and business. It is addressed in education, healthcare, politics and civil and criminal justice systems. Controversy mounts over who should answer to whom, for what, and what ground rules should be used to elicit a response. In response to this need, accountability has begun to be considered the elixir for finding solutions for everything from the national debt, failing schools, and climate changes (Tetlock, 1995). As the increase in interest for accountability continues, understanding its aspects becomes valuable to the leader so they can help meet the client's need and guide group members to accept responsibility.

Accountability means to be called to account for one's actions. Organizations assume it is a fundamental principle in their operations, yet articles and media stories tell us differently. In today's business, having a sense of obligation or willingness to be accountable does not appear to be a trend or a common practice. Although accountability is a desire it is often not the reality.

This would lead us to believe that we need to develop a more informed understanding of accountability if we are to ever hope for i) implementing desirable organizational behaviors and ii) helping groups achieve maximum results, while at the same time helping people be accountable for their actions.

Public concern for national events is creating a greater need for not only understanding the typology of accountability but also for developing approaches to hold people accountable when they choose unacceptable behavior and approaches that diminish the effects of a group. It is becoming more common that the people hiring leaders are looking for mechanisms, processes and directions for ways to not only design processes for achieving outcomes but also for helping individuals and groups become more accountable. Responding to the need for generating accountability has really become an issue of responding to social performance, or rather the concern for living up to the values of the organization, being conscious of the impact on people and making an overall positive contribution to society. It would appear that who better to help with this need, than a leader.

With the increased popularity accountability has received over the years, it is interesting to note that there is little or no material provided to leaders to help them bring the elements of accountability to the profession, to the group process and to group members. Yet, accountability lies at the center of three important aspects for leadership. First it is central to our understanding of *group dynamics* and group management. Without accountability the quality and outcomes of group work would be unsound and uncertain. Second, it is key to the comprehension of *social performance*. Accountability requires a mutual exchange of expectations adding to the social meaning of the group. And third, it is essential to the *establishment of responsibilities*, including roles and expectations. Accountability requires that particular outcomes be communicated clearly to those responsible for producing them.

While leaders, theorists, and psychologists refer to accountability as an important attribute and competence required for business and personal success (Goleman, 2002; Koestenbaum and Block 2001) the leader is tasked to find ways to positively affect the dynamics of the group so that accountable behavior can be achieved. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to pursue a more in-depth

understanding of accountability and present a formula for leaders to incorporate when working with group members.

### **What is Accountability:**

Accountability is a complex concept that has become a commonplace term, particularly in democratic governance. In fact it is often called the promise of democracy, or the point where.... “the buck stops.”

### ***An historical perspective***

“Accountability has served as a traditional anchor for the modern state since its emergence in late Middle Ages” (Dubnick 2002). Back in 1086, William I ordered a detailed account of all property in England. He required every subject to give access to royal surveyors, the listing and value of each citizen’s assets. Not only were property holders required to ‘render a count’ of what they owned, they were to give this information based on the terms set by the king’s agents (Brooke, 1961, pp. 91-2,114-15). Accountability began in Britain as a device used to enhance the legitimacy of the royal court. It draws from strong Anglican concepts (Dubnick, 1998). King James II of England made the first recorded use of the word in 1688, when he said to his people, “I am accountable for all things that I openly and voluntarily do or say.” Dubnick, has also traced accountability being used as a tool of governance to the Norman conquests of both England and Sicily nearly two centuries earlier. Historically the concept of accountability was about persons in authority requiring their subjects to provide details of their situation.

Today a similar concept exists within organizations and businesses, where a person in authority wants those for whom they are responsible to work reliably and communicate the progress and status of their end product, along with taking ownership for the results. In many cases these people will use a leader to help do this. It then becomes one of the leader’s tasks to understand who will be holding who accountable (who is the person in authority and who is responsible for the work) and what consequences will occur if work is not done well or the status not reported clearly. In this way the leader can help groups provide details of the situation and achieve a level of accountability.

### ***A multicultural perspective***

Accountability is viewed differently in different cultures and in some countries it is not used at all. In several languages there is still no equivalent term for the word accountability. It is often equated with words like responsibility, answerability or responsiveness.

- “In most of the romance languages (French, Spanish and Italian as well as Portuguese), various forms of the term ‘responsibility’ are used in place of the word accountability.

- For northern European languages (Dutch, Danish and German), translations for the word accountability are closer in meaning to ‘duty’ or ‘obligation’.

- In Japanese, a dictionary search turned up the transliterated term “akavntabiritii”. There were 17 distinctive traditional Japanese terms associated with ‘responsibility’, none of which were explicitly linked to the English-language notion of accountability.

- Israelis are familiar with the word and concept of accountability but there is no equivalent to the term in modern Hebrew.

- Finnish translations for accountability directly relate to the term used to stress an ‘obligation’ (ie. *vetvollisuus*). Three key terms in the Finnish dictionary for accountability are *tiliveivollisuus* (*tili* meaning ‘pay’ or ‘financial tally’), *kirjanpitovehollisuus* (*kirjanpito* meaning ‘bookkeeping’) and *vastuuvollisuus* (*vastuu* meaning ‘onus’ or ‘burden’).

- In Russian, the word accountability is a distinct term with roots in the concept of ‘report’, especially as it relates to financial matters. In this sense, they have developed a term that captures not the sense of ‘responsibility’ but what the French call *complexe a rendre* (‘the rendering of accounts’)” (Dubnick 1998, p.69-70).

### ***A definition***

In The Dorsey Dictionary of American Government accountability is described as “the quality or state of being accountable, liable, or responsible.” Accountability is about accepting an obligation or a willingness to accept responsibility, since it is about being called to account for one’s actions. It is about being accountable ‘for what’ and accountable ‘to whom’. Accountability is the extent to which one must answer to a higher authority (legal or organizational), for one’s actions in that system (at large or within a particular

organizational position or group). In that sense accountability requires people to justify their responses and realize they may be accountable with or without being visible to others.

Accountability (account-ability) implies an element of potentiality. Can the person give account? Since the word literally means an 'ability' to be called to 'account'. Therefore accountability involves behaviors as well as outcomes. Cummings & Aaron, give three fundamental criteria for holding a person accountable. They believe that the person being held accountable must have.....

1. **the capacity for rational behavior-** the law calls this mens rea. It is the belief that the person's psychological state is that of an able person. A person does not have to "give account" if the person is not capable of doing so.
2. **the ability to foresee the consequences of the outcome-** being held accountable is based on the belief that any reasonable person could have anticipated the outcome with all the information about the situation presented to them. A person does not have to "give account" if the unexpected or unforeseen arises.
3. **not deviated from the expectations-** when one is being held accountable his or her actions are based on the expectation or moral standard they are being held to. A person does not have to "give account" if they comply with the expectations laid out for them. (Cummings & Aaron, 1999).

These criteria of accountability are important to understand if a leader is to design processes that will help a group achieve their outcome and help group members take responsibility for their assigned role. It is about being more accountable for good performance and rising standards. The leader's role then becomes one of helping the "accounter" hold the "accountee" responsible. However, the concept of responsibility is different from accountability as explained below.

### ***Accountability versus Responsibility:***

Accountability is different from responsibility which is about: carrying out an assigned task; taking the necessary action; being independent; and providing proper management. Accountability is about answering for one's actions in regards to an imposed law or regulation placed on a person. Where as accountability responds to an imposed law, responsibility is about an obligation regarding a code of conduct, a statement of ethics, and standards for proper behavior. Responsibility is internal. It requires an inner commitment to moral restraints and aspirations. Accountability on the other hand, is external and relates to the person answering to others for one's actions and behaviors. You can be responsible for job X, but you are accountable for your responsibilities to person Y. There is a public component to accountability, since it is about someone treating an individual as responsible and calling them to give answers and reasons for their behaviors and their results. The accountable person or group is held responsible and judged by an external standard. For the leader wanting to encourage accountability, this means establishing processes and creating understandings around what is necessary for the group to be held responsible and account for their actions.

### ***Accountability and Leadership:***

What do these aspects of accountability mean for the leader? They mean when considering the concept of accountability in homogeneous groups, the leader must think in terms of compliance with authority and governance in relation to both the person who has hired them and the group. To help the group be accountable, the leader's relationship with the client becomes very important for understanding roles and expectations. For the leader to be accountable it means following a Code of Ethics in a way that strives to help the group make the best use of member contributions, along with providing the group the opportunity to achieve sustainable results and systems for accounting for their decisions and actions. The leader is accountable for enhancing the legitimacy of an action. The obligation one assumes as a leader who chooses to lead a group in one way or another is the area in which they will be called to account. Helping the group members make decisions to act in the group's behalf and communicate outcomes to the appropriate person(s) is how the leader can guide the group towards being accountable.

As leaders, who create and guide people through a process to achieve desired outcomes, understanding the fundamentals for helping groups establish accountability for actions is critical to the profession and to the success of one's work.

***Accountability Dynamics:***

Since the concept of accountability implies a relationship which includes authority and control, there are three main interpersonal characteristics that make up the theory of accountability: external, social interaction and authority (Dubnick, 2003).

i) **External-** this interpersonal characteristic involves incorporating an external evaluative force into the dynamic of the group or to the person who has hired the leader. The relationship incorporates communication and feedback between the one being accountable and the one holding them to account. The person that has hired the leader or the group itself may be the evaluative force for the leader. A specified person, the organization, society or members within the group may be the evaluative force for the group and the group members. The key point is that an outside or external force is holding the person or group to account.

ii) **Social-** this interpersonal characteristic involves a social interaction and exchange, one side calls the another to account and seeks answers while the other side responds and accepts sanctions. The social dynamic involves listening, giving feedback and communicating a message. Here the leader must have the skill set to be able to relate to all parties involved as well as help group members communication amongst themselves and to those they are accounting to.

iii) **Authoritative-** this interpersonal characteristic involves respectful responses and understanding of assigned roles. In order for accountability to exist, the action must have a person or system that calls the leader or the group 'to account'. This 'accounter' (usually the person paying the leader) asserts the rights of authority and control on the person being held accountable. In other cases individuals within the group may

have people in or out of the group who they must report their actions to and be accountable to.

Within these interpersonal characteristics of external, social and authoritative, the dynamics involving roles occurs as well. As people take on the role of scrutinizing, justifying, sanctioning or controlling they relate/interrelate to people on three different levels: personal, professional or public. Each of these levels also plays a part in the success of accountability and are important to recognize as leaders deal with group member roles.

**1. personal-** involves an individual responsibility. This focus is on a level of expectation from the individual wanting to complete a task. It relates to internalized standards, consciousness and morality (Corbett 1996, pp. 201-2). When a person is not committed to the requirement of being accountable the chances are high he or she will not be.

**2. professional-** involves a mechanism of control. This focus is on performance measures of evaluation and corrections of wrong doing. It relates to ultimate answerability to a superior (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, 228). When a person does not have to report to anyone within a system the level of accountability is reduced.

**3. public-** involves a measure of responsiveness and consensus in respect to the preferences of others. This focus is on the anticipation of wishes of others and the compliance with demands. When a person does not consider they have a “shared reality” with others in the group, it is difficult to entice them to be accountable.

What is important for leaders to remember in wanting accountability as an outcome, is that people, to some degree, direct their own behavior. It was the French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) who proposed that the human mind controls human behavior and obeys no natural laws. All elements and levels of accountability are linked to individual behaviors associated with individual perspectives and unique styles of account giving (both those of the leader and of group members) (Mulgan 2000). These behaviors, function within different assumed roles with social interactions. Welsh believes “Somewhere



within each person is a core, whether we call it conscience, or intuition or faith. This core is the component that defines a person in the midst of others” (Welsh, 1994). What that means to the leader, is that individual group members determine how accountable they will be, not the group, although the group does play a role in the chosen outcome. For the leader, who is guiding individuals through a process to achieve desired outcomes and creating processes for individuals to be accountable for the results they determine necessary, it is critical to be aware of the group member’s individuality, member individuality in the midst of others.

### ***Accountable Group Members:***

People behave for their own reasons, not necessarily for the reasons of others. Mainstream modern psychology calls this “purposive behavior,” “intentionality,” “decision making,” “self-control,” “choice,” or sometimes “self-efficacy” (Schmajuk, and Thieme, 1992). Whatever “label” you place on this type of behavior, the fundamental condition is that people choose their behavior and will be accountable because they choose to be accountable, not because someone has told them to be accountable. That is why in some cases a person will account for their actions by reporting the truth and others they will justify, excuse or deny their part in the situation. The person is the one who choose their level of commitment based on their own perceptions of themselves and their personal needs. This premise is a valuable point for leaders when understanding how to affect accountability and responsibility in a group setting.

Thompson, Peterson, & Brodt found in their studies that when people were accountable to a supervisor, teams made up of strangers achieved more accountable results than did teams of friends. They concluded that strangers will be most effective in a profit-accountability environment (the type of environment where making money is the main goal). The second level of effectiveness for achieving accountable results was a people-accountability environment (the type where success depends on using the talents of others). The least effective result for achieving accountability came when group members did not have any accountability requirement at all. (Thompson, Peterson, & Brodt, 1996). The study showed that the reason for these results had to do with groups of friends being more concerned with maintaining harmonious relationships than with wanting to be accountable. Interestingly, what was discovered, is that teams of

friends felt least “cohesive” (sticking together tightly) when they were accountable to another person (i.e. a boss or supervisor), whereas, teams of strangers felt most “cohesive” when they were accountable to another person, like a supervisor. When it comes to group members being accountable for their actions, relationship concerns get in the way of positive results. The pressure of being accountable for something works against close knit groups because people are more concerned about cohesiveness and relationships than being accountable for the action. Accountability, from this perspective, turns people in unified groups into fence-sitters who rarely stray from the safe midpoints of the scales on which they express judgments (Tetlock, 1979). Sadly this one study indicates that teams of friends or cohesive members may not be the best group for achieving accountable results.

There are also some other dysfunctions associated with the desire for accountability. The concept has been used in impression management tactics (Ferns, 1997) to force people to behave and fit in with the group in order to be perceived well by others. Accountability has also been used to stereotype individuals into categories of those who can perform and those who can't (Klimpski and Inks, 1990). In addition accountability has been involved in the misallocation of scarce resources in the belief that only certain conditions and people can achieve and deliver the results and therefore resources will be allocated to them only (Adelberg and Batson, 1978).

Accountability does have several positive effects in relation to group dynamics. It is known to elicit pro-group behavior, because group members are likely to be concerned with the welfare of their group regardless of the circumstances. Some researchers maintain that group members are likely to adapt their behavior to the audience's expectations to monitor their self presentation (essentially they want to look good to others and be perceived well by others) (Deutsch & Gefard, 1955; Kelley, 1952). A person's behavior in the presence of an audience is strongly determined by a fundamental desire to avoid censorship and seek positive evaluation by others. When a group holds its members accountable 'social loafing' is reduced and accountability is increased. It is thought that people work harder on collective tasks than under anonymous conditions (Williams, Harkins, & Latane, 1981). Although the group does not have to be cohesive, a number of people working towards a common goal affects

the results of people being responsible for a task and accountable for their actions. When people (or groups) are held accountable for their responses, strategic effects can be obtained. A group of people can plan how to execute a plan of action and be a source of motivation to others. What this means is, social influence does have an impact on accountable behavior. Unfortunately what researchers have found is that accountability may be demonstrated only to satisfy a fundamental desire for the group member to achieve a positive evaluation by others and acceptance in the group. What this suggests is that if a person feels motivated to work for and be committed to the group and they believe being accountable is a positive strategy for group acceptance, then the individual will be accountable (Deutsch & Gefard, 1955). Essentially, accountability is not caused by differences in the perception of the group norm but is attributed to differences in motivation to comply to that norm by the individual (Ajzeh & Fishbein, 1980).

What does this mean for the leader who wants to help a group become accountable for their results while at the same time wanting to create a cohesive group environment for the individuals to work within? It means when it comes to focusing on accountability in groups, leaders must focus on individuality rather than cohesion.

Human behavior is a complex phenomenon. All individuals do not behave the same way when presented with identical accountability situations. This can make the leader's job even more challenging since individuals maximize the situation to their own advantage and to the extent permitted by the constraints imposed on them. Therefore, as a leader making individuals aware of such constraints or accountabilities such knowledge will be necessary for helping a group achieve its maximum output (Jensen and Meckling, 1976).

Leaders and businesses that advise or demand groups within their organizations to be accountable will fall short if they do not recognize that as important as the institutional context is, the fundamental component for achieving accountable behavior rests on the individual, (the group member) not the group membership. This thinking is well described by the Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus, circa 600 BC, when he said, "Human greatness comes only from within. We must recognize our own strengths and limitations. By learning of our present

condition we can structure a path for future behavior." (The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 1995). Accountability literature recognizes self-interest as a strong motivating factor in explaining why people behave in an accountable way (Tetlock, 1979). If a person is to be great and be accountable for their actions, the secret for success lies within understanding the individual.

### ***Accounting for Accountability:***

Therefore the main element in accountability is the individual. As individuals work within the dynamics of a group, they function from three different points of reference including: psychological, behavioral and relational. Taking this into account, I have created a formula which draws from these three reference points. The formula illustrates elements involved in accountability and the dynamics which occur between them.

This accountability formula takes into account the human elements of the psychological, behavioral and relational components of a person. It breaks down these elements into desire, discipline and dialogue, The **Psychological** aspect, relates to desire. The person must want to be accountable and have the drive and commitment to follow through on their intent, if they are going to exhibit accountable behavior. The **Behavioral** aspect, relates to the ability to have discipline. The person might want to be accountable, but without the capability to achieve it, the intended outcome may not occur. The **Relational** aspect, relates to dialogue. An accountable person is answerable to something or someone else. This dynamic requires the ability to exchange information clearly and understand the outcome and intent desired.

This accountability formula can help leaders help individuals and groups give account for their actions and be responsible in their duties.

### **Accounting for Accountability**

*A formula for achieving the accountability outcome*

**Desire-Psychological + Discipline-Behavioral + Dialogue-Relational = Accountability**

(D x C) + (I x A) + (C x R) = Accountability  
(Drive x Commitment) + (Implementation x Acquirement) + (Contracting x Relating)= Accountability

In this formula, the arguments (the elements within the brackets) are multiplied together. Each argument significantly affects the other. If one of those arguments totals zero it brings the total of the nested function to zero. The aspects of Desire, Discipline and Dialogue form a cumulative affect on the success of accountability, while the elements within them are significantly dependent on each other.

While using this formula, if for example a person has drive, but lacks commitment toward the project, they may be void of passion to get involved and may not want to be held responsible for the results. This would create a low score for desire. If a person has the desire and is willing to engage and really wants to achieve, but cannot implement the mechanisms for making that happen, they will fall short on achieving positive results. This would result in a low discipline score. And if a person has the desire and discipline to sign up for a task, but does not have the capacity for dialoguing and cannot understand what is expected of them or cannot relate to those people they need to include in the outcome, then again the total success factor would be reduced and the final total for accountability would be low.

To gain a more in depth understanding of these areas, I offer the following explanations.

### **Desire- (*Drive x Commitment*)**

This psychological element deals with the internal passion a person has towards the action. To elevate the aspect of desire, the leader must help the individual create a desirability within themselves to want to be part of the outcome. To do that, they must help the person understand their potential possibilities, the role constraints they may exist, expectations placed upon them, and the required need to participate. Desire is about helping the individual be a strategic thinker.

*i) Drive-* is described as the ability to direct the motions and press or force something into an activity a course, or a direction. It is about the ability to carry on or carry through. This aspect includes having; motivation, courage, diligence, resilience, optimism, intentionality, exertion, momentum, duty, responsiveness,

initiative, acting on opportunities, self confidence and the ability to lead change.

The degree to which individuals believe that outcomes are contingent upon their personal characteristics or behavior will affect the outcome. For example, highly competitive individuals have been shown to be orientated towards manipulation, aggressiveness, exploitation and derogation of others (Beu and Buckley, 1966). Their set of extreme individualistic values causes a lack of concern for the welfare of others and for being accountable for their actions. Individuals with greater self esteem and with optimistic beliefs about being able to cope and believing in their level of competence, can facilitate cognitive processes and performance in a variety of settings, including quality decision making. These are the people who accept accountability for their actions. Once these people decide to take action, they invest a great deal of effort and persistence in achieving the task but not to the detriment of others (Beu and Buckley, 1966).

*ii) Commitment-* is described as an agreement or pledge to do something in the future and be obligated or emotionally impelled to stick with it. This aspect includes having; a sense of obligation, consciousness resilience, ownership, power to perform the task, control, sharing of a common purpose, a willingness to respond to an authority, shared values, morality, integrity, guiding principles, rules of conduct, adherence to laws, responsibility and a capacity for follow-through. Commitment is affected by both internal and external justification (Staw 1981, p. 580). The more significant the accountable action the more one perceives the responsibility to be accountable. This means people aren't as interested in being committed to the 'little things'. If the person who is being held accountable does not honor or respect the person holding them accountable, the level of accountability will decrease along with their commitment. If there is no respect for the person in authority it will be a stretch to maintain a level of commitment to the result. When there is perceived fairness and perceived motives, commitment will rise. Commitment incorporates aspects of social identities, human capacity to deal with information, the ability to interact socially and make a rational choice (Trondal 2001). The decision for a person to be commit or not commit is based on individual motivation and individual perspective.

### **Discipline: (*Implementation x Acquirement*)**

This behavioral element deals with the ability a person has to complete a task. To elevate the aspect of discipline, the leader must help the individual create a timeline for deliverables and an awareness of resisting factors or personal impasses which might exist and block the achievement of the goal. Helping individuals understand when the appropriate time to complete the task is, what context the deliverables should be presented in and the best approach for reporting the results will help with the success of the project. Discipline is about helping the individual be an achiever.

*iii) Implementation-* is described as effecting or ensuring the actual fulfillment of a task by using concrete measures. This aspect includes having the ability to plan, analyze the problem, manage projects, set measurable goals, provide structure, clearly understand the outcomes, prioritize the tasks, make decisions, think critically, working productively, anticipate obstacles, stay organized, and strategize.

This aspect includes choice and abilities. Implementation will only occur when people are faced with issues about which they care deeply about. Their intellect, beliefs, and emotions must all be engaged (Ferris, 1997). When a person who is exhibiting self-determined behavior, feels that their decisions to implement are freely chosen and reflect their personal values, it is shown that the person will demonstrate a greater increase in productivity and implementation (Deci & Ryan, 1990, Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is self-determination along with project management skills, and an awareness of the exactly what is expected, which allows an individual to mobilize their energy, display their competence, activate their abilities and reach a high level of implementation.

*iv) Acquirement-* is described as a power or skill that results from persistent endeavors and cultivation. This aspect includes having; self confidence, flexibility, the ability to master a task, exceed performance demands, set personal objectives, demonstrate perseverance, possess stamina, reach achievement, display reliability, be credible, work in the spirit of optimism, and show a willingness and determination for the project.

There is substantial evidence suggesting that the more one expects a

certain behavior to lead to a certain reward or punishment, and the more one values the reward, the more likely they are to acquire it. The person's motivation to acquire will be drawn from their perception of the value of the result. This equates to greater perceived magnitude of the expected reward or punishment, greater accountability demonstrated. People who, set their own goals, do not drift from the target, have a high degree of control over the goal achievement, and receive concrete feedback about their performance, are more likely to acquire what they set out to accomplish (Steers R., 1975). They will acquire what they want and be accountable to those they are answerable to.

**Dialogue: (*Contracting x Relating*)**

This relational element deals with the capability for developing interpersonal relationships. To elevate the aspect of dialogue, the leader must help the interpersonal relationships within the group. The focus here, is on helping individuals understand what effect they have on others, what behaviors are appropriate, how to collaborate and negotiate as a group as well as understanding the other person's perspectives and style for clear transmission of messages. It is also about establishing relationships for mutual agreement. Dialogue is about helping the individual be a leader.

v) *Contracting*- is described as perceiving, apprehending and formulating a commitment which defines and limits the rights and duties of each person involved. This aspect includes having; awareness of the conditions which need to be involved, visibility to the correct information, understanding about what needs to be done, self-management for honoring the contract, adaptability in collaborating for mutual goals, realism in formulating limits and duties and establishing expectations to be reached. Contracting relates to the authoritative characteristic of accountability.

In accountability situations, the focal individual understands that his or her actions will be compared to some standard by the evaluator. However, if behavioral expectations are unclear or if the priorities are vague, individuals may not feel accountable and may behave as such (Baucus and Near, 1991). The aspect of contracting must include details of roles, responsibilities and timelines, as well as socially acceptable behavior. Groups are a set of elaborate relationships, only a few of which are discrete or explicit. The person being held



accountable must also have a sense of why this action is of value along with a sense of the rights, privileges, and obligations required of them. The more clear the expectation and the role, the more a person will feel and be accountable (Maclagan (1983, p. 415).

*vi) Relating-* is described as a person being connected by consanguinity, close relations, affinity, or a common origin. This aspect includes having; Bottom of Form clear and open communication, clarification of information presented, empathy for those involved, connectivity with the system holding them accountable, an understanding and acceptance of the expectations required, the ability to network and engage others, the talent for influencing people, demonstrate personal impact, be trustworthy and be open to all levels of feedback. Relating relates to the external characteristic of accountability.

Developing high quality relationships and increasing the understanding of what others expect, leads to internalization, compliance or conformity to expectations (Beu and Buckley, 2001). Accountability is a talking place among individuals whose identities and decisions are shaped by their social roles. A group governs the nature and types of communication that exists between its members, including, what manner accounts may be required, given, honored or discredited (Scott and Lyman 1968, p. 58). Several bodies of literature (including performance review, attitude change and trust) suggest that the position of the person holding others accountable affects the results. The higher the position held the more accountable the person will be. In addition the more public the act of being accountable is made, the more it will positively affect the behavior of the person accountable (Carnevale 1985, p. 233). If the leader learns that the group does not respect the person in authority then again accountability levels will have negative results.

### ***The Role of the Leader in Maximizing Accountability:***

A group can only be as accountable as the people who participate, manage, and work within it. The structure of systems, the make up of the organization, and the practices of the group process are all needed to sustain accountable results and build accountable behavior. A major emphasis must be placed on communications systems as a major ingredient in building successful

accountability structures and outcomes since as mentioned previously, accountability has an external feature involving social interaction and exchanges with authority. In respect to how a leader can address these components and maximize accountability, I suggest the following list of actions for the leader as they develop and guide people through the process.

**i) external**

- ✓ gain a clear understanding of what the client has determined as accountable actions.
- ✓ communicate clearly to the group what the client's selected requirements are.
- ✓ help the group understand what the expectations are in regards to being accountable.
- ✓ state clearly at the end of the meeting who will be accountable for which action and the specifics of those actions.

**ii) involves social interaction and exchange**

- ✓ establish environments and systems for open communication, information sharing and trust.
- ✓ help to create and establish effective methods of evaluation.
- ✓ create methods for clarity of information based on the needs of the recipient.
- ✓ provide linkages between the behavior of the group members and the outcome of the group in a way that honors individuality.

**iii) requires an authority**

- ✓ ensure that individual objectives are not at odds with the organization's objectives.
- ✓ have a clear understanding of; the environment the group is working in, the objectives the group are working towards, and the individual or system which is holding group members accountable.
- ✓ establish clarity around the rewards, consequences, approvals and permissions required.
- ✓ create performance monitoring processes to act as benchmarks for the level of work importance.

As a leader, recognize that a person accounts for what they choose, leaders cannot impose accountability, they can only guide people to make the right choice. For the leader the following checklist and consideration points can be a valuable tool when preparing to help a group be accountable for their actions.

Consider.....

- ✓ The number of expectations set by the person in authority.  
*Are there too many requirements to or too few to have meaning to the result?*
- ✓ The capability of the person being held accountable.  
*Does the person have the necessary competencies from the accountability formula to do the task?*
- ✓ The clarity of communication system and information received.  
*Are the requirements clear, concise and specific in nature?*
- ✓ The structure for accountable actions to occur within.  
*Is there a system for prioritizing, arranging and equalizing the distribution of actions in place to accomplish the task?*
- ✓ The personalization and sense of personal responsibility connected to the outcome.  
*Is there an emotional attachment to the task? Does the individual trust and respect the person or system they are being held accountable to?*
- ✓ The time boxing for prioritization and implementation.  
*Are there dates associated with specific expectations?*
- ✓ The tractability of events and actions.  
*Is there a way to keep tract of the on going progress of the action?*
- ✓ The answerability roles.  
*Is there an assigned individual to whom "the buck stops here"?*

The process leading to accountability becomes one of monitoring and

control for the leader (the person responsible for the group process and guiding group members towards accountability). The following variables determine success of the outcome for both the leader and the individual and are important to be aware of when working with groups.

- evaluation approaches for performance,
- task difficulty,
- group dynamics,
- expectations of others and
- most importantly the awareness of internal traits of the individual being held accountable.

***Conclusion:***

“Accountability is the product of an organization’s values and beliefs. It is about; what is important to them, how business should be conducted, and how relationships should be maintained” (Gray, 1995). In that regard, accountability depends on the free flow of appropriate information and on effective forums for discussion and cross-examination. Unless those people calling individuals to account have full access to the relevant people and the relevant information their investigations and assessments in calling people to account will be frustrating and decision making will be difficult.

For the one being held accountable, the thought process is about whether or not to justify the action, make an excuse for the behavior, provide an apology or acknowledge shame for the results (Scott and Lyman 1968). For the leader, having people be accountable is about considering the person’s self-concept and their level of desirability to engage with others over the issue or task. In essence it is about helping people think strategically. When a person is being called to account they must ask themselves is it wise to take on the responsibility for this role and be held accountable for it? Therefore accountability requires a balance between obedience, loyalty, and participation between all parties involved.

The goal of building accountability involves affirming and reconstructing the legitimacy of policies and practices. It deals with the pressure to justify one’s decisions and actions to others. If the leader’s objective is to have people behave in ways that are consistent with the goals of the organization, inline with the desired outcome of the group, and appropriate, honest and ethical in nature,

then it will be critical to remember to incorporate methods for building accountability into the meeting process. Since accountability is significantly influenced by: what others expect, how individuals gather information in regards to fulfilling those expectations, and how they perceive they will be treated if they deviate from those expectations, group dynamics will be equally important to the process.

Accountability (account-ability) implies an element of potentiality. Can the person give account, since the word literally means an 'ability' to be called to 'account'. For the leader working towards this end, it means creating a format for group members to willingly own up to one's action and not make excuses for bad decisions. The three female whistleblowers for Enron, Worldcom and the FBI, who were voted Time Magazine's 2002 Persons of the Year, are referred to as "women of ordinary demeanor but exceptional guts and sense" by writers Richard Lacayo and Amanda Ripley. Perhaps "guts and sense" are the 21st Century's criteria for individuals to be accountable. 'Guts' to hold onto the moral standards established by the organization and 'sense' to strategically think things through and anticipate possible outcomes. It is the leader's job to help make that happen within themselves and others.

Human Dynamics services are designed to help support you and your organization. I hope you will consider using us as a resource and refer us to anyone you think would benefit from our services. [www.human-dynamics.com](http://www.human-dynamics.com).

Eileen's doctoral work dealt with "*What Personality Traits Contribute to Accountable Behavior*". For more information on this topic you can contact her at Email [edowse@human-dynamics.com](mailto:edowse@human-dynamics.com).

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Self-presentation, Leary and Kowalski highlight three factors driving impression management: the relevance of impressions to one's goals, the value of those goals, and the gap between one's current and desired image (Leary and Kowalski 1990).