

April 2013 Edition

## Is Lack of Accountability Holding Back Your Strategy?

Does this sound familiar...you've finished developing a new strategy and everyone on the management team apparently agrees with the new strategic direction, but then the strategy never happens. There are many reasons why strategic plans do not get executed, but we are going to focus on one of the most important reasons, lack of accountability. To achieve your strategy you need a high level of engagement that comes from an organization that is held accountable for its execution.

What is so frustrating is that organizations spend a lot of time defining jobs, roles and goals, assuming it will lead to better performance; people will know exactly what they need to accomplish and what the consequences are if they make or miss the target. But, in reality, accountability is confusing as rewards are misapplied, consequences are watered down or never occur, and people don't see the connection between results and recognition.

So why is accountability getting confused within your organization? Based on our experience and documented research, the following two reasons contribute to the confusion over accountability:

**First, the natural complexity of today's organizations.** Most of our clients have some form of a matrix organization, along with enabling staff and business units. Securing accountability across these structures becomes a real challenge when each has its own budget and priorities. Work processes add an additional layer of complexity as they cross functions and business units. Up, down and across, business interactions make it difficult for managers and employees to know whether their actions have impact, or what other changes are impacting workflow. As a result, assigning accountability for actions good or bad is difficult.

**Second, as Ron Ashkenas writes "people work hard to avoid it"** ([HBR Blog](#)). Since kindergarten, we have been taught failure is bad, and that continues to be the case for employees in most organizations. It is not surprising that employees will pursue all avenues (reduce the



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**“Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion.”**

Jack Welch, Former  
CEO General Electric

project scope, involve others to share blame, make resource requests that won't fly, etc.) to evade accountability and risk putting their reputation on the line.

Accountability is hard to secure, but it can be done. Here are few suggestions to help your strategy execution:

1. **Focus on progress not failure.** The goal is to achieve the strategy, so you need to create a positive climate, which assumes people want to do the right thing.
  - Communicate why the employee's contribution is important to the organization, and how its achievement will make a difference. To commit, we need to believe in something bigger than just ourselves.
  - Make it clear who is accountable for what and how results will be measured.
  - Meet regularly to identify potential challenges before they become a major problem.
  - Re-prioritize responsibilities and tasks to allow the employee or team to complete the assignment. Show your commitment to the assignment by being supportive.
2. **Appoint leaders to initiatives and processes that cut across the organization.** They can have end to end responsibility for achieving agreed to results, and establishing sole accountability for cross-functional activities.

Accountability can be elusive, but it is critical to successfully executing your strategy. It's worth the effort to make accountability happen. What's your experience?

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Albu consulting is a strategy management consulting firm focused on engaging and energizing leadership teams to formulate robust business strategies and follow through on execution of key strategic initiatives. Our mission is to help our clients achieve and strive to exceed all their business objectives. We do this by establishing strategy management as an organizational competency and part of everyone's day-to-day responsibility. We work collaboratively with goal driven, proactive CEOs of middle market companies that are open to new ideas and passionate about increasing the value of their businesses today and tomorrow.

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