Accountability: Taking Ownership of Your Responsibility
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More and more managerial challenges require leaders to be accountable—to take initiative without having full authority for the process or the outcomes. Accountability goes beyond responsibility. Whereas responsibility is generally delegated by the boss, the organization, or by virtue of position, accountability is having an intrinsic sense of ownership of the task and the willingness to face the consequences that come with success or failure.

Executive Summary
An increasing number of organizations are putting in a lot of effort to measure engagement and foster empowerment in order to develop a culture of accountability—taking ownership of projects, processes, and problems that cut across lines of position and formal responsibility. The role of managers is to create an environment in which acting with greater accountability is rewarded and something that is not to be feared. To do so, managers need to provide five key elements.

The first is support, which needs to come from three levels: senior leadership (organizational), the direct supervisor, and the work team.

The second component is freedom. If there is too much direction from the top or from the immediate supervisor, the individual will have no ownership of the process or the results. The employee needs freedom to decide how to achieve the goal or task.

Information is the third element. Whether it is from the supply chain, the customer value chain, or the internal information system, managers need to have access to data in order to make sound decisions that they are willing to stand behind.
Resources are the fourth component. To be accountable, managers need to believe that they have enough resources to succeed. Lacking the necessary resources can undermine feelings of accountability.

The fifth and most important element is goal and role clarity. People need to know to whom they are accountable and for what, and they need to be able to balance accountability for both the process and the results.

In the final analysis, a culture of accountability is one that provides a free flow of information, works to secure viable resources, keeps fear to a minimum, rewards risk taking, and treats mistakes as learning opportunities and not career-ending events.