

Who Is To Blame?

When something goes wrong in an organisation there is all too often the cry, "Who's to blame?" It is as if there can be a single point of failure in a large, complex organisation, and that all that has gone wrong can be attributed to an individual. Perhaps there has been a situation of fraud, negligence or gross misconduct in which case some person(s) may be easily identified as contributing to the situation. However, even in such clear situations, there are often systemic factors supporting or aiding the guilty. Usually the situation is not so clear, the problems less defined, but organisational politics and scapegoating demand someone be blamed. If someone can be blamed for a situation then it redeems and relieves everyone else, and the organisation can carry on in the false belief that the issue has been dealt with... until it occurs again.

I am aware of organisations where being placed in certain roles is like a death sentence. Wait a year and that person will be found at fault and will exit the

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Abstract

Rather than finding and blaming an individual when something within an organisation fails, organisational learning is enhanced by taking a systems approach.

Keywords

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That is one who is to blame!

organisation. The flip side to that are those positions that, no matter who is in the role, are recognised and rewarded for their valued contribution. Both types of role, forever guilty or perpetually successful, regardless of who fills them, suggests systemic issues rather than the contributions of an individual.

Whenever blame is sought, there is a problem of irresponsibility. Rather than attributing blame, it is better to seek systemic solutions. Everyone needs to honestly

ask, “How have I contributed to this outcome?” This approach does require time, effort, responsibility, and team commitment to improved group outcomes. The approach has the potential for getting toward the root of issues and better appreciating the complexity and interrelationship of functions across the organisation. With that understanding it is harder to blame a single element, and the development of organisational wisdom becomes possible.

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 3 (Pivotal Life Concepts) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [*Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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