

**Promoting Accountable Leadership Through Human Resource Management**

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Master's Program in Human Resource Management

HRM 596: Master Thesis

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May 23, 2022

### **Abstract**

One of the main challenges organizations are facing nowadays is the need for accountable leaders. This study aims to determine what accountability in leadership or accountable leadership means and how it can be promoted through Human Resource Management (HRM). The study was carried out as a literature review of existing research with regard to accountable leadership. From the review it was identified that whilst there are many definitions and concepts of accountability in leadership, there is agreement on the way accountable leaders act and on the importance of having such leaders to influence the business' success. Overall, the literature suggests that organizations should work on building accountable leaders and that accountability in leadership can be promoted through different functions of Human Resource Management, including training and development, performance management, compensation and rewards management, as well as the general building of an environment of trust, support and accountability. This paper could assist organizational leaders understand what accountability in leadership means and the importance of being accountable. It can also aid organizations and HR professionals in finding ways to create and promote a culture of accountability within their organizations. Future research building on the current findings can seek to identify the best HR practices that organizations are following to promote accountability in leadership and to construct an HRM-related accountability system that HR departments in organizations could adopt.

*Keywords:* leadership, leader, accountability, leader accountability, promoting accountability, human resource management

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## Introduction

To be considered as a leader, one should be able to influence, encourage others and eventually build trust. As Vince Molinaro noted in his 2016 book *The Leadership Contract*, the fundamental challenge organizations face nowadays is the desperate need for accountable leaders (Molinaro, 2016). Roger Connors, co-founder and former CEO of Partners In Leadership, states that there is a crisis of accountability in organizations. He believes, however, that “when properly approached, accountability can really be the low-hanging fruit for optimizing organizational performance and accelerating organizational change efforts” (Gomez, 2019). According to the Landmark Workplace Accountability, 85% of the people who were surveyed lacked clarity on the company's expected outcomes, 93% were unable to align their work or take responsibility for desired outcomes, and 84% blamed leaders' behavior as the single most important factor influencing responsibility in their organizations (Gomez, 2019).

Accountability has evolved from a once-restrictive form of financial and management accounting that was the domain of more economically connected disciplines to a more encompassing term that takes many shapes and is influenced by a range of circumstances (Mero et. al., 2012; Messner, 2009; Sinclair, 1995; Roberts, 1991). More recently, a strong correlation has been discovered between performance, behavior, and accountability (Patterson, 2013; Mero et al., 2012; Frink & Klimoski, 2004). Many organizations, in particular, adopt the practice of being held accountable for good service, performance, and behavior (Mero et al., 2012; Sinclair, 1995). For Frink & Klimoski (2004), accountability is considered the “root of a viable social system” (p.2) and is becoming more important in more formal organizations.

Accountability necessitates the personal understanding of one's own role and responsibilities, as well as the individual performance goals, including performance standards, main roadblocks to fulfilling obligations, and the demands and means that one requires to succeed. Accountability is a word that means "ownership", and is essential at all levels of the organization. Romzek (2015) for example stresses the importance of accountability, stating that it is "fundamental to how people and organizations operate" (p.27).

As mentioned earlier, one of the most essential qualities that a leader should have is accountability (Enfroy, 2022; Standard, 2020; Patel, 2017). Effective leaders are always accountable for all of their decision making (Gallup, 2022; Ryba, 2020; Patel, 2017), striving to continually improve and develop themselves (Ryba, 2020). They seek and act on feedback, learn from their mistakes, and take action when necessary (Ryba, 2020). Accountable leaders influence others to take responsibility, win their subordinates' trust and respect, and contribute to the improvement of the organizational culture (Ryba, 2020; Standard, 2020). In the context of this study, leader accountability is defined as 'the leader's obligation to perform their duties while accepting responsibility for their actions, whether these bring success or failure, and being open about the results'.

This study will specifically focus on synthesizing the relevant literature around accountability in leadership and will examine how organizations can promote accountability through Human Resource Management practices. The next section describes the purpose of this study in more detail, as well as the structure and methodology of the research.

## **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to determine what accountability in leadership or accountable leadership is and how it can be promoted through Human Resource Management (HRM). Establishing what leader accountability means, while discovering the various definitions of accountability and what is out there with regard to accountability in leadership, helps one understand and determine how academics but most importantly organizations and HR professionals can promote the concept of accountable leadership.

## **Structure and Methodology of the Study**

This research is an extensive and comprehensive literature review on the subject of accountable leadership and the possible ways through which HRM can be used to promote leader accountability. The literature reviewed derives mostly from academic articles, journals and books. The first part of the study includes the definitions and basic concepts of leadership and accountability, as well as how leader accountability is defined. The second part focuses on the subject of accountability in leadership, explaining the dimensions of accountable leadership, and what accountable leaders do. The third part describes how accountability can be promoted through HRM. Lastly, in the conclusions section, a summary of the study and recommendations for organizations and HR professionals are provided, as well as the research limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **Definitions and Basic Concepts**

### **Leadership**

Leadership has been an “attraction” for many researchers and an ever-evolving, expanding, and investing theme (Painter- Morland & Deslandes, 2017; Chen et al., 2016). In today's competitive dynamics of organizations, leadership is one of the most important aspects of difference and relevance (Melo et. al., 2020). According to Bernard Jenkin, leadership is about building a shared understanding of objectives, of agreed plans, and of agreed ways, means and ends (Jenkin, 2014, p.87).

### **Accountability as a Leader’s Trait**

While the literature suggests various leadership styles and leaders’ characteristics, accountability is considered to be one of the essential qualities that good leaders have (Enfroy, 2022; Standard, 2020; Patel, 2017). “Leader” in this context refers to a person who occupies either a formal position of authority or an informal but widely accepted position of influence (James et. al., 2007). Good leaders take accountability for their leadership, as well as mistakes, (Gallup, 2022; Ryba, 2020; Patel, 2017)) and are always striving to improve and develop themselves (Ryba, 2020). They seek and act on feedback, learn from their mistakes, and take action when necessary (Ryba, 2020). Effective leaders recognize the value of supporting and developing individuality while still comprehending organizational structures and the need to adhere to rules and policies (Patel, 2017). Leaders who hold themselves accountable win respect from their people, model integrity and professionalism, while also fostering trust among team members and contributing to the improvement of the organizational culture (Ryba, 2020; Standard, 2020).



## **Accountability**

There are multiple definitions of accountability over a variety of different contexts. Blagescu & de Las Casas (2005), Bovens (2007), and O'Dwyer & Unerman (2007) define accountability as a relationship that is based on some people's commitments to demonstrate, review, and take responsibility for performance, both the results accomplished in light of agreed-upon expectations and the means utilized, and as something that encompasses morals, rights, and responsibilities. Accountability is also defined as being compliant and reaching one's personal responsibilities, feeling obliged to another person, and having to justify one's actions to others (Rutkowski & Steelman, 2005).

The Oz Principle, according to Connors et al. (1994), defines accountability as the attitude of always questioning, "What else can I do to improve my situation and get the results I want?". "Seeing it, owning it, solving it, and doing it" is the method. It necessitates a level of accountability that includes creating, keeping, and anticipating personal commitments. It's a viewpoint that prioritizes current and future efforts over reactive and historical explanations. The practice of "making, keeping, and aggressively answering for personal commitments" is critical to establishing responsibility in the workplace. Personal accountability, in the end, implies that people individually See It, Decide to Own It, Work to Solve It, and finally Commit to Do It. (Connors et. al., 1994)

Jenkin (2014) states in his article that accountability should not be about looking for someone to blame when things go wrong, but rather empowering people to carry out their tasks while ensuring that they understand what and how they should be doing and how important these tasks are for the achievement of the agreed outcome.

Finally, the following definition of accountability was offered by Frink and Klimoski (1998): “the perceived need to justify or defend a decision or action to some audience which has potential reward and sanction power, and where such rewards and sanctions are perceived as contingent on accountability conditions” (p. 9).

### **Personal, Organizational and Financial Accountability**

The Oz Principle mentioned above defines three main classifications of accountability systems. The first one, personal accountability, is described as the willingness to claim ownership of one's actions (Connors et al., 1994). The second and not so relevant to this study is financial accountability which involves the assessment of an organization's success based on financial gain or loss (Connors et al., 1994). Organizational accountability, which is the third classification of accountability systems, is defined as “the agreed upon communication standards that measure an organization's success or failure” (Thompson, 2016, p.26; Connors et. al., 1994).

Considering that this study focuses on leaders' accountability, the system that relates to this subject is personal accountability, which, according to Kouzes and Posner (1993), is the starting point of leader accountability. This issue will be further discussed later on.

### **Felt Accountability**

Another useful definition worth noting here is the notion of "felt accountability." (Laird et al., 2015, p.89) Felt accountability and its impact on the desired outcomes and performance of people inside an organization is highlighted by Laird, Harvey, and Lancaster (2015). Wikhamn & Hall (2014) support this by describing felt accountability as an "essential component of the workplace" (p.458), citing reasons such as providing "guidance &

direction" (p.458), establishing "role expectations" (p.458), and clarifying "performance & behavior" (p.458) criteria as some of the advantages of having it in place (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014). Felt accountability relates to performance being reviewed and assessed by an audience and is defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of the enforce mechanisms of accountability inside an organization, which may alter according to the individual's observed reality (Laird et al., 2015; Wikhamn & Hall, 2014). Hall et al. (2006) define accountability as "an implicit or explicit expectation that one's decisions or actions will be subject to evaluation by some salient audience(s) (including oneself), with the belief in the potential for either rewards or sanctions based on these evaluations" (p.88).

A number of studies have been undertaken to investigate the relationship between felt accountability and job satisfaction; however, the results have been mixed, and no conclusive conclusion on the impact of accountability on job satisfaction has been reached (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014; Hall et al., 2006; Laird et al., 2015, Thoms et al., 2002 and Breux et al., 2009). The significance of such findings shows that people view accountability differently and that the obligations placed on people as a result of accountability can be understood in a variety of ways, which can lead to contradictions (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014). This is especially difficult when examining issues that influence workplace accountability. The acknowledgement of an individual's perception of accountability could be recognized as another issue to consider while holding someone accountable. Bovens (2007) backs up this claim, stating that accountability is an "elusive concept" (p.448) and that the idea of accountability varies depending on the individual.

Wikhamn and Hall (2014) notice the importance of social context in the successful implementation of accountability within organizations. When holding someone accountable for their performance, behavior, and actions, negative and positive associations in relation to

accountability have a major impact (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014; Thoms et al., 2002; Hall et al., 2006).

### **Informal and Formal Accountability**

Within an organization, there are two types of accountability: formal and informal sources of accountability (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). Formal accountability entails the establishment of formal procedures within an organization's system of accountability and the use of mechanisms such as “formal reporting relationships, performance evaluations, employment contracts, performance monitoring, reward systems (including compensation), disciplinary procedures, supervisory leadership training, personnel manuals, etc. (Frink & Klimoski, 2004, p.3)”. Informal accountability, on the other hand, pertains to the use of mechanisms but those who are not necessarily part of formal policies and procedures, such as the norms and values of the organization, the corporate culture and the interpersonal relationships within an organization (Frink & Klimoski, 2004; Romzek et al., 2012).

#### ***Informal Accountability***

While it is acknowledged that informal accountability mechanisms exist, little is known about their impact and influence on total accountability of personnel in a company (Romzek et al., 2012; Frink & Klimoski, 2004; Sinclair, 1995). Willems & Van Dooren (2011) highlight the "promising nature of new 'horizontal' forms of accountability" (p.510), which seems to concentrate on softer, invisible aspects. Romzek et al. (2012), on the other hand, underline the problematic nature of informal accountability, emphasizing on the implicit nature of the expectations set and on the fact that it is less transparent.

### *Formal Accountability*

The majority of existing academic research focuses on formal accountability structures within businesses (Hall & Ferris, 2011). The concept of formal accountability is made up of a number of elements. Systems that monitor and control activities, behavior, and performance, as well as the mechanisms that make up the systems and the managers who implement and execute them, have all been developed. These formal accountability frameworks typically follow a more traditional hierarchical structure (Willems & Van Dooren, 2011; Rus et al., 2012; Sinclair, 1995).

When employed in isolation, formal accountability systems and their reliance on formal processes and sanctions, according to Willems & Van Dooren (2011), are "inflexible" and "formalistic," (p.510) resulting in an inability to fully ensure accountability in practice. Despite this, there is substantial evidence supporting that such systems improve performance, and the concept of perceived accountability has a considerable impact on behavior (Steinbauer et al., 2014).

Laird et al. (2015) emphasize the potential of formal accountability systems to eliminate any ambiguity by clearly identifying the relationship between performance, actions, and behaviors, as well as the incentives or punishments that may be imposed as a result. Such arrangements appear to make it more difficult for individuals to accept credit for successful accomplishments and to delegate blame for failures (Laird et al., 2015).

### *Manager Accountability*

When looking at formal accountability, it can be difficult to distinguish between manager and system accountability because managers or persons with a certain level of seniority may be enforcing or exploiting the system's accountability mechanisms (Joannides,

2012; Messner, 2009; McKernan, 2012; Roberts, 1991). However, the manager's relationship with their subordinate must be taken into account. To what extent is a favorable outcome based on the relationship between the individual and the management or on the control imposed by the manager when considering the influence of accountability on behavior and performance? (Mero et al., 2012; Bovens, 2007). Control and monitoring are frequently thought to be the most effective ways to develop and maintain an accountability system (Mero et al., 2012; Bovens, 2007; Mansouri & Rowney, 2014), however, Mansouri & Rowney's (2014) recent research suggests that control mechanisms may not always be "mechanisms for accountability" (p.50).

According to Roch and McNall (2007), accountability is defined as the desire to satisfy the person to whom one is answerable by giving them the response that the individual believes the person wants. The concept of valuing the superior or individual to whom the person is providing an account is mentioned by Mero et al. (2012). Both sides of the relationship must be addressed when determining the influence of a manager's accountability. Individual accountability can also be altered purely by the manager's monitoring and supervision of the individual, which "reinforces individual answerability for performance" (Mero et al., 2012, p. 1628).

Mero et al. (2012) found that managerial behavior supports employees' need to understand organizational standards, and that workplace monitoring and control does have an impact on employees being held accountable for their actions, behavior, and performance. Managers are the "most proximal audience" (p. 1646) to their staff, according to Mero et al. (2012), and thus the most influential when it comes to accountability. Joannides (2012) emphasizes that the optimal form of accountability entails the individual explaining, justifying, or giving an account of their actions, decisions, behavior, or performance to a

higher authority in person. When contemplating influence, power adds an interesting dimension to accountability (Rus et al., 2012). Hierarchical accountability systems ensure that managers have some influence when holding people to account, but they may compromise the accountability relationship's validity (Rus et al., 2012).

Manager accountability takes on a new dimension according to Stewardship Theory. While it is primarily focused on motivation, it directly supports the idea of individuals aligning with managerial objectives rather than being driven by personal aspirations (Davis et al., 1997). Limited goal conflict between supervisors and subordinates may help to align value systems and foster the growth of the connection between two parties (Mansouri & Rowney, 2014). This emphasizes the concept of personal accountability to a senior individual and, to some extent, illustrates the influence managers may have when it comes to individual accountability for performance, behavior, and actions (Mansouri & Rowney, 2014; Davis et al., 1997).

Wikhamn and Hall (2014) discuss the positive and negative associations of felt accountability in their study on accountability and satisfaction: organizational support as a moderator, emphasizing the importance of what a manager chooses to recognize and whether accountability is perceived to be used positively or negatively. Consideration is given to situations where only failures are recognized when holding an individual accountable, and managers are regarded to have "excessive control" (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014, p.466) over individuals as a result of their use of accountability methods (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014). Accountability is viewed as a "stressor" in such situations (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014, p.466) and can have a detrimental impact (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014; Hochwarter et al., 2005). Managers' capacity to perceive accountability in a positive light, recognizing strong performance and demonstrating concern for an employee, on the other hand, is thought to

have a significant impact on overall accountability, regardless of the outcome (Wikhamn & Hall, 2014; Thoms et al., 2002).

### *System Accountability*

The accountability systems within organizations have been the subject of extensive research (Merchant & Otley, 2006). Most organizations, according to Hall and Ferris (2011), have some type of accountability mechanism in place. Performance appraisal systems, accounting systems, surveillance mechanisms, and computer usage (monitoring) are examples of such mechanisms, as are employment contracts, disciplinary procedures, and personnel manuals (Hall & Ferris, 2011; Frink & Klimoski, 2004). The explicit implementation of rules, processes, and policies that enable the company to monitor and manage the activities, conduct, and performance of employees in the workplace constitutes this formal means of accountability (Hall & Ferris, 2011).

Accountability systems are intended to apply governance and, in certain cases, legislate laws in order to influence the quality of the final product or manage the behavior of people and their settings (Thompson, 2012). The rules of accountability systems are frequently implicit, intrinsic, extremely comprehensive, and only a few people are fully aware of them. Some of the key elements that lead to a breakdown of communication and responsibility within an organizational structure include education and leadership levels. Business intelligence solutions, such as knowledge management (Markus et. al., 2002), make it easier to access, capture, and exchange data, as well as make accountability decisions inside businesses.

While there is no doubt that such systems have a huge impact and influence when it comes to fostering accountability in a company, they must be weighed against other systems



that may or may not be deployed (Merchant & Otley, 2006). Traditional techniques and hierarchical approaches utilized within accountability systems, according to Willems & Van Dooren (2001), are no longer appropriate for modern businesses. Because of the formal and restrictive structure of these systems, accountability is restricted in practice, weak in integration, and frequently occurring retrospectively (Willems & Van Dooren, 2011). Willems and Van Dooren (2011) emphasize the growing benefits of informal systems and emphasize the need for a more holistic approach with varied degrees of consequences. Messner (2009) also supports this by the technique of voicing concerns about present management techniques, particularly their limited nature, and calling for more "inclusive forms" (p.919) of accountability. Concerns have also been expressed about the practical and operational aspects of accountability systems, which some argue detract from the moral and ethical dimensions of accountability (Messner, 2009). While there has been a greater emphasis on incorporating social issues into accountability systems (Turusbekova et al., 2007), its total impact and comparability to other components of accountability must be considered.

In contrast, Zelnik et al. (2012), support that accountability systems can be beneficial to a company, when implemented correctly. This is also backed by Hall & Ferris (2011), who go on to emphasize the need of using systems to implement the appropriate level of accountability.

### **Leader Accountability**

Considering that this study focuses on the concept of accountable leadership and the personal accountability that leaders demonstrate, definitions of leader accountability were also researched. Chaffee (1997) defines leader accountability as "the obligation one assumes

in accepting the prerogative to lead the community in one way or another, make decisions, and act on its behalf” (p. 7). Leader accountability is defined by Wood et al. (2005) as the leader’s willingness to accept the responsibilities that were assigned to them as part of their job, to be publicly linked with their actions, words, or reactions, as well as be questioned about their beliefs, decisions, pledges, or actions. For the purposes of this research, a combination of the above definitions will be considered, and that is ‘leader accountability is defined as the leader’s obligation to perform their duties while accepting responsibility for their actions, whether these bring success or failure, and being open about the results’.

### **Accountability in Leadership**

For many years, scholars and practitioners have been emphasizing the concept of organizational leadership. An interest in the personal and situational factors of both productive and dysfunctional leader behaviors has been central to the research and observation of leadership. Surprisingly, accountability is usually only highlighted in the popular press when there are perceived gaps in accountability. Furthermore, recent corporate scandals highlight the importance of accountability for an organization's functioning and effective operation. Accountability entails an expectation or belief that a person would act in a certain way. Through accountability, individuals are assumed to be held responsible for their actions, thus maintaining social order (Frink & Klimoski, 1998).

In this section, the various ways of accountability of leadership are explained, narrowing in on understanding the relationship between leadership and accountability, how accountability in leadership exists and what being an accountable leader means.

#### **Authentic Leadership and Accountability**

According to Northouse (2010), authentic leadership has evolved as a leadership theory based on ethics and values that are desperately required in today's society. One of the theory's most compelling arguments is that authentic leadership may be built over time (Walumbwa et al., 2008). However, few academics have focused their research on how to cultivate authentic leadership (Gardner et al., 2011). In this regard, accountability has been deemed necessary to support society's core structure (Von Dornum, 1997), and recognizing its possible link to authentic leadership may provide leaders with practical insights for influencing their leadership's authenticity (Frederick et al., 2016).

Authentic leadership is still in the conceptual and empirical stages of development, but it has emerged as a prominent term in the light of the recent scandals and revived attention among researchers and practitioners (Frederick et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2011). Walumbwa et al. (2008) validated an authentic leadership measure and urged for more study to improve the theory of authentic leadership. Wood and Winston (2007) characterized accountability as a three-part concept that encompassed responsibility, openness, and answerability.

The popularity of authentic leadership reflects a need for trustworthy and accountable leaders (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Accountability can help leaders explain their behaviors and underlying reasons to their followers in a proactive manner (Frederick et al., 2016). Authentic leadership and accountability seem to be sharing many common terms and concepts, such as “discovering oneself and remaining open (Kouzes & Posner, 2011), accurately conveying self (Tonkin, 2014), reflecting on and learning from mistakes (Avolio, 2005), telling the truth and admitting mistakes (Kouzes & Posner, 2011), practicing personal transparency (Avolio, 2005), developing relational transparency (Hughes, 2005), having optimal self-esteem (Kernis, 2003), followers’ positive attribution of leader intention (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2005), and managing reputation (Frink et al., 2008; Hall et al., 2004) and impressions (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999)” (Frederick et al., 2016, p.305). In addition, many contemporary authors encourage leaders to practice both authenticity and accountability (Frederick et al., 2016; Eastman, 2014; George, 2010; Watts, 2011; Wolfe et al., 2009). According to Diddams and Chang (2012), being open about one's flaws can improve one's perception of authentic leadership.

### **The Essence of Leadership Self-Accountability**

Although the current business and management research has been showing great attention to accountability of others (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; Brandsma & Schillemans, 2013; Christensen & Laegreid, 2015; Schleiter & Voznaya, 2018), it seems that the “psychological demonstration (i.e., self) of accountability, namely accountability as an interpersonal value (i.e., self-accountability)” has not been getting so much attention (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a, p.41; Dhiman et al., 2018).

Self-accountability is considered to be a unique type of accountability that is based on a self-evaluation of one's behavior with the goal of improving it. (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Bergsteiner & Avery, 2010). Dhiman et al. (2018) define self-accountability “as the need to justify one’s actions and decisions to oneself in order to confirm or enhance a self-identity or image shaped by strongly held beliefs and values” (p. 80).

Without the presence of others in the decision context, a self-accountable leader can acquire a sense of self-accountability for their own behavior (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Pelosa et al., 2013). Self-accountability is frequently linked to “good judgment and wisdom” (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a, p.42; Castelli, 2016), and, according to Zacher et al. (2014), personal wisdom may predict a leader’s behavior and determine the quality of their effectiveness. When leaders have a strong sense of personal wisdom for a given scenario, they can hold themselves accountable for their actions (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a).

Self-accountability in the field of leadership has been studied in terms of “self-identity, performance improvement, and personal wisdom” (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a, p.42; Dhiman et al., 2018; Dose & Klimoski, 1995; Ghanem & Castelli, 2019b; Musah, 2011; Pelosa et al., 2013). Self-identity, according to Dose & Klimoski (1995), is necessary for

self-accountability since it requires consciously focusing on some element of oneself rather than external motives. Self-accountability has consequences for leadership responsible behavior because leaders examine their actions in light of important identity prescriptions. By linking appropriate behavior to identity, self-accountability can enhance self-relevance and internal drive (Dose & Klimoski, 1995). Moreover, leaders' performance seems to be improved and developed when self-accountability exists (Artley, 2001; Ghanem & Castelli, 2019b; Galindo, 2009; Mansouri & Roney, 2014). Self-accountable leaders tend to "avoid oppression and act equally with their subordinates" (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a, p.42; Mordhah, 2012), while also making choices and decisions based on ethical and sustainable principles (Peloza et al., 2013). In regards to personal wisdom, referring to the ability to consider the implications of decisions (Ackoff, 1999), it appears that there is a correlation between self-accountability in leadership and moral-cognitive growth, with self-accountable leaders demonstrating high morale (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019b). Leaders with self-accountability are expressing practical wisdom and are capable of solving organizational problems and achieving business objectives, while creating a culture of accountability (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a).

In the next section of this study, a framework for practicing self-accountability is presented. The framework is suggested by Ghanem & Castelli (2019a) with the purpose to support leaders in improving their ethical behavior.

### **Embracing Accountability through 'Above the Line Leadership'**

The authors of the book 'The Oz Principle' (Connors et. al., 1994), support that the source of an organization's success derives from its people's willingness to embrace accountability. Regardless of the scope, the most recent strategy or the texture and shape of

an organization's structure, success is not guaranteed unless accountable people, and especially the leaders of an organization, stand before those structures, systems, and strategies. (Connors et. al., 1994)

Referring to the 'Wizard of Oz', the book's authors question whether an organization's management "wizards" can help solve the accountability problem. Despite earning high salaries though, America's top chief executive officers are not known for their outstanding leadership performances but rather for their bad habit to hand off accountability to subordinates without acknowledging their own responsibility for acquiring results. The "blame game" and the endless "thirst for exposure" are just two symptoms of a widespread "responsibility avoiding" syndrome that has affected business organizations as well. When confronted with poor performance or disappointing outcomes, the majority of people in organizations today instantly begin to construct excuses, rationalizations, and explanations for why they cannot be held accountable, or at least not totally liable, for the problems. If this victimization culture and emphasis on short-term fixes over long-term solutions, immediate gains over long-term progress, total quality programs over total quality attitudes, and process over results, continue, the accountability problem will eventually have an impact on the American organizations' productivity, competitiveness, morale, and wellbeing. (Connors et. al., 1994)

Considering the above, one cannot help but wonder what the solution would be to this problem and how can organizations move 'Above the Line' of failure, excuses, victimization and helplessness, and reside by the sense of reality, ownership, commitment, problem solving, and determined action. When people and organizations intentionally or subconsciously escape accountability for individual or collective gain, they find themselves

thinking and acting 'Below the Line'. They lose their energy and willpower as they become trapped in the "victim loop", until they feel absolutely powerless. (Connors et. al., 1994)

### **'Steps to Accountability'**

To get 'Above the Line' and out of the "victim cycle", individuals are expected to climb the 'Steps To Accountability' by adopting 'See It', 'Own It', 'Solve It', and 'Do It' attitudes. The first stage, 'See It', entails perceiving and acknowledging the situation's entire actuality. Accepting responsibility for the experiences and realities you create for yourself and others is the second stage, 'Own It'. The third phase, 'Solve It', requires altering reality by identifying and implementing solutions to problems you may not have considered previously, while avoiding the trap of returning to 'Below the Line' when barriers arise. Fourth, the 'Do It' phase requires mustering the commitment and bravery to follow through with the answers you've discovered, even if they're high-risk. These four steps, fortunately, make a lot of sense - common sense, and are expected to move people 'Above the Line'. (Connors et. al., 1994).

While they may occasionally slip 'Below The Line', 'Above the Line leaders' do not remain there for long; they actively seek and provide feedback; they hold themselves to the same level of accountability as everyone else; and they want to assist others climb and stay 'Above the Line'. 'Above the Line leaders' strive hard to free those who are trapped in the "victim cycle", motivated by a desire to strengthen the human spirit. (Connors et. al., 1994)

### **Leading from 'Above the Line'**

To master the 'Above the Line leadership', and embrace accountability, leaders are expected to recognize when others are stuck 'Below the Line' and are not able to achieve



their goals, and intervene soon enough. They put their own safety and comfort at risk by looking beyond the symptoms to the root causes of the problems that arise from a lack of accountability. They recognize that changes in structures and processes frequently mask real issues, and they have the capacity to see through the haze to see things for what they are and “discern to what extent people at all levels of the organization have failed to shoulder responsibility for the quality of their own individual contributions” (Connors et. al., 1994, p.183). When they detect ‘Below the Line behavior’ and recognize that it is time to intervene, ‘Above the Line leaders’ start to coach individuals out of the “victim cycle” and help them concentrate on the right issues, in the right way. They “help people feel empowered by the concept of accountability, not trapped by it” (Connors et. al., 1994, p.190), and demonstrate patience, nurturing, and appropriate follow-up. (Connors et. al., 1994)

In the process of moving ‘Above the Line’, leaders should not go too far, pushing themselves or others to take accountability to the extreme. The Oz Principle argues that people's situations are influenced by things outside their control as well as what they do or do not do (although a person should always consider how his or her actions or inaction have contributed to current circumstances). People can also take accountability to the extreme by attempting to control others. Such people strive to push others Above The Line into a world they have created to suit their own views and prejudices, acting as self-appointed "thought police". Leaders should not try to force their subordinates to be more effective, righteous, informed, productive, friendly, braver, trustworthy, or politically or socially "correct" in any way, but rather coach, encourage, teach, offer feedback, admonish, love, and lead them. (Connors, et. al, 1994)

Another characteristic of the ‘Above the Line leaders’ is that of understanding that one cannot control everything and that not everything is and should be their responsibility.

Recognizing the “uncontrollable” factors and focusing on the controllable ones, helps keep a balance between falling ‘Below the Line’ and rising too eagerly ‘Above the Line’. After all, “being accountable means worrying about things you can do something about” (Connors, et. al, 1994, p.187). When correctly understood and implemented, accountability can provide people with a new sense of control and influence over their circumstances, allowing them to accomplish the outcomes they seek. Finally, assisting people in getting ‘Above The Line’ entails assisting them to ‘See It’, ‘Own It’, ‘Solve It’, and ‘Do It’. (Connors, et. al, 1994, p.180-197)

Leaders must be accountable for how they model accountability. ‘Above the Line leaders’ who succeed become role models for everyone in their sphere of influence. An example of such a leader is Jack Welch, General Electric’s CEO, who, according to the authors of the book, models ‘Above the Line’ accountability in his own life by admitting that he is not perfect and keeping himself and the organization climbing the accountability ladder. (Connors et. al., 1994)

In general, ‘Above the Line leaders’ are expected to model accountability and set an example, to allow people to drop ‘Below The Line’ from time to time to vent their frustrations, to recognize victim stories and ‘Below The Line’ excuses when they hear them, to use accountability as a way to empower people toward results, to expect people to coach them to get ‘Above The Line’ when necessary, to practice what they preach, to avoid focusing solely on accountability to the exclusion of everything else, and to coach people ‘Above The Line’ by listening, acknowledging, asking, coaching, and committing. (Connors et. al., 1994)

### **The Dimensions of Accountable Leadership - A Model of Leadership Practice**

In an article about accountable leadership in schools and the way a change in the social contract between schools and their authorizing agencies may alter the practice of school leadership, Elmore (2005) supports that, understanding accountability and improvement, can provide a model of leadership practice. The basic tenets of this model would include the development of internal accountability, the importance of agency, the technical and social/emotional dimensions of improvement and the distribution of leadership.

Internal accountability, according to Elmore (2005), is at the heart of accountable leadership. Internal accountability is defined as the consistency and alignment of people's ideas about what they're responsible for and how they're responsible for it, as well as collective expectations at the organizational level and the processes by which people within the organization account for what they do. When internal accountability exists, all responses to the external environment of a school or an organization are preceded by and determined by it, with the result of eliminating incoherence and atomization. Moreover, as Elmore (2002; 2004) supports, people in schools learn values and expectations primarily through practice, rather than developing new behaviors by learning new values and expectations. As a result, accountable leadership must focus on modeling common values through participation in instructional practice.

The importance of agency -both individually and collectively- is considered to be another principle of the accountable leadership practice model. Individual and collective agency are both present in schools with high internal responsibility (Elmore, 2005). Individuals who take personal and collective responsibility for the consequences of their actions have a significant impact on their immediate and extended environments. People gain

agency by working in ways that highlight the causal connection between their actions and what students learn, especially in a default culture that emphasizes lack of efficacy, passivity, and powerlessness. Agency is emphasized in accountable leadership models as a prerequisite for powerful influence in the broader environment. (Elmore, 2005)

Accountable leadership also focuses on the technical and social/emotional dimensions of improvement. Even if poorly designed, external accountability systems promote and reward development (Elmore, 2005). Improvement is both a process and a practice. It starts with instructional improvements that address student learning issues, and then moves on to obtaining external knowledge and mobilizing internal knowledge to solve those issues. It nurtures and requires practices that result in higher performance via organizational structures and processes. Improvement, however, is not something constant. Individuals' may face periods of growth, where new knowledge and practices are learnt, but also periods of stasis, consolidation and maybe deterioration. While discovering that growth is not linear and continuous, brings disappointment, it also points out the necessity of motivating, encouraging and individuals from those accountable leaders (Elmore, 2005).

The last principle that Elmore (2005) indicates, is that accountable leadership entails the distribution of leadership. While developing internal accountability and fostering improvement processes, organizations become places where leadership is distributed according to expertise. The traditional, role-based leadership models do not match the advanced types of improvement, and the significance of knowledge sharing, especially by those who intend to know more about the instructional problems their school faces, as well as the strategies that are used to solve those issues, becomes a necessity. By utilizing this expertise and distributing leadership through a focus on problem solving, organizations nurture and build successful practices, as well guarantee their improvement (Elmore, 2005).

### **Accountable Leadership “in Practice”**

According to a global study done by leadership accountability specialist Vince Molinaro, 72 percent of business executives and HR experts believe accountability is crucial for business success. However, just 31 percent of respondents are pleased with the level of executive accountability in their own companies (Pechan, 2021; Molinaro, n.d.). Taking into account how important accountability in leadership is considered by field practitioners, it would be an oversight not to include their point of view with regard to this subject.

#### **Rules Followed by Accountable Leaders**

Effective leaders at all levels recognize and act on the necessity of two-way responsibility. They never hunt for scapegoats because they hold themselves fully accountable for the success of their team. As Paloma Cantero-Gomez states in her Forbes article (2019), there are the five key principles of accountability that accountable leaders adhere to. (Gomez, 2019)

The first one is that leaders take full responsibility for decisions. Positive outcomes are heavily reliant on making the right decisions, and making the appropriate decisions requires a clear definition of who is responsible for carrying it out (roles), when it must be done (clear timelines), who will be affected by it, and who must be notified. Effective leaders examine their actions on a frequent basis, particularly those involving recruitment and promotions. Regular review processes make it easier to keep track of them and allow ample time to correct any mistakes before they cause too much damage. (Gomez, 2019)

The second principle is that leaders take responsibility for communication. Effective leaders ensure that their decisions and plans are well-understood by their followers. They

understand the value of listening to superiors, subordinates, and peers in the same way. They specify the information, inputs, and outcomes they anticipate. When misunderstandings occur, they focus on their involvement in miscommunicating their message rather than the negative role performed by their team members. Negative outcomes are owned by accountable leaders. They hold themselves responsible for the positive performance of others around them, while not tolerating non performing individuals. They are the ones that listen first and speak last. (Gomez, 2019)

Always thinking and saying, “We” instead of “I”, is considered to be the third principle of accountable leadership. Employees will not willingly align to leaders' authority unless there is a sense of trust and teamwork. Obeying a command does not guarantee beneficial outcomes. Making people accountable accomplishes this. The leader's team's faith in them gives them the kind of positive authority that makes people feel accountable. Many times, earning this competent authority comes down to small actions like thinking and saying "We" instead of "I." Workers are more motivated to work hard when they feel appreciated, according to the American Psychological Association's 2016 Work and Well-Being Survey. Ninety-five percent of those who stated their company respected them said it pushed them to achieve their best. (Gomez, 2019)

The fourth rule that accountable leaders follow is to run effective meetings. The author states that effective and accountable leaders care about resources. They begin and end on time because they believe they are accountable for other people's time and efforts. They understand that meetings should be a process that leads to increased productivity, open communication, stronger teamwork, and, most importantly, better results. Meetings are an important tool for achieving measurable results and quality standards are always established

around a clear goal and then followed up with a straightforward summary email that includes work assignments and deadlines. (Gomez, 2019)

The last point is that leaders transform problems into constructive feedback. Accountability is sometimes misunderstood as purely consequential and nearly totally post-hoc. Constructive feedback is critical at all levels and phases. Things can always be done better and accountability is a continuous improvement process that leads to perfection. Effectiveness is a skill that may be taught but must also be earned. (Gomez, 2019)

### **Promoting Accountability in Leadership through Human Resource Management**

Connors et al. (1994) refer to a widely used exercise, called 'The Broken Squares Game', to describe contexts in which people don't fear accountability and instead teach and coach each other to win whatever game they're playing. They use it to explain how joint accountability and interdependence, the lessons of 'The Broken Squares Game', are applied in the most powerful work environments (Connors et. al., 1994). While individuals accept responsibility for their own performance and outcomes, they also recognize that achieving overall goals requires collaboration and a sense of shared responsibility. Accountability works in favor of those who work in such circumstances and who understand that by taking responsibility for their own mistakes can only lead them to a better future (Connors et. al., 1994). In such environments, people spend less time and energy making excuses and more time and resources identifying problems, taking risks, and taking constructive action to fix problems (Connors et. al., 1994). Learning takes the place of punishment, achievement takes the place of failure, and victimization is replaced by accountability.

Armstrong (2006) defines human resource management (HRM) as the "strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets – the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives" (p.3). Considering that, in order for organizations to be viable, accountability should be at the heart of their structure and way of operation (Frink & Klimoski, 2004), and that the main objective of strategic HRM is to improve organizational effectiveness (Armstrong, 2006), organizations should ensure that the concept of accountability is part of their human resource management strategy.



The following section aims to present the different ways in which accountability in leadership can be promoted, what should be avoided while doing so and how organizations can develop accountable leaders.

### **A Framework for Practicing Leadership Self-accountability**

Self-accountability is critical for organizational leaders, and establishing an accountability culture in the workplace is just as important. To accomplish this, organizations should instill “self-criticism, self-monitoring, self-management, self-leadership, and moral cognitive” in their leaders' training and development (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a).

Before they can lead others, leaders must first lead themselves (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a). Within organizations, leaders' actions and behaviors can inspire and influence others. A leader's pursuit should be to learn themselves, to understand what values they have and what they need to improve (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Self-criticism can assist leaders in observing the concepts and assumptions that affect their actions, resulting in increased self-awareness (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a). In addition, the leader's self-awareness practices may lead to increased leadership effectiveness by taking into account psychological strengths and emotional triggers, as well as understanding how dark side personality traits (such as the need for approval, tendency to be judgmental, need for perfection, and control) negatively impact relationships (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Castelli, 2012, 2016; Gatling et al., 2013).

Enhancing self-monitoring in organizational leaders may help to increase self-accountability (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a). In setting where there is effective accountability, self-monitoring is considered to be one of the best behavioral precursors to boosting high-quality decision making and minimizing inappropriate conduct (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Latham & Frayne, 1989; Quinn & Schlenker, 2002). Self-monitoring can be accomplished

through feedback (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a). Feedback can assist a leader understand how people in the organization see them (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Burgoyne et al., 2004; Rothausen, 2017). As a result, input from subordinates can be quite useful in assisting leaders in improving their self-monitoring abilities (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Hager, 2012). Leaders will develop their leadership skills, communication skills, and ethical behavior when they receive constructive feedback and can adjust and improve their leadership abilities, communication skills, and ethical behavior (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Schyns et al., 2011). To assist leaders improve their self-monitoring skills, organizations can adopt the concept of 360-degree feedback (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Burgoyne et al., 2004; Hager, 2012; Rothausen, 2017; Schyns et al., 2011). This management development feedback model can increase the leader's awareness of others' perceptions and give critical information that allows the leader to self-improve, allowing for better self-monitoring and relationship management (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Hammerly et al., 2014).

Self-accountability is at the center of self-management, according to Colburn (2019), where leaders' attitudes and behaviors establish a culture of self-management and subsequently assist leaders in demonstrating self-accountability (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a). Self-management is a critical ability for leaders who want to be successful and contribute to the success of their organizations (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Strydom et al., 2015), as well as an important motivational mechanism in expanded work design (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Zeijen et al., 2018). Self-management practices can assist leaders control their own activities and improve their decision-making skill by assessing complexities and developing precise goals and tactics to handle and overcome organizational issues (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Daft et al., 2015). Examples of these practices include “recognizing organizational needs, creating personal goals, developing a plan toward achieving goals, self-evaluation of

progress and self-administered consequences based on progress toward goal attainment”

(Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a, p.49; Dose & Klimoski, 1995; Houghton & Neck, 2002; Manz, 1986; Zeijen et al., 2018).

Self-leadership practices such as behavior-focused, natural-reward, and constructive-thought can help increase self-leadership (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Manz, 1986; Van Zyl, 2014). These practices assist leaders in regulating their feelings and behaviors in the workplace in order to achieve their objectives (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Zeijen et al., 2018). The most crucial practice of the behavior-focused techniques is self-observation (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Manz, 2015). Self-observation entails a leader's awareness of why and when they exhibit specific behaviors, allowing the leader to adjust their conduct to achieve the desired outcomes. Self-observation can be practiced by taking notes on significant events throughout the day, asking feedback from others (peers, followers, superiors), and journaling (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Houghton & Neck, 2002; Neck & Manz, 2013; Zeijen et al., 2018). Natural-reward strategies are based on features of work that are naturally motivating. Using these practices, leaders will be able to reform their work in ways that make them feel more self-controlled, competent, and/or purposeful. Leaders will also be able to establish sentiments of purpose regarding the congruence of goals and naturally compelling tasks involving their well-being and values (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Manz, 2015; Zeijen et al., 2018). Constructive-thought techniques are based on the belief that by thinking constructively, leaders can modify their thoughts (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Van Zyl, 2014). For example, substituting dysfunctional thoughts with more functional ones can help a leader's self-efficacy, perseverance, and challenging goals, all of which can lead to enhanced leadership effectiveness (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Manz, 2015).

Cognitive moral development theory (CMD), as proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), supports that individuals go through a series of moral reasoning phases that serve as the foundation for their ethical behavior (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a). In terms of leadership, leaders assess the morality of activities based on their prior knowledge of justice at each stage (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a). Leaders with more moral knowledge and experiences are able to realize moral judgment at advanced levels of cognitive–moral development (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Jones, 2009), and thus contribute to the development of employee morality (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Barron, 2015). Moral cognitive knowledge can be taught and effectively fostered (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Jones, 2009; Lind, 2016; Schlaefli et al., 1985). Organizational leaders can be trained in this area to improve their moral cognitive development and moral competence. The training will help organizational leaders build healthy relationships and demonstrate concern for the organization's overall well-being (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Barron, 2015). Offering training to employees that focuses on pertinent ethical challenges, dilemma discussions, and role playing can help business owners and leaders invest in ethics training programs to boost morality (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Kavathatzopoulos, 2003; Mayer et al., 2009; Lind, 2016). They can also communicate the value of ethics by rewarding and promoting ethical managers, as well as serving as ethical role models (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019a; Mayer et. al., 2009; Stevens & Brownell, 2000).

### **Promoting Accountability Through Five Areas of Concentration**

People are intrinsically motivated to keep their promises for a variety of reasons, none of which include being forced to do so. By developing an organizational culture that fosters and cascades accountability through five areas of concentration, leaders may inspire employees to take more responsibility.

According to Gallup's research and consulting experience, one way that accountability can be promoted is by defining what people are accountable for. All employees need to know what the expectations are and on what accountabilities -short term or long term- they should focus on so as to achieve business goals and support the mission, values and purpose of the organization. (Robertson & Dvorak, 2019)

Another way of promoting accountability is by setting and cascading goals throughout the organization. Managers should assist employees in setting measurable, specific goals that are aligned with their individual roles once they have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Most employees should be given metrics to help them determine whether or not they are meeting the organization's objectives. Subsequently, leaders should make it a priority to keep everyone informed about how their individual contributions and triumphs affect the organization's goals. (Robertson & Dvorak, 2019)

The third way is to provide updates on people's progress. Customer or employee surveys, ongoing project updates, key listening posts with important stakeholders, or a combination of these can all provide feedback. However, frequent talks between managers and staff are the most effective kind of feedback. Managers should not ask themselves if they have all the data while writing a progress update, but rather if they have the correct data, which is performance-oriented data. (Robertson & Dvorak, 2019)

Aligning development, learning and growth, is considered to be another way of strengthening accountability in people. Organizations must give opportunities for people to improve, learn, and grow, whether through talks between management and employees or as part of a continuing developmental path. Managers that focus on employee development

assist employees in overcoming obstacles that impede them from meeting goals while learning and growing in their roles. (Robertson & Dvorak, 2019)

Finally, to enhance accountability, it is important to show that people's progress and success is recognized and celebrated. Praising good work, celebrating small wins and learning from them encourages employees to go beyond their comfort zones and establishes accountable role models for others to emulate. (Robertson & Dvorak, 2019)

### **What to Avoid in the Process of Promoting Accountability**

While leaders may understand the importance of holding individuals accountable for their actions, many fail to do it effectively. In an effort to promote accountability, people think that others will do the right thing and track their own progress automatically (Connors et. al., 1994). As a result, leaders do not ask for regular reports and eventually miss the opportunity to give feedback on time and prevent some situations. When receiving that report, though, leaders may make another mistake which is to avoid any unpleasant confrontations that may arise as a result of a poor report, because they fear that this might harm the relationship with the person (Connors et. al., 1994). Assuming that particular issues are simply too difficult for some people to overcome, and therefore choosing to ignore instead of confronting them is something that leaders should not be doing (Connors et. al., 1994). Moreover, by accepting excuses instead of the truth, even though leaders may know what is going on, will not mediate the problem but rather give people the illusion that they are getting away with something without taking true responsibility. Another thing that leaders may miss is to clearly communicate what the expectations and goals are, what the purpose of accounting is and how important reporting for progress is (Connors et. al., 1994). Allowing other obligations to occupy all of their time and not putting regular accounting at the top of

their priority list is also something that sabotages accountability. Finally, leaders who fail to coach others effectively towards the desired goals or think of teaching accountability as something that difficult and tedious for those involved, are, in the end, the ones who undermine the existence of accountability (Connors et. al., 1994).

### **Developing Accountable Leaders**

While executives' leadership and their performance and accountability standards may be products of human attributes and hence not totally teachable (Allio, 2005; Van Wart, 2003), researchers agree that training can help create a significant amount of managerial knowledge and capacity (Lee & Suh, 2018). In addition, when leaders are held accountable for feedback, they are more likely to use it to enhance performance (Aziz et al., 2015; Allen & Dennis, 2010; Hall et al., 2004; McCall, 2002).

Taking into account what literature suggests regarding the promotion of accountability in leadership, the first step that organizations and HR departments should take is to ensure that leaders are aware of what accountability is and how important it is to embrace and promote it. Leaders might benefit from training in certain skills and abilities to better grasp what it means to be accountable and how to exhibit responsibility. By incorporating accountability into a leadership development program, leaders at all levels will learn how to keep promises and understand the value of being dependable and trustworthy in others' eyes (Pechan, 2021). Managers can also benefit from leadership development by learning how to create and express expectations, as well as how to hold their direct reports accountable for the outcomes they commit to.

Providing business leadership education is considered one of the two leadership practices that organizations can use to raise awareness of the importance of preserving

organizational integrity capacity as a strategic asset, as well as the importance of developing accountability that leads to balanced moral decisions at both the microeconomic operational and macroeconomic strategic levels (Petrick & Quinn, 2001). The more company leaders and other stakeholders understand the nature and value of accountability, the more likely they are to work together to nurture it and avoid the negative consequences of victimization.

Corporate leaders can also hold themselves accountable for principled, balanced decisions in internal and external work situations by learning to apply the judgment integrity framework to internal business policy decisions and external strategic partnership decisions (Petrick & Quinn, 2001).

The second practice that organizations can follow is to expand the scope of business leader accountability by including the regular application of social and environmental accounting and auditing processes, as well as transparent public disclosure of the outcomes (Petrick & Quinn, 2001). In many countries, the social and environmental accounting literature (SEAL) is now sufficiently developed to generate auditing and reporting mechanisms that are responsive to changing patterns of civil accountability, such as The Global Reporting Initiative and the Earth Charter (Petrick & Quinn, 2001; Zadek, 1998; Zadek et al., 1997). The firm's corporate credibility and reputational capital are enhanced by the transparency and responsiveness of this process of building stakeholder interactions around basic non-financial as well as financial values. The development of integrity capability as a strategic asset of the organization is implicated by this broader notion of business leadership accountability (Petrick & Quinn, 2001).



## Conclusion

Having accountable leaders in an organization should not be taken for granted but rather considered as a privilege. Research has shown how crucial accountability is for organizations and the impact it has on the way they and their people operate. Given the extensive literature review was carried out, various definitions and basic concepts of leadership, accountability and leader accountability were identified. In the section “Accountability in Leadership” the various ways of exercising accountability in leadership were presented, while focusing on understanding the relationship between leadership and accountability, how accountability in leadership exists and what being an accountable leader means. The next section of this study described the different ways in which accountability in leadership can be promoted, what should be avoided while doing so and how organizations can develop accountable leaders.

Taking into account the initial purpose of this study and what has been identified, this final part of this study aims to share some recommendations with organizations and HR professionals who work towards promoting leader accountability in their organizations. In addition, the research implications, recommendations for future research and research limitations are presented in the following pages.

### Recommendations for Organizations and HR Professionals

Promoting accountability in leadership should be one of the top priorities that organizations and HR professionals set in order to improve both their people’s and organization’s performance. Accountability in leadership can be promoted through various functions of Human Resource Management, including, but limited to, training and development, performance management, compensation and rewards management. Business

leaders and HR departments should define what accountability means to their organizations and understand how having accountable leaders can impact the success of the organization. They should also focus on building an environment of trust and support, while they themselves are serving as ethical and accountable role models.

Just like with every employee, organizations should define what leaders are accountable for and clearly communicate those expectations and accountabilities that are needed to achieve business goals and support the mission, values and purpose of the organization. This could be achieved by incorporating a presentation of the organizational values and objectives in the leaders' induction program as well as providing people with job descriptions that explicitly define what their responsibilities are. In addition, the policies, standards and agreed code of conduct should be communicated from the beginning to ensure that everyone is on the same page and knows what is acceptable and not.

Another way to promote accountability is to incorporate accountability in leadership development programs. By instilling "self-criticism, self-monitoring, self-management, self-leadership, and moral cognitive" in their leaders' training and development, organizations can support leaders in practicing leadership self-accountability, and by providing ethics training programs they could boost their leader's morality. Organizations must give opportunities for leaders to improve, learn, and grow, as well as being coached and advised when needed.

After setting measurable and specific goals that are aligned with the leaders' individual roles, organizations should decide on the best way to monitor their people's performance. Adopting the concept of 360-degree feedback is considered to be one way to do it as this will help leaders understand what others think of their leadership style and how it can be improved. Asking for regular reports while allowing people the time to put regular

accounting at the top of their priority list is another way to ensure that leaders are right on track, they do not offer excuses and that, when needed, an unpleasant confrontation will be justified, depending on the progress they are displaying. On the other hand, organizations should provide updates on people's progress. Customer or employee surveys, ongoing project updates, key listening posts with important stakeholders, or a combination of these can all provide feedback. However, frequent talks between managers and staff are the most effective kind of feedback.

Showing that people's progress and success is recognised and celebrated, and connecting being ethical and accountable to the organization's compensation and rewards system, can definitely impact the way people think of accountability and increase the levels of accountability in leadership.

Finally, another way to promote accountability is by including the regular application of social and environmental accounting and auditing processes, as well as transparent public disclosure of the outcomes.

### **Research Implications and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study could assist leaders understand what accountability in leadership means and the importance of being accountable to themselves, their subordinates and the organization in which they are working. Organizations and HR professionals can also benefit by learning about the various ways accountability can be promoted and question whether they have been embracing accountability and developing their leaders the right way.

Despite having access to adequate literature regarding accountability in leadership, the number of studies that focus specifically on *promoting* accountability in leadership is way

less. Moreover, it was not possible to locate an HRM-related study that was specifically aimed at helping HR professionals understand how they can promote leader accountability.

This is definitely an important research venue that can be pursued in the near future.

Considering that all organizations should instill the concept of accountability in leadership in their human resource management strategy, it is therefore suggested that future research should be conducted to identify the best HR practices that organizations have been following to promote accountability in leadership, with the aim to create an HRM-related accountability system that organizations could adopt.

### **Research Limitations**

This study was a literature review of the studies available in regard to accountability in leadership and the ways through which accountability can be promoted through Human Resource Management. Although useful information was collected to achieve the purpose of this research, going into the field and seeing leadership accountability in practice would help acquire more in-depth knowledge on this subject and assist in identifying the best HR practices that organizations are using today to develop accountable leaders and promote a culture of accountability. Furthermore, the lack of extensive studies on how HR departments can assist organizations in promoting accountability in leadership through specific HR practices, also noted above as a future research possibility, is another limitation of this study.

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