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EXECUTIVE COACHING SERIES

Psychology of Performance: Accountability and Authority

White Paper

08-23-10

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Organizations ask our consulting division, BizPsych (www.BizPsych.com) to assess and coach executives and managers who experience conflicts among vertical relationships; those relationships that are based on hierarchy within the company's organizational structure, as well as cross-departmental conflicts on a regular basis. These conflicts are often rooted in unclear accountability and authority for the C-level, vice-presidents, managers, supervisors and front line producers. This creates significant performance and execution problems throughout the organization.

Elliot Jaques (in his collective works) has defined accountability and authority for management at all levels. Accountability and authority define where people stand with each other within the organization and clarify appropriate communication. Authority determines who is able to say what to whom, and who under given circumstances must say what to whom and to expect compliance on prescriptive communication. In the managerial hierarchy, the manager is held accountable for the producer's results, so clearly defining authority and accountability is important. When coaching executives, it is important to define the accountability and authority behaviors that are appropriate and necessary in the vertical relationships between managers and their subordinates, and in the horizontal cross-functional relationships between people within the organization. The vertical relationships are those means by which the work that needs to get done is assigned, resourced, and evaluated; and the cross-functional relationships are those means by which the flow of work across functions is processed and improved through time.

BizPsych is the Organizational Psychology sister company of MINES and Associates, P.C. and is based in Littleton, CO. BizPsych has assisted many healthcare and other industry leaders in creating lasting change within their organizations. To learn more about the publishers, or to contact us, visit www.BizPsych.com.

Jaques noted that it is absolutely imperative that organizational leaders be clear not only about their own decision-making accountability, but they must also make it equally clear for each and every manager below them in the organization. All of these managers must also meet regularly in two-way discussions about major issues with their immediate subordinates, in order to get their help in making decisions for which the manager alone must be accountable. Even in discussions between the managers and subordinates, it is always the manager that is ultimately accountable for decisions. Even when the subordinate has more knowledge than his or her manager on a given matter and makes a recommendation; it then becomes the manager's decision to move forward with that decision.

There may be times during an organization's growth or life span when a manager may have multiple roles and/or levels that they are accountable for. The manager may be in a managerial, supervisory, and even a front line producer role on a given day if the department or work group is small enough or does not have the resources to accommodate separate levels and roles. This is commonly referred to as "down in the weeds," "wearing many hats," or "collapsed strata (time span)." This is not ideal; however, at times it may be the best one can do. For example, the Chief Physician or Chief of Medicine in a hospital or a department may be a senior manager accountable for all of the medical outcomes within the hospital. They may also directly supervise attending physicians and may even practice medicine on a front line level. Given the multiple levels, the manger/supervisor/physician has role conflicts, time conflicts, and expertise requirements that may be uneven across the three levels. This may contribute to conflicts, inefficiency, quality concerns and productivity problems.

When coaching executives and managers in professional settings the person being coached needs to answer the follow questions. How does your organization define accountability and authority at each of the roles? What impact has the clarity or lack of clarity had on your organizations effectiveness and performance? What scenario solutions can be developed to solve the organizational challenges of each role?