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Tripping Over the Toolbox

An employee is rushing to finish a task at the end of the day because there is a strict no-overtime rule.

Focused on getting to the timeclock to punch out, he trips over another worker's toolbox that was left in the walkway and falls.

Whose fault is this?

- Management
- The employee who tripped
- The owner of the toolbox
- Other?



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We Know Blame Is Toxic

- HOP tells us "blame fixes nothing"
- Safety culture demands a "no-blame mindset"
- But we need to acknowledge three realities:
 - Recognizing blame as unproductive isn't enough to eliminate it
 - When we say "no blame" we don't mean "never blame"
 - It is possible to talk about human factors and even mistakes in safety without blame!



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Where are we with blame?

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Question

Think of a time you blamed someone for something that went wrong.

Why do we find it easy to blame others?

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Question

Think of a time when you were blamed for an incident.

What did you experience and how did it affect your work?



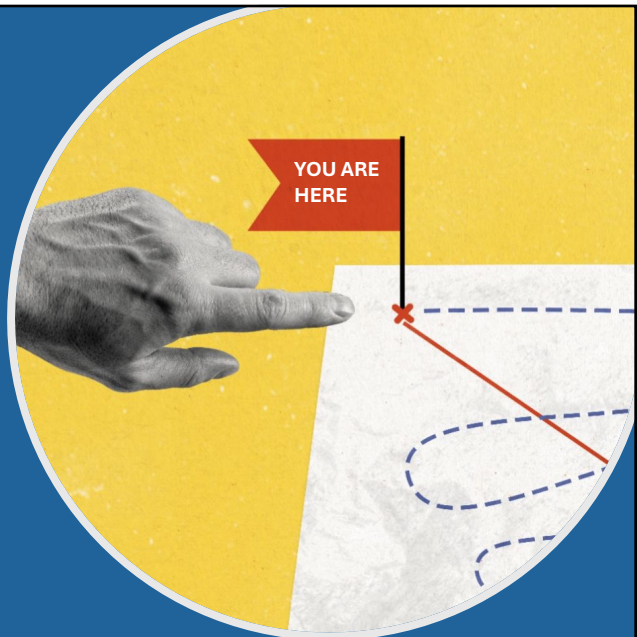
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A Common Starting Point

- We've all blamed someone
- We've all been blamed



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Symptoms of a Blame Culture



Disciplinary
measures



Social
consequences



Passive
aggression

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Disciplinary Measures

- A blamed individual is punished to discourage the actions believed to cause the incident.
- Punishment is also used as a warning sign for others: don't make mistakes or this will happen to you, too.
- "Blame, Shame, Retrain" mentality is counterproductive!



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Social Consequences

- Blame shows up as ridicule from all levels of an organization, framing an incident as an extension of an individual's personal shortcomings.
- How many times have you been in a situation where a person involved in an incident was called "stupid" or "incompetent"?



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Passive Aggression

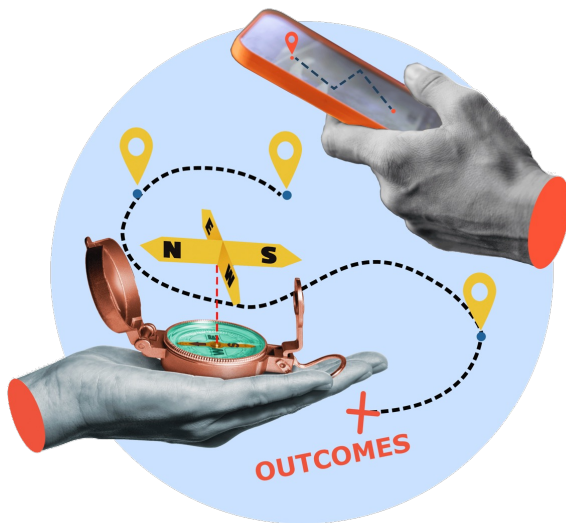
- A blamed individual being given undesirable schedules, having their communications ignored or being micromanaged.
- Passive aggression can be subtle, like reducing a part-time employee's hours, or it can be overt, like excluding an individual from team activities.



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Picture a map...

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The Cardinal Directions of Blame

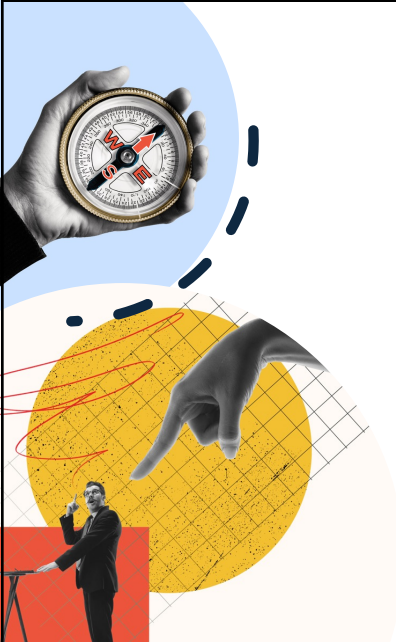
Identifying the different directions of blame and where they lead us.



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Blaming the System

- "They never fix anything around here."
- "There's no way to make them happy."
- "We can't hit our production goals with this crappy equipment."
- "How do they expect me to turn out quality parts with a machine that hasn't been PM'd in six months?"
- "The only time we hear about safety is after something bad happened."

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Blaming Someone Else

- "What were you thinking?"
- "You might be the only person in the world that could do something that dumb."
- "If third shift would actually do a little work around here things might be different."
- "If maintenance would fix some of these hydraulic leaks I wouldn't have hurt my back."

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Blaming Yourself

"How could I have done something so stupid?"

"What was I thinking?"

"I can't believe I just did that."

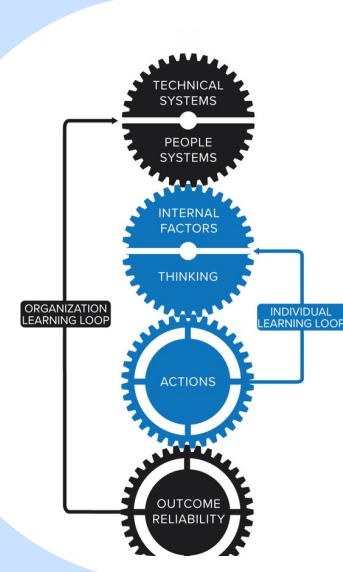
"I should have been paying better attention."

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Human Factors Framework

- In business we want **reliable outcomes** in safety, quality, productivity or other areas.
- There are two learning loops we examine when looking to improve these outcomes:
 - Organization learning loop**
 - Individual learning loop**

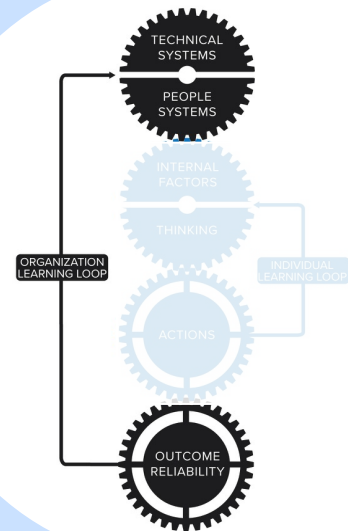


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Organization Learning Loop

- The **organization learning loop** includes:
 - **Technical systems** like equipment, maintenance, processes and even our safety management systems.
 - **People systems** including team dynamics, supervisory skill and overall culture.
- These systems are set up and managed with the goal of a **reliable outcome**. But there is another side of this equation.



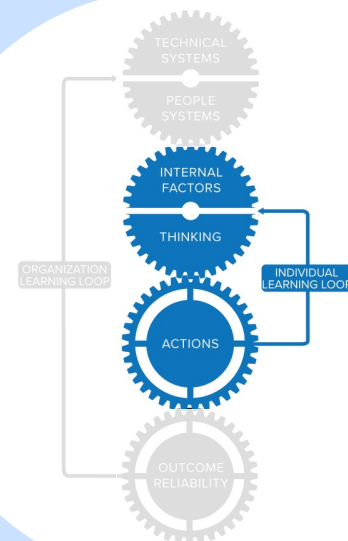
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Individual Learning Loop

- The **individual learning loop** connects the **systems** to the **outcomes** through the people that do the work. It includes:
 - **Internal factors**: distraction, fatigue, being in a hurry, feeling sick, overconfidence and many other human factors.
 - **Thinking**: conscious decision making and subconscious habitual responses, influenced by **internal factors**.
 - **Actions**: the result of our **thinking** informed by our **internal factors**.



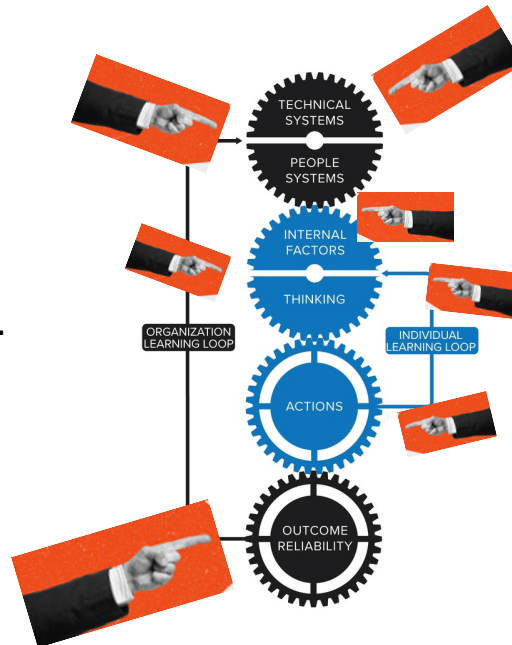
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Blame in the Framework

- There's no doubt **blame** can have an impact on our desired reliable outcomes.
- What specific areas of this framework could be influenced by **blame**?



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Blame's Effects

"Pointing fingers does not make things better, it makes you bitter."

- Candace Carnahan
Safety Motivational Speaker, Empowerment Advocate
Workplace Injury Survivor

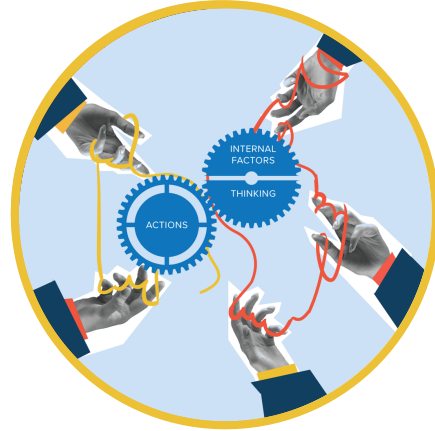
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Fear of Blame and Its' Consequences

- Reluctance to use stop work authority
- Reduced incident reporting
- Amplified human factors
- Eroded communication
- Limited transparency



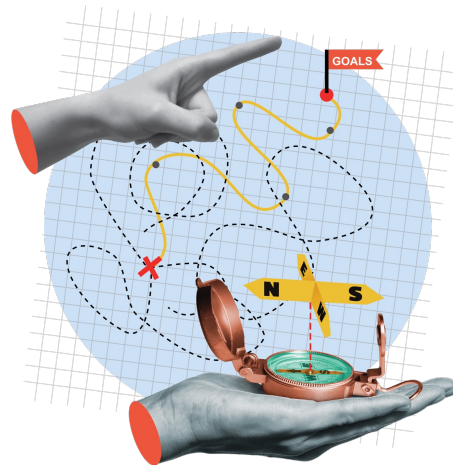
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Blame and Accountability

Untangling blame from accountability.



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Reorient Towards Accountability

Accountability considers:

- Where we've been
- Where we are
- Where we're going



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What is Accountability?

Accountability is a commitment to our established goals and outcomes.

- It starts with **expectation**
 - What needs doing, how and by whom
- It continues through **acknowledgement**
 - Incidents happen, they may shift our expectations
- It is maintained though **reorientation**
 - Despite changes we stay focused on our goal



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The Blame Tactic

Blame is a tactic that points us away from learning opportunities and from achieving our desired outcomes.

- Blame starts with **fixation**
 - What went wrong, how it went wrong and who did it
- Blame builds with **ignorance**
 - Blame ignores holistic variables like systems, actions and human factors
- Blame **enforces through punishment**
 - Punishing “who did it” with the intention of discouraging further mistakes



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The Fork in the Road

- An incident presents us with the option of shifting to the direction of blame or sticking to the accountability path.
- The easiest way to untangle blame from accountability is to **deconstruct our reaction** to an incident, then see how we can achieve our desired outcome while learning from the situation – without blame.



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Tripping Over the Toolbox, Revisited

- An employee is rushing to finish a task at the end of the day because there is a strict no-overtime rule.
- Focused on getting to the timeclock to punch out, he trips over another worker's toolbox that was left in the walkway and falls.



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Tripping Over the Toolbox, Revisited

Desired outcomes after the trip:

- Taking care of the injured employee
- Acknowledging an incident occurred
- Preventing a repeat incident
- Ensuring incidents have consequences



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Where Does Blame Get Us?



The Path of Blame

- Blaming the system
- Blaming someone else
- Blaming ourselves

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How Do We Achieve These Outcomes Without Blame?



The Path of Accountability

- Seeing the big picture
- Reorienting
- Staying focused on our goal

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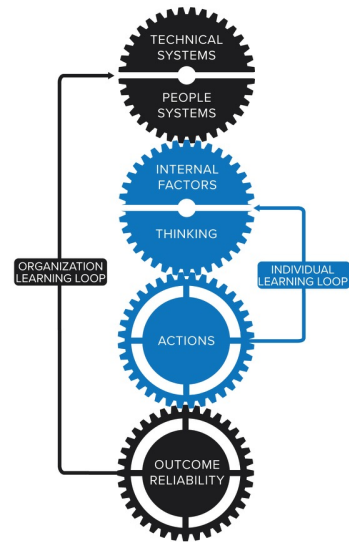
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People Are Not Hazards

By removing blame, we free ourselves to improve the entire system rather than isolating a single target for punishment.



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Committing to Accountability

Understanding accountability as a promise.

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Organizational Requirements

To commit to accountability, your organization's culture needs to have a foundation of:

- Psychological safety
- Mutual respect and trust
- Continuous improvement



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Commitment Questions

Who needs to commit?

- Organization
- Leaders
- Safety professionals
- Workers

***Accountability
cannot reside
solely on the shop floor!***



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Commitment Questions

What are we committing to?

- Outcomes
- Safety
- Communication
- Transparency

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"No Blame" Isn't "No Consequence"

Consequences are not the number one priority and may not be disciplinary.



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Making an Accountability Map

Commitment		Persons/ Departments	
Action Proposed	ETA	Status	Last Updated

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Contingencies

The accountability map:

- Keeps us focused on accountability
- Provides transparent, consistent, timely communication
- Shows us the risk of blame returning to our culture
- Is perfect for learning teams



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Being Realistic

An accountability map:

- **Demonstrates** that concerns were communicated, received and shared
- **Identifies** areas responsible for the issue
- **Displays** that initiative was taken and gives a reason for a stall
- **Contextualizes** all issues and things that are going right

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Other Navigation Tools

- Online portal
- Digital displays
- Updates during regular meetings
- Biweekly emails



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Review

Putting it all together.



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Directions, Commitment, and Maps

Blame	Accountability	Maps
Points in three counterproductive directions: • System • Others • Self	A collective commitment to: • Communication • Transparency • Safety • Outcomes	Maintain blame-free accountability by measuring: • Commitment • People • Action • Timing & Status

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Tripping Over the Toolbox, One Last Time

Who's accountable?

- The management
- The person who tripped
- The owner of the toolbox
- Other



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QUESTIONS?



THANK YOU

Scan this QR code to access no-blame accountability resources.

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