

# How to develop accountable employees



Even though many organizations now consider annual performance reviews a thing of the past, there's still a set of expectations for all employees within an organization. While there are a number of ways you keep your workforce aligned on [performance expectations](#), the best way is to develop employees who are accountable for their own results and performance.

When you have a team of individuals who take ownership of their responsibilities and are committed to achieving results, your organization will be more productive, profitable, and successful.

When it comes to performance management, [95% of employees](#) are dissatisfied with their company's performance evaluation process, and 90% believe that it doesn't provide accurate information. With the overwhelming majority being so dissatisfied, it's easy to see why accountability is an issue in today's workforce.

Let's explore what you can do to develop a culture of employee accountability.

# Develop accountable employees

[Research suggests](#) that when we feel a sense of ownership over our work, it not only influences our feelings toward our organization; it actually makes us more helpful and generous toward others as well. Developing accountable employees is about creating a culture of ownership and responsibility. When your team members feel that they have a personal stake in their work, they are more likely to take ownership of their responsibility to achieve success.

To develop accountable employees, managers and employees must work together to establish clear lines of responsibility to ensure everyone has a strong idea of what they own. Without employee accountability, your workplace will suffer from an accountability gap—which is when people aren't sure what they're responsible for, resulting in unmet expectations, bad behavior, and broken commitments.

[Research shows](#) that an employee accountability gap which lasts three or fewer days costs up to \$5,000 in lost time and resources as employees ruminate about problems instead of speaking up. When an accountability gap reaches five days or more, an estimated \$25,000 is wasted.

**Our Job Map tool helps  
your employees understand  
exactly who their role  
impacts (and how!)**

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Another critical aspect of developing accountability is to ensure that your team members feel empowered to make decisions and take ownership of their work. This can be achieved by providing them with the resources and support they need to succeed and by encouraging them to take initiative and solve problems on their own.

## Measuring impact

Having tools in place to measure impact helps employees see the effectiveness of their work and helps managers see where additional coaching is needed. These ongoing impact conversations keep employees engaged and working towards an actionable set of goals. Companies that have consistent feedback systems in place have [almost 15% lower](#) turnover rates for a reason—because their employees feel engaged and empowered at work.

Measuring an employee's impact can be as simple as checking in with other teammates to evaluate how they are contributing to the larger team. Some questions they can ask include:

- How can I better support you in your work?
- What could I have done better to help you achieve your goals?
- Have I communicated clearly?
- How could I improve as a collaborator and team player?
- Have I applied feedback you've given effectively?
- How does my work impact your work?
- What do you think are my strengths and weaknesses, and how can I improve?
- What feedback do you have for me on how I can be a more effective teammate?
- Is there anything I can do to better support you and the team?

# Creating efficiency

There's one thing that most organizations can agree on right now: resources are limited and work feels busier than ever. This makes operating with efficiency a high priority.

Efficiency and accountability go hand in hand—having efficient processes and systems in place can help improve accountability. When you have efficient processes, it's easier to track progress, spot bottlenecks, and hold individuals and teams accountable for their performance. At the same time, accountability ultimately leads to more efficiency by creating a culture of responsibility where individuals and teams are motivated to perform at their best and are willing to get their jobs done—and communicate when they aren't able to.

To foster more efficiency within your team, it's important that everyone clearly understands their roles and responsibilities, works well together, and is aligned on common goals. Using a tool like Arbinger's 3A+ framework, you can work with each teammate to establish clear expectations and regularly check in on progress. Our [Job Map](#), combined with a simple and powerful rating system that helps employees hold themselves accountable—our [3A+ Framework](#)—helps team members focus on their four (or less) key roles. Any more, and you'll sacrifice quality, efficiency, and cause burnout.

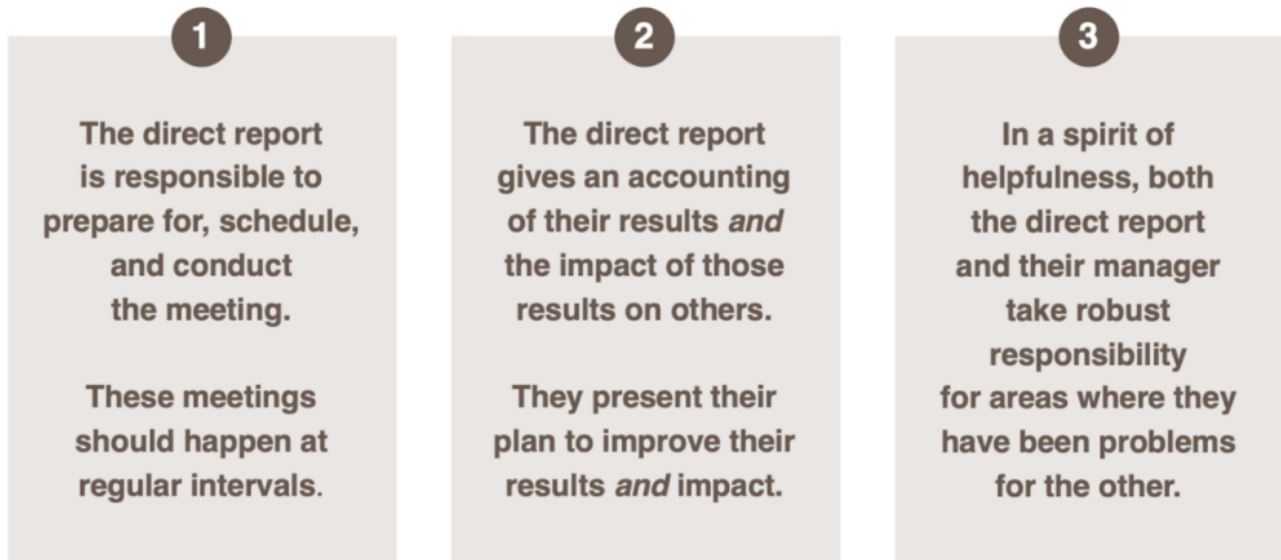
These roles and priorities can shift overtime, but there should never be more than four on someone's radar at once.

# Checking in frequently

An accountable employee is also responsible for evaluating their own performance. That means scheduling their own check-in conversations. Using the 3A+ framework, employees and their managers following the following key principles to ensure productive, ongoing conversations that are at the heart of a

shift from holding people accountable to develop accountable employees.

## 3A+ Conversations



Three things should happen when an employee takes accountability for their performance check-in:

- The employee prepares for, schedules, and conducts the check-in meeting. These should happen at regular intervals.
- They give an accounting of their results *and* the impact of those results on others. The employee presents a plan to improve both.
- In a spirit of helpfulness, both the direct report and their manager take robust responsibility for areas where they have been problems for the other.

## Navigating conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of any organization, and it's essential to have effective strategies for managing it. When conflict happens—and it will—it's important to address the root of it. Too often, conflict stems from failing to see other people as people. We get caught up in our own agendas

and forget about our collective goals.

An effective way to see conflict differently is to simply focus on facts. When we're in conflict, we tend to center our communications around the interpretations we're making, not realizing that we're speaking about our own perceptions and not necessarily about reality.



## Challenge:

Next time you're in conflict with a peer, make a list with two columns. Start by listing why you're frustrated or annoyed (what you believe to be true). On the other side, list what you know to be fact. It's a handy way to catch ourselves getting upset about things when we don't have all the information.

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One of the most effective ways to navigate conflict is to establish clear communication channels. When your employees feel like they can talk to one another, genuine conversations can take place. Part of navigating conflict is creating an environment where your team members feel psychologically safe and can share their concerns openly and honestly. Establishing clear frameworks for managing conflict also helps ensure everyone is on the same page when it comes to working through conflicts in a productive manner.

## Nurture self-awareness

When we're self-aware, we're more likely to recognize our impact on others and adjust our behavior accordingly. The root



of all working relationships starts with seeing and understanding our impact on others. This awareness of our impact on others is at the heart of the way we communicate to the way we get work done. But it's not always intuitive for us to think of others before ourselves. Because of this, self-awareness (and ultimately, self-accountability) can feel elusive. We have to start with by adopting mindset that empowers us to recognize that those around us are people who matter as much as we do.

What we really want, of course, are engaged employees who naturally hold themselves accountable. These are employees who recognize that what they're doing negatively impacts others or the organization and take the initiative to adjust their efforts in order to be more helpful.

We might think this is a dream state—that there's no way to develop an entire organization whose employees operate in this manner. Why? Because we know from our own experience that most people tend to approach their work in a self-focused way—with what we call an inward mindset. With this mindset, they see others as objects: as vehicles they can use to achieve their own objectives; as roadblocks they can blame when something doesn't go their way; or, as irrelevancies they can safely ignore because they're of no use. We call this way of seeing others an inward mindset.

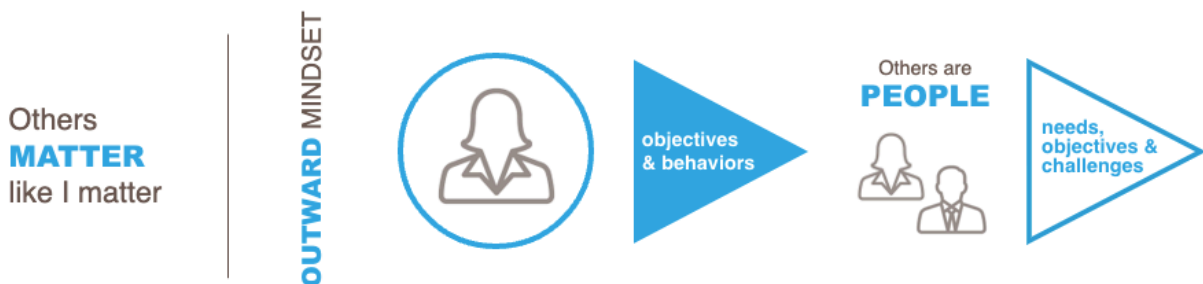


Because those who have an inward mindset tend to think about their job as nothing more than achieving their own performance objectives, they're not interested in others' needs and objectives. Consequently, they let themselves off the hook

for—or are simply blind to—the negative effects they might have on others in the organization.

## Outward mindset: Understanding our impact

As entrenched as this inward mindset might be, it is possible to awaken others to the people around them. As an individual becomes alive to the reality and humanity of the people around them, they become more curious about others' objectives, needs, and challenges. And, they become more interested in how their own work impacts the success of the people around them. Those who approach their work in this way have an [outward mindset](#) and see their work in terms of their impact on the needs, objectives, and challenges of others.



A leader can accelerate this transformation from an inward to an outward mindset by helping employees understand that their job is to work in a way that helps others be more successful—that every individual objective serves another person's or group's objectives. Some meet the needs of a manager, and others serve customers or end users. Some support peer groups or internal customers, and others enable those they supervise to achieve their tasks and objectives more effectively.

When individuals and organizations shift from an inward mindset to an outward mindset, employees focus on collective results rather than their own individual objectives. They are aware of and curious about others' needs and goals and are



constantly adjusting their efforts to be more helpful to others.

## **Using an outward mindset to develop accountable employees**

More than any format or script for performance conversations, a fundamental shift from an inward to an outward mindset transforms an employee's performance conversations with their manager. When employees rethink the meaning of their job to include impact and not just effort and outcomes, they can hold themselves accountable for what really matters.