Accountable.

A normal question in cooperation is: To whom should I go when I see a mistake or an undesired effect? Or a new challenge? No problem answering that question.

But if we talk about an accident having impactful effects and ask 'who is accountable for this?' feelings of shame, blame, and fear for being punished arise.

But when something goes wrong and everyone is looking away, or walking away saying; 'this is not my problem', this problem exists longer then necessary. Or when a new challenge pops up and no one says 'well, I will take care of it', chances for improvement and renewal fade away.

We were asked by a global company to design a module for a newly appointed Management Team on Accountability.

Responsibility, accountability and the fear of punishment.

The newly appointed Director, chairman of the MT, writes: 'A strong point on site is that when people have accepted the Accountability, they deliver. On the other hand, there are frequently situations where responsibilities are not clear or disputed and then nothing happens. Examples are work processes, permits or even operational activities.

People are aware of these situations but not able to solve it by volunteering to take ownership and support each other in turns. Maybe it is not recognized or appreciated enough as well and you only take a risk to fail if you volunteer. I often see that people push the responsibility away from them and try to make others take it. The problem or request does not go away with that and we lose time and energy on these discussions'.

What is the problem?

Being accountable is not the problem, but taking responsibility in undefined situations. Because when you are accountable you have to perform.
Accepting accountability is the problem.

A discussion goes as follows: 'This is your A' , 'You have the A', ' No It is not my A, but yours'. 'Yes, because….'. 'No, because….'. ' Yes,…..'. 'No…..'.

Is it normal in cooperation?

It is in the core of our concept of cooperation. Always the tension between taking care of my own responsibilities and serving others.
The result must always be an acceptable balance.
The time frame one wants to use is important.
A balance every moment?
Or a balance in time: a timespan of ten years, or till the next meeting.

Solutions?

Let us look at three solutions where two people have a different goal and can only use the same tool.

1**. Go on fighting**. No solution for either: none reaches the goal, or there is a kill and that blocks all cooperation for the future.

2. **Surrender/give way**: is a bad solution for you now, for the other person it can be okay, but if we meet again in the future and we both benefit, this is acceptable. If the other person says: 'Next time I will help you', it is an acceptable solution. This will only work when one trusts the other. This depends on the reputation of the other. Therefore open talk about reputations is important. Or, I just do not worried about the future and will give in now, as a gesture.

3. **Agree on a solution that serves both now**.

A discussion procedure
This procedure helps the manager to come to mutually acceptable solutions.

1. Agree on what is the problem with performance A?
2. How does performance A look by the end? Agree on that.
3. What are possible solutions to realise performance A?
4. Test the possible solutions on the outcomes. Value, select one and agree.
5. Who is going to contribute to performance A. Agree.
6. Execute.
7. Evaluate the outcome.

A training module
1. Raise awareness of the problem with 'the bridge' exercise.
2. Discuss optional actions and the consequences of different solutions.
3. Show that goal, time perspective and the 'computational thinking' skill are important. Use the 'the winning game' exercise. Discuss the applicable decision rules and reflect on all assumptions made. At the end one formulates new rules to develop and establish Cooperation.
4. Explaining the procedure for solving problems.
5. Practise with real cases.

The role of the Director, managers.
They must understand that when asking someone to take responsibility for a new performance, one has to provide the necessary means (money, time, support, feedback,….). Or, if the manager does not give any new means, to explain why.

The top manager has the means to add necessary new resources to facilitate someone taking the A and realising the performance.

Managers must learn to speak up to their manager and to negotiate their necessary means.

The goal of all these activities is to achieve a shared responsibility for solving a normal problem, and not to be imprisoned by the blaming game.

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