## Responsibility, Ownership And Accountability At Work
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My partner in this article series, Deborah Goldstein, recently gave three great tips on how to co-create living "Ways of Working," or "WoWs," with your team. To *recap*:

- *Ensure* there is clarity about which communication [01] is best for which type of communication.
- Agree on response times to [02] frustration about when a reply is *due*.
- Establish agreed-*upon* "office hours" so every team member knows how to best get in [03] *spontaneously* without any scheduling issues.

These tips are essential to get started with organising *hybrid* teams and to set up some basic structures and WoWs — and to allow for *spontaneity*, as well. What Deborah wrote about having "*living* WoWs" comes with a commitment from each and [01] team member; *namely*, to speak up when WoWs need revisiting. But there is natural resistance *toward* this *commitment*. After all, how often is there *anxiety* attached to bringing up unpopular topics because you don't want to *ruffle feathers*? How often does someone want to avoid *rocking the boat*? How often do individuals feel a sense of [02] and *exhaustion* about why it's always me who has to *bring* these topics up?

Our curiosity *piqued*. Discovering which of the above factors might *play a role* and how to invite people to participate in the evolution of WoWs to *enhance* the *effectiveness* of their team [03] intriguing. Three words jumped to mind when Deborah and I were reflecting on the above: responsibility, ownership and accountability. So I put on my "ExperiMentor's hat" and invited the collective *wisdom* of our teams to see what [04] with them when they heard the words:

- Responsibility

- Ownership

- Accountability

In the teams, we started off by creating shared meaning and understanding of these three words. As a next step, we explored how each of these words becomes "visible" when working together as a team. What [01] from these conversations was *insightful*. See for yourself:

### Responsibility

The word "responsibility" was the most [02] understood word of the three. There was the biggest *overlap* between what this word means and how responsibility can be seen and [03] in a team. A *composite* of what we heard team members say: "Responsibility is when I deliver on my promises, on time, on *spec* and with the highest level of quality possible in the [04] of time given." Responsibility can be seen when results are delivered.

## Ownership

Ownership was a more challenging word — especially for non-native English speakers. **Hence**, do not **take it for granted** that everyone understands this word in the same [01] you do, especially when working internationally! Teams said they used the word "ownership" frequently, and noticed when it was **absent**: "John Doe does not show enough ownership." "Jane Doe is [02] the opposite and takes on too much ownership." So what are we taking from that? Some have too much of it, some don't show enough of it... And so the word "ownership" is often used when it is not present in the right dose.

Since the teams had a hard time putting words to what ownership actually is, we offered to share our understanding of the word: Ownership is when someone takes responsibility for a task and feels the intrinsic [03] to **follow up** and **follow through**.

This is especially important when unexpected difficulties surface, making it clear that the task can no [04] be **fulfilled** on time, on spec or at the quality *acceptable* to deliver to the team. Ownership in action is being *proactive*.

An example of this would be when a team member speaks up early in a process and shares what is not working or what *could* develop into an issue or a less-than-ideal situation. The [01] would be someone waiting until the deadline to share the **misalignment** of the intention and the **outcome** of a task or project. Ownership is also displayed when someone on the team [02] their hand to ask for help early on in the process. Something our conversation partners didn't mention, but what occurred to us, is that ownership is visible when a team member realises potential that others have [03] to see.

## Accountability

Similar to the word "ownership," "accountability" was another difficult word — especially again for non-native speakers of English.

Accountability takes ownership and responsibility from the inside to the outside — from me to we. From individual to team. When I feel responsible and take ownership for a task, accountability is something that I receive from those [01] me, my colleagues, teammates, my supervisors. They support me when I raise my hand to ask for help, or they **nudge** me when I am **slacking**, **faltering**, off pace or losing perspective.

Now that we have established a baseline around the meaning of these words, we invite you to engage in a similar exercise with your teams. You can even take this one step [02] and reflect on what behaviours your teammates can adopt to demonstrate responsibility, ownership and accountability.

Our sense is that certain behaviours need to be linked with actions from team members and leaders **alike** either acknowledging the benefits of [03] behaviour or what *tweaking* might be necessary. How to link behaviours, actions and feedback loops in real [04] is something we are going to explore in our next article.