Credit and blame at work

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Definition

The process of assigning causal responsibility to oneself and others, for either positive or negative outcomes in the workplace, is a very important cause and effect of many other variables at the individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis

Credit and blame at work

- ➤ **Introduction**

- **Individual factors**

- **Group factors**

- **Organizational factors**

- **Conclusion**

Introduction

In the workplace, credit and blame is an integral part of:

- **Job satisfaction**
- **Turnover**
- **Lawsuits**
- **Organizational commitment and morale**
- **Work relationships and conflicts**
- **Learning and development**
- **Performance appraisals**
- **Safety and violence**
- **Promotions and raises**
- **Stock price and financing**
- **Legislation**
- **Government intervention**

The six stages of a project…

1. Enthusiasm
2. Disillusionment
3. Panic
4. Search for the guilty
5. Punishment of the innocent
6. Rewards for the uninvolved

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- **Introduction**
- ➢ **<u>Individual factors</u>**
- **Group factors**
- **Organizational factors**
- **Conclusion**

Individual factors

Benefits of inaccurate attribution

- **Minimize embarrassment, guilt, remorse, and anxiety**

- **Boost confidence, self-esteem, and sense of control**

- **Maintain one's status, rank, and reputation in the organization**

- **Avoid punishment for failures, shortcomings, and mistakes**

- **Create a simpler, more acceptable explanation for why things are the way they are**

Individual factors (continued)

Risks of accurate attribution

- Diminished confidence in one's knowledge, skills, and abilities

- Risks of diminished pride, status, rank, and reputation

- Threatening vested interests and the power structure within the organization

- Empowering rival individuals or groups within the organization

- Having to grapple with complexity, ambiguity, and responsibility

Individual factors (continued)

Risks of inaccurate attribution

- **Diminished sense of one's own integrity and true capabilities**

- **Inability to build on strengths and remedy weaknesses**

- **Reputation as being unfair, political, or agenda-driven**

- **Attrition, performance, commitment, and morale issues for peers and subordinates**

- **Unjustified focus on people rather than problems**

- **Counterproductive organizational behavior and/or retributive justice in reaction to unfair credit or blame**

Individual factors (continued)

Benefits of accurate attribution

- **Better assessment of one's own true talents and capabilities**

- **Individual performance can be improved over time**

- **Individual learning and development can be accelerated and new challenges can be met more effectively**

- **One can gain the trust, respect, and loyalty of others**

Individual factors (continued)

Individual variables that affect credit and blame processes

Self-serving bias: most individuals tend to take credit for their successes and blame external causes for failure

Actor-Observer effect: most individuals attribute others' behavior to personal or dispositional factors and their own behavior to situational factors

Individual factors (continued)

Individual variables that affect credit and blame processes

- **People who are narcissistic are more susceptible to self-serving biases, taking credit for good outcomes and blaming others for bad outcomes**

- **People who are open to experience and agreeable are less prone to inaccurate or self-serving biases in terms of credit and blame**

- **People who are depressed are more likely to attribute failures to internal, stable, and global factors**

Individual factors (continued)

Levers for change

- Recognize that trying to change the dynamics of credit and blame in an organization is complex and can be very risky

- Consider your own role in the credit and blame dynamics and ways that you might be inadvertently helping to maintain the status quo

- Explore strategies for soliciting and responding to more feedback in a non-defensive manner

- Explore strategies for holding yourself more clearly accountable to criteria that are as objective and transparent as possible

- "Look in the mirror and out the window"

Individual factors (continued)

Levers for change

- **Recognizing that there will be risk involved, explore strategies for giving more honest and candid feedback to others**

  - **Try to assign blame and credit more accurately while balancing the need to be sensitive**

  - **Carefully consider the timing and the venue when communicating credit or blame**

  - **Attempt to frame things positively when possible and change the focus from the past to the future**

- **Work to institute more objective and transparent systems for the analysis of individual, team, and organizational performance**

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Group factors

Benefits of inaccurate attribution

- **Preservation of group stability, power structure, and cohesiveness**

- **Minimize anxiety about questioning assumptions or people**

- **Maintenance of internal group pride and commitment**

- **Maintenance of group status and reputation in the organization**

- **The group avoids punishment for failures, shortcomings, and mistakes**

Group factors (continued)

Risks of accurate attribution

- **Diminished confidence in the group's capabilities**

- **Risks of hurting the self-esteem of members of the group**

- **Risks of challenging the established power structure of the group**

- **Diminished support or rewards from the rest of the organization**

- **Transparency to other groups can lead to vulnerabilities**

Group factors (continued)

Risks of inaccurate attribution

- **The group is not able to accurately assess its internal capabilities and limitations**

- **Team performance and learning can both be adversely impacted**

- **Power and rewards can be unfairly allocated, leading to more dissatisfaction and higher turnover**

- **The group can suffer from internal and external suspicion and mistrust**

- **There can be unnecessary symbolic and substantive conflicts with other groups**

Group factors (continued)

Benefits of accurate attribution

- **Better assessments of what the group can and cannot accomplish**

- **More efficient and effective team learning**

- **Increased trust, communication, and cohesion within the group**

- **The alignment of power and rewards with actual expertise and contributions**

- **Better communication with other groups**

- **Enhanced reputation in the rest of the organization**

Group factors (continued)

Group variables

- **Level of motivation to constantly align and realign internal structures and processes to meet external challenges**

- **Norms for candid communication, risk taking, asking for help, admitting mistakes, and learning**

- **Norms of transparency and a commitment to maintaining trust**

- **Not necessarily a comfortable environment, but a "safe" one**

- **The style and approach of the leader or leaders of the group**

- **The style and approach of the members of the group**

Group factors (continued)

Levers for change

- **Teams should take both an adaptive and a technical approach to challenges**

- **Select team leaders and members based on their ability to thrive in and foster a learning environment**

- **Teams should assess and improve their ability to be constructively self-critical**

- **Stop for comprehensive process checks at key intervals**

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Organizational factors

Benefits of inaccurate attribution

- **Can help the organization maintain its prestige and standing in the community**

- **Can help maintain the power structure in organizations**

- **Convince investors to support the organization and management**

- **Prevent the government or regulators from intervening**

- **Protects the pride and self-esteem of members of the organization**

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Organizational factors (continued)

Risks of accurate attribution

- **Having to confront hard facts about the quality of products or services**

- **Diminished support and/or rewards from external stakeholders, i.e.: Wall Street and investors**

- **Can challenge the power structure in the organization**

- **Lawsuits and/or government/regulatory intervention**

- **The self-esteem and status of organizational members can be negatively impacted**

Organizational factors (continued)

Risks of inaccurate attribution

- **Organizational learning is prevented or slowed down**

- **Leadership roles filled with those who are most politically connected rather than those who are most capable**

- **The organization loses focus on ensuring that internal capabilities will be configured to meet changing external demands**

- **Widespread anxiety as people fear that they might be unfairly rewarded and/or punished**

- **Less organizational citizenship behavior and discretionary effort**

- **Violence, revenge, and sabotage in response to injustices**

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Organizational factors (continued)

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- Individual factors
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Benefits of accurate attribution

- **Organizational performance and learning increase**

- **Power and rewards accrue due to merit rather than politics**

- **The organization unleashes more of its employees' discretionary efforts**

- **Social bonds and trust within the organization are stronger**

- **The organization can develop better relationships with external entities when it holds itself responsible**

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Organizational factors (continued)

Benefits of accurate attribution

- **Increased levels of organizational commitment, performance, job satisfaction, focus, and good citizenship behavior**

- **Increased levels of justice and fairness**

- **Resources spent understanding business drivers and developing strategies rather than building alliances and playing politics**

- **Relevant and realistic appraisals of individual and team performance for development, rewards, and role assignments**

Organizational factors (continued)

Organizational variables

- **Organizational history and the degree and kinds of organizational politics**

- **The culture of the organization- i.e.: the level of participation and openness, tolerance for innovation and risk taking, etc.**

- **The style and approach of leaders of the organization**

- **The style and approach of members of the organization**

- **The balance of power both within the organization and between the organization and external entities/stakeholders**

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Organizational factors (continued)

Levers for change

- **Consider the ways that inaccurate assignment of credit and blame is both a cause and an effect of other issues**

- **Select organizational leaders for their ability to foster an open, fair environment**

- **Select organizational members based on their likelihood of being able to solicit, receive, appreciate, and give candid feedback**

- **Develop cultural norms regarding credit and blame**

- **Establish the right criteria for what does and does not merit credit/blame and periodically reevaluate these criteria**

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Conclusion

- **The processes by which credit and blame are assigned are at the very center of organizational behavior**

- **Individuals, groups, and organizations that attempt to change the ways in which credit and blame are assigned must take risks in the short term in order to do so**

- **Individuals, groups, and organizations that monitor and improve the processes by which credit and blame are assigned on an ongoing basis are likely to be more successful over time**

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