



FOCUS ARTICLE

## The Accountability Principle in Oz

The path to organisational accountability outlined in the Oz Principle parallels the journey taken by Dorothy and her friends in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. In the story, the characters realise that the tools for achieving their goals were with them all the time. Likewise, achieving organisational accountability and the success that goes with it, is in large part a matter of drawing on the existing abilities and expertise of employees and empowering them to transform how they work.

### The Importance of Accountability

In The Oz Principle, authors Roger Connors, Tom Smith and Craig Hickman offer a reinterpretation of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz in which each of the major characters represents a concept related to accountability, or how individuals and organisations take responsibility for actions and outcomes. Their approach is compelling, utilising fanciful figures in the service of what can be a threatening idea. Accountability, after all, often has a strong emotional component closely associated with blame and guilt. The genius of the Oz framework is that it allows people to view accountability in terms of process and teamwork, where personal responsibility is a feature but not the focus.

The book's authors establish the difference between a healthy, effective culture of accountability that leads to **better performance** and a more punitive environment that results in a lack of success. Behaviours related to the former are "above the line", while those characteristic of the latter are "below the line". Examples of below-the-line behaviours are, unfortunately, prevalent in many organisations. They include finger pointing, avoiding responsibility, comments like, "it's not my job" or "that's not my department" and a wait-and-see attitude. Most people have found themselves in a position where either they themselves or those around them engage in some version of these behaviours.

## Introducing the Oz Principle

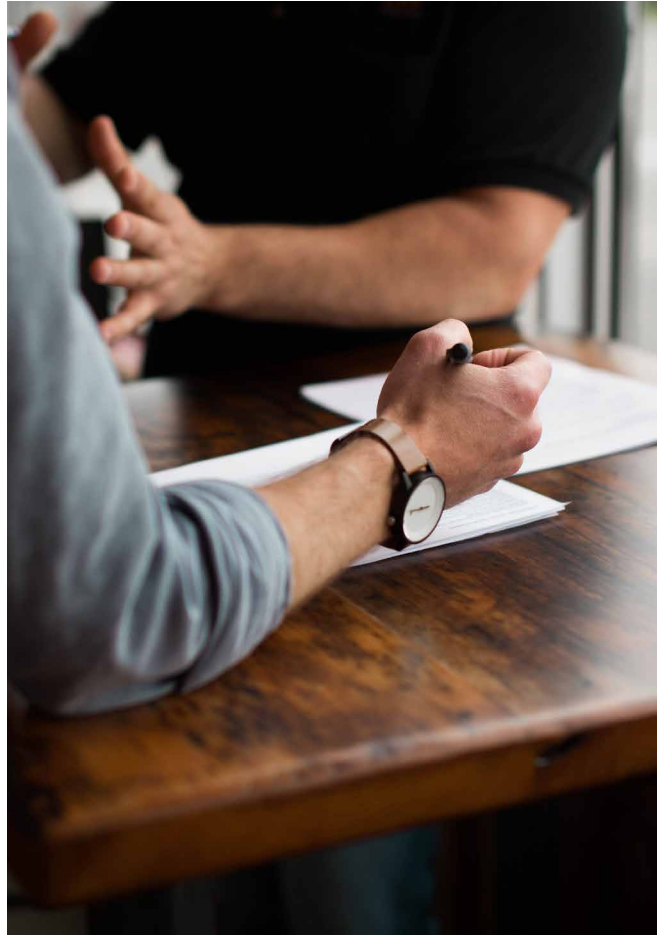
The storytelling element comes in to illustrate above-the-line behaviours and break down accountability into tangible, sequential steps. Even those unfamiliar with the story of Dorothy's quest to reach the Emerald City and enlist the wizard's help in getting back to Kansas, find themselves drawn in by the memorable cast of characters: the lion, looking for courage; the tin man, in search of a heart; the scarecrow, pursuing wisdom; and Dorothy herself, longing to be home.

Each figure corresponds to a step on the "yellow brick road" toward organisational accountability, represented by the Emerald City. The lion illustrates the first stage: see it. Like the lion, employees in an organisation where accountability is prized are called on to summon the courage to take an honest look at their circumstances. If the goal at their site is incident-free operations, then the people, processes and procedures as well as equipment have to be viewed with a critical eye and without fear of recrimination. Perhaps what this act of courage reveals is that people require more **specialised training** or targeted interventions. It could be that processes and procedures are overly complex or out of date. It may also be that the equipment requires more frequent maintenance or may simply be ill suited to current processes. Without an honest account of what stands in the way, no progress can be made toward the goal.

The tin man embodies the second step: own it. This takes heart; individuals who cultivate care and concern for their colleagues, their work, the tools they use and the outcomes they achieve will be motivated to take responsibility for or, in other words, "own" what needs improving. At this stage, those on the journey toward organisational accountability choose, together, what they can own. It can be overwhelming and even impossible to address every obstacle to safe operations at once. It is important to choose carefully and consciously which problematic aspects the team should confront first, keeping in mind what may have the greatest impact.

The scarecrow is associated with the next step: solve it. More than knowledge, this takes wisdom—the ability to understand where the solution lies, especially if it is outside the area of expertise of a particular person or team. At this stage collaboration yields excellent results, breaking down the silos that keep knowledge,

ideas and creativity from flowing freely. By communicating with people in other departments or divisions, or at other sites and even distant locations, a team may even find that the solution to a particular problem already exists.



Finally, it is time to complete the final step: do it. All Dorothy has to do at this point is click the heels of her ruby slippers together and repeat the words, "There's no place like home." At the organisational level, people are empowered by the accountability process to create a timeline and an action plan and begin to carry it out. Just as Dorothy realises that she has had the power to return home all along—since first receiving the ruby slippers upon her arrival in Oz—people often experience a similar sensation when following the steps to accountability. Seeing reality for what it is, caring enough to change what's not working, collaborating on a solution and coming up with a plan—these steps are accessible to anyone at any time.

## Creating a Culture of Accountability

In the story, it turns out that the wizard is only a man, and, in fact, practicing accountability is not magic, but a state of mind, usually achievable by shifting perspective. Glenda, the good witch in the Oz story, does help Dorothy and her friends on occasion, waking them from the soporific effects of the field of poppies, for example, and pointing out the magical properties of Dorothy's shoes. Similarly, enlisting a professional guide through the four steps can be helpful as an introduction to the accountability principle. DEKRA experts offer **workshops for leaders and supervisors** interested in more detailed instruction on how to engage with the accountability

principle. These sessions incorporate real issues and goals set by the participating organisation and conclude with a timeline and a rough roadmap toward concrete improvements.

In closing, it is worth noting that above-the-line behaviours are much more consistent and organic within a supportive culture where "considered failure" is acceptable and viewed as a vehicle for learning. Organisations where attempts at improvement are valid even when they fall short of their goals are more resilient and more likely to succeed ultimately. Leaders who create a **culture of care** have already laid the groundwork for a culture of accountability, where both individuals and the organisation as a whole can thrive.

### DEKRA Organisational & Process Safety

DEKRA Organisational and Process Safety are a behavioural change and process safety consultancy company. Working in collaboration with our clients, our approach is to assess the process safety and influence the safety culture with the aim of 'making a difference'.

In terms of behavioural change, we deliver the skills, methods, and motivation to change leadership attitudes, behaviours and decision-making among employees; supporting our clients in creating a culture of care and measurable sustainable improvement of safety outcomes is our goal.

The breadth and depth of expertise in process safety makes us globally recognised specialists and trusted advisors. We help our clients to understand and evaluate their risks, and work together to develop pragmatic solutions. Our value-adding and practical approach integrates specialist process safety management, engineering and testing. We seek to educate and grow client competence to vide sustainable performance improvement; partnering with our clients we combine technical expertise with a passion for life preservation, harm reduction and asset protection.

We are a service unit of DEKRA SE, a global leader in safety since 1925 with over 45,000 employees in 60 countries and 5 continent. As a part of the world's leading expert organisation DEKRA, we are the global partner for a safe world.

We have offices throughout North America, Europe, and Asia.

For more information, visit [www.dekra-uk.co.uk/en/dekra-organisational-and-process-safety/](http://www.dekra-uk.co.uk/en/dekra-organisational-and-process-safety/)

To contact us: [dekra-ops.uk@dekra.com](mailto:dekra-ops.uk@dekra.com)

To contact us: +44 (0) 23 8076 0722

Would you like to get more information?

Contact Us