

The Blame Cycle



Facing up to our mistakes isn't always easy and our initial reaction might be to protect ourselves by blaming someone else or the situation. While blaming might make us feel better for a moment, the consequences of blaming and not taking responsibility build up over time – disrupting team morale and affecting performance.

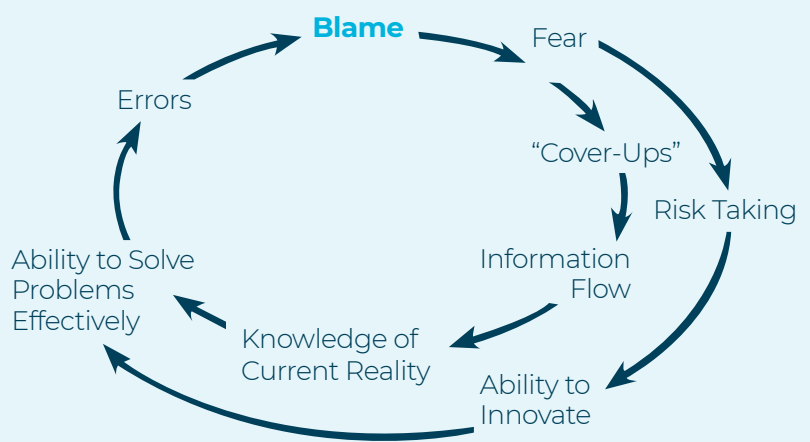
'The Blame Cycle' is a model we can use to see the impact blaming has on us, our team and our organisation.



WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

The main reason we might blame others is fear (e.g., the fear of losing one's reputation or the fear of being punished). However, when we blame and don't take responsibility, a new fear comes up – the fear of being found out. This leads to continued cover-ups and negatively affects the flow of information. Having a lack of information or the truth obscured hinders problem solving, and often results in more errors. This atmosphere of fear stifles our ability to take risks and discourages innovation. In other words, where there is blame, there is no learning or growth.

THE BLAME CYCLE



Source: M. Paul (1997), 'Moving from Blame to Accountability', *The Systems Thinker*.

WHY DO WE BLAME?

Blame is simply the discharging of discomfort and pain, and it has an inverse relationship with accountability. Take a look at some of the reasons why blame exists:

- **Blaming others is easier than confronting the issue.** It's easier to deflect accountability and turn away from the hard work it takes to get to the root cause of the issue.
- **Blaming others means you don't need to be vulnerable.** Accountability by definition is a vulnerable process. E.g., "I need to admit I've made a mistake" or "I need to have a conversation with you because you have made a mistake and it's impacted me". Both examples require grit, tenacity and empathy.
- **Blaming others feeds our need for control.** When we blame someone else, it puts the responsibility of taking ownership of blame onto someone else. Taking personal ownership also means we have to listen to the other side of the story. We lose control of the narrative.



REFLECTION

How has blaming others held you back in your development? For example, 'By putting the responsibility on others, I've missed out on opportunities to learn and show that I care'.

How can being accountable for the mistakes you're fully (or partly) responsible for help you in your role? For example, 'By owning up to my mistakes, I can lead by example – creating a safe space for others to do the same'.