MODULE 1 · SESSION 3

Making Accountability Visible in Practice

How an operating cadence turns delegated authority into observable commitments, reviews and corrective action.

Theory session

Advanced

Running case: Northstar Forge

ORIENTATION

Where this session sits

1.2 distributed authority; 1.3 makes its use observable

MODULE 1	MODULE 2	MODULE 3
From Founder to Leadership System	Culture as an Operating System	Strategic Continuity Under Pressure

SESSIONS IN THIS MODULE

1.1 Recasting the Founder's Operating Authority
Redesigning the founder's role and the executive team around it

1.2 Selecting Leaders and Distributing Authority
Assessing senior candidates and assigning decision rights

1.3 **Making Accountability Visible in Practice**
Turning delegated authority into observable commitments
YOU ARE HERE

SESSION OUTCOMES

What this session explains

Turning delegation into something that can be seen and corrected

01 **Accountability requires visibility**

You cannot hold someone to a commitment nobody can observe the state of.

02 **A cadence is a set of different conversations**

Weekly, monthly and quarterly answer different questions and should not be merged.

03 **Commitments must be specific**

What, by when, by whom, and what evidence settles it.

04 **Corrective action is the test**

A rhythm where nothing ever changes is reporting, not accountability.

DEFINITION

What accountability means operationally

Not blame, and not a personality trait

WORKING DEFINITION

Accountability is the observable state in which a named person has committed to a specific outcome by a specific date, progress is visible without being asked for, and there is a scheduled moment where shortfall produces a decision.

1

Named, not shared

Two owners is no owner. Shared accountability is the most common way a commitment quietly becomes nobody's.

2

Observable without asking

If the only way to know the state is to ask, the system runs on the manager's memory rather than on design.

3

Attached to a decision

Reporting a miss with no consequent choice trains everyone that the commitment was optional.

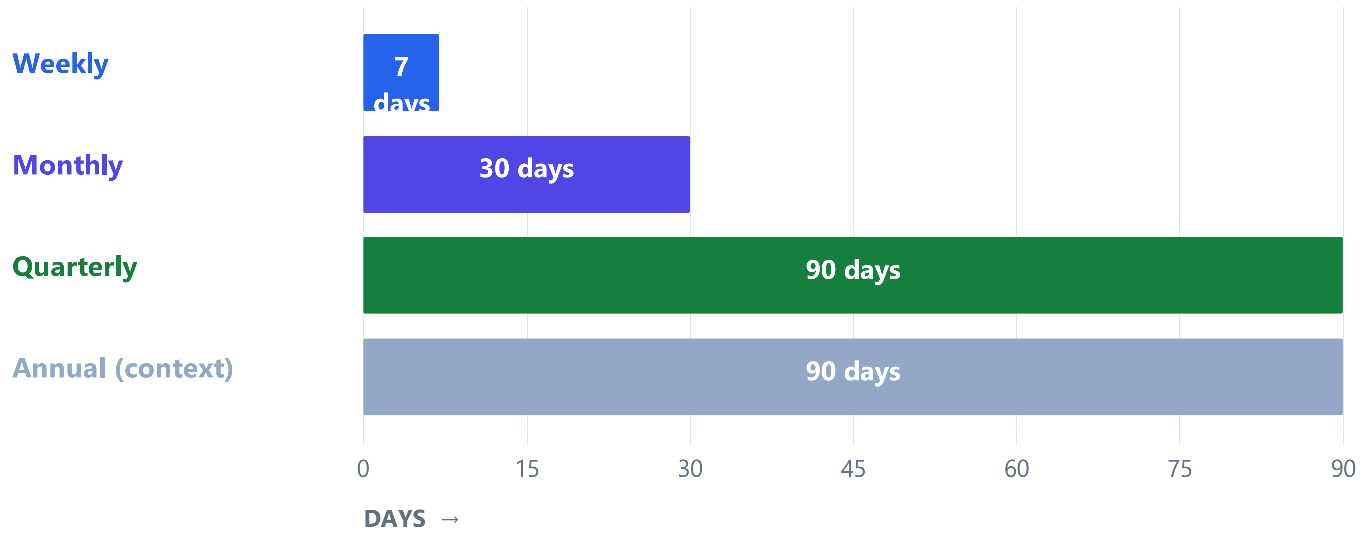
Sull, D. & Spinosa, C. (2007). Promise-based management. Harvard Business Review, 85(4), 79–86.

CONCEPT 1 · THE CADENCE

Four rhythms, four different questions

Merging them produces meetings that answer none of them

AN INTEGRATED LEADERSHIP OPERATING CADENCE



Each rhythm reviews a different horizon. The weekly cannot fix a strategy problem; the quarterly cannot fix a blocked delivery.

WEEKLY

Are we blocked?

Commitments due this week, obstacles, and who needs a decision. Short, and never a status parade.

MONTHLY

Are we on track?

Outcome metrics against the plan, with variance explained by the owner, not by finance.

QUARTERLY

Is the plan still right?

Commitments set, resources reallocated, and anything that should stop.

What a commitment has to contain

Five fields; a commitment missing any of them cannot be reviewed

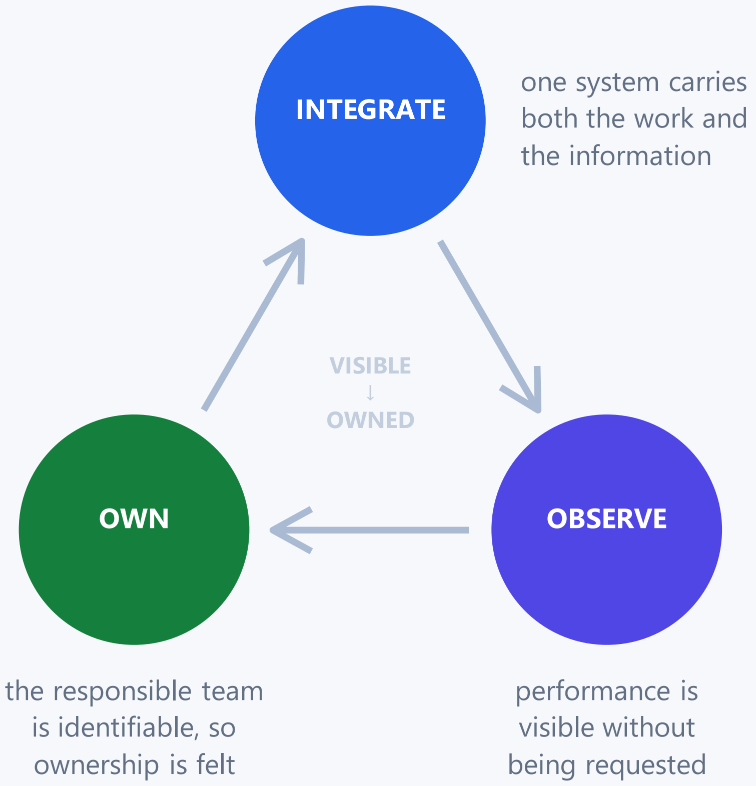
Field	Weak version	Reviewable version
Outcome	“Improve delivery reliability.”	“Line-side stockouts below four per week.”
Owner	Operations and warehouse.	One named person, with the other as consulted.
Date	“This quarter.”	“Measured in the week commencing 17 November.”
Evidence	A report at the end.	The existing dashboard; no new reporting created.
Consequence	Unstated.	“If not met, we pause the second line rollout.”

THE FIELD THAT IS ALWAYS MISSING

The last row is the one omitted almost universally. A commitment with no stated consequence of missing it is a statement of intent.

Ownership follows from visibility

The DENSO mechanism, generalised



WHY IT WORKED AT DENSO

One flow, not two

Connecting ordering to delivery meant performance had a single traceable path, and therefore an owner.

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE

Design out the ambiguity

Where responsibility is genuinely split across a handoff, no amount of management insistence creates ownership.

THE WARNING

Visibility without authority

Making performance visible to someone who cannot change it produces anxiety, not accountability.

Status reporting and accountability review

They look similar, occupy the same slot, and do different things

STATUS REPORTING

Describing what happened

WHAT IS DISCUSSED

Activity completed, effort expended, difficulties encountered.

WHAT THE MEETING PRODUCES

Shared awareness — and a queue of people waiting to speak.

THE TELL

Nobody leaves with a decision, and the same items appear next time.

ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW

Deciding what changes

WHAT IS DISCUSSED

Commitments met and missed, and what that implies for the next period.

WHAT THE MEETING PRODUCES

Decisions, reallocations and explicit new commitments.

THE TELL

Someone leaves with less resource, or a different priority, most sessions.

A QUICK DIAGNOSTIC

Read a sample of agendas. If they list topics rather than decisions, the rhythm is reporting — however senior the attendance.

What happens when a commitment is missed

The response defines what accountability means in practice

NOTHING

Noted, explained, carried forward. Teaches that dates are aspirations and reviews are theatre.

PROPORTIONATE CORRECTION

Understand the cause, decide what changes — scope, resource, owner or the commitment itself.

PUNISHMENT

Blame attached to the person. Produces defensive reporting and hidden problems — Session 2.2.

DIAGNOSING BEFORE DECIDING

Cause of the miss	Proportionate response
The commitment was unrealistic.	Fix the commitment-setting process; the owner is not the problem.
A dependency failed.	The dependency's owner is accountable, not the one who reported.
Priorities changed mid-period.	That was a leadership decision; retire the commitment explicitly.
Execution fell short.	Support, then consequence if it repeats. This is the only case about the person.

Three cadences that consume time and produce nothing

All three are well attended

The status parade

Looks like Everyone reports in turn for ninety minutes.

Why it fails Information already available is read aloud, and no decision is made.

Fix Circulate status beforehand; use the meeting only for blocked decisions.

Shared ownership

Looks like Two functions jointly accountable.

Why it fails Each reasonably assumes the other is handling it.

Fix One name per commitment; everyone else consulted.

Metrics without owners

Looks like A dashboard reviewed collectively.

Why it fails A number nobody owns cannot be explained or corrected.

Fix Every metric gets a name and a threshold that triggers action.

CASE STUDY

DENSO

An automation project whose most useful outcome was clearer ownership of delivery performance.

Ownership as a by-product of integration

Connecting information to movement made performance traceable

BEFORE

Movement and information separate

THE FLOW

Parts ordered, moved and delivered to the point of production — conveyance done manually.

THE COORDINATION PROBLEM

Physical movement and the ordering information travelled on separate paths.

THE CONSEQUENCE

When delivery went wrong, responsibility sat somewhere between the warehouse and production.

AFTER

One flow, visible ownership

THE INTEGRATION

AMR delivery connected directly to the parts ordering system, replacing manual conveyance and its information flow.

THE OPERATING RESULT

Just-in-time delivery with fewer errors and delays; over half a million successful missions by early 2023.

THE UNEXPECTED BENEFIT

Warehouse and production teams gained clearer ownership of delivery performance.

READING THE CASE

Accountability became clearer because the process had an integrated system and a repeatable mechanism. Ownership follows from visibility, not from exhortation.

Drawn from the session case pack.

APPLICATION

Bringing the theory to Northstar Forge

An operating cadence the executive team can actually run

Rhythm	What is reviewed	What must change
Weekly, 30 min	Commitments due, blockers, decisions needed.	A blocked item leaves with a named decision or an owner of the unblocking.
Monthly, 90 min	Outcome metrics against plan, explained by the owner.	Resource moves, or the commitment is formally revised.
Quarterly, half day	Commitments set, priorities reallocated, retirements.	At least one thing stops — the additive failure from Course 4.
Every commitment	Outcome, owner, date, evidence, consequence.	No commitment enters the list without all five.
Every miss	Cause diagnosed before response chosen.	Response matched to cause, not to seniority of the person reporting.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Module 2 turns to the culture in which these conversations either surface the truth or suppress it.

SUMMARY

What to carry out of this session

1. **Accountability requires observability.**
   A commitment whose state can only be known by asking runs on memory, not design.
2. **One name per commitment.**
   Shared accountability is the most reliable route to nobody's.
3. **State the consequence when you set the commitment.**
   Without it, the date is an aspiration and everyone knows it.
4. **Separate reporting from review.**
   If nobody leaves with a decision, the rhythm is consuming time rather than directing it.
5. **Diagnose the cause before responding to a miss.**
   Only one of the four common causes is actually about the person.

FURTHER READING

Sources for this session

Primary references behind each concept

COMMITMENTS	Sull, D. & Spinosa, C. (2007). Promise-based management. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(4), 79–86.
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