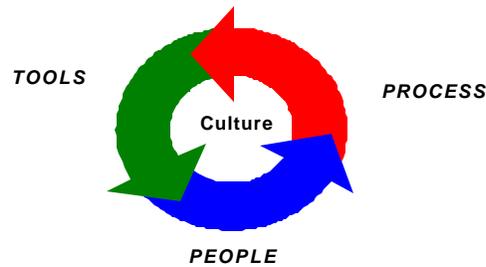


# *The Blame Game*



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## *The Blame Game*

Not often enough do we look at aspects of our personal and business lives that hinder our ability to function, to develop relationships, to interact with others, i.e., to become productive and effective individuals. These neglected or overlooked aspects can become Roadblocks in our personal and business lives - Roadblocks that keep us from "being who we can be". Often we look at new, "state-of-the-art" ideas, concepts and technology silver bullets to help change/improve ourselves or our corporations. We always think of "adding" these things to our lives to make a difference. We never seem to think that if we "subtract" or get rid of some things - Roadblocks - in our lives, they might make more of a difference. One such Roadblock we should think of subtracting is the Blame Game.

Over the number of years I've been in the Information Technology industry, I've had many opportunities to help organizations and individuals (in a mentoring capacity) to improve in the areas of technology, business practices (processes), and skills (through training & education). During this time I've tried many new concepts/ideas - some that have worked and some not. I've also seen that the biggest improvements can be made by looking at who we are and what we do; improving/shaping those first, before we try new, sometimes unproven, ideas, concepts and technology. What we are and what we do is the foundation that must be used to build and improve. If the foundation were less than solid or even crumbling, building upon it by adding something new would be a mistake. This I feel is true for individuals and organizations. Our individual and organizational propensity to blame, in my opinion, is a significant factor that weakens our foundations. We need to become aware of blaming techniques of The Blame Game, the harm they cause, how much we are engaged in them, and how we can change these practices.

### **What is the *Blame Game*?**

Blaming is a self-defense mechanism. People react (personally, in a group, or as a corporation) when they are under pressure, when they make mistakes, when they are put into "uncomfortable" situations, or when they are attacked. They react in two basic ways (with variations) - they fight back (attack) or they withdraw. Blaming is used to deflect a problem, incident, situation and/or attention away from yourself. We all have been involved in using the Blame Game in our life times - on both the receiving and/or giving end.

Blaming can have varying degrees of impact on the "blamee" - the individual or organization. In the extreme it can cause considerable harm. All of us need to reflect how we felt when we've been blaming targets. The images you see in Figures 1 - 4 come to my mind and fairly well represent some of the blaming intensity and the degrees of harm the Blame Game may cause. In **Figure 1** we see a typical example of someone "pointing the finger at us" for a problem or situation we may or may not be the cause of. And we may feel like the proverbial "donkey". In **Figure 2** the Blame Game increases in intensity and we may find ourselves the target of intimidating grilling tactics intended to "have us own-up" and admit we are the cause of the problem. **Figure 3** represents an even more onerous Blame Game situation - wherein an individual or organization is constantly "keeping you under its thumb" by letting you know repeatedly how much of a screw-up" you are - i.e., an individual or organization that doesn't believe in a culture where making mistakes is tolerated. **Figure 4** is the most damaging of all. It represents a blaming situation wherein a supposedly "trusted friend", maybe under pressure, deflects attention from himself/herself and hurts you terribly personally and/or professionally using blaming techniques.

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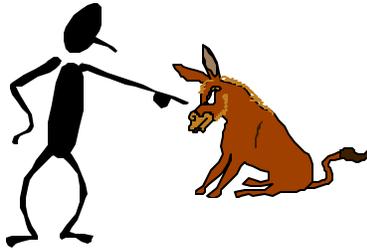


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

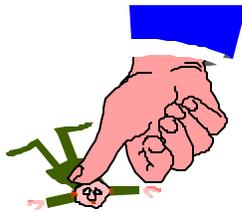


Figure 3.



Figure 4.

## How Pervasive is the *Blame Game*?

We have been conditioned to blame over a lifetime. We learn at a young age, in our family environments, that "owning up to mistakes" can have dire consequences - physical punishment, loss of privileges, belittlement, etc. We learn defense mechanisms like the Blame Game to cope. We also learn from our parents' sometimes-less-than-stellar examples that blaming is OK, and maybe even acceptable. The blaming practice is so common that we even make fun of it - do you remember the comic strip Family Circus? And the ghostly character "Who Me?" that is used by the children in the cartoon as a symbol of the "blamee" or scapegoat for something that they did, but did not want to accept responsibility for.



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As part of our blaming instinct, it appears we fulfill the "law of retribution". We have been conditioned to think that once we or someone else have been blamed, then it is only fair that punishment follows. We feel we or someone else has to dole out the punishment. And we don't appear to be satisfied until it is. We also confuse /don't distinguish between discipline and punishment. There is a difference.

Punishment is a punitive action performed out of anger, frustration and for our own satisfaction, gratification or well being. Discipline is performed out of a patient and caring concern for the affected individual - their growth, maturity and well being. That blaming/punishment conditioning is reinforced throughout our lifetimes in all facets of our society, including the business world.

How does this blaming/punishment conditioning affect us in our business world? Blaming appears to be a key initiating trigger for judgements we carry out against individuals. We have our own perceptions about good and bad performance as it pertains to business activities. These perceptions are first used by us as filters to measure our own success and failure in business situations. And then used by us to measure/evaluate the success and failure of our peers and those we direct. We seem to use the following process: (1) We analyze performance, (2) Place a value on the performance, (3) Based on our perceptions, we make a judgement of the performance (in a range from Good-Bad), and then (4) Use the Blame Game to trigger punitive action if the performance doesn't measure up to our standards. What is wrong with this picture? This kind of blaming/punishment conditioning doesn't allow us to establish the kind of lasting corporate cultures required to sustain the risk-taking, the improvement and growth necessary for us to stay competitive. This is exacerbated in some businesses that take a very short term view - get the stock prices up as high as possible- while keeping the organization barely glued together. The pressure of time and the need to show short-term business results make blaming even more prevalent in these companies.

### **Blaming is Ingrained in Our Society**

How pervasive is the Blame Game and how conditioned have we become to using it? As I've already mentioned it is very prevalent in our personal lives. It starts at the personal level and appears to be supported/reinforced in every aspect of our society. Some prime examples are:

- It's in the mass media which bombards us every day. Do you ever pay attention to how much you see it on TV, in the newspapers or other publications? Pay close attention to the prime time news shows. How many times do they report, "situation X occurred, but we don't know yet WHO IS TO BLAME. Why is it more important to find WHO IS TO BLAME (and hopefully punish) than it is to report on the real human suffering caused by the situation, the possible root causes for the situation and the potential solutions to prevent recurrence? It appears if we can find a scapegoat it makes us feel better and allows us to forget the situation and move on.
- It's in our civil and criminal courts. It does appear that the Blame Game is used extremely well to deflect blame from the guilty to someone else, or to some other object or cause that can't be put on trial - whether it is a societal prejudice, an unjust law or social condition, an abusive parent or sibling, etc. We have become very good at finding scapegoats that lessen our responsibility for our actions. And all of us see so many examples of this through the mass media.
- It's in our highest governing bodies. If the budget overruns, or if the economy is lagging, or if the crime rate is up, or if social security is failing, everyone points to everyone else to blame - congress blames the President, the President blames congress, the Democratic party blames the Republican party, the Republican party blames the Democratic party. All blame to deflect the ir responsibility unto someone else. And we the public throw up our hands and don't know whom

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to blame! Now we even have to endure presidential sex and other scandals with associated round-robin blaming games. We appear to have become so accustomed to the political Blame Game that we are no longer aware of the harm it causes.

- It's in our business world. Is it surprising that it happens in our business world when it happens in every other part of our society? But, how much finger pointing, CYA, Blaming does go on in our business culture? I believe it is so pervasive that I'll make the following rash statements:

*The Blame Game is popular entertainment in our business culture at the work group, department and especially at the corporate level. In the extreme, The Blame Game in the form of scapegoating is used to initiate reorganizations, layoffs, mergers and financial manipulations to mask real problems, and deflect the true cause of failure should these not succeed. The "winners" of the game are often rewarded as the result of a failure someone else, rightfully or wrongfully, took the blame for. But there are no winners in defeat, just those who are rewarded for skillfully playing the game. Didn't someone say, "you get what you reward"?*

Are these rash statements or do they contain truth? Of course there are companies that do approach organizational improvements/changes the right way - they have the right business motives, take the time to plan and they have the know-how, patience and perseverance to implement the changes. And they recognize the importance of their people and the corporate culture in the process. But, through observation, reading, and through personal involvement with corporations that have launched major change initiatives (reorganizations, layoffs and mergers), a number of them are not successfully completed (even though public appearances may initially be to the contrary). Why they are not successful is difficult to say. Is it because corporations didn't have the right business motivation, didn't plan well, or didn't have the know-how, patience or perseverance? Because we don't want to analyze and reveal our failures to others, and because we use the Blame Game well to deflect the blame away from the root cause of failure, we may never know why these change initiatives fail. As Schopenhauer observed ...how long we remember our victories and how soon we forget our defeats. Perhaps if we were able to examine these failures we would see the influence of the Blame Game in them.

### **The Role of *Image* in the Blame Game**

*"Image is Everything"*

*"(Product X) Makes you Look Good"*

How many of you have heard of these advertising slogans? Both were successful; the second was used by a major software vendor where I was employed. What is obviously common between them - their focus on *Image*? *Image* is so important to us as individuals and corporations. If it weren't these slogans wouldn't work.

How does the importance of *Image* relate to the Blame Game? Let me make another rash statement:

***Image** is part of the fabric of our lives and we use blaming techniques to protect it. We are focused on looking good, getting ahead, getting our way, and making sure everyone notices. We have lost our sensitivity to people and our desire to know them, their abilities, and their needs. It takes time to know people and what they are made of - their **Substance**. When we don't take the time to know our people, it*

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*becomes much easier, less threatening, to take business action that doesn't consider them as an important factor.*

The Blame Game is then used as an easy way to point fingers at them as the "root causes" of business failures or the "roadblocks" to organizational change and re-engineering, followed by the next easy step of removing them (people) from the scene.

Are the above rash statements or do they contain truth? Think about how many decisions you've made, friends and family members have made, and corporations have made all to protect or enhance our *Image*. When we are in the mode of protecting or enhancing *Image* we are obviously looking inward, looking after our own self-interest. When we are consumed with looking inward, we don't have the time and capacity to look outward, looking after the interest of others. If we look inward enough in our business lives, we don't have time to build the strong people (individual or departmental) business relationships we need. And without those relationships in place, it does "become much easier, less threatening, to take business action that doesn't consider people as an important factor".

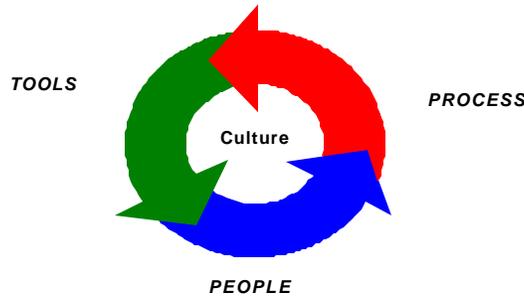
### **The Blame Game as an Improvement Roadblock**

Why is it so important that we recognize the Blame Game and its effects on our business culture? We all know it is an extremely competitive world out there. For us to compete as individuals and as corporations we have to adapt, to change and to improve. There are signs all around us that show how many corporations are changing and the magnitude of their changes - corporate reengineering, layoffs and mergers. We all want these changes to be successful. We want significant improvements made and not just "change for the sake of change". We need to remove significant roadblocks that keep us from improving.

#### **Why is the Blame Game a Roadblock to Improvement?**

Because successful change is based on: (1) Knowing your current state (Point A) - issues and problems that keep you from being competitive, (2) Determining the root cause (s) - the real reasons behind the issues/problems, (3) Determining your future state (Point B) - a target model for improvement, and (4) Developing and successfully executing a plan to move you from Point A to Point B. As we said earlier, the Blame Game may be used to deflect blame away from situations and people that are the root causes of situations/problems unto innocent workers. If you're solving the wrong problem masked by the Blame Game, how can you possibly move successfully from Point A to Point B? How do you even know that Point B is the right way to go?

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**People-Process-Technology-Culture, Figure 5.**

Let's use the People-Process-Tools-Culture model, Figure 5, to clarify how the Blame Game may affect organizational improvements. The components in the model are the key assets of a corporation which are needed to make it run. Let's put these components into perspective: In my opinion, **People are the most important assets**, the Foundation, of our organizations; **Processes** provide the HOW TOs to conduct our businesses - they exist to support our People, to make them more effective; **Tools** (e.g., **Technology**) exist to integrate with our processes, automate them and make our people more productive (not replace them). And our **Cultures** provide the glue - the values, expectations, freedoms, and constraints - that ties them all together.

Not everyone may agree that People are the most important assets of our organizations, or that Culture is that important (and therein lies some of the basis for the use of the Blame Game), but everyone should agree (1) that we need processes and tools (technology) to get the job done. And that (2) these (Processes and Tools) are used by People in the organization. And (3) People live within and affect, and are affected by, our cultures. **The bottom line is:** everything good, bad, or indifferent that happens in our organizations revolves around our People - processes don't create or run themselves, tools aren't implemented and run by themselves, and Cultures aren't created and exist just for the sake of existing. Processes, Tools and Culture exist to let People in the organization perform their jobs effectively and efficiently.

If everything revolves around People in our organizations, why do we try to implement major changes by using processes or tools as *Silver Bullets Solutions* - bypassing the real issues and problems that may be affecting people in the organization. Why can't we realize that, "People will be either the biggest proponents or the biggest roadblocks" to major change initiatives? I think the answer to that question is: Because we don't give People credit for being the most important assets, the Foundation, of our organizations. We cannot fire *Silver Bullet Solutions* at them and hope they'll do anything but duck!

If People aren't being considered as the most important assets of our organizations, then it follows that the earlier statements made are also probably true: "*We have lost our sensitivity to people and our desire*

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*to know them, their abilities, and their needs. When we don't take the time to know our people, it becomes much easier, less threatening, to take business action that doesn't consider them as an important factor".* Because we don't consider People as an important factor it becomes easier to use the Blame Game. And when we use the Blame Game we hinder the process of finding root causes to problems and get off on the wrong foot with our change initiatives. **It is also important to note:** even if the Blame Game doesn't keep us from effectively doing root cause analysis to identify problems, it may keep us from effectively executing the change initiatives, unless corporate cultures are changed to eliminate this behavior.

### **How are Target Models for Improvement Affected by the *Blame Game*?**

Earlier we talked about a simple process for change that requires us to define Target Models for Improvement which allow us to "go from Point A to Point B" during a change initiative. People, Processes, Technology, and Culture may not be the only components within an organization that may need improving. A set of organizational components that may be part of a corporate change initiative can include:

- Organizational Mission
- Business Strategy
- Technology Strategy
- Products & Services
- Core Competencies and Skills
- Supporting Business Functions - Business Planning, Marketing, Sales, Product Development & Support, Legal, Purchasing, etc.
- Organizational Structure
- Processes and Tools (Technology) to Support Business Functions
- Corporate Culture
- Operational Facilities and Capital Equipment

A change initiative may be very broad and may even require modification of the organizational mission, corporate business strategies, products & services and everything else supporting them, i.e., essentially every other component on this list. Or it may be isolated for example to a Supporting Business Function, the people running it and the processes and tools supporting it. Given all of these possible change scenarios, how does the Blame Game affect improvement in these areas? The complete answer requires research and may be addressed in a future document. It is too large to be addressed here. But, to give you an idea let's look at some concrete examples:

1. The Blame Game invades and corrupts our corporate cultures. We said that Culture provides the glue - the values, expectations, freedoms, and constraints - that ties People, Process, and Tools together. Our culture sustains us - who we are, how we behave, how we work together are all facilitated by our corporate cultures. The corporate culture can help make us productive and effective or it can drag us down. The Blame Game is one of those elements that can eat away at the corporate value foundation and drag us down with it. If we say we value honesty and integrity, if we say we value responsibility and accountability, if we say we value quality, or if we say we value people - the Blame game can help to destroy them all.

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2. The Blame Game adversely affects collaboration and cooperation within the organization. The effectiveness of project teams and cross-functional corporate teams is damaged. Teams and team members need to build strong relationships to be effective. And strong relationships are built on trust and respect. Trust and respect are built on factors such as honesty and integrity, responsibility, accountability. These are all elements that are weakened or missing if team members practice the Blame Game.
3. The Blame Game adversely affects our attitudes towards People. And our attitudes towards People have a profound effect on our ability to initiate and sustain process and technology improvements in our organizations. The Blame Game has the following effects:
  - a. The *Blame Game* clouds the importance of process in our organizations because of our propensity to blame all of our problems on People. We don't recognize that missing, ad-hoc, in-appropriate and ineffective processes have more to do with our business problems than the people involved. In fact, through his pioneering quality work Dr W. Edwards Deming postulated and was able to support statistically through root cause analysis that 85 % of the time our problems were due to missing, ad-hoc, in-appropriate and ineffective processes, not People. By blaming our problems on People, we are missing an opportunity to improve our organizations by tackling the pertinent processes.
  - b. Our focus on *Image* drives us to produce shallow solutions that look good, but don't work. We look for the short-term splash, instead of the long-term improvement. Examples are:
    - We create nice paper policies and procedures that sit on the shelf and "have no teeth", i.e., are never enforced; but, they sure look and make us feel good when we produce them. Instead, we need operational practices that work, which everyone uses, and are continuously improved over time. But, these take hard work and considerable time to establish. We don't have the perseverance to establish process improvement teams and focus on continuous improvement.
    - As stated earlier, we look for and implement *Silver Bullet Solutions* - processes, tools/technology or even packaged training products. When we look for and implement these solutions we appear to go out of our way to not involve the people in the organization that would be affected by these *Silver Bullets*. Why? Because (1) that would take too much time, and (2) they might disagree it was the right solution to the problem.
    - Even if we are lucky and a *Silver Bullet* is the right solution for the problem, we are more interested in the big splash and making it available on everyone's desk top than we are in implementing it the most effective way. We throw solutions at our people with no attempt to adequately train and mentor them, with no sensitivity to their angst - due to the disruption of their current work culture or to their loss of productivity because of large learning curves.

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### **Is the Game Played in Your Organization? Is it a Roadblock to Improvement?**

Only you can answer these questions. Only you can say who plays it. And only you can say what the Game's impact is within your organization.

What is your organization's blaming scenario? Is your organization unique in its use of the *Blame Game*? To answer these questions let's look at the results compiled at a "Birds of a Feather" session on the *Blame Game* recently conducted by a business associate and me. Key comments from this session are summarized here. And even though the session was limited to discussing the Blame Game as it relates to process improvement, the comments would also apply to the affects of blaming in other improvement initiatives. The complete text can be referenced in the SEPG Blame Game Case Study section at the end of this paper.

The Birds-of-a-Feather *Blame Game* attendees were a cross-section of commercial and government participants from Israel, Europe, Canada, and the U.S. Most attendees were members of, participated in, and/or lead Software Engineering Process Groups (SEPGs) within their organizations. They were very interested in discussing people resistance and other barriers to process improvements in their organizations.

These two hypotheses were presented to the group to determine if they were true and to what extent:

**A. Hypothesis 1 - The Blame Game is Used to Initiate Reorganizations, Layoffs and Mergers**

**B. Hypothesis 2 - People are the Foundation for Process Improvement**

After the introduction of the hypotheses, the session was guided by the following discussion categories:

**A. Exploring the Process Improvement Roadblocks**

**B. Identifying Barrier Removal Techniques**

During the **Exploring of Process Improvement Roadblocks**, the group asked and responded to the following questions. Detailed responses are in the SEPG Blame Game Case Study section at the end of this paper.

**Do we play the Blame Game? And who plays it?**

The response was a resounding YES. Everyone played it - individuals at all levels, teams, and departments. The *Blame Game* is especially used in matrix organizations. Other organizations are blamed for problems - finger pointing is a common practice.

**Why do we play it?**

Primarily we appear to play the game because it is easy to play (no organizational repercussions), we are used to playing it, and we use it to protect ourselves and escape responsibility for our actions.

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### **Does it accomplish anything; is blaming all bad?**

As it is normally played (in its scapegoating form) it accomplishes nothing positive. The body of the paper discusses the negative effects of blaming. Sometimes blaming may be a valid action to take if it is done in a positive, root cause analysis situation.

### **What are the characteristics of the Blame Game?**

Blame is placed on events, objects and people. Notice, blame is placed not just on people, but predominately on people. We appear to: Judge ourselves based on intent, but we judge others based on their actions. A lesson to be learned here - we jump to conclusions and into blaming situations without knowing the facts. We don't treat others as fairly as we treat ourselves.

From the organizations represented, it was clear that the Blame Game was popular entertainment in all of their organizations. They could identify and relate to it at a personal and organizational level. Did the session confirm or deny truth of these two hypotheses?

- **Hypothesis 1 - The Blame Game is Used to Initiate Reorganizations, Layoffs and Mergers**

There wasn't firm confirmation of the hypothesis. Most suspected it was true. But no one knew for sure, or could tell that this happened in their organizations. There was a strong feeling that it was possible within our blaming culture.

- **Hypothesis 2 - People are the Foundation for Process Improvement**

Everyone at the session believed in the importance of People - they had no doubts about the importance of People within their organizations related to Process Improvement. But, they felt that others in their organizations didn't necessarily feel the same way.

### **What Action Can We Take to Overcome the *Blame Game*?**

Given your company and your unique culture, you probably have the best answer for your own situation. But again, it appears from the SEPG comments there are a considerable number of generic actions we can take that will help all of us overcome the Blame Game. Here are some of the categories of response from the SEPG group. The detailed responses are in the SEPG Blame Game Case Study section at the end of this paper.

- **Stop the deflection of problems** - adopt defect root cause analysis. Don't run away from finding the fundamental cause of the problems.
- **Take responsibility** - admit mistakes as a learning experience.
- **Change the blaming culture** - "civilize out" the natural instinct to blame.
- **Establish objective performance standards** - based on common corporate vision and values
- **Build effective relationships** - adult-to-adult relationships instead of parent-to-child. Trust and respect are paramount.
- **Develop teamwork** - we all sink or swim together. No blaming of others.
- **Don't forget personal agendas** - WIIFM (What's in it for me?) has to be satisfied. Being able to satisfy this need will help us to overcome individual people barriers.

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We have to remember that People are the Foundation of our organizations, our cultures. Processes are there to support our People - to make them more effective. Technology exists to integrate with our processes, automate them and make our people more productive (not replace them). Not only do we have to have this perspective, but we as organizational change agents have to believe and demonstrate to our clients that People are the Foundation. It has to be demonstrated in our client working relationships, our willingness to evaluate and use "the best" of their practices, and in our willingness to stand up to our convictions. It has to be demonstrated in our efforts to define and implement organizational process and technology implementation strategies that consider the needs of the People affected.

### **Personal Blame Game Remedies**

The Blame Game starts and can be stopped at a personal level. We as individuals can make a big difference and do have the power to stomp the Blame Game. As noted in the comments from the SEPG group, concrete actions can be taken to overcome the Blame Game. And you probably have some to add to the list. I would like to add a couple of my own. Here is what I try to do:

- Maintain a **Service** instead of a **Self** orientation
  - **Believe**, *"There is no limit to the good we can do if we don't care who gets the credit."*
    - *Use the two most important words: **Thank You***
    - *Use the most important word: **We***
    - *Minimize the least important word: **I***
  - Maintain a sensitivity towards others
    - **Don't believe**, *"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"*
- Maintain your perspective

*"To laugh often and love much;  
To win the respect of intelligent persons  
and the affection of children;  
To earn the approbation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;  
To appreciate beauty;  
To find the best in others to give oneself;  
To leave the world a bit better; whether by a child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition;  
To have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation;  
To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived - - -  
This is to have succeeded."*

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

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## **Acknowledgements**

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I would also like to acknowledge the very fine words, concepts, values, human feelings and considerations in the following publications. They provided some of the focus and incentive for this paper.

- *The Search for Significance*, by Dr. Robert McGee (My first introduction to the *Blame Game*)
- *Peopeware*, by Tom DeMarco and Tim Lister (The importance of People in the IT world)
- *Built to Last*, by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras (Values, service concepts, foundations)
- *Stewardship*, by Peter Block (a model for future organizational interaction)
- *Principle-Centered Leadership*, by Stephen R. Covey (Integrity)

## **About the Author**

Mr. Fred Hein has helped organizations to innovate, develop and implement technology, process, education, and cultural changes at project and corporate levels. He has encouraged the establishment and use of reusable technology, process and education components. And he has promoted a quality orientation, strongly emphasizing the need for continuous innovation and improvement.

Fred believes strongly in the unique value each individual can bring to an organization. And believes in establishing corporate cultures where everyone "can be what they can be". Fred is interested in hearing about your Blame Game experience - your comments and suggestions. He can be reached at email: mhein@proscilab.com.

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## **SEPG Blame Game Case Study**

The Birds-of-a-Feather *Blame Game* session was held at the Dallas SEPG. The attendees were a cross-section of commercial and government participants from Israel, Europe, Canada, and the U.S. Most attendees were members of, participated in, and/or lead Software Engineering Process Groups (SEPGs) within their organizations. They were very interested in discussing people resistance and other barriers to process improvements in their organizations.

### ***Blame Game Agenda:***

- I. Introducing the Participants
- II. Defining the Ground Rules
- III. Introducing the Framework
  - A. Hypothesis 1 - The Blame Game is Used to Initiate Reorganizations, Layoffs and Mergers
  - B. Hypothesis 2 - People are the Foundation for Process Improvement
- IV. Discussing the Topic
  - A. Exploring the Process Improvement Roadblocks
  - B. Identifying Barrier Removal Techniques
- V. Summarizing Major Discussion Points

### **SEPG Member Blaming Scenarios**

The following comments were made, questions asked and conclusions drawn at the session:

- Blame is placed on events, objects, and people.
- “Blaming doesn’t accomplish anything”.
- People blame because blame is easy to do; what is hard to do is to change the process that puts us into a blaming circumstance.
- We avoid acceptance of responsibility. Blaming is responsibility passed to someone else; we need to take responsibility for our actions/mistakes.
- We explain events to protect ourselves. If fault lies anywhere, it should lie with the organization, not the individual. If we are to improve we must identify the causes of our problems - root cause analysis is key and should replace the blaming instinct.
- “We judge ourselves based on our intent, but we judge others based on their actions”. Does this dictate changes in our interaction with other people in blaming situations?
- Is it a truism that educated people don’t blame? Or do they just find more clever/acceptable ways to place the blame?
- Is it wrong to blame in every case? Sometimes **it is the person** who is to blame.
- Blame used to identify a scapegoat is bad. Blame is then used to expel the scapegoat from the tribe (i.e., our hypothesis: The *Blame Game* is used to initiate reorganizations, layoffs, and mergers).
- The *Blame Game* is used in matrix organizations. Other organizations are blamed for problems - finger pointing.
- Politicians use blame techniques. We are political animals and live within a political culture. Does this justify our use of blaming techniques? Sometimes changes do need to be made in the political structure - are there techniques other than the *Blame Game* that can be used to initiate these changes?

## *The Blame Game*

- There is a human need that has to be satisfied in process improvement situations: What's in it for me?
- The "Fairness Issue" can be an impediment to process improvement. Everyone's desires cannot always be satisfied; consensus cannot always be fully obtained. The desire to be fair to everyone may delay decision-making and thus hinder process improvement efforts.

### **Suggestions for Mitigating Blame and Removing Process Improvement Barriers**

The following excellent suggestions were made by the attendees to remove the Blame Game roadblocks.

- Adopt defect root cause analysis. If one is looking for the cause of a problem, this is a scientific activity--one is looking to improve; that is good. The scapegoat syndrome is bad - blaming is not scientific. Don't run away from finding the fundamental cause of the problems; identification is the basis for improvement.
- Review projects; look for pluses as well as negatives. Defer the blame until the project review (cause seeking).
- If one assigns blame to oneself and states "now lets keep from doing it again" it gets the improvement process going. Adopt a philosophy: "Take the hit and move on; admit mistakes as a learning experience". Educate management that making mistakes is OK. We all make mistakes and it is one of the key ways that we learn.
- Organizational culture can remove barriers. We must recognize raw emotion and our fundamental capacity to blame. A good, effective organization will "civilize out" the natural instinct to blame- we should reason, not blame.
- Never blame anyone reporting to you; the responsibility is yours.
- Don't be "dead right"; be flexible and be able to recognize the value of other ideas.
- Adult-to-adult relationships instead of parent-to-child are needed within our organizations. People don't get defensive in adult-to-adult relationships. If we are not defensive, we are less likely to blame and are also more open to problem solving participation.
- Teaming arrangements (US rather than YOU), instead of contract arrangements should be used.
- Must have mandatory trust and respect training. Must have diversity training and be sensitive to others.
- The idea/concept of "identity" works. Group members identify with each other when they are successful. There should be a group identity where a group takes responsibility for its successes and mistakes. This takes the pressure off an individual and reduces the propensity to blame. We need to perpetuate success and the reduction of blaming (increase the size/population of successful groups) - creating departments, organizations, and companies that have success-oriented cultures.
- Having an immediate team goal adds commitment - teams must have a reason for existence. Goals should be complimentary to corporate goals.
- Trust and respect are very important between individuals and organizations. Successful teamwork demands it. Trust and respect are individual paradigms. Trust and respect have to be earned in an organization (as it must in personal relationships); it begins with unconditional acceptance of each other. We can only have trust and respect when we remove the barriers. Initially we must give people the benefit of the doubt concerning trust and respect.
- Need to build pride in an organization. If there is pride, there will be trust and respect. Pride can be built at an individual and organizational level. Managers have a responsibility to make this happen. "If a country obeys the law, you have no problem with blame". Principles embodied in the law

## *The Blame Game*

should guide our individual behavior. Group agendas directed by principled, ethical behavior should govern our actions. Establish ethics committees.

- Performance standards should be directly related to the corporate “Vision”. Lower level goals, rewards, and measurements need to be established; all should support the corporate “Vision”.
- WIIFM (What’s in it for me?) has to be satisfied. Being able to satisfy this need will help us to overcome individual people barriers. People and organizations have personal agendas. If you can satisfy another’s personal agenda, you can be successful. On process improvement efforts, must do a “one to one” with anyone who feels they deserve it; otherwise improvement initiatives cannot succeed.
- To be successful: get sponsorship from above and then start at the grass roots, eyeball-to-eyeball. Have a push-pull philosophy. Sometimes you have to PULL at the bottom and build a critical mass; continue until a plateau is reached. Use this as evidence to doubting managers. Along with this you need to PUSH from the top - senior management commitment and support. This is how an organization can overcome a history of failure in process improvement efforts - everyone in the organization needs to be involved.
- Knowing the infrastructure of a company will help make the improvement efforts succeed. Do a pilot with one project in a group willing to support the improvement initiative. When it is successful, this team acts as champions. With their support, get upper management buy-in. By showing it works well in one group (publicizing it throughout the organization), others will follow.
- Xerox made improvements successfully by training and obtaining sponsorship/commitment from the top. No finger pointing.
- 360 degree reviews are another success technique: performance evaluations by reportees, managers, internal and external customers (talk about building personal relationships).