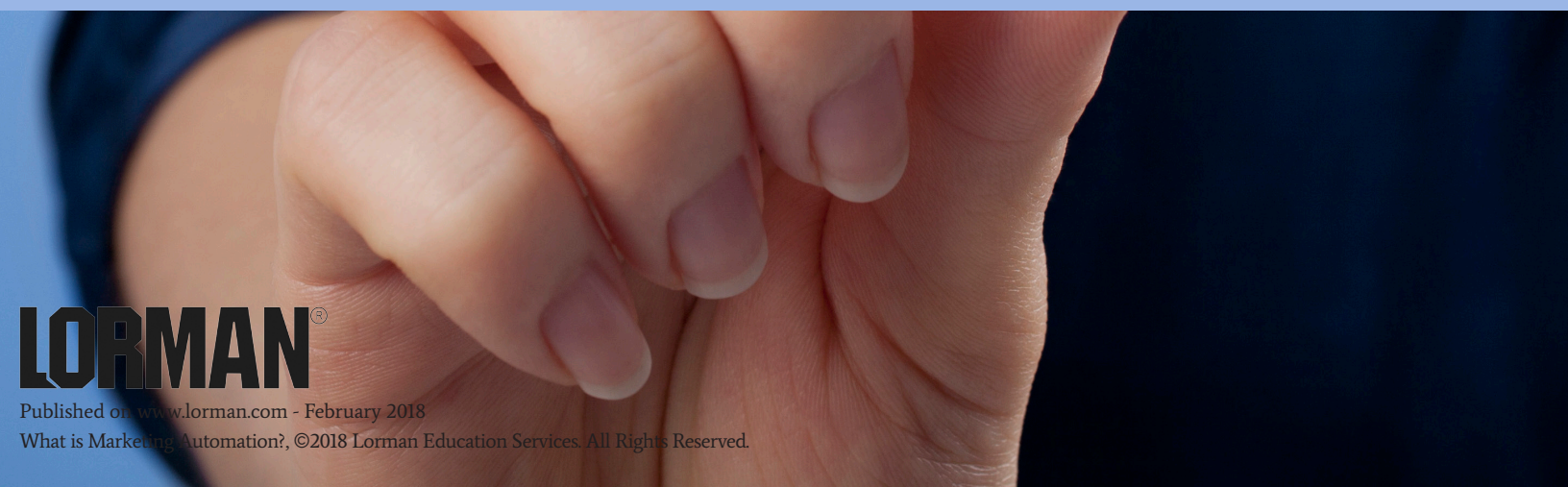




# Span of Influence: Authority Isn't What It's Cracked Up to Be

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# Span of Influence: Authority Isn't What It's Cracked Up to Be

—By Jason Myers, Chief Marketing Officer, Matrix Management Institute

*When you're leading teams that include stakeholders, which is pretty much most teams nowadays, authority isn't going to do you much good. Even direct reports no longer appreciate the use of authority or accept the "because I said so" management style - they want to weigh in on decisions.*

*Good news is here - you don't need authority in order to lead!*

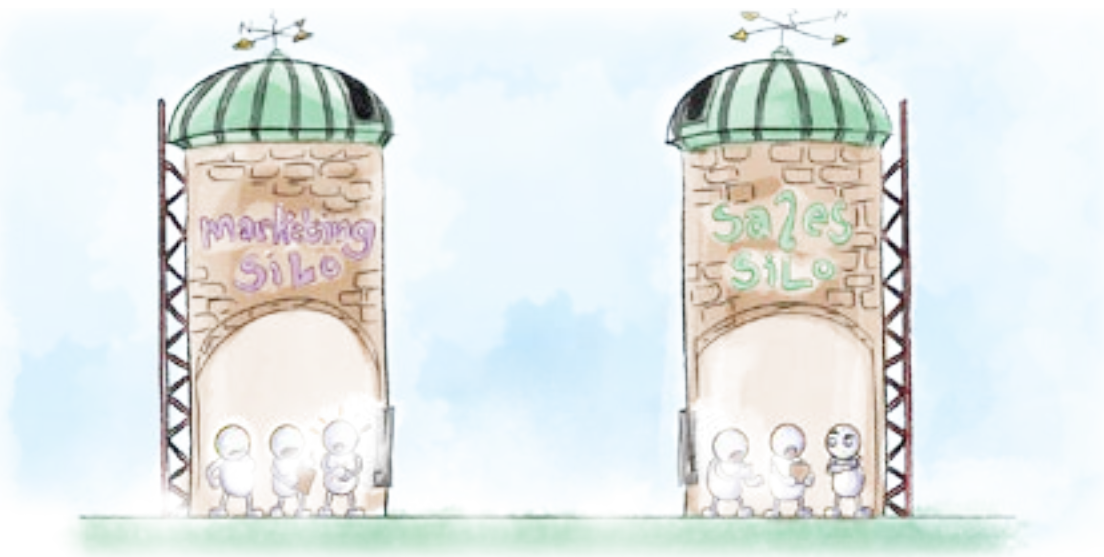
ABCPharma\*, a pharmaceutical manufacturer, was struggling with delivering their orders on time.

When they looked at their entire manufacturing process, they found gaps between steps in the process that were more than a week long in some cases. During those gaps, the unfinished product or packaging just sat in the warehouse waiting for the next step to begin. There was no reason for each step to begin this much later, but the process was never mapped out in its entirety before, and each team simply did their work the way that made sense to them.

Each team's process was optimized and focused only on their specific area. Leaders felt that they couldn't control other areas, so they didn't bother coordinating with them.

Once the company began looking at this issue from a place of accountability instead of authority, they began to see how shared accountability, collaborative processes and building stronger cross-functional relationships could help them bridge the gaps and become more effective overall.

*\*company name changed*



ABCPharma re-examined their processes and optimized them so that there was no more than a two-day gap between steps. This was a tremendous accomplishment; however, ABC's leaders acknowledged that the hardest part of this change was getting leaders to adopt

collaborative decision-making and shared accountability.

The learning curve was the steepest for leaders who still believed in authority as a crucial element of leadership.

## Why Authority Doesn't Work Anymore

The days when a leader could control the work of everyone on the team are long gone. Leaders who try this approach find that it's not only unproductive, but impossible.

As work becomes more specialized and knowledge-based, a leader cannot know or control everything. Team members bring in knowledge and skills necessary to produce the team's outcome, and the leader's authority cannot replace this expertise.



Regardless of the level of intelligence, experience, or energy, one person cannot possibly know the ramifications of every decision to be made; therefore, instead of authority, which comes from the span of control, leaders need to look at

accountability. The span of accountability gives the leader a sphere of influence.

In sum, leaders can lead without authority

through [strong relationships, shared accountability, and ability to collaborate effectively](#). These skills are increasingly in demand in today's business environment.



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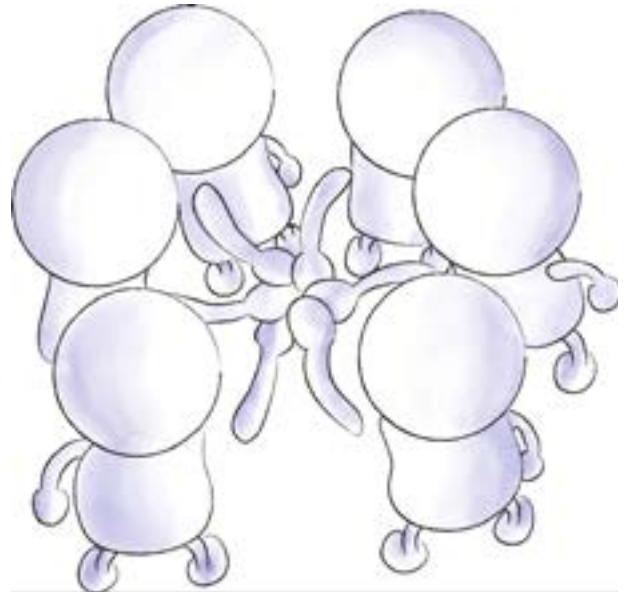
## Shared Accountability

When accountability is strictly individual and not shared, each team does its own job based on the metrics they are measured against and each leader's accountability is tied to the goals of only his or her area. This creates a disincentive for leaders to cooperate with other leaders, for teams to cooperate with other teams, or for leaders to collectively prioritize goals or outcomes across the organization.

It's important to realize that most leaders' span of accountability is bigger than just his own area of work. For example, if you lead a product group, your work is tightly connected with planning, materials management, manufacturing, sales, marketing and other groups. Yet you have no control over these areas.

You might lead a large initiative and be a member of several other major projects. Your span of accountability is bigger than just your product. How can you lead an

initiative team when everyone on that team reports to someone else and only has accountability tied to the area they came from? Not very effectively!



The solution to this problem is to introduce [shared accountability for goals and outcomes](#). That means that everyone who has a major stake in your initiative has a shared accountability for the outcomes of that initiative. You sink or swim together. This provides the incentive you need for team members and other stakeholders to work together, to cooperate.



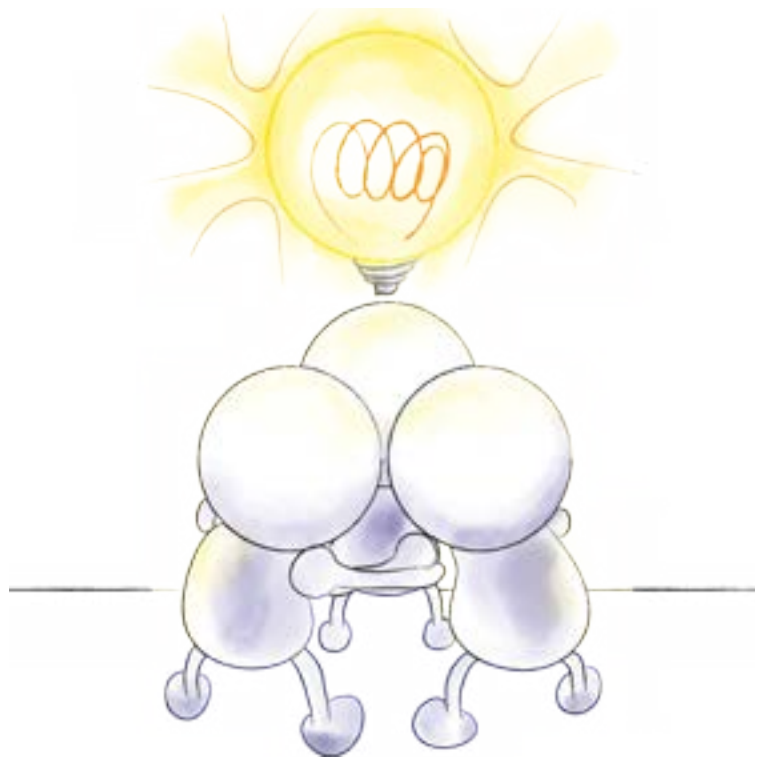
Shared accountability also helps teams build stronger relationships, because they are in it together, and so they have to find ways to work with one another for the good of the whole. The team winning becomes more important than an individual winning. One way to make sure the team works together effectively is through true collaboration.

## Effective Collaboration

In authority-based organizations, decisions are often made individually. A typical leader comes up with an approach or strategy, presents it to the team, gathers input, and then delegates out the tasks needed to complete the work. The team may work together on the assignments, but this is hardly collaboration.

Some people think that collaboration is sitting around a conference table, discussing an issue, and then having the leader make a decision that everyone may or may not buy into. The fact is that true collaboration is neither of these things. True collaboration is something much more effective and efficient.

When effective collaboration is at play, all the stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process. The leader acts as a facilitator, walking the team through the process, having them define the scope of the decision, the criteria for making the decision, brainstorming and analyzing the options. Everyone participates and shares their expertise.



The collaborative process leads naturally to consensus. If the process is run properly, the best possible decisions will be made and they will be ones that the team, who share accountability with the leader for the outcome of the initiative, can all buy into and help to implement.

## There Isn't Much Such a Team Can't Do!

Learn about the important skills for leaders working with multiple stakeholders, download our white paper, [Operationalizing Your Matrix](#).

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