The Lost Initiative

Role Clarity • Leadership Follow-Through • Shared Ownership

Situational Dilemma

A T&D Associate and a Customer Support team member were invited to a series of five 1-hour virtual meetings with a product owner to learn about a new company product. The intent was for these two employees to become product experts for their respective departments.

Over the following year, there were no clear expectations for how this knowledge should be applied. At the beginning of the next year, each employee had a new performance objective added: create client-facing content for the product by year's end.

Leadership was hands-off after setting these objectives. Both employees struggled to understand the scope of what was required and found attempts to get clarity from the product Owner unproductive. As the deadline approached, the product Owner finally agreed to a virtual meeting to provide guidance, but there was very little time left to create meaningful content.

Given everyone's existing workloads and the ambiguity of the end product, the initiative slipped through the cracks.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

- If you were the Customer Support or T&D associate, what would you put on your performance review for this objective and why?
- What responsibilities should leadership have taken earlier to set this project up for success?
- What responsibilities did the employees have once the objectives were assigned?
- What role did the product owner play in the breakdown, and how could it have been addressed earlier?
- What roadblocks existed, and how might they have been avoided through shared norms or clearer structures?
- If you were in a leadership role, how would you address this situation now, with the deadline approaching?
- What would you do differently to prevent this in the future?

Responsibility Lens

Leadership's Role	Employees' Role
Set clear expectations for scope, deliverables, and support after training.	Seek clarification early; escalate when ambiguity persists.
Provide structured follow-up checkpoints, not just objectives.	Take initiative to define their role in the absence of perfect clarity.
Ensure subject matter experts are accountable to support others.	Collaborate cross-functionally and communicate blockers proactively.

Culture-Building Application

Run this situational dilemma with multiple groups — leaders, individual contributors, SMEs, and cross-functional teams — and compare responses:

• Do leaders assume employees will "just figure it out"?

• Do employees expect leadership to lay out every detail?

• Do SMEs see themselves as accountable partners, or passive knowledge holders?

• Where does communication and escalation break down?

Use the Responsibility Lens to facilitate a conversation about what a shared ownership culture looks like in real projects, not just hypotheticals.