SACRS FALL CONFERENCE

NOV. 10-13, 2026 | OMNI RANCHO LAS PALMAS RESORT & SPA | **RANCHO MIRAGE, CA**

SACRS · LEGAL SECTION

SACRS
EXECUTIVE LEADERS IN LAW
FAST AND FLAWLESS
SPEED | PRECISION | GREATER IMPACT

Motivating Teams to Own, Lead, and Deliver

FACILITATED BY

DENA GUNSOLLEY

Manager of Learning & Organizational Development | OCERS

ORANGE COUNTY OCERS EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM

THE BOTTOM LINE

How do we get people to do more with less time and no additional pay?

Cut the wait, not the work	Front-load the facts. Find where files sit and wait, and fix that first.
Let them decide more	Turn routine approvals into clear rules, so the extra call happens on the spot.
Pay in recognition	Specific thanks and visible progress cost nothing, and they keep careful work going.

You don't need a bigger budget.
You need fewer waits, clearer rules, and more thank-yous.

Eisenhardt, 1989 · Lee, Willis & Tian, 2018 · Amabile & Kramer, 2011 · Gallup & Workhuman, 2024

What's in it for you and your team



- Fewer missed details
- Faster decisions
- Ownership that sticks

Peer conversation. Three tools for Monday.



60

SECONDS

Turn to a neighbor

Start with your best work

"

Recall a case your team nailed — thorough and on time.

What made that possible?

Hold onto that story — we'll come back to it.

THE PREMISE

Careful vs. fast is a false choice

Careful AND Fast



STANFORD RESEARCH

The fastest teams used more information, not less

In high-velocity environments, fast executive teams tracked more real-time information and weighed more options at once than slower teams.

Eisenhardt (Stanford), Academy of Management Journal, 1989

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STANFORD RESEARCH · FOR LEGAL TEAMS

Fast teams weren't less thorough. They were thorough sooner

1 Front-load the facts

Request everything at intake. Find gaps in week one, not week ten.

2 Keep options open

Sketch two or three paths early, so a stalled file can pivot.

3 Name a go-to advisor

A senior attorney for quick consults. Stuck 15 minutes? Ask.

4 Decide who breaks the tie

Disagreement shouldn't park a file. Know who makes the call.

5 Don't reinvent the wheel

Reuse templates and prior briefs and memos. Share deadline calendars.

6 Smooth the handoffs

Clear ownership at every stage, so files never wait in silence.

START HERE Ask your team: "Where do our files sit and wait?"

Eisenhardt (Stanford), Academy of Management Journal, 1989 · doi.org/10.2307/256434

45 MINUTES · MOSTLY YOU TALKING

Our path today

CHAPTER 01
Curious & owning

CHAPTER 02
Empowered to lead

CHAPTER 03
Accountable

CLOSE
Three takeaways



The qualifying question



The extra call, on deadline



Owning outcomes



Moves for Monday

HOW WE'LL WORK

How our breakouts work – Groups of at least 3



3 prompts

Timekeeper
Moves the group every ~2 minutes

Scribe
Captures your table's single best idea

Reporter
Shares it in 60 seconds if called on

Everyone
Real examples from your team, not theory

01

Curious & owning the work

Asking the qualifying question



01 · CURIOUS & OWNING

In the work, questions are a performance skill

> People don't stop asking because they aren't curious.
>
> They stop because asking feels risky or slow.

Follow-ups surface the facts

Follow-up questions signal listening, build trust, and draw out what people don't volunteer.

Brooks & John, HBR, 2018

Stay curious in the work

Tolerating uncertainty is what turns curiosity into actually asking.

Kashdan et al., HBR, 2018

Safety comes first

Psychological safety was the top factor separating Google's most effective teams.

Edmondson, Harvard, 1999 · Google re:Work, 2015

Breakout 1

CURIOSITY & OWNERSHIP



1

0:00 – 2:00

Recall a time someone on your team asked the question that saved a case. What made them ask it?

2

2:00 – 4:00

What quietly discourages questions on your team — deadlines, tone, past reactions?

3

4:00 – 6:00

What's one qualifying question every new file on your team should trigger?

01 · SHARE-OUT & TOOL

Four questions that prevent rework



SHARE-OUT

Which question would have saved your team the most time this year?

YOU LEAVE WITH

A 4-question checklist for every new file



PURPOSE

What decision will this work support?

PREVENTS
Answering the wrong question



GAPS

What's missing, unclear, or conflicting?

PREVENTS
Late surprises in the case



PEOPLE

Who holds key facts — doctor, employer, HR?

PREVENTS
Facts that surface too late



DONE

What does “complete” look like — by when?

PREVENTS
Missed deadlines

02

Empowered to go the extra mile

The extra call - still on deadline



02 · EMPOWERED · START THIS WEEK

Empowerment, with guardrails: how to do it

1

Define what they can decide alone

List three decisions your team can make without you. Share it Monday.

Lee, Willis & Tian, HBR, 2018

2

Make progress visible

End each week naming one file that moved forward — and who moved it.

Amabile & Kramer, HBR, 2011

3

Build skill, then step back

Pair newer staff with a go-to advisor. Then let them lead the next call.

Deci & Ryan, 2000

THE EVIDENCE **105 studies, 30,000+ employees:** empowerment boosts creativity and trust — with support.

Breakout 2

EMPOWERMENT & THE EXTRA MILE



1
0:00 – 2:00
When has someone made the extra call that changed the outcome? What gave them permission?

2
2:00 – 4:00
Where do your people wait for approval they don't actually need?

3
4:00 – 6:00
What guardrail could you set so they move faster without checking in?

02 · SHARE-OUT & TOOL

Turn your answers into guardrails

1

Pick

Three approvals your team waits on

2

For each approval

Choose one:

- They just do it
- They do it, then tell you
- They ask you first

3

Share

Tell your team the new rules Monday. Revisit in 30 days.

WHAT YOUR LIST COULD LOOK LIKE

Extra call to clarify a record
→ They just do it

Reprioritize a file to hit a deadline
→ They do it, then tell you

Anything going to the Board
→ They ask you first

03

Accountable & responsible

Owning outcomes, not just tasks



03 · ACCOUNTABLE

Accountability starts with clarity

1 in 2



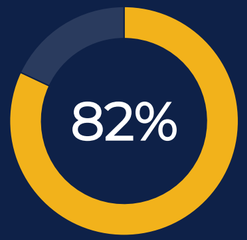
employees strongly agree they know what's expected of them at work

Gallup

The five clears

Bregman, HBR, 2016





of managers say they have limited to no ability to hold others accountable

Carucci, HBR, 2020

Breakout 3

ACCOUNTABILITY & RESPONSIBILITY



1
0:00 – 2:00
How does accountability differ from blame on your team? How would a new hire tell?

2
2:00 – 4:00
Where do expectations get fuzzy — handoffs, deadlines, or the quality bar?

3
4:00 – 6:00
When someone owns a mistake, how do you respond — and what does that teach everyone watching?

03 · SHARE-OUT & TOOL

Ownership sounds like...

INSTEAD OF	TRY
~~"That's not my file."~~	"I'll find out who has it."
~~"No one told me."~~	"I'll ask for what I need."
~~"We missed it because..."~~	"Here's what happened and what I'll change."
~~"It's done."~~	"It's done — and I verified it."

Share-out: 2–3 tables, 60 sec each

TAKE IT HOME

Three moves for Monday

1



CURIOUS

Reward the question

Thank people for asking qualifying questions, especially when it slows you down.

2



EMPOWERED

Set guardrails, then step back

Define what they can decide alone, so the extra call happens without a meeting.

3



ACCOUNTABLE

Make it clear, then make it seen

Spell out what “done well” means and recognize the behavior you want repeated.

Well-recognized employees are 45% less likely to leave within two years — Gallup & Workhuman, 2024

SO SIMPLE THEY'RE EASY TO SKIP

Three easy wins right now ...



01

Say thank you. Specifically.

"Thanks for asking about that missing record - it saved us rework."

CURIOUS



02

Ask: "What do you need from me?"

Then clear one obstacle this week, so their extra call is easier to make.

EMPOWERED



03

Tell them how it turned out.

Close the loop on the files they touched. People own what they can see.

ACCOUNTABLE

BEFORE YOU GO

Your one commitment

1 · TODAY

Write your move

One thing you'll do with your team in the next 7 days.

2 · TODAY

Choose an accountability partner

Someone at your table. Swap cell numbers right now.

3 · DAY 30

Set your check-in date

Pick a day about 30 days out to text your accountability partner: what you tried and what changed.



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FURTHER READING

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KEEP
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