

UNITED WISDOM

The Scapegoat: How Shared Anxiety Finds a Convenient Culprit

Relationships and Intimacy

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Epigraph

> *all were sick*

Jean de La Fontaine, The Animals Sick of the Plague, Book VII, Fable I, translated by Elizur Wright. Shared adversity begins this literary story; it is not a diagnosis of a contemporary community.

What this article is about

A team prepared an event, but some materials are unfinished on opening day. Participants are anxious: visitors are waiting, time is short, and reputation is at risk. Someone recalls a new helper who answered a message late yesterday. The discussion quickly changes. Instead of mapping unfinished tasks, people discuss the helper's attitude. One late reply explains the whole failure, while checking other decisions seems an unnecessary delay.

This is an authored example, not research into a particular team. The reply may have had consequences deserving examination. Its connection to the entire lack of readiness remains to be established. A convenient culprit emerges where shared anxiety gains one bearer and assigning that bearer replaces investigating causes. Someone's actual error does not establish every subsequent conclusion about them.

The article distinguishes this transfer from examining specific responsibility. We neither declare every conflict scapegoating nor guess participants' hidden intentions. We consider how an explanation works: which facts remain, which disappear, and what permits one person to be considered the cause of shared adversity? This restores specificity without presuming guilt or innocence, or promising that clear words immediately calm everyone.

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I. Anxiety and causal explanation perform different tasks

Anxiety concerns experienced uncertainty or threat; it does not itself establish an event's cause. Participants genuinely need to finish and decide what happens next. The strength of that feeling does not identify who broke an agreement. Separate two statements: the situation provokes anxiety; a particular action produced a particular result. The first can be recognised immediately while the second requires information about the process. Mixing them makes certainty about a culprit seem the natural continuation of a feeling, although a checked connection is still missing.

A named person gives an explanation visible form. There is a name, message, familiar voice, and an action easily repeated in discussion. Preparation schedules and task allocation are harder to present. An easy story does not establish sufficiency, however. If materials were unfinished before yesterday's message, a late reply cannot explain the whole route. If confirmation genuinely blocked an essential stage, establish that separately. In either case, temporal and substantive connections matter more than the convenience of a general story about a bad participant.

Recognising anxiety without a ready accusation need not delay every action. Decide which material is needed immediately, whom to notify about limitations, and what to postpone. Some actions precede a completed causal examination. An urgent decision does not establish historical guilt either. Transferring a task today does not prove its former holder caused every difficulty. Immediate coordination and subsequent responsibility checks concern different subjects. Confusing them is especially easy when everyone wants a quick return to a sense of manageable order.

When spectators are present, haste can increase: work must be done and the visible failure explained. Communication is a separate task. State unreadiness honestly and name an available next step without publicly appointing a final culprit. This does not guarantee audience approval. Needing an explanation now does not create causal facts the team has yet to check.

II. A convenient culprit is not evidence

Someone can be convenient to blame because they are less familiar, less influential, or have made a conspicuous mistake. These are possibilities rather than assertions about every newcomer. Convenience itself is difficult to prove through one scene. Examine observable features of an explanation rather than supposed psychology. Which actions are attributed to the person? Are they connected with the result? Is information limiting the accusation considered? Can an account change when other participants and decisions enter view?

A dangerous movement turns one action into a description of the whole personality, then uses that description to explain everything following. A late reply means disinterest; disinterest means they ruined everything. Different questions stand between those parts. Replies can be delayed for various reasons, while unfinished materials have their own history. Distinguishing them requires no exonerating version. It preserves necessary checks. Without them, a judgement is complete while an examination of what happened during preparation remains unfinished.

Test the story by substituting a name. How would the same fact be judged if a long-standing organiser had sent the message? This thought experiment does not prove a double standard, but identifies a possible difference worth checking. Return to actual information and roles afterwards. Different responsibilities can give similar actions different significance. Mechanical equality of conclusions is not required. Ask whether the difference follows from duties or solely from a pre-existing judgement about who counts as a good person.

Sometimes the accused accepts a broad conclusion to end a difficult discussion. Agreement can matter, but clarify what is admitted: reply timing, a particular delay, or an entire account of attitude? We cannot decide beforehand why someone agreed. Avoid expanding an acknowledged fact through an ambiguous general statement, and allow them to identify the action they consider theirs.

III. A fable shows a choice, not statistics

In La Fontaine's fable, shared plague leads the animals to seek a culprit. The lion's admitted killings are excused; the donkey's admission to eating another's grass prompts a fatal accusation. This is a literary scene of unequal judgement. La Fontaine, Book VII, Fable I. It reveals a question about choosing a bearer of common adversity, without proving how contemporary courts or every team operate.

Our authored example concerns how explanations are reached. If participants have already selected an outcome, each fact may serve only to confirm it. This possible organisation of examination needs checking within the team rather than derivation from resemblance to a story. Calling a helper a donkey and an organiser a lion would not complete analysis: labels would again replace information with categories. Answers about today's event must come from today's sequence of work, duties, and actual effects. A metaphor does not perform this work for participants.

Literary persuasiveness is not causal proof. A story can make injustice vivid without establishing that a superficially similar event works identically. Check differences: did an action matter, who had information, how were decisions selected, and which explanations considered? Where someone broke an important agreement, literary comparison does not

cancel it. It asks for accuracy of scale: responsibility for one's violation differs from being made the cause of everything troubling other participants.

IV. A ritual image is not a contemporary mechanism

Leviticus 16 describes a religious rite of atonement. In verses 20–22, the community's transgressions are confessed over a live goat subsequently led into the wilderness. Leviticus 16:20–22, inspected KJV edition. This is a ritual text within a particular tradition, rather than research into group anxiety, contemporary accusations, or the psychological effectiveness of excluding a person.

Compare the image of transfer while preserving different subjects. The rite follows religious prescription; our team example concerns actions and consequences during preparation. We derive no historical inevitability of the second from the first. Nor do we assert that a contemporary accusation unconsciously repeats an ancient ritual. No causal research supports that here. The comparison has a modest function: symbolic removal of shared burdens and establishing particular responsibility answer different questions, even where similar names occur in conversation.

This boundary preserves respect for tradition and analytical accuracy. A rite cannot be reduced to a simple thinking error without examining its own meaning. Neither can contemporary humiliation be justified through an ancient text. Present actions need their own grounds and checks. A source distinguishes genres rather than authorising exclusion. A metaphor directs attention while remaining a metaphor; treated as an explanation, it can hide missing facts behind a culturally persuasive story.

V. Responsibility needs scale and sequence

Examine what was assigned, what someone knew, and what they could do at the relevant moment. Then consider the action and its consequences. This is our working framework, not a universal legal standard. A team can reconstruct deadlines, communication channels, and dependencies. Unnamed obligations cannot automatically be considered equally understood by everyone. A named and broken obligation is a separate fact. An incomplete process does not prove innocence, but determines which conclusions remain premature.

A conclusion's scale should match an established connection. A late reply may delay transferring a file without causing previously required materials to be missing. Alternatively, confirmation may be essential to completing a stage. Establish which occurred. Responsibility then has a subject: a delay, consequence, and possible correction. Someone need not prove general goodness to limit an excessive accusation. Nor must they be declared generally bad to

identify a broken agreement. Specificity preserves both possibilities without a comprehensive moral examination.

Responsibility can span several decisions without equal shares. One chose an unsuitable deadline, another failed to check material, and another replied late. Information establishes relevant actions, not attractive symmetry. Sometimes one participant genuinely bears primary responsibility. They are not thereby a scapegoat if conclusions concern established actions and checking remains possible. Our subject is replacing examination with assigning a bearer of shared adversity, rather than forbidding definite conclusions where sufficient grounds exist.

Check the opportunity to warn about difficulty separately. Was the channel known, could someone report before the deadline, and who should respond? This does not excuse every delay; it locates an available action. Where warning was possible and required, examine the breach specifically. Where several participants' messages went missing, the reporting arrangement may also need correction.

VI. Agreement by many does not replace independent information

Several participants may repeat one explanation without new facts. Agreement increases while the foundation stays unchanged. This does not mean a majority necessarily errs. Distinguish repetition from confirmation. One person saw a file transfer, another heard a report, and a third accepted a general judgement. Their statements concern different subjects. Separate direct observation, second-hand information, and personal inference without humiliating anyone because their knowledge covers only part of an event.

A common explanation can combine distinct difficulties. Materials are unfinished, people tired, visitors unhappy, and old conflicts visible again. A selected culprit receives responsibility for the whole set. Different problems may need different actions, however. Correcting a delayed file need not remove tiredness; notifying visitors need not repair mistrust. A remaining difficulty does not prove another failure by the person. It may show the original story mistakenly combined tasks needing separate consideration.

Objecting to a shared version is not automatically defending guilt. Someone may ask to clarify a causal connection while acknowledging an error. Hear the subject of their doubt: what needs checking? Doubt does not establish the opposite version either. Claims about a systemic cause need description and connection to the event. Invoking a system does not dispense with facts, just as invoking a bad helper does not replace them. Otherwise one convenient bearer is replaced by another vague explanation and preparation remains unexamined.

Independent information need not sound persuasive or detailed. A short file-readiness entry may clarify sequence more than a long account of a helper’s attitude. This is no rule to trust documents exclusively: messages can be incomplete or mistaken too. Identify the question each source can clarify, and keep its use within what it actually supports.

VII. Exposing a pattern can repeat its method

Someone notices an unfair examination and immediately declares the organiser the source of every problem. The group becomes bad because it appointed a bad culprit. This may preserve the original method: complexity again acquires one bearer. A particular accusation can be called ungrounded where facts permit. That does not establish every intention, past decision, or future action of the accuser. Limit conclusions when defending someone too. A good aim does not turn another's general characterisation into an established explanation of everything.

Name an action needing change instead. A late reply is linked to all unreadiness without checking; other stages are unexamined; an overall motive is attributed. These descriptions permit considering procedure without excluding another group from human complexity. An organiser may acknowledge an error, clarify information, or disagree. The response is not guaranteed. A specific comment preserves checking and the possibility of correcting precisely the insufficiently grounded movement without issuing an opposite final verdict.

Avoiding another bearer does not require neutrality towards humiliation. Stop a particular insult or defend a conversational boundary where possible. Consider safety and your role. Not every witness can intervene publicly; another channel or later support may be available. No universal intervention script is offered here. Our principle concerns explanation: limit unsupported conclusions without repeating their form towards the other side. Responsible action can be decisive about its subject without judging the entire nature of those involved in a mistaken discussion.

Someone can decline to endorse a general characterisation while continuing the work. This matters where immediate public objection would expand conflict. Suggest checking one stage or clarifying a fact separately. The form depends on circumstances and role. We measure neither moral worth through loud disagreement nor every silence as agreement with an unsupported verdict.

VIII. Examination must allow information that changes conclusions

Examination differs from fixing a culprit by permitting revision. Which facts could show a late reply mattered less, or another stage mattered more? If nothing can change the conclusion, name that limitation. Perhaps an adopted decision is being discussed rather than causes investigated. Such a decision needs understandable grounds too. A closed judgement cannot honestly be presented as open inquiry, inviting explanation only so each answer becomes more evidence of a bad attitude.

Reconstruct preparation through actually available messages and tasks. Invent no missing information and demand no complete private history. Insufficient data remain insufficient. An immediate step can be taken for a stated limited purpose, with checking continued later if needed. Unknowns should not automatically become negative descriptions of a helper, nor evidence of innocence. Accurate boundaries separate today's decisions from what is actually established about the past.

Information can alter correction's scope too. A missed handover may require fixing one stage. Unagreed expectations require naming duties. Repeated breaches of an important condition may require deciding future participation separately. Our analysis does not prohibit that option; it needs substantive grounds rather than shared anxiety's intensity. We do not promise every role remains at any cost. A group's need for quick relief should not be called a completed examination of who did what and on what scale.

Clarification applies to others too. A new version connecting failure to an organiser needs checking and limits of scale. Revision is more than replacing the name in an old story: it changes how conclusions are reached. Error remains possible after correction. Keep information and grounds available for later clarification instead of making an explanation someone’s final characterisation.

IX. Correction does not end with changing the culprit

Return to the task after clarifying causes. Prepare materials, explain visitor expectations, change deadlines, or agree duties. If discussion only acknowledges excessive blame, a practical failure may remain. That does not devalue corrected treatment; it reveals different subjects, dignity and organisation. Neither should close the other. Limit an excessive judgement while naming a next stage, preserving discussion of actual errors without returning to a story in which one person spoiled everything.

Corrected treatment should also match consequences. A public accusation may leave others' impressions intact if clarification reaches one listener privately. Choose a suitable method with

the person's wishes and actual setting in mind. Avoid displaying their feelings again to stage beautiful collective reconciliation. Correct information and ask separately whether another action is needed. Acknowledgement does not authorise demanding immediate forgiveness or treating a calm response as proof the initial discussion was insignificant.

A group may remain anxious after a more accurate examination. This does not mean the culprit was identified insufficiently strictly. Deadlines and uncertainty may remain real. Address them concretely rather than intensifying personal judgement to obtain final relief. A pause, narrowed task, or coordination assistance may be needed. None universally calms everyone, but each addresses actual conditions, while renewed moral accusation may merely close the question of what remains to be done.

The next stage may need another person even if the original accusation was excessive. Explain that through time, skills, or current task conditions rather than treating it as confirmation of the old verdict. Retaining a role does not prove absence of error either. Organisation concerns future work; historical conclusions concern established actions. They relate without being identical claims.

X. A shared problem needs no total verdict on a person

Our use of scapegoat refers neither to everyone criticised nor everyone less influential. It names a transfer where assigning a bearer replaces proportionate examination. An impression alone cannot establish it. Check asserted connections, known actions, and opportunities for clarification. This preserves attention to unfair judgement without making the label a convenient way to stop all responsibility discussions. Otherwise the term becomes another unchecked label replacing substantive conversation.

Examine the late reply separately. A delayed essential stage is acknowledged; unsupported attribution of every failure is reduced. Other decisions enter the sequence. Someone need not be flawless for this examination to be permissible. A group need not be malicious for an explanation to need correction. These distinctions allow action without first choosing a complete hero and villain. Responsibility becomes visible in actions while shared anxiety retains a subject still requiring attention.

Historical texts hold attention on metaphor and unequal judgement. They cannot replace facts about today's team. Our practical step restores questions: what happened, which connection is supported, and what helps now? An answer may be unpleasant, incomplete, or require changing a role. It is more accurate when a person is not measured by the whole weight of a shared situation. A common problem remains a common task, a particular error remains particular, and the need for relief does not suffice to appoint a convenient culprit.

What this means in practice

Choose one dispute about failure relevant to your role and available information. Separate circumstances from accusation: what failed, which consequences are known, and which actions are attributed? State temporal connections and each information source. Repeating a shared version is not independent confirmation. Where facts are absent, preserve the unknown rather than explaining through character.

Check scale. Which part could the action cause? Which other stages need consideration? What could change the conclusion? Do not assign equal blame for symmetry or declare innocence solely because examination was unfair. Consider an established breach and an excessive accusation separately.

Name the next task: materials, deadlines, or duties. Correcting treatment, consider the error's subject, publicity, and the person's wishes. Require neither forgiveness nor displays of calm. Where threats exist, select actions through actual safety and role; this article replaces neither emergency assistance nor professional procedure. Its limited aim is restoring facts, proportion, and revision without promising immediate collective calm.

Key quotation

> *acquit the strong*

Jean de La Fontaine, The Animals Sick of the Plague, Book VII, Fable I, concluding moral, translated by Elizur Wright. A literary generalisation raises a question about examination, without establishing a particular contemporary participant's guilt.

Connections between traditions

Leviticus describes a religious rite; La Fontaine's fable depicts unequal accusation. Comparison requires distinguishing ritual meaning and moral satire. Similar images establish neither identical mechanisms, historical causation, nor permission to judge a contemporary group without facts.

Our authored team analysis concerns specific connections between actions and results. Its practical function is restoring responsibility checks instead of appointing anxiety's bearer. Texts help formulate a question; present decisions depend on present information and remain correctable.

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Sources

• B17-R45-S1. Jean de La Fontaine. Fables. Book VII, I, The Animals Sick of the Plague. Elizur Wright translation. Entire fable and edition information read, not the whole collection. A literary scene without a contemporary empirical claim.

• B17-R45-S2. Leviticus 16. King James Version. Entire displayed chapter read; verses20–22 selected for comparison. Ritual text without direct quotation or a historical-origin claim for contemporary group processes.

Tags

scapegoat, anxiety, accusation, responsibility, group, team, conflict, causes, consequences, facts, checking, proportion, revision, influence, error, agreement, testimony, metaphor, ritual, fable, traditions, dignity, boundaries, coordination, deadlines, obligations, distinction, La Fontaine, Leviticus, United Wisdom

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