ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS × ITERATIVE DESIGN

Building an *Accountability System* From Scratch

The story of 16 weekly reports — and how an evolving accountability framework reduced past-due line volume by more than 80% while transforming late deliveries from a vague complaint into a measurable conversation with named owners and clear next actions.

81%	16	3-Way	4
REDUCTION IN PAST-DUE LINES	WEEKLY ITERATIONS MARCH → MAY	ROOT-CAUSE CLASSIFICATION	STAKEHOLDER LAYERS BUYER → VENDOR → EXEC

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The number existed. The *accountability* didn't.

Past-due purchase orders weren't unknown. The count sat in the MRP system, visible to anyone who wanted to look. But "we have X lines past due" wasn't a metric being actively managed — it was a fact being observed. No weekly cadence, no buyer-level ownership, no vendor segmentation, no aging analysis. The number drifted, and without infrastructure to hold the drift accountable, it always drifted back up.

> **THE CORE PROBLEM**
>
> A KPI without infrastructure is a wall poster, not a management tool. The team needed a system that made each past-due line **someone's specific problem**, with a clear category, a clear next action, and a visible trend. Without that, even successful triage efforts evaporated as soon as attention shifted to the next fire.

What was actually missing

01 **No cadence.** The number was checked when someone happened to ask. Without a weekly rhythm, there was no expectation that progress would be measured — and therefore no expectation that progress would be made.

02 **No ownership.** Reports rolled up to "the supply chain team." There was no breakdown by buyer, planner, or commodity, so no one had a personal scoreboard. Without individual accountability, the work defaulted to whoever felt the most pressure that day.

03 **No root cause.** A past-due line could mean the vendor was failing, the system was demanding the impossible, or the buyer hadn't followed up. Without categorization, every conversation started from zero — repeating the same diagnostic instead of acting.

04 **No trend.** Each conversation was a snapshot. Whether the number was getting better, worse, or oscillating was invisible. The hardest question to answer was the most important one: *is what we're doing working?*

A system that *evolved* 16 weeks in a row.

Rather than designing the perfect report up front, I built the simplest useful version, distributed it weekly, listened to what conversations it created, and added the next dimension the data was missing. Each iteration earned its place by surfacing something the previous version couldn't see. By Week 16, what had started as a line count had become a multi-dimensional accountability framework.

— SIXTEEN WEEKS OF ITERATION —

REPORT 01	**Baseline KPIs.** Line count, dollar exposure, vendor count. Outlook-hardened HTML format. Buyer bar chart. Vendor hot list. Establishes the cadence.
REPORTS 02-07	**The 20-day pain threshold.** Lines under 20 days are MRP noise; lines over 20 days require active recovery. Adds planner accountability cards, week-over-week deltas with directional arrows, aging distribution charts.
REPORTS 08-10	**Expedite vs. Full-LT split.** Classify every line as either expedite (PO inside quoted lead time) or full-LT late (vendor had runway and missed). Reframes vendor accountability completely. Standalone supplier review dashboards introduced.
REPORT 11	**Promise dates added.** Where vendor-committed dates existed, track miss rate. Initial reading: only 14% of lines had promise dates — but of those, 76% were late to promise. Surfaces both coverage and compliance gaps.
REPORTS 12-16	**Three-way framework operationalized.** Expedite / Full-LT / Late-to-Promise becomes permanent. Vendor table adds inline split bars. Narrative shifts from "how many are late" to "whose fault is it and are they keeping commitments."

> *"Each report earned its complexity. We didn't add a dimension until the absence of that dimension was the thing stopping the conversation from moving forward."*
>
> — ITERATION DESIGN PRINCIPLE

Three categories. Three *different conversations.*

The single most important architectural decision in the whole system was the three-way classification. Past-due lines aren't all the same problem, and treating them as if they were guaranteed that every conversation devolved into the same generic "vendor performance" frustration. Naming the three categories forced everyone — buyers, planners, vendors, leadership — into specific, actionable next steps.

The three categories

CATEGORY 01

Expedite

ACTION: PARTNER

PO released inside the vendor's quoted lead-time window. We asked for the impossible. Solve with stocking parameter changes, safety stock, demand smoothing.

CATEGORY 02

Full-LT Late

ACTION: ESCALATE

Vendor had complete lead time and still missed. This is genuine performance failure. Solve with escalation, commitment-date enforcement, alternate sourcing.

CATEGORY 03

Late-to-Promise

ACTION: ENFORCE

Vendor confirmed a specific arrival date and missed even that. Trust-broken category. Solve with formal performance reviews, contractual recourse, supplier development.

WHY THIS MATTERED

Before classification, the standard supplier conversation began with five minutes of "what are we even talking about?" before reaching any actionable substance. After classification, the conversation opened with **"You have 23 expedites and 11 full-LT lates this week"** — and the agenda wrote itself. Expedites became *our* problem to fix (stocking). Full-LT and Promise misses became *their* problem to explain (commitment).

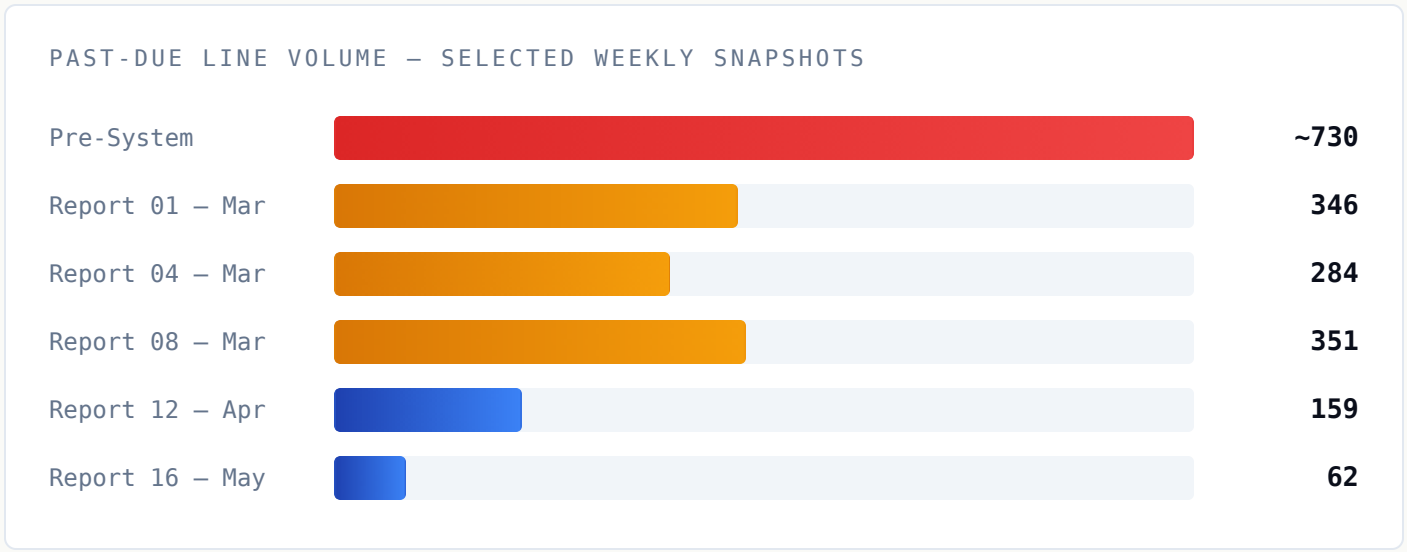
The buyer-level scoreboard

The same three-way split was applied at the buyer and planner level. Each individual now had a weekly scorecard showing how many lines they owned, what category they fell into, and how their numbers had moved week-over-week. The metric became personal, and the personal became actionable.

THE RESULTS

The *chart that proved* the system worked.

Sustained reduction over 16 weeks, visible across every dimension the report measured. The headline metric — total past-due lines — dropped from the mid-300s to the low 60s, with the chronic core (lines ≥ 20 days) declining even faster. But the more telling story was in the second-order metrics: promise-date coverage climbed from 14% toward an 80% target, and the conversations at supplier reviews shifted from defensive to collaborative.



The progression wasn't linear. Some weeks ticked up — a sudden mix-shift toward full-LT lates, or a chronic supplier flaring. But the trend across the full 16-week arc was unmistakable, and crucially, the system surfaced the temporary regressions early enough to act on them.

81%
REDUCTION IN TOTAL PAST-DUE LINES

14% → 80%
PROMISE-DATE COVERAGE TARGET

Weekly
SUSTAINED CADENCE ESTABLISHED

Infor XA (ERP) · Claude AI · Gemini · Python in Excel · HTML Email · Chart.js · Outlook-Safe Templates · Iterative Design

WHAT I LEARNED

Accountability isn't a meeting — it's *infrastructure.*

Ship the minimum useful version first

The first report was deliberately simple: counts, dollars, vendors. It would have been tempting to spend a month designing a polished system before the first send. The actual win came from getting something in everyone's inbox by week one, then letting the conversations it generated tell me what dimension to add next. Each iteration was earned by the gap the previous one revealed.

Naming categories changes behavior

The single largest behavioral shift didn't come from any analytical breakthrough — it came from giving the three problem types specific names. "Expedite" / "Full-LT Late" / "Late-to-Promise" weren't just labels; they were prescriptions. Once buyers and vendors had the vocabulary, the right conversations happened automatically.

Trend is more important than snapshot

Any single week could be misleading — a mix shift, a chronic supplier flare, a closeout pull-in. The accumulating week-over-week trend, with directional arrows and a growing comparison table, was what made the system credible. Leaders could see whether the number was moving the right direction, and at what pace, regardless of the noise in any individual snapshot.

LOOKING FORWARD

Every supply chain has metrics. The teams that win are the ones with the infrastructure behind them.

A KPI without ownership is a dashboard. A KPI with weekly cadence, individual scorecards, root-cause classification, and visible trending becomes a management system. The same iterative-design pattern — ship the minimum, listen, add the next missing dimension — can be applied to OTIF, inventory turns, supplier scorecards, demand-plan accuracy, or any other metric that's been "tracked" without ever being managed. The accountability isn't in the chart. It's in the cadence.

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