

IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY



INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS
FOR CHILDREN IN SPORT

Improving accountability

The purpose of this resource is to help you develop a clear action plan for improving this area.

Each resource follows a common structure:

- What we mean by this area
- Why it matters
- What good looks like
- Common traps to avoid
- Possible first steps
- Links to additional resources (where applicable).

What we mean by accountability

Clarity of expectations at an individual level, around goals and behaviour standards, and a willingness to take responsibility for achieving them.

Why it matters:

When you have accountability, you have leadership at all levels. It doesn't guarantee success, but it does guarantee people are doing everything they can to achieve it.

When accountability is lacking in the culture, issues get missed or ignored. Where behavioural issues are ignored, they tend to get worse.

While senior leaders and boards cannot and should not oversee day to day actions and decisions at a front-line level, you do have ultimate accountability for creating the culture which influences how people act day to day, and you do have ultimate accountability for safeguarding.

What good looks like:

Read the following description, and make notes on where you most want to improve accountability in your organisation.

- **The organisation has a clear purpose** which everyone buys into, and which is a great source of inspiration and energy for everyone, including athletes as well as staff, and key stakeholders.
- **This purpose is translated into clear goals and measures**, which can be used to evaluate progress.
- **Measures go beyond tick box numbers** – such as number of people who've taken part – and try to measure quality and whether anyone is actually better off, i.e. Meaningful impact.
- **You review progress against these goals and measures regularly**. Everyone knows how you are performing against your goals and key measures at any point. Creating positive pressure to improve. By positive pressure we mean it is received positively, focusing people on learning and how to improve, not negative stress or defensiveness.

- **Individuals have clear roles and responsibilities** which align with this purpose and goals. People have clarity on where they can best add value.
- **Individuals get frequent high-quality feedback**, enabling them to accurately judge how well they're performing against a high standard.
- **There are clearly defined behaviours** which define your desired culture, and which support the pursuit of the purpose.
- **These behaviours include a focus on creating a positive environment** which prioritises wellbeing for all – including staff, athletes and in particular children.
- **People at all levels own these behaviours**, and they influence how people approach their work. People also give each other feedback on these behaviours. Praising positive examples, constructively challenging behaviour which is not consistent with the culture you aspire to.
- **There are clear consequences** when people behave in ways that are not consistent with these. Toxic behaviour is not tolerated.
- **The leadership team hold themselves to a high standard** in trying to model these behaviours. They seek feedback from people on the extent to which they are consistently modelling them.
- **The leadership team lead by example on feedback around these behaviours**. Calling out good examples, and challenging counter examples
- **There is collective understanding of the behaviours where you need to make more progress**, and shared ownership of this drive for improvement.

Common traps to avoid:

Again, read through these traps, noting which you recognise a need to work on.

- **A purpose which is not balanced**, e.g. prioritising performance at a cost of the wellbeing of people.
- **Not translating purpose into clear goals, measures, and priorities**.
- **A disconnect between purpose and what activity is prioritised**. E.g. A sport sets out a purpose to be inclusive, but little funding and resources are given to the Women's side of the sport.
- **Under investing in the time required to get people on board with your purpose and goals**, and the behaviours that define your desired culture. Another trap is making this communication one way. Building of ownership requires two-way communication. E.g. When communicating values, open up a discussion around examples that exemplify this value for people. Draw out the behaviours that stand out from these positive examples. And then have people rate how well you're consistently living up to those standards. See the Additional Resources section below for a 4-point scale to engage people in scoring your consistency.
- **Not reviewing progress** against goals and measures.
- **Negative accountability**. An approach to accountability which creates fear and anxiety, and damages psychological safety, where people feel tempted to not be open about challenges.
- Individual accountability unintentionally increases **siloeed focus** – with people focused on achieving their goals, even at a cost to the wider goals of the organisation.

- **Senior leaders thinking they cannot and should not be held accountable** for the actions of individuals. Remember accountability doesn't guarantee 100% success, but it does guarantee people are doing everything they can. By accepting accountability for who you put in key posts and the culture you create, good senior leaders will pay much more attention to what you can influence.
- **Setting out broad values, which are generic** and open to interpretation. Values should be underpinned by a set of behaviours which define what you will see when it is being lived. Along with what is **not** meant by the value.

Possible actions to improve accountability in your culture

1. Improve clarity on purpose, goals, and measures.
2. Improve individual clarity of each person's role and responsibilities. Using the [RACI/RASCI](#) framework for mapping out who is accountable, who is in a supporting role etc, is a great way to do this.
3. Set out the behaviours you want to define your culture. Three questions we have found useful in this process are:
 - Think of examples of when you've been at your best: What are the behaviours that stand out from these?
 - Think of the people who exemplify the culture you want: What are the qualities and behaviours you most admire in them?
 - What are the behaviours you see sometimes that you most want to challenge?
 - What behaviours would you like to see more in our culture?
4. Culture conversations: Bring your desired behaviours to life by asking people to score how consistently you live up to them in the culture, using the scale below. Encourage discussion in small groups around why people gave the score they did.
Score the consistency of each on a scale of 1 – 4, where:
 - 4 = Consistently a strength
 - 3 = Generally good, but not always. Still fall short sometimes
 - 2 = Some great examples, but not the norm
 - 1 = Seldomly live it. Critical weakness
5. Positive reinforcement: focus on learning from great examples which exemplify each of your values and behaviours. Getting people to explore the lessons from these examples can be used to help improve the consistency of this behaviour in the culture.
6. Ask everyone in your senior team and Board to read [this paper](#) on culture and improving accountability, before opening up a discussion as a team on:
 - What aspects of the culture you want to work on and change
 - How you as leaders of the organisation can take more accountability for culture. Being explicit about the different roles of the Board, CEO and Senior Leadership Team
7. Set up a 360 feedback process, seeking feedback for yourselves as senior leaders, on the extent to which people feel you model the behaviours. Include feedback to each other as part of this exercise. To reinforce a growth mindset to this feedback, normalise the point all of us will have behaviours which are strengths and behaviours we need to work on.
8. Invest in feedback skills for anyone in a leadership position, equipping people to give skilled feedback on behaviours which are against the culture you want. By skilled, we mean creating psychological safety (so the recipient doesn't get defensive) and then giving direct feedback.

Additional Resources – insights from some of the world’s leaders in this space

- How to challenge and hold to account with skill - 7 minute video on Kim Scott’s Radical Candour model: <https://vimeo.com/800934916/8da8e75c20>
- Combining accountability with psychological safety - 11 minute Ted talk by Amy Edmondson. Focus on combining accountability and psychological safety from starts from 8 minutes and 45 seconds into the talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuuI9gX8>
- Don’t call people out, call them in! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xw_720iQDss
- An excellent white paper on culture, and the role of the CEO and Board in shaping it: <https://www.walkingthetalk.com/building-confidence-in-your-culture-report>
- Excellent article on accountability by Gallup: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/257945/ways-create-company-culture-accountability.aspx>
- Right way to hold people accountable from HBR: <https://hbr.org/2016/01/the-right-way-to-hold-people-accountable>
- Examples of clarity of purpose
 - UNICEF
Mandate: to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.
 - British Paralympic Association
Mission: To enable world-leading performance at the Paralympic Games and to drive positive, sustainable change in UK society.
Full strategy document:
https://storage.googleapis.com/paralympicsgb/BPA_STRATEGY_2022-2032.pdf

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