

CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

TOPICS

Cultivate Your Personal Accountability
Nurture the Accountability of Your Organization to its Stakeholders
Foster Internal Accountability in Your Organization
Support the Accountability of Health Care Providers and Health Workers
Measure Performance
Share Information
Develop Social Accountability
Use Technology to Support Accountability
Provide Effective Oversight

This section explores the need for and nature of the practice of creating a culture of accountability, along with principles and activities that will strengthen your organization's capacity for enhanced accountability.

THE CHALLENGE

As the CEO of a provincial hospital in Honduras, you and your governing body's chairperson have decided to challenge the hospital's employees to improve the quality of all the emergency and ambulatory care clinics. What are the characteristics, systems, rewards, and consequences you need to build for a culture in which all staff behave accountably to maximize gains in service excellence? How should the governing body best model its own behavior for ethical and transparent decision-making?

Accountability means that institutions—ministries, organizations, and health facilities—are responsible for meeting the needs of the people they were created to serve and protect. Cultivating accountability is creating an environment in which governing actions are trustworthy, fair, inclusive, and effective. By these actions, the governing body establishes itself as legitimate. Openness, transparency, and responsiveness are its key enabling factors. Cultivating accountability may be difficult to achieve, yet it has clear benefits.

Accountability exists when there is a relationship between two parties, and the performance of tasks or functions by one party is subject to the other's oversight, direction, or requests for information. Accountability means ensuring that officials in public, private, and voluntary sector organizations are answerable for their actions and that there are consequences when duties and commitments are not fulfilled.

When accountability is strengthened, the opportunity for corruption is diminished, and health system outcomes—such as responsiveness, equity, and efficiency—are positively affected.

Integrity, transparency, accountability, trust, and participation are all linked and deeply intertwined; they are constituent and overlapping elements of the accountability chain. Integrity and transparency promote accountability. All three establish trust and legitimacy, which promote participation in decision-making, as shown in Figure 11.1.

FIGURE 11.1 Accountability leads to better organizational performance. All of the elements of accountability, beginning with integrity and transparency and embracing inclusion and trust, contribute to produce shared strategic direction and effective and efficient use of resources. Shared direction and responsible use of resources, in turn, improve organizational performance.



In the following sections, we will see the actions the governing body leaders can adapt to their unique realities and take to create a culture of accountability in their organizations.

CULTIVATE YOUR PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Good governance in the health sector is a group process. For group decision-making to be effective, however, individuals must be personally responsible for their own work, behavior, and results. When you are personally responsible, you take ownership of situations, challenges, and strategies and see them through to completion. To help achieve personal accountability, several actions may be considered, such as those listed below.

- Accept responsibility for your actions.
- Accept responsibility for the future direction of your organization.
- Answer questions from stakeholders, community members, and health workers.
- Seek feedback on your actions and decisions.
- Openly admit your mistakes to stakeholders.

Among these actions, which two or three are the most important in your situation and why? What should you do to improve your capacity to take these priority actions?

NURTURE THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF YOUR ORGANIZATION TO ITS STAKEHOLDERS

Governance leaders are responsible for their own personal behavior and commitments, and they must also ensure that their organization is accountable to stakeholders, such as patients, communities, elected politicians, and public and private purchasers and providers of health services. To help ensure this organizational accountability to stakeholders, consider the actions listed below.

- Make all reports on finances, plans, budgets, and performance available to the public, and share them formally with stakeholders and staff.
- Establish a formal consultation mechanism.
- Establish mechanisms to investigate whether you and your staff have met the expected standards, goals, and targets.
- Establish a process that requires you and your staff to defend your actions, face questions, and explain yourselves to the public and stakeholders.
- Establish a process that holds accountable those who are responsible for falling below the standards expected and rewards those responsible for achieving or exceeding those standards.

To know what other actions you can take to enhance your organization's accountability to its external stakeholders, refer to the [LMG Project's guide for cultivating accountability](#).¹

Of these actions, which two or three are the most important in your situation and why? What should you do to improve the capacity of your organization to conduct these priority actions?

FOSTER INTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

The health workforce is large, comprising clinicians and nonclinical workers, as well as support staff. In many countries, volunteer community health workers are also a vital part of this workforce. Leaders who govern must create workplace conditions in which internal stakeholders are proud of their work and are motivated to continuously improve access to high-quality services. The actions below can help you enhance and expand the accountability of staff in your health system or organization. Remember, practicing accountable behaviors is everyone's responsibility—the governing body, management, and staff. In addition, because the governing body's role is oversight, it should take responsibility for internal accountability in the organization by ensuring that:

- there is a free flow of information internally in the organization;
- goals or tasks are clear to all employees;
- managers and staff have sufficient resources to be able to succeed;
- performance and targets achieved are monitored in a transparent manner;
- there are consequences for nonperformance or underperformance, as well as rewards for excellent performance.

Of these actions, which two or three are the most important in your situation? For these two or three actions, what factors are most likely to frustrate their successful accomplishment? What should you do to improve your support of employees in your organization, without duplicating management's role or micromanaging?

SUPPORT THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AND HEALTH WORKERS

Clinicians (physicians, nurses, nurse-midwives, pharmacists, laboratory technicians), and public health workers form a unique subset of employees or internal stakeholders. Effective governing bodies are skilled at listening to these health care providers and workers to assess how well the system is working and to define innovative and cost-effective strategies

1. Management Sciences for Health, *Cultivating Accountability for Health Systems Strengthening: Series of Guides for Enhanced Governance of the Health Sector and Health Institutions in Low- and Middle-Income Countries* (Medford, MA: MSH, 2014). Available at: <http://www.lmgforhealth.org/Govern4HealthApp/cultivating-accountability>

for performance improvement and health systems strengthening. To be more accountable to health care providers and workers and to make them accountable, ensure that:

- managers provide timely, clear, and specific performance expectations and feedback to health workers and heads of health facilities;
- the performance of health workers is regularly reviewed;
- any underperformance is discussed with the concerned health worker;
- a process is established for community members and stakeholders to ask questions of health workers, the head of the health facility, and members of the hospital board or health center management committee;
- a system of rewards and recognition is established for health workers who meet established standards.

See [Section 22](#) for actions that can be considered for human resource development.

What two or three actions can you take working with your management team to enhance the accountability of health workers and health managers in your organization?

MEASURE PERFORMANCE

Those who govern should avoid the temptation to micromanage. However, management should develop and use “balanced scorecards” or “performance dashboards” that document how well the organization is doing to achieve a handful of key indicators of success or essential measures of progress within plans. A balanced scorecard is a management system that enables an organization to set, track, and achieve its key business strategies and objectives by looking at four major areas: customers, finances, internal business processes, and knowledge, education, and growth. In contrast, dashboards evolved as the information systems equivalent of the automotive dashboard that displays real-time changes in information. Dashboards are tactical tools and often use charts that look like gauges. Dashboards have shorter monitoring timeframes than scorecards, which monitor strategic priorities. Scorecards monitor longer-term outcomes, whereas dashboards often measure processes.

Some suggested approaches include:²

- Develop an explicit measurement strategy to measure your progress.
- Ensure measures for all strategic and operational objectives are identified.
- Make sure that the perspective of the customer or health service user is taken into account throughout the measurement process.

2. Adapted from R. Behn, “Why measure performance? different purposes require different measures,” *Public Administration Review* 2003; 63(5):586-606.

- Ensure performance is measured and reported disaggregated by sex.
- Make certain that the performance information is used to refine programs and policies.

What two or three actions can you take working with your management team to enhance the accountability of health workers and health managers in your organization?

SHARE INFORMATION

Effective governance decision makers need information that is accurate and timely. This information should cover the right issues and be presented in formats that are easy to understand and use. Effective governing bodies establish a positive partnership with health managers and clinicians to define the minimum dataset that will inform all concerned about how well the organization is performing on the following core dimensions:

- people using services
- costs of services used
- vacancies among health workers
- citizen satisfaction
- health worker satisfaction
- medicine and supply stock-outs
- death rates

The activities specified below may be undertaken by the management and staff with the support of the governing body to make wise use of information and cultivate a culture of accountability.

- Publish relevant, timely, and accurate information in accessible formats.
- Use modern information and communication technologies for wider and more effective dissemination of information.
- Grant access to information to those who are affected by decisions, transactions, or the work of your organization.
- Transparency within your organization is as important as transparency with external stakeholders.
- Share information about plan, budget, spending, and outcomes.

What two or three actions can you take with management to help share information with the public and other stakeholders to more effectively engage with stakeholder and best use your organization's services?

DEVELOP SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The governance of health systems owes a duty to engage with, to inform, and to be accountable to a broad array of external stakeholders in local, provincial, or national society. Effective governing bodies do not hide from public scrutiny; rather, they proactively design sensible engagement strategies and performance reporting with these groups.

Social accountability refers to a broad range of actions and mechanisms that citizens, communities, independent media, and civil society organizations may use to hold public officials and public servants accountable. These mechanisms contribute to improved governance and increased health system effectiveness through better health service delivery and empowerment.

Social accountability in the delivery of health services may be strengthened by using several of the mechanisms listed below. Cultivating Accountability for Health Systems Strengthening (MSH, 2014) provides descriptions of these mechanisms:

- community scorecards and citizen report cards
- public hearings
- participatory budgeting and public expenditure tracking
- citizen charters
- community radio

Which two or three of these mechanisms are appropriate in your situation? Which mechanisms can your organization use to make health service providers more accountable to the communities they serve?

GENDER AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Gender accountability is related to gender relations and power differences at all levels, and there is often a lack of knowledge and sensitivity among politicians and providers regarding people's specific needs based on gender. Women and broadly, individuals with gender identities other than men often encounter problems accessing health services and holding service providers accountable. No structure may be available for them to articulate their expectations and needs. To overcome these constraints, social accountability processes have been widely promoted as a mechanism to make service delivery responsive to gender concerns.

USE TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT ACCOUNTABILITY

New communication technologies are increasingly available to support: (1) the engagement of internal and external stakeholders; (2) a two-way flow of timely and accurate ideas, insights, and information among stakeholders for planning and performance monitoring; and (3) promptly recognizing progress in plans in order to show appreciation for the work and results achieved.

Governing body members should familiarize themselves with various eHealth and mHealth technologies available in the market. eHealth is the use of information and communication technologies for protecting, promoting, or restoring health—e.g., for treating patients, conducting research, educating the health workforce, tracking diseases, or monitoring public health. mHealth is the use of mobile and wireless devices to improve health outcomes, health care services, and health research. Leaders who govern health systems can use technology in several different ways, for example:

- promoting transparency, cultivating accountability, and engaging with stakeholders;
- monitoring service delivery, and rapidly collecting data and evidence for evaluation purposes;
- exchanging knowledge and information and developing capacity;
- involving citizens in the monitoring of health services, such as using mobile phones to report on medicine and vaccine stock-outs, waiting time at clinics, functionality of equipment;
- publishing procurement opportunities for goods and services.

See [Section 27](#) for more on use of information and technology in governing.

Of the activities listed above, which two or three are the most important in your situation?

In which two or three practical ways can your organization use technology to make health services more transparent and accountable to health service users?

PROVIDE EFFECTIVE OVERSIGHT

Good governance is shaped by, and also shapes, good leadership and management of health systems, organizations, and programs. While micromanagement by governance leaders or governing body members erodes the morale and effectiveness of managers, effective governance does need to protect and enhance the mission and the assets entrusted to the governing body. Leaders who govern have a duty to monitor the organization's plans and performance. This oversight role—which includes activities such as those listed below—is critical and essential.

- Monitor the financial health of your organization.
- Examine its financial sustainability.
- Build your organization's long-term ability to mobilize and allocate sufficient and appropriate resources.
- Use actual financial and cost data for planning, oversight, and evaluation.
- Set up and monitor key financial and outcome indicators.

See [Section 16](#) for more on how a governing body should perform management oversight.

Of the activities listed above, which two or three are the most important in your situation? How can you best accomplish them? What are the obstacles leaders who govern are likely to experience in the oversight process? How might those obstacles best be removed or reduced by the governing body?

What are two or three practical ways to help ensure the successful accomplishment of effective governance oversight?