



Accountability, Alignment, and Ownership

Three underlying principles make that make collaboration work: accountability, alignment, and ownership.

- » **Accountability** in collaboration means that roles and responsibilities are clear, explicit, and understood in the same way by the relevant stakeholders.
- » **Alignment** in collaboration means that everyone who needs to help implement the decision is in agreement about the work to be done and how to do it.
- » **Ownership** in collaboration means that the people who will be affected by a decision feel like they had a voice in the decision in some way—that they had a chance to make their needs and wishes known. When stakeholders feel “ownership,” it’s like they are in the same car with you. When the project is “theirs,” they care about the results.

Let’s look at how these three principles might look in your own work.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Although you are in “charge” of wellness within your organization, you are not solely accountable or responsible for the well-being of your employees. A person’s health and wellness are made up of many factors, most of which are out of your control.

Part of your role is *helping employees uncover what they want for themselves* when it comes to their health and wellness, and supporting them as they aim to get it.

Uncovering and illuminating what employees want for themselves gives them a say in the program and will likely lead them to feeling more committed and supportive.

Although you aren’t accountable for the health and wellness of employees (the actual outcomes), you are responsible for deciding, creating, and delivering the level of support you and your organization can offer.

For example, you may be accountable for the following:

- » Creating annual goals for what you and/or your team can accomplish
- » Forming a group of stakeholders (to solve a problem, create a solution, or give feedback about an existing program)
- » Creating an agenda and sending it out in advance of a meeting
- » Hiring a vendor to support a goal.

When you are bringing a group together for collaboration, you won’t and don’t need to be accountable for everything. That’s the opposite of collaboration.

You will need to be clear as to who is responsible for what. If you are forming a committee, what is your role? What can other group members be responsible for?

For example, you may be in charge of the invitations, creating the agenda, and facilitating the meeting. Or you may want to have a neutral facilitator if you need to be a subject-matter expert for a particular meeting.



In the meeting, you may ask others to contribute ideas, offer their opinions, do work outside of the meetings, attend certain events, or create their own events.

Don't assume your team members understand what you want them to do. They need to understand roles and responsibilities. These roles and responsibilities can be added to the sample agreement in this toolkit.

If there is an action item, you can say, "Who wants to take this?" or "Jeff, this sounds like something you would be good at."

If possible, know and leverage the strengths of your collaborators to further engage them.

ALIGNMENT

Alignment means creating a common understanding with each other about how to achieve specific goals. Everyone is "on the same page" about what they are trying to achieve as a group and how they will do it. Alignment also means that the group has the right level of support to achieve the goals.

You may need to provide the tools they need to do the work (what you're asking them to do), communicate effectively, and help them maintain their sense of connection with each other and to the work.

At the start of bringing people together, **it's vital to create alignment within the group around the problem to be solved and the desired outcomes for solving that problem.** Taking the time to do this will build their relationships with each other and ensure that the right solutions are developed and implemented effectively.

Here are a few ways to help a group get aligned with each other around their work:

- » Share the purpose or mission of wellness at your organization
- » Educate the group about your company's wellness philosophy and/or the different facets of wellness
- » Create a toolkit or resources to make it easy for them to support wellness
- » Develop a detailed plan for communicating. This can be email templates or presentations for them to use, flyers to hang up, or even information about when you'll communicate with them
- » Create a process for checking for checking in with the group between meetings
- » Offer a way for them to contribute ideas as a group outside of meetings (i.e., a Slack channel or Yammer).

OWNERSHIP

An important aspect of building sufficient ownership within your stakeholder group is to consider how you'll make decisions. Each decision-making process fosters a different level of ownership.

1. **Decide and announce:** This approach does not foster ownership or alignment, but it may be perfectly fine in some situations. For example, if it's a small decision or a low-risk decision, the decision won't affect a lot of people. It's fast, but the risks are that the decision could be blocked, it may be not as good a decision without input, or the decision could take a long time to sell.
2. **Gather input from individuals and decide:** This is a good approach for when the accountability for the decision is yours, but you either want input or cannot get stakeholders together. This approach does help you understand what employees and leaders want, believe, and don't want. It helps them feel at least some ownership around the decision.



3. **Gather input from a team and decide:** If you lead an advisory group or team, this approach can build a reasonable level of ownership and alignment. Hearing all sides of a topic discussed openly builds relationships, trust, ownership, and alignment.
4. **Consensus:** Although this method can take the most time, it delivers the most powerful results for shared ownership and alignment around a decision.

Although collaboration is a different way of working, it can be very rewarding and lead to more creative, effective, and sustainable results for your wellness program. Approaching your work with these three principles in mind will get easier over time, and you'll find that people enjoy working with you and feel pride in their accomplishments. Truly a win-win outcome!