

What does a True Accountability System Look Like in Schools?

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Organizational accountability is always and only a system that enables you to build trust with your primary stakeholders. Your primary stakeholders are members of the group without whom you would have no reason to exist. The biggest obstacle regarding accountability concerns the amount of technical knowledge stakeholders and those within the organization have. Those in the organization have a great deal of technical knowledge regarding the work. Those outside the organization have very little, if any.

The point at which trust can be built and which must therefore be the basis for an organizational accountability is the equally meaningful point along a continuum between those with all the technical knowledge and those with none. We refer to that equally meaningful point with the term *benefit*. A stakeholder expects a *benefit* as a result of their decision to form a relationship with an organization.

The benefit is the point along the continuum that describes what the non-technical stakeholder expects of the organization while also allowing the organization to recognize how to use its technical expertise to deliver it. Both technical and non-technical people can use language at that point and recognize it as the same thing, despite their very different levels of expertise.

A True Accountability System enables an understanding regarding the technical work within an organization for a non-technical audience. Organizations of all kinds use a wide variety of formal systems to do this including but not limited to annual reports or summaries, anticipated benefits through marketing or advertising, new product releases or hints, political campaigns, and communication with boards and the general public.

What each of these has in common is that first, they identify the benefit they expect to provide to their stakeholders in a manner the stakeholders can clearly understand, and second, they attempt to build trust regarding their ability to deliver that benefit into the future. Organizations that then deliver on those benefits going forward build and maintain trust with their stakeholders while those who fail to deliver do not. Positive or negative consequences for the organization and those in it then follow.

It is important to note that the reason a stakeholder forms a relationship with an organization concerns the benefit they expect to receive. They may base that decision on the past, but the benefit is always ahead.

Translating this to schools is a surprisingly easy effort. Imagine yourself in the position of a stakeholder, which for a school is always the students, their parents, and the community. Now imagine all the benefits you expect as a result of having a relationship with your local public school. The language in these responses will be powerfully simple: e.g., "I want my child to be safe," "I want to be ready for the world when I graduate," "I need employees who can think critically."

One striking thing about schools that makes such a system useful is that the benefits are almost always the same from one school to the next. But what is not the same is what that means to a specific school. Each school is a unique organization and will need to do different work to deliver a similar benefit.

Effective organizations all over the world begin and end their accountability conversations with this notion of benefit and when schools can do the same on a regular basis the amount of information and understanding our stakeholders will have will far surpass anything that exists today. And if our stakeholders can understand what is happening on our schools, so can our policy makers.

True Accountability in schools is anything but a participation trophy. Because the language of accountability is now in language the stakeholder understands, the validity and what a school or district reports regarding their effectiveness will also be easy to see. Only the truth in that environment will serve to build trust as what is true and what is not true is readily apparent. Leadership in a True Accountability environment is one of its most critical functions.

Suggesting that this work is doable does not mean it is effortless. It requires discipline, a clear understanding of True Accountability frameworks and processes, and a willingness to constantly learn and grow and shape a school for the future.

For more information on the True Accountability efforts taking place across the country, please go to brave-ed.com.