

Accountability, Alignment, and Ownership

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

1. **Accountability** in collaboration means that roles and responsibilities are clear, explicit, and understood in the same way by the relevant stakeholders.
2. **Alignment** in collaboration means that everyone who needs to help implement the decision agrees about the work to be done and how to do it.
3. **Ownership** in collaboration means that the people who will be affected by a decision feel like they have a voice in the decision in some way—that they have a chance to make their needs and wishes known. When stakeholders feel ownership, they care about the results.

Let's review how these three principles might look in your own work.

Accountability

Although you are the wellness professional 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 to help employees uncover what they want for themselves when it comes to their health and wellness. This gives them a say in the wellness strategy and will likely lead them to feel more committed and supportive.

Although you aren't accountable for employees' health and wellness 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)
- Developing an agenda and sending it out in advance of a meeting
- Hiring a vendor to support your wellness initiative.

DOS AND DON'TS OF COLLABORATION

DO ...	DON'T ...
Be clear about who is responsible for what.	Try to accomplish everything yourself—That's the opposite of collaboration.
Clearly define and communicate roles and responsibilities.	Assume your team members understand what you expect without clear communication.
Know and leverage the strengths of your collaborators.	Overlook individual strengths and talents.
Encourage input, participation, and ownership.	Discourage ideas and feedback from contributors.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND EXAMPLES

- When forming a committee or working group, reflect on your role and the responsibility of the group.
 - What is your role?
 - » You might handle invitations, draft the agenda, and facilitate the meeting.
 - » If you need to focus as a subject matter expert, consider appointing a neutral facilitator.
 - What are other group members responsible for?
- During meetings:
 - Ask others to contribute ideas, offer feedback, and help with action items
 - Encourage others to take initiative:
 - » “Who wants to take this?”
 - » “Jeff, this sounds like something you would be good at.”

Alignment

Alignment means creating a common understanding about how to achieve specific goals. Everyone should be on the same page about what they are aiming 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 their goals.

You may need to provide the tools they need to do the work (what you’re asking them to do), communicate effectively, and 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 regarding the desired outcomes for solving that problem. Taking time to establish alignment will build relationships that ensure the right solutions are developed and implemented effectively.

Here are a few ways to help a group align 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 the different facets of wellness.
- Create a toolkit or resources to make it easy for them to support wellness.
- Develop a detailed communication plan. This can consist of email templates or presentations, fliers, infographics, and a communication timeline.
- Create a process for checking in with the group between meetings.
- Offer a way for them to contribute ideas as a group outside of meetings (e.g., 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.

- **Decide and announce:** This approach does not foster ownership or alignment, but it may be perfectly fine in some situations, such as a small, low-risk decision that won’t affect many people. While this approach is fast, it could come with risks. The decision could be blocked, it may not be successful, or it could take a long time to sell.

- **Gather input from individuals and decide:** This is a good approach for when the accountability for the decision is yours, but you want input or cannot get stakeholders together. This approach helps you understand what employees and leaders want, believe, and don't want. It helps them feel some ownership around the decision.
- **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 openly builds relationships, trust, ownership, and alignment.
- **Come to a team consensus:** While this method can take the most time, it delivers powerful results for shared ownership and alignment around a decision.

Although collaboration is a different way of working, it can be rewarding and lead to more creative, effective, and sustainable results for your wellness strategy. 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!