



Creating the Context for Success

THE ACCOUNTABILITY CHECK-IN CHAT

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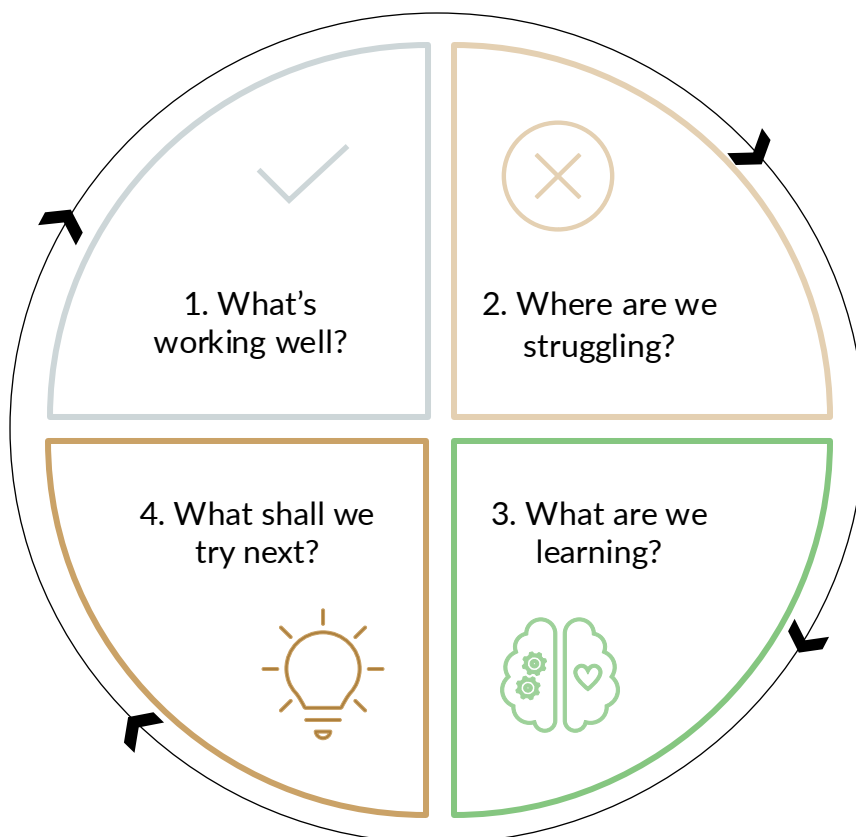
'We just need people to be more accountable.' is a phrase I often hear from the leaders I work with. The challenge is that when leaders say this, what their people hear is 'You're not doing enough,' or 'You're letting me down.'

And this is because accountability is discussed when things are going wrong, rather than as a means of setting things up for success. It's this punitive view of accountability that holds leaders, teams and organisations back from boosting progress and performance. Because what it triggers is fear.

Fear is primal, and it's powerful. Our brains are wired to avoid situations that we perceive as threatening and that trigger a fear response, which has consequences for accountability because activates a variety of processes and reactions in our brains and bodies that have powerful effects on the way we think, feel and behave.

Understanding this means that we need to approach conversations about accountability with an agenda of creating safety and space for people to speak openly and honestly about their experiences.

The Accountability Check-In does this through four simple questions:



What's Working Well?

We learn little about excellence by studying failure. This is why it is important to start with this question as not only will people's answers build a sense of understanding, confidence, and appreciation for the strengths of existing ways of working together, but it will also surface approaches and resources that can be built on when it comes to reducing accountability issues and supporting high performance. And even if it feels like almost nothing is working well yet, the fact that you are having this conversation together is a step in the right direction.

Where Are We Struggling?

There is no shame in struggling, and following with this question makes this clear and explicit. Struggle is simply a signal that you're still learning and by normalizing struggle, people feel safer to speak up and candidly discuss the challenges they are experiencing. And even if it feels like everything is going well, there is always more to learn as the world around you and your team keeps changing.

What Are We Learning?

By making learning together part of your shared goals, and not just the achievement of outcomes, this question makes it safer for people to be more candid and vulnerable with each other. Because your context and needs keep changing, you are never "won-and-done" when it comes to building a culture that honours and amplifies of accountability. This means that while day-to-day outcomes absolutely count, in the end it is your ability to mindfully and proactively support people to feel safe as they discuss accountability that will make success sustainable.

What Shall We Try Next?

This invites you to co-create accountability solutions together and supports you to be realistic about your context, available resources, and levels of commitment for implementing changes. It also helps you clarify the next steps that will be taken, who will be responsible for what actions, and how you will continue communicating about the changes.

Putting it into action

If, as you chat together, the conversation starts to become quite messy, it is important to know that behind every scathing criticism or expression of cynicism lies someone's unexpressed hope. Rather than leaping into defensive mode or cutting the conversation short – provided everyone is speaking respectfully – we recommend slowing the conversation down and asking about the unmet hopes that underlie the frustration or fears that are being shared.


This can often be achieved with simple questions such as: "Based on your concerns, what would success look like for you?" or "Given our history and limitations, how would you most like to see us move forward?" In my experience, our biggest cynics often become our greatest champions once they have felt truly heard.

And be in no doubt that this seemingly simple conversation has the capacity to significantly improve your team's levels of psychological safety, help you quickly find ways in which to address challenges with accountability and leave people feeling cared for and supported to perform well.

It will be worth every minute of investment.

Your Accountability Check-In Chat

1. What's working well?




Four horizontal lines for writing.

2. Where are we struggling?




Four horizontal lines for writing.

3. What are we learning?



Four horizontal lines for writing.


4. What shall we try next?



Four horizontal lines for writing.

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4. What shall we try next?



Four horizontal lines for writing.

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DR. PAIGE WILLIAMS is a speaker, author, and PhD in Organizational Behaviour.

Paige believes that leadership is the most potent leverage point in any system – team, family or workplace – to create positive change. And that we each have a capacity to lead, exceptionally, that we are yet to realise.

Her ambition is bold: to teach, inspire and encourage you to have the confidence, clarity and commitment to be the exceptional leader the world needs you to be.

Using a potent blend of neuroscience, psychology and her own extensive international business leadership experience, Paige helps leaders across business, government, NGOs, and education to lead themselves, their people and the systems they work in, exceptionally.

The results are dramatic and measurable.

An Honorary Fellow of the Centre for Wellbeing Science and an Associate of Melbourne Business School, Paige is known as a leadership and culture expert. The potent combination of real-life leadership experience and deep academic knowledge fuels her superpower of translating complex ideas and academic research to make them real, relevant, and relatable to the work that people do every day.

Paige is the author of five books on leading well in modern times. She is obsessed with one question above all others: 'What does good look like?' and suggests that answering this question requires a multifaceted, systems view of leadership in the 21st century.

In her latest book, ***The Leaders Ecosystem***, she provides nine critical essays and insights that enable a contemporary leader to meet the challenges and leverage the opportunities of our time.

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