

A definition of Dynamic Accountability is “under construction”: it evolves as we go deeper and the requirements of it grow and together we are building the concept. A definition of Dynamic Accountability cannot be static but needs to, like the name itself implies, change over time. Context is crucial here and we need to adapt the way we understand Dynamic Accountability based on how the environment we work in changes. More traditional approaches to accountability included rather static checkmark exercises like complying with funding and registration requirements. This often created an environment of distrust and non-constructive relationships. Instead of naming and shaming, we need to transform the way accountability is understood and use a more positive approach of naming and framing.

Even though a fully comprehensive and single simple definition of Dynamic Accountability does not yet exist, to communicate externally we decided on key characteristics that can be used when explaining the concepts to others:

Dynamic Accountability...

... is an inclusive, participatory and bottom-up approach way of practicing accountability that goes beyond transparency and static traditional forms of accountability

... is driven by meaningful stakeholder engagement through two-way-feedback streams and closed feedback loops.

... means using stakeholder feedback to let people’s voices drive our decision-making processes.

... demands accountability to a wide a range of stakeholders especially the people most affected by our work.

... requires agile and adaptive programming based on stakeholder needs in different environments and context.

... demand from CSOs to loosen their hold on power and build mutual partnerships.

... is not a one-time exercise but demands for continuous conversations and improvements based on people’s feedback.

This also means that we need to move away from the term “beneficiaries” as it implies an uneven power dynamic between giver and taker, where CSOs provide people entitlements. Instead we should address them based on a rights-based approach. When starting to apply Dynamic Accountability mechanisms we also need to consider that there might not be a culture yet where communities feel like they have the right to hold CSOs to account. This cultural change will be a long process and requires CSOs to gradually give up on some of their power and put stakeholders in the driver seat.

The notion of “loosening hold on power” in the definition of Dynamic Accountability is crucial here. Feedback has been used in practice for a long time but what’s necessary in terms of practicing Dynamic Accountability is that we need to move way from a vertical to a horizontal feedback loop. This means that instead of pre-defining what kind of information we need from them and start understanding what they need from us, how they want to communicate with us and what questions they need answers to. We need to let people speak for themselves and explore what us being accountable means for them.



Questions we still need to explore

As we collect examples and experiences of how Dynamic Accountability is being adopted and while our members are continually improving how they implement the approach, Dynamic Accountability still needs to further development, in particular:

- How can we improve our practices in closing the feedback loop? In which contexts should we apply which processes to report back to the person who gave the feedback?
- How can we 'mainstream' the approach in our own organisations, e.g. integrating it into MEL processes, programme design, incentivising staff, contributing to culture change etc.?
- How do we link internal accountability mechanisms to external ones? How can we best be accountable to our staff?
- How do we package and advocate for Dynamic Accountability with different stakeholders (donors, governments, management, people we work for and with etc.)?
- How can we generate “hard” evidence on the success of applying Dynamic Accountability?
- What does Dynamic Accountability mean in the digital age? What are the risks? What are the opportunities?

How Accountable Now will follow up

To further work on explored open challenges we will address these questions in different formats of exchange and learning:

- The “100-day challenge” peer advice group: We have just started to form the group on “Feedback and Complaints mechanisms”. If you are interested to join this group, you can get in contact with ibuechner@accountablenow.org. Further groups will follow in early 2019.
- Workshop(s) at our next AGM 2019 as well as our next Annual Workshop in autumn 2019.
- Webinars to share best practices.