

Holding Leaders Accountable

The topic of accountability has gained currency over time, as much is being expected from those who lead. The assumption is often made that accountability is about reporting on performances and achievements, but sadly this is far from being the case. The perceptions and understanding of what constitutes accountability or what is expected may vary through the lenses of leaders at different levels. Any short-sightedness, misguided perception and misunderstanding may have its rooting in whom the individual leader perceives as their constituents. Where the scope of one's leadership is defined, this limitation may lead to a high level of misunderstanding of the role the individual leader is required to play and how it can impact on the wider society.

Those who lead at the national level are accountable to the state. These would include political governance, trade unions, non-governmental and civil society organizations. These are all mass based organizations which cater to varying sectors of the public and national community. The church is a classic example that can be used to reinforce the point. The leadership of community based organizations or business enterprises are not to be exempt from being held accountable for the stewardship and actions. As it stands, no category of leader can escape the burden of accountability, although it may be a common practice to shift accountability particularly for failings to others. That is known as 'passing the buck.' Others would simply refer to it as 'looking for excuses.' Those who are of such a narrow-minded outlook as well as pay attention to safeguarding self interest, tend to show their support by attempting to defend the indefensible. Generous names such as 'yard fowls and/or lackeys' are ascribed to such persons.

For the most part, discussions on how to hold leaders accountable generally focus on the legal requirements as dictated by statutes, constitutional requirements and policy documents. These are important instruments to be followed in ensuring that the behaviour of leaders is not corrupted, and that they follow the dictates of democratic leadership. This is basically an ideal that often does not seem to exist in practice. With a comparison often to be made of the authoritative and dictatorial rule which is known to be practiced in the eastern countries, those in western

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societies would boast of good governance being experienced. If this was ideal, then one would reckon that there would be no human outcry over the practice of corruption. Hence there would be no need to have legislation to stamp out corruption and promote the integrity of public officials.

Generally, a code of conduct governs most professions and business practices. These are supported by trade unions which believe that standards are important to guide the functioning, operations and management of an organization and enterprise. Where there are standards, it means that procedures should form part thereof. Out of this evolve clear expectations of each team member, of which the leader as the principal is to guide and oversee. Leaders must clearly demonstrate their readiness and ability to lead. In holding leaders accountable, those whom they lead should ensure that measures are in place to evaluate their functioning and to hold them accountable for their actions.

As most grapple with how to get our leaders to be more accountable, we may wish to consider that, “Accountability is not simply taking the blame when something goes wrong. It’s not a confession. Accountability is about delivering on a commitment. It’s responsibility to an outcome, not just a set of tasks. It’s taking initiative with thoughtful, strategic follow-through. (Harvard Business Review, Peter Bregman: 2016).

Based on the influence of leaders, it is important that the accountability of leaders is not taken lightly. It is for the constituents to guard against having leaders who demonstrate that they do not have clear priorities, show a declining interest in involving them in the decision making process and are seemingly more prone to making unilateral decisions and fail in their communication with the masses. These along with low level values and moral traits are signs of an ineffective leadership, and the emerging problems as far as accountability is concerned.

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