Mutual Accountability Roundtable

The idea of mutual accountability is that multiple actors are accountable to each other[1]. How might this work in ICANN? It would be necessary to carve out a space within the various forms of accountability undertaken within ICANN that are of the principal-agent variety. So where the new community powers construct the community as a principal who calls the Board as agent to account, a line of mutual accountability would enable all ICANN structures to call one another to account. So one could imagine a Mutual Accountability Roundtable that meets at each ICANN meeting, perhaps replacing the current Public Forum. The form would be a roundtable of the Board, CEO and all supporting organisations and advisory committees, represented by their chairpersons. The roundtable would designate a chairperson for the roundtable from year to year who would be responsible for facilitating each Mutual Accountability Roundtable. Each Roundtable may pick one or two key topics to examine. Each participant could give an account of how their constituency addressed the issue, indicating what worked and didn't work. This could be followed by a discussion on how to improve matters of performance. The purpose would be to create a space for mutual accountability as well as a learning space for improvement.

It could be argued that this form of mutual accountability would contradict and undermine the vertical chain of accountability established in the new community powers and cause confusion. The answer to this is that ICANN needs a combination of accountabilities to manage its complexity as an organisation. In the IANA transition, it is critically important for ICANN to have a strong principal-agent relationship at the centre of its accountability system to replace that of the NTIA. However, that system is vulnerable to charges that the community assuming the role of accountability holder or forum is itself not representatively accountable to the global public of Internet users. To address this requires a way of introducing a system of mutual accountability as well as a recognition that ICANN is accountable as a whole ecosystem to a set of democratic standards and values captured in its Bylaws.

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[1] L. David Brown: `Multiparty social action and mutual accountability' in *Global Accountabilities: Participation, Pluralism and Public Ethics* Cambridge University Press, 2007.