BUILDING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARDS

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Effective School Boards?

If the School Governing Council never met again would it be the principal’s biggest nightmare or a dream come true?
Looks like it's your governance.

Is it... serious?
Approaches To Governance

Five Ways Boards Can Function

All boards have their own unique characteristics and behaviours which are driven predominantly by the organisation’s vision, mission, values and core business and the heads and hearts of board members.

Typically there are five styles or modus operandi that reflect the way boards operate.
Policy Governance Model
(John Carver)
Policy Governance (John Carver)
## Corporate Governance Model (R Tricker)

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Three Modes of Governance (R Chait)

**Fiduciary Mode**

**Key Question:**
What do we have and how do we use it?
Have we complied with legislation/regulations?

**Strategic Mode**

**Key Questions:**
What is the plan?
What do you think of the plan?
The Board must do what?
Management must do what?
Three Modes of Governance

Generative Governance Mode

Key Questions

Have we framed this issue correctly?
How else might we look at this?
What else should we consider?
Mixed Views on Governance

- Are boards inconsequential at best meddlesome obstacles to the efficient exercise of executive power?

- Boards are incompetent groups of competent people (John Carver)

- Our firm belief is the directors and CEO’s should choose the more difficult but ultimately more rewarding path of building better boards that actually contribute substantial value to the organizations they serve and the shareholders they represent. (D Nadler, B Beham)

- Trustees are often little more than high powered well intentioned people engaged in low-level activities (Chait, Holland and Taylor).
The Board/Council is a strategic asset that creates comparative advantage.

Boards are a resource-collectively and individually.

How can we assist School Boards so they operate as an asset for the school and school leaders?

What is truly a great board? How does a board go about transforming itself from a ritualistic appendage to a real team?

Will legislation and regulation alone generate good governance?
Governance is the art of steering societies and organizations. Governance is about the more strategic aspects of steering, making the larger decisions about both direction and roles.

Considered by some experts to be a too simplistic definition of ‘Governance’.
Definitions

- Governance is neither simplistic nor neat – by nature it may be messy, tentative, unpredictable and fluid. Governance is complicated by the fact that it involves multiple actors, not a single helmsman.

- They articulate their interests, influence how decisions are made, who the decision makers are and what decisions are taken. (*Institute on Governance*)
Governance determines:
- who has power,
- who makes decisions,
- how other players make their voice heard and
- how account is rendered.
Governance and Context

Governance is a highly contextual concept. The processes and practices that will apply will vary significantly given the environment in which they are applied.... When working in the field of governance, one operates in an area where one size does (never) not fit all. (*Institute on Governance*)
Key Questions

- What do various stakeholders expect from a school and from the governing authority in its oversight role?

- What does the principal need and expect from the board?

- How do the chairperson and principal define quality participation and contribution?

- Are those expectations clearly communicated through an effective induction process and measured through a regular individual and collective board evaluation process?
Key Questions

- How does the board or committees assess the competencies and skills need for the board?
- Are there well defined boundaries between the board and the executive team so that oversight does not encroach upon operations?
- Does the board have the strength and depth to steer the school through any critical incident?
Specific Board Functions

Specific Functions

- Articulates the organization’s mission and values
- Provides strategic direction and approve the strategic plan and ensure it is consistent with the vision and mission
- Confirms and monitors the organization’s programs and services
- Selects the CEO and review their performance
- Ensures that adequate resources are available and that they are managed effectively
Specific Board Functions

Specific Functions, continued

- Enhances the organization’s public image
- Oversees the risk management plan
- Resolves conflicting priorities
- Ensures compliance with the law
- Evaluates the Board’s own performance.
Effective Governance

• Better boards don't happen they are designed.
‘The effectiveness of boards depends on what happens inside boardrooms—the capabilities, the behaviours and the way boards organize their work. It has little to do with the avalanche of governance rules now demanded by regulators……’

(R. Leblanc & J Gillies, Inside the Board Room).
For a Governing Council to remain effective it needs to attend to its own conditions through evaluating its performance and targeting specific areas of improvement, in relation to composition, meetings, and decision making processes.
Standards/Principles of Good Governance

ACNC  Governance for Good-the ACNC’s guide for charity board members.

ASX  Corporate Governance Principles

Common Standards/Principles

- Board decision making processes and culture
- Agenda design and preparation
- Education of board members
- Clarity of the role of the board and management
Common Standards/Principles

- Leadership: Chair and Principal
- Board composition and size
- Board monitoring of the organization’s performance
- Board performance
- Oversight of risk management.
Values cement the organization

An engaged board: Create and sustain a culture of collaboration candour and trust

Foster a culture of open dissent

Develop governance policies such as code of conduct, conflict of interest.
Processes

- Clarity about who makes decisions
- Clarity about who contributes to decisions and at what stage(s)
- Clarity about reporting arrangements, including from Committees
- Clear meeting procedures - ensure all members are familiar with these processes
- Manage information flow between the board, the school community, the government, and management
Agenda Design and Preparation

- ‘The humble agenda constitutes the single most powerful tool for either empowering or emasculating the board.’ (Building Better Boards).

- **Macro agenda:**
  Discuss the agenda for the year within the context of the Board's functions.
Meeting agenda

- Avoid the Board becoming a passive recipient of information

- Give priority to key strategic issues. Too much operational information encourages a focus on operational matters

- Divide the agenda between policy and strategic items and monitoring and reporting routine.

- Identify those items that are for information only.
Meeting agenda (continued)

- Board members have the opportunity to place items on the agenda via the Chair

- Prepare discussion papers to stimulate and guide debate of strategic issues

- Prepare timely and informative Council papers

- Determine what should be in the Principal's report

- Determine style of written reports from Committees.
Educating the Board

- Build the capacity of the Board as a collective
- Board orientation: Effective induction process and resource pack - personal briefings from at least the Chair and the Principal
- Continuing professional development of members - both Individual and as a Board.
Leadership

‘Effective boards require leadership.’

- For a board to be effective there are probably two essential ingredients—a Chair who capably fulfils a board-leadership role and a CEO (principal) who wants the board to perform and sees the board as complementary to the CEO’s (Principal’s) work. Other blockages to board effectiveness can be removed if these two ingredients are in place.

- (D Fishel The Book of the Board: Effective governance for non-profit organizations)
The Chair

- Understands the scope of the Boards functions and establishes a positive relationship with the Principal
- Clarifies what support and feedback the Principal wants
- Creates a solid front to the outside world during critical incidents.
- Discourages dominant discussion
The Chair

- Focus debate on strategic priorities
- Ensure the boundaries between governance and management are clearly understood
- Schedule in consultation with Board Committee chairs
- Deal effectively with dissent
- Facilitate communication between Board members and management
- Say thank you.
Principal

- Attitudes towards their board helps shape the relationship between them
- Agree on how you will work with the chair.
- Discuss and agree on how board meetings will be conducted
- Agree on how and what you will report to achieve within the year
Meet weekly or fortnightly

Identify when the Chair will be the spokesperson for the school

Ensure there is common understanding of the Principal’s role in relation to the board and as leader and manager of the school.
Board Composition

- Develop a profile of the skills and experience of Board members and identify gaps.

- Be proactive in seeking out new/potential Board members.
Student Achievement

- 2.7 In partnership with the principal, the school board has established a shared definition of student achievement
- 2.8 The school board regularly engages in rigorous discussion about, and questioning of, student achievement
- 2.9 The principal regularly provides data on student progress to the school board
- 2.10 The school board receives an annual profile of student achievement
School Performance

Strategy

• 2.13 The school board has developed a strategic directions statement, and subsequently monitors its implementation
• 2.14 The principal has developed a strategic (action) plan for the board’s approval
• 2.15 The principal and school board have agreed on a schedule for reporting on the implementation of strategic actions
• 2.16 The school board has discerned a financial plan for the long-term sustainability of the school, and subsequently maintains oversight of this plan.
Board Performance

- Step back and take stock of performance-how well the Board is functioning
- Evaluate the Board's performance (self-evaluation, external evaluation)
- Be aware of sensitivities associated with individual board performance
- Deal with individual Board member performance issues.
Risk Oversight

- The board has shaped an risk management framework for the school

- Maintains oversight of its implementation.