

Deliberating Differently in the Boardroom



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Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership

- Advances nonprofits and volunteerism by strengthening leadership, encouraging innovation and empowering individuals to develop a vital and engaged community
- Passion alone isn't enough when it comes to creating strong nonprofits
- Work with aspiring and established leaders every day to help them build the skills and connects that can take their impact to the next level

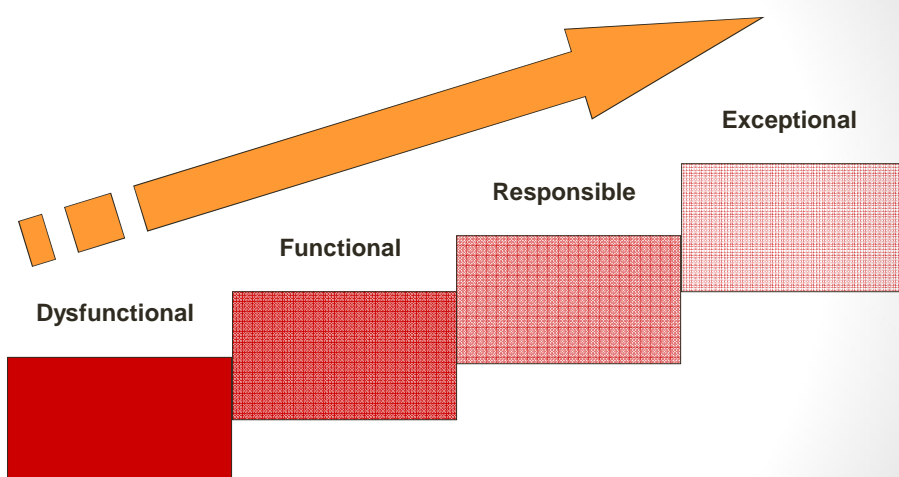


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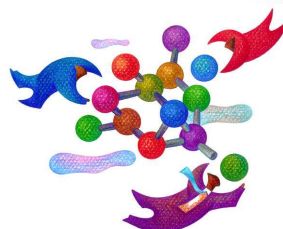
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Context



The Problem

- Board conversations are not as robust and effective as they could be.
- Boards appear to be “stuck” in a limiting frame of reference dictating how they should deliberate and decide.
- Both individual board member engagement and collective decision-making suffer as a result.



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A Proposed Solution

- Boards need to foster a sustained culture of inquiry at the board level....
- This calls for a more thoughtful focus on how boards think and deliberate.
- Boards need to ask better questions, promote more evocative discussions and stimulate authentic debate.
- This leads to more meaningful dialogue and more effective decision-making.

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Culture of Inquiry

Exceptional boards institutionalize a culture of inquiry, mutual respect, and constructive debate that leads to sound and shared decision making.

- Seek more information, question assumptions, and challenge conclusions
- Draw on multiple sources of information and perspectives and ensure all voices heard
- Deliberate differently
- Be conscious of corporate vs. nonprofit leadership styles and decision-making

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Culture of Inquiry

- Is there a shared culture of inquiry that leads to better, more informed decisions within your organization?
- Is there a two-way appreciation of challenging questions?
- How much real candor is there between the CEO and board members?
- Between fellow board members?

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Creating a Culture of Inquiry

1. Ask Hard Questions
2. Stay Abreast
3. Prepare for Meetings
4. Recognize Group Think and Speak Up!
5. Recognize Bounded Awareness
6. Recognize Own Mental Maps
7. Increase Engagement

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Practice # 1:

Ask Hard Questions

- Authenticity means that you act and speak with truthfulness or candor
- This may be the most powerful thing you can do to build real trust and commitment with others over time
- **Learning Points:**
 - ◆ Board members must have (or develop) the courage to speak up, voice concerns and ask “the hard questions”
 - ◆ Deeply impacted by who is in the boardroom
 - ◆ Trust is vital to sustain authenticity

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Source: Peter Block from “Flawless Consulting”

Practice # 2

Stay Abreast

- Make sure you have the information you need to make to deliberate and make good decisions

- **Learning Points:**

- ◆ What happens between meetings is vital!
- ◆ Board Materials – “boards get the information they deserve” and Online Board Portals

Practice # 3

Prepare for Meetings

- ◆ Careful Framing of Questions
- ◆ Annual Imperatives
- ◆ Built-In Educational Time
- ◆ Consent Agenda
- ◆ Dashboards
- ◆ Specific Meeting Themes
- ◆ Annual Calendar of Meetings
- ◆ Specialized Retreats
- ◆ Focused Pre-Readings/Reports
- ◆ Expert Guests/Facilitators

Practice # 3

Prepare for Meetings (cont'd)

Learning Points:

- Many board meetings are simply boring!
- Time must be carved out for real dialogue
 - Pre-work + Dashboard + Consent Agenda
- Education of board members is essential
- Make meetings more “retreat-like”

Practice # 4

Recognize Group Think and Speak Up!

Irving Janis defined “group think” as:

“A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ striving for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.”

Practice # 4

Recognize Group Think and Speak Up (Cont'd)

Learning Points:

- All board members are “essential evaluators”
- Leadership should avoid stating their position or preference at outset of deliberations
- Appoint a “devil's advocate” (to question assumptions and plans) for key decisions.
- Ask for everyone's opinion on critical matters!
 - Five Finger Consensus or Index Cards or Round Robin

Practice # 5

Recognize Bounded Awareness

A phenomenon that occurs “when cognitive blinders prevent a person from seeing, seeking, using, or sharing highly relevant, easily accessible, and readily perceivable information during the decision-making process.”

1. Failure to **see** information
2. Failure to **seek** information
3. Failure to **use** information
4. Failure to **share** information

Practice # 5

Recognize Bounded Awareness

(Cont'd)

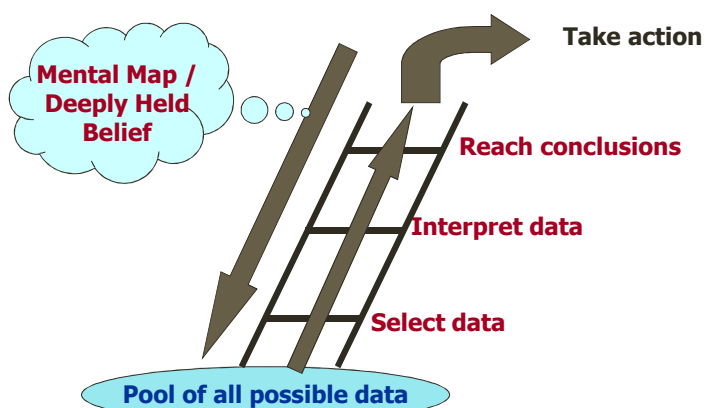
Learning Points:

- Board members often fail to ensure they have the information they need to make decisions
- As such, board members regularly make poor decisions because they do not have the needed information
- Board members must perceptively see, aggressively seek, appropriately use and transparently share information to fulfill their governance role

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Practice # 6

Recognize Own Mental Maps



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Practice # 6

Recognize Own Mental Maps

(Cont'd)

Learning Points:

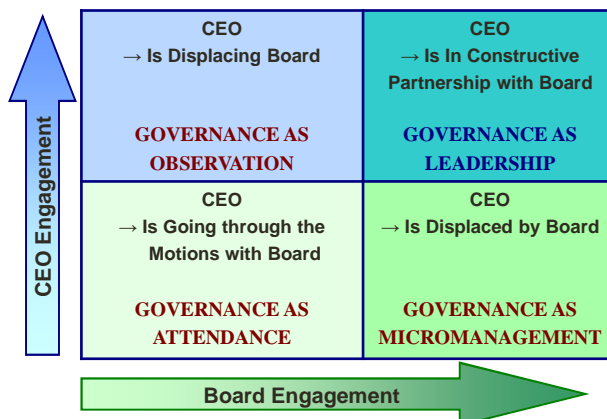
- It is vital that each of us try to identify our own “mental maps”
- Mental maps are one of the critical reasons why diversity is so vital
- A board culture of inquiry and authenticity will assist in understanding our own (and collective) mental maps

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Practice # 7

Increase Engagement

The Vital Role of Engagement – CEO & Board



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Source: Richard Chait, et.al, "Governance as Leadership"

Barrier # 7

Increase Engagement (Cont'd)

Learning Points:

- ◆ Group dynamics are critical to success
- ◆ Constructive partnership with CEO is vital
- ◆ Foster board's ability to trust and thereby seek more information, question assumptions, and challenge conclusions
- ◆ Deliberate differently!

Catalytic Questions

- What keeps us awake at night given the change in the economy?
- What will be most strikingly different about our agency after this troubled economic time is over?
- What will be most different about how our board operates after this troubled economic time is over?
- What are our hidden assets?
- On what list do we want to rank #1?
- What is distinctive about our organization? Is that quality/service becoming more or less valuable in the world in which we work?

10 Ways To Improve Board Governance



1. Actively foster an intentional dialogue about governance in your organization
2. Conduct a “Board or Governance Assessment”
3. Think in new ways (and ask good questions) by deliberating differently
4. Establish or update your organization’s values and ethics standards
5. Create a “Governance Committee” and charge it with improving governance throughout your organization

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10 Ways To Improve Board Governance

6. Make sure all board members know their responsibilities: legal, governance, regulatory & financial (board member “job description” helps!)
7. Evaluate CEO and board leadership annually
8. Empower Board Secretary to improve governance
9. Provide regular education concerning governance issues and trends (much is changing!)
10. When in doubt, in crisis or in transition – seek governance expertise, counsel or training

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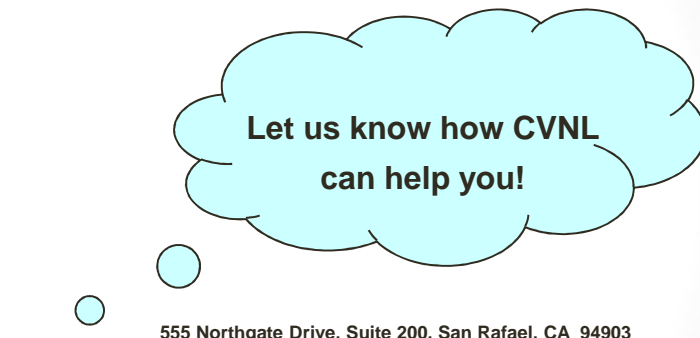
A Parting Thought...

- ✓ Keep your **thoughts** positive
Thoughts become your words...
- ✓ Keep your **words** positive
Words become your behaviors...
- ✓ Keep your **behaviors** positive
Behaviors become your habits...
- ✓ Keep you **habits** positive
Habits become your values...
- ✓ Keep your **values** positive
Values become your destiny.

-- Gandhi

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Thank You!



Let us know how CVNL
can help you!

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