

I acknowledge the traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. In particular, the local Gadigal people of the Eora Nation – the land on which I work. I pay respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders both past and present, and thank them for their wisdom handed down over generations.

Board conversation starters.

Introduction

There is no one set way to do governance, or one set way to develop the board. In fact if the development of the board is prescribed then it's probably not very strategic.

The idea of these conversation starters is to get the board thinking about how to do what they do – how the board can best be in service to the organisation, clients and community.

They are by no means exhaustive. In fact they hardly scratch the surface. Depending on the level of skills, experience and appetite for learning the board may have completely different development needs and plans. Whatever the case, I encourage you to start a conversation.

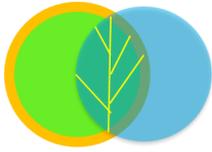
How to use these questions

These questions could be used with a consultant - naturally I prefer this option because then the whole board can be IN the conversation, and you get independence and expertise. But you might appoint a board member to facilitate each question, or a staff member, whatever suits. You might have a board development day, or you might do one question per meeting.

The overall arc of these discussions, in my view, is that being a member of a management committee or board is a wonderful opportunity to collectively create a strong and vibrant organisation; in the not for profit sector there is the added privilege of serving community. How can you best do that.

I've also included an object of discussion for each topic. I hope they are useful for you.

Whatever you decide – make a start and enjoy your journey.



Skills and experience

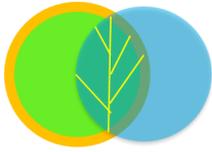
Object of the discussion: map skills and experience of the board members. Identify gaps and devise a strategy to fill those gaps.

1. What skills and experience does the board need?
 - a. For compliance (e.g.: understanding financial statements)?
 - b. For strategy (e.g.: is it the role of the board to identify new sources of funding? What skills will that entail?)
 - c. Be sure to focus on both skills AND experience.
2. What skills and experience does each board member bring?
 - a. Should we rate the experience (“lots” to “little”)?
3. Where are the gaps?
 - a. Who needs to know, what?
 - b. Do we all need to know everything?
4. How will we fill the gaps?
 - a. External training?
 - b. Internal training?
 - c. Other options?
5. How will we continue to learn new skills – from good to great?

Strategy

Object of the discussion: to understand the strategic landscape and the direction of the organisation. To decide when and how a refresh should take place.

1. Where is the organisations current strategic direction contained (strategic plan, annual reports, minutes, somewhere else?).
2. How does the organisation keep abreast of developments that will impact strategy?
3. When was strategy last reviewed? Does it form a part of the board’s annual calendar?
4. [If strategy hasn’t been reviewed recently] What are the “big things” that are arising in our environment that will affect us in the next:
 - a. 12 – 18 months;
 - b. Beyond.
5. What are we actively doing now with respect to 4(a)?
6. What are we doing to future proof the organisation against 4(b)?
7. Where are things NOT working (client complaints, staff turnover, falling volunteers etc) and what do these things tell us with respect to strategy?



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8. What ways are open to us as a board to keep more focused on strategy as a part of our ongoing role?
 - a. Inverted agenda?
 - b. Strategic dashboard?
 - c. Using risk to highlight strategy?
 - d. Mechanisms to capture staff innovation?

Leadership

Object of the conversation: to give thought to and intention around how the board acts as leader(s). To be clear on the leadership role and how to enact that.

1. What does this board see as it's leadership role as a board? Examples:
 - a. To set strategy but not to lead;
 - b. To set the tone for the whole of the organisation;
 - c. To advocate within the sector for social change.
2. What opportunities do you have to model behaviour, and what type of behaviours do you want to model? Examples:
 - a. Turning up at staff events or other interactions and being grateful to staff;
 - b. Sending a message through reactions to senior staff that encourage learning over failure.

Concluding statements

These are just three possible conversations.

Please feel free to contact me about any of the questions, to discuss other conversation starters, or to engage me to help you navigate the conversations and record outcomes. But whatever you do, having any conversation is better than having none, so take the time to talk, tell stories, and more than anything – enjoy the journey.

David Puls.

If you want to use these conversation starters you may do so free of charge on the provision that you acknowledge David Puls, becoming/change, and print this document without amendment (including logo).