

Shaping Governance for the better

Su Turner FRSA 

B is for Behaviour

Behaviour can make or break a governing board. The stakeholder model of governance that we use in many schools, has its advantages, bringing together all stakeholders with an interest in the school; but as we know, can also have pitfalls.

As a fan of appreciative approaches (covered in A is for Appreciative), I'm going to turn the question around and instead of focusing on *tackling bad behaviour in our boards*, I want to focus on *improving the effectiveness of our board!*

So what are the steps to improving board effectiveness? A phrase that has always resonated with me is that boards need to be inclusive, transparent and accountable. I thought I would explore how these three elements can improve the way that your board works together, breeding better behaviour and outcomes.

Inclusive Governance

Having the right people around the table is key. Having a good balance of skills, backgrounds, experience and enthusiasm is one of the benefits of the stakeholder model. However, I know from working with many boards, just filling governor vacancies is a challenge, and quite often, boards take anyone that shows an interest.

Skills Audits are a great way of identifying what the gaps are in your board's knowledge and experience, but this, for me, is only half of the story. The way that people behave and their interpersonal strengths can also have a big impact on board and team effectiveness.

[Dr Meredith Belbin](#) studied teamwork for many years, and he observed that people in teams tend to assume different "team roles." He defined a team role as "a tendency to behave, contribute and connect with others in a particular way" and named nine team roles that underpin success.

These team roles were sectioned into three groups: *Action Oriented, People Oriented, and Thought Oriented*. (see image)

Belbin's research demonstrated that in order for a team to be effective and successful, you needed all nine roles. This doesn't necessarily mean that you need nine people, each with a 'role', as people often assume more than one role; what's key is that you ensure that you have all nine in your team.

So translating this to Governing Boards, how does your board compare? I know that some of you struggle to get governors to be more proactive, with only a few governors really grasping their link roles - could this be down to their role type?

Transparent Governance

Transparent governance is easily understood, both within the board and externally. Having clear systems, structures, good communication and clarity of roles, is vitally important in any transparent system of governance. Many boards that we work with though, don't really understand their individual or collective roles and responsibilities; which in turn leads to frustration and potentially poorer outcomes.

So the importance of good Induction and Training, to help governors navigate their role and contribute - is a step towards transparent governance. But so too is improving the board's self-awareness. Having a clear view of your board's strengths and areas for development leads to a shared view and clarity.

Accountable Governance

Accountability is the cornerstone of effective governance. Its importance is signified by the fact that it is covered in two of the three core roles of a school governor.

According to the [DfE's Handbook](#), it's about creating robust accountability for executive leaders. This means holding them to account for both the educational performance and for the financial and organisational performance of the school; and in ensuring money is well spent.

But we like to look at accountable governance in three ways:

- Being **Accountable** for effectiveness and efficiency of school performance, finance and value for money as described in the Handbook.
- Taking **Account** of different sources of information in your board meetings
- Giving an **Account** of the work of your governing board and its actions to stakeholders.

Governors need to understand their accountabilities, and then be accountable for their undertaking.

In summary, I know that by working to become more inclusive, transparent and accountable will help governing boards to improve their culture, teamwork and consistency. Which all leads to better behaviour.

www.shapinggovernance.co.uk

Image: Shutterstock

© Insight to Impact Consulting 2017-2021

