

Demystifying Board Development

Workshop 2

People, Culture and Talent Team,
NHS Leadership Academy

Demystifying board development workshops content

- 1 What is the current context for health and care board development?**
- 2 What is health and care board development?**
- 3 What do good health and care board dynamics look like and what can hinder them?**
- 4 How do we know what is needed?**
- 5 How do we design what is needed?**
- 6 How do we find the right facilitator?**
- 7 How do we support and/or deliver board development?**

Power definitions...

“the production of intended effects”

Bertrand Russel

“The ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way”

Dictionary

“the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims when others are trying to prevent them from realising them”

Max Weber

“Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keep together”

Hanna Arendt

Types of power

- **Coercive** - uses threat of force to gain compliance – someone is forced to do something that he/she doesn't want to do
- **Reward** – based on the right of someone to offer or deny tangible rewards to others for doing what is wanted or expected of them
- **Legitimate** – comes from an elected, selected or appointed position of authority (and maybe underpinned by social norms) – it relies on position in authority hierarchy (may not be recognised by person with it)
- **Expert** – based on knowledge, skills, talents, credentials and reputation
- **Referent** – the ability of a leader to influence a follower because of the followers loyalty, respect, friendship, admiration, affection or a desire to gain approval
- **Informational** – change agent ability achieved through being an information source – having knowledge that others need or want and data that's vital

Power struggles

- A competition for power
- A situation in which two or more people or groups compete for control in a particular sphere
- An entrenched battle between key people or groups



Where power shows up in boards

- Which constituencies are represented in the membership
- Which issues are discussed
- Who influences the views of members
- Which members have a voice in the discussions
- Whose views prevail in decision making
- Who is responsible for implementation

Issues affecting the perspectives and power base of board members

- Roles
- Organisational allegiances
- Diverse characteristics
- Personal styles
- Historical influences



Roles

- Board members roles (and related backgrounds) can lead to them having different perspectives, views and opinions, which can be complimentary but can also cause conflict
- Those who have technical roles such as Finance Directors may focus on different issues and have different perspectives to those who have more general portfolios
- The role of executive directors and non-executive directors on boards can also create divisions and complex dynamics
- Executive directors often have more technical expertise, political knowledge and connections within the organisation and non-executive directors can therefore feel excluded and under-valued
- Non-executive directors may derive power from their external roles and relationships and their relationship with the chair, which means that executive directors can feel excluded and under-valued

Non-executive directors need to...

- Get the right balance between assurance that things are on track and getting involved, because if they are too operational, the trust between them and the executive can reduce
- Manage the temptation to be over-active as a way of demonstrating that they are adding value
- Work out the balance between a hands off and a more challenging and/or directive approach, particularly if things are not going well in terms of organisational performance
- Shift back and forth from being curious and sitting alongside the executives and being more formal and assertive
- Create the right balance between working directly with committees and individual executives versus looping back via the chair to avoid undermining her/him
- Be aware of the danger of strategic drift as they can invest lots of time agreeing issues and then assume implementation will follow but this is not necessarily always the case
- Ensure they have an ongoing understanding of the organisation because it and its context change constantly, so they need to develop good radars to pick up and respond to signals
- Hold the narrative for the organisation which can be difficult because they are only there intermittently, so they need to keep up to date with what is going on
- Help the board develop its own identity and dynamic, but as boards tend to just meet in formal sessions it can be hard to establish the relationships and trust that is required for this

Executive directors need to...

- Navigate the tendency that many non-executives have to get too operational
- Be open to being challenged by non-executives
- Update non-executives about important issues
- Accept that non-executive members have mixed abilities and backgrounds
- Realise that non-executive members have different levels of leadership skills
- Understand that strategy questions can be challenging for non-executives as they may not have sufficient understanding of some of the issues
- Manage different expectations about non-executives' off-board work time and involvement
- Accept that different expectations may mean that committees run in very different ways
- Involve the board by bringing problems that will engage them but not make them feel that their time is being wasted and executives should have been able to find solutions themselves

Organisational alliances

- Many of the new health and care boards comprise members who are employed by different organisations, sometimes in different sectors such as local authorities and the VCSE sector
- This should enable them to work together to see the bigger picture so they can work across the system to resolve big challenges that span organisational boundaries
- However, sometimes the resolution of these pan organisational challenges means that their organisation will lose services, resources, funding, staff, etc to achieve system gain
- In these situations, board members may feel conflicted about where their loyalties lie, not least because many current leaders have emerged from a competitive climate, so they are hard wired to focus on organisational outcomes instead of system gain
- They are used to being measured in relation to organisational rather than system performance and the threatening economic climate makes it challenging for them to focus on system rather than organisational sustainability

Diverse characteristics

- It is obviously advantageous for boards to comprise difference in relation to the age, gender, disability, race and sexual orientation of their members, so that they more closely represent the populations they serve and can utilize a variety of perspectives
- However, the issues of power and privilege shows up in peoples' attitudes, behaviours, decisions and actions and this can lead to inequality and exclusion
- It is not uncommon for boards to miss the riches of the diversity of thought and experience they could access because they aren't facilitating equal voice and engagement for all their members

Personal styles

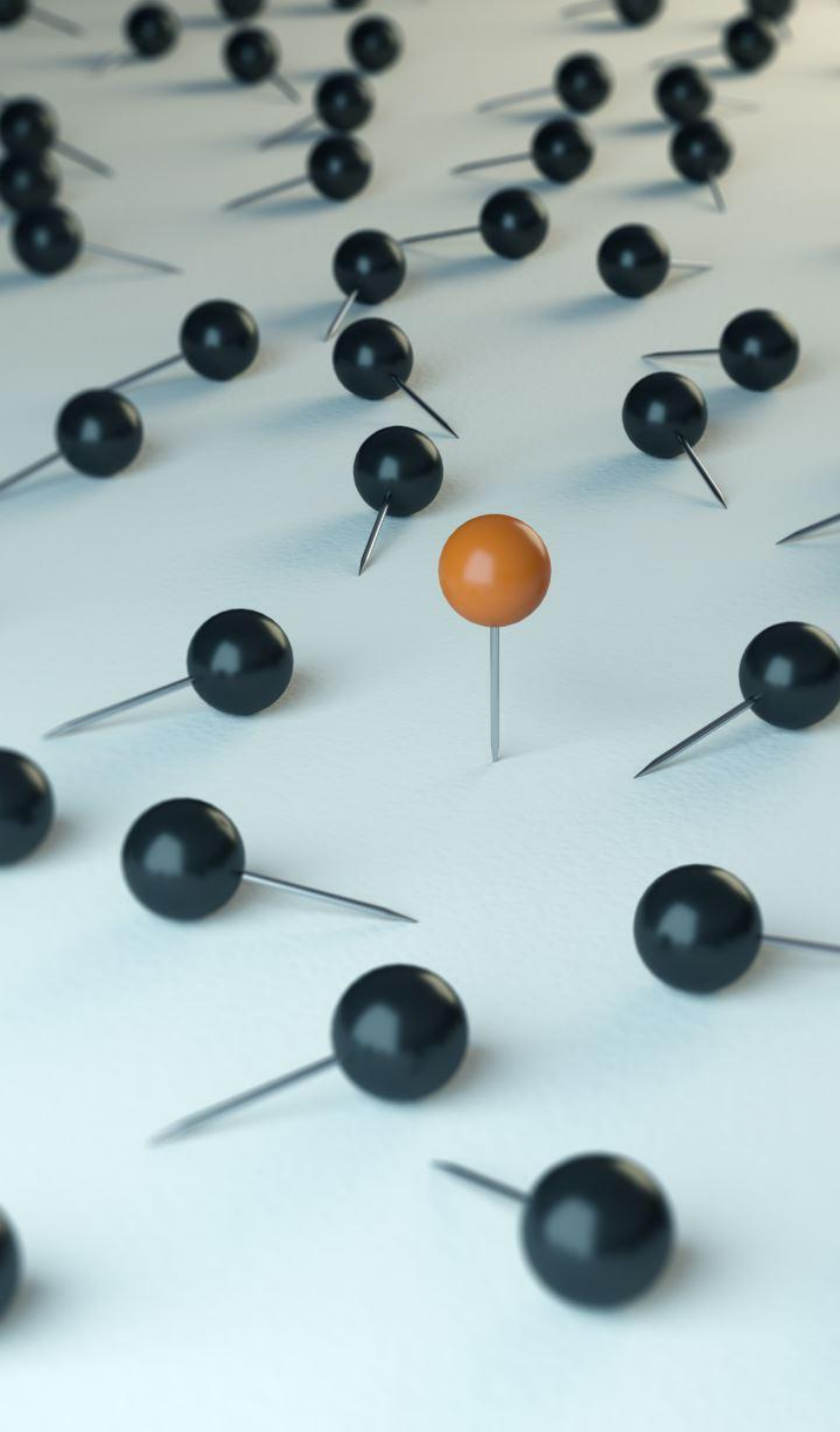
- It is arguably beneficial for boards to have diversity in relation to behavioural preferences, work styles, education, previous experience and upbringing, so that they have access to a multiplicity of ways of engaging, understanding and intervening in relation to their decision-making and action
- However, many of these differences can lead to a difference in values, expectations, behavioural norms, approaches and views, which can lead to difficulties ranging from unproductive disagreement to intractable conflict.

Historical influences

- The previous experiences of board members will affect their expectations of how effective boards function
- This will influence their approaches and behaviours and will impact on the ways in which they perceive others' attitudes and behaviours
- They may also have previous relationships with some board members and this may affect how they operate, either because they bring historical conflict and tensions into the board or they bring strong allegiances which creates the potential for sub-groupings to emerge



Impact of the challenges



Board relationships

- There can be huge power imbalances which can lead to competition, collusion and conflict
- This means that it is difficult for board members to engage in collective negative capability (i.e. the ability to tolerate not-knowingness in order to ask the right questions and find the right information to aid decision making)
- This leads to either protracted disagreements or over speedy decision making with results that derive from the vested interests of individuals and sub-groups



Board anxiety

Fear of:

- looking silly
- offending others
- not being accepted
- being alone in an opinion
- not being liked or respected, or feeling part of the group
- talking too much or not talking enough
- conflict

These fears can reduce board members power, sense of agency and confidence which can trigger or reinforce their inner critic voices and imposter syndrome experiences thereby having a hugely negative impact on their feelings and behaviour



Board purpose

Wilfrid Bion

- In addition to having conscious purpose, groups experience unconscious forces that create purpose in relation to the psychological and corresponding emotional needs of the group
- The work group (conscious purpose) and the basic assumption group (unconscious purpose) co-exist and the basic assumption group often dominates
- There are **3 types of basic assumption groups** – dependency, fight/flight and pairing
- **Dependency groups** behave as if the purpose of the group is to be sustained by the all-knowing leader on whom it depends and if the leader fails to meet its expectations it may become hostile
- **Fight/flight groups** behave as if they exist to either fight against or flee from a threat so they either ignore other activities and possibilities and only focus on the perceived threat or they avoid the threat completely and only focus on peripheral matters
- In **pairing groups**, two people usually get together on behalf of the group to “save” the group by providing an ideal solution to its challenges and they provide great hope to the members but can simulate great disappointment if they fail

Board culture

- There is much emphasis on developing organisational culture, but less attention is paid to board culture, which obviously hugely influence organisational culture
- Board culture derives from individual members values, approaches and behaviours and the group dynamic
- It emerges from a mixture of conscious positions taken by board members and unconscious norms, drives and forces which develop amongst them
- In boards where the challenges are not managed well, it is likely that there will be a negative dynamic which will shape the culture and potentially influence the organisational/system culture





Group think

- The illusion of invulnerability
- Collective efforts to rationalise
- Unquestioning belief in the board's morality
- Stereotyped views of rivals and enemies
- Pressure exerted on dissident board members
- Censorship of deviations from apparent group consensus
- A shared illusion of unanimity
- The emergence of self-appointed mind-guards