



De-Mystifying Board Development Programme

Workshop 2

Workbook

Monday 18th March 2024



3.3 Impact of the health and care board dynamics challenges

If the challenges described in 3.2 are not managed well, they can have a hugely negative impact on board dynamics in some of the ways explained below.

3.3.1 Board relationships

If the challenges are not proactively managed, 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) which leads to either protracted disagreements or over speedy decision making with results that derive from the vested interests of individuals and sub-groups.

3.3.2 Board anxiety

In boards where the challenges are not managed well, there can be an anxiety below the surface, which Barratt argues surfaces via the following fears:

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

3.3.3 Board purpose

Bion argues that in addition to group's having a conscious purpose, they also experience unconscious forces that create purpose in relation to the psychological and corresponding emotional needs of the group. He believes the work group (conscious purpose) and the basic assumption group (unconscious purpose) co-exist and that the basic assumption group often dominates. He says that 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 it exists 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. If boards are not

able to deal well with the challenges, they may fall into the grip of one or more of the basic assumption modes of operating.

3.3.4 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.

3.3.5 Group think

Another potential manifestation of a dysfunctional board dynamic is “group think.” Garratt refers to Janis's work on the eight components of “group think” in relation to the possibility of board dysfunctionality and underperformance via the following collective behaviours:

- 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

4 How do we know what is needed?

To understand what kind of support boards need it is vital to undertake a thorough diagnostic process, because unless there is clarity about what is happening or not happening and why it is or isn't happening, it's impossible to create the right kind of intervention and select the right type of facilitator.

Figure 11 shows the diagnostic process advocated by the NHS Leadership Academy “Integrated Care Board/Integrated Care Partnership Development” slide set which utilises a variety of data sources.

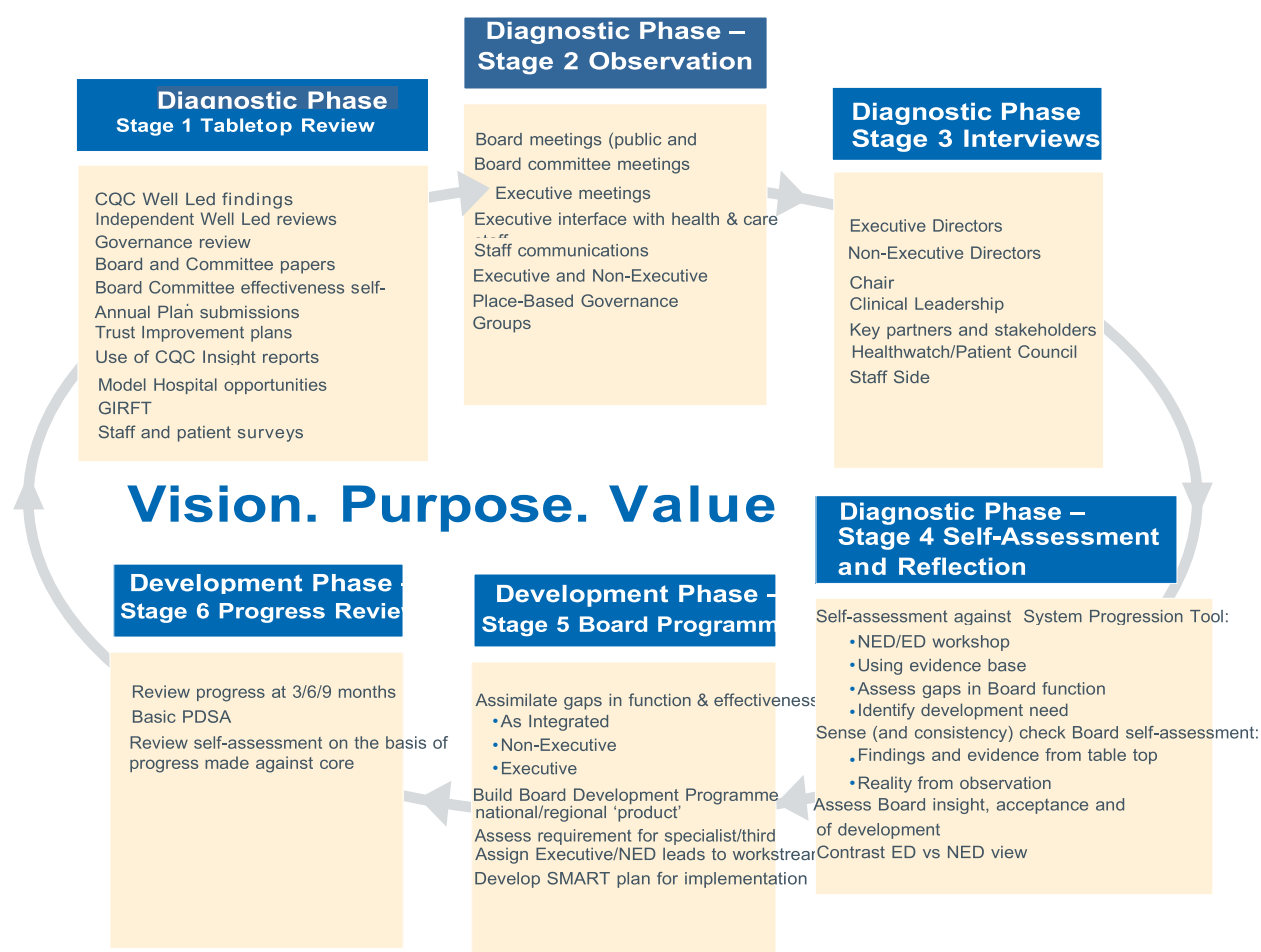


Figure 11

The Figure 11 diagnostic process is very comprehensive and will surface lots of information about the boards functioning and development needs. It may also be useful to include diagnostic data from the new “NHS England fit and proper person test framework for board members.” The framework includes a set of standard competencies for all executive and non-executive board members and assessments against them need to be completed on an annual basis.

In addition to considering the above data sources, it is important to recognise that the person who commissions board development work is often the chair or CEO and given the central role they will play in the intervention, it may be as useful to simply start by having a conversation with them. To discover what they need it may be useful to ask the following questions:

1. How is the board functioning at the moment?
2. What is going well?
3. What could be better?
4. What is the nature of the relationships between board members and how does power play out between them?
5. What are some of the behavioural and group dynamic challenges?

6. How is the board doing in relation to the behaviours described in Section 3.1 and shown in Figure 12? These could be scored out of 10 by the commissioner of the work and then by all the other board members later in the diagnostic process
7. What is the board culture like? It may be helpful to include some of the questions created by Sher and Brissett and shown in Figure 13
8. What are their hopes and fears about the board development outcomes?
9. What are their hopes and fear about the board development process?
10. What are their views about the right kind of facilitator?

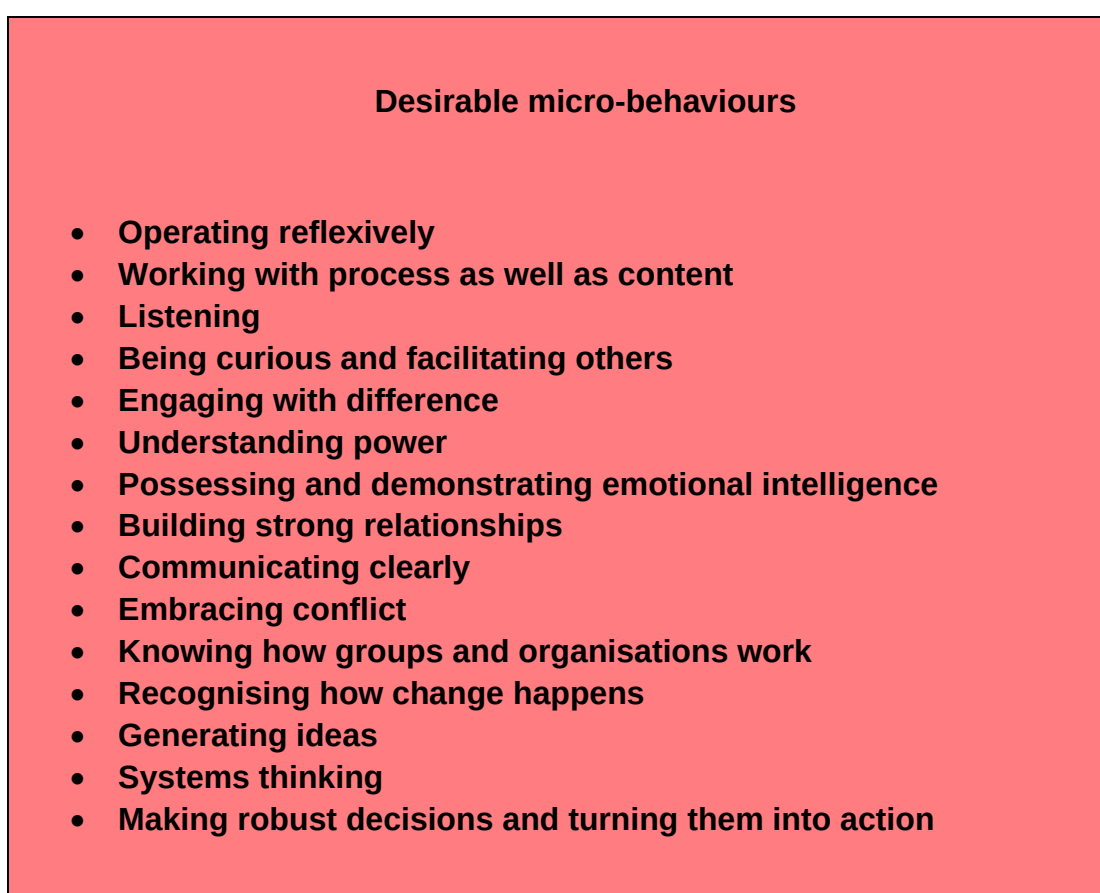
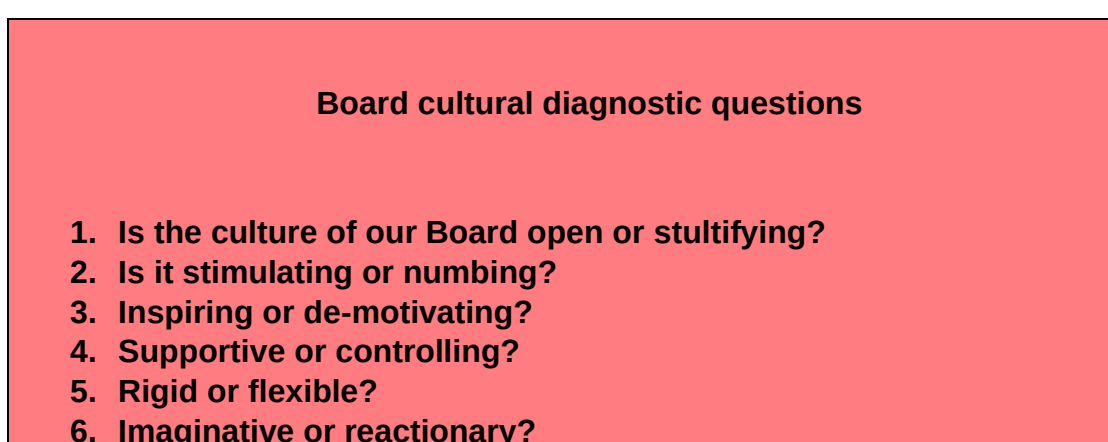


Figure 12



7. Is the Board a custodian or directing? Or a Board of guardianship, inspection or policing?

Figure 13

During the conversation its important to ask follow up questions to help the respondents drill down further into the current situation and the desired future state. In straightforward board development work these can be open questions that don't need to be informed by huge amounts of board development knowledge or expertise but in more complex interventions it may be necessary for the question formulation and potentially the entire conversation to be conducted by an experienced board development facilitator.

It is often the case that chairs or CEOs decide they need a board development intervention when they think their board isn't performing well or there are specific problems in their group dynamic. In these instances, it is helpful to encourage them to identify the issues they are witnessing in order to build a picture of what might help. Sometimes they will say that their board is functioning well, but they would like some development support to help it perform even better. In these instances, it is useful to test their appetite for a diagnostic exercise and/or intervention that surfaces problems in the group dynamic that they aren't aware of, because it's common for previously unspoken problems to be articulated as part of these processes.

Following the initial conversation, if the chair or CEO wishes to proceed, the questions in Figures 12 and 13 need to be refined on the basis of her/his answers and then used in one-to-one conversations with the other board members. After that it can be useful to do some board meeting observations to gather more data.

NOTES

