



De-Mystifying Board Development Programme

Workshop 3

Workbook

Monday 15th April 2024

5 How do we design what is needed?

Having conducted a thorough diagnostic exercise, it should be possible to describe the current situation, the desired changes and the intervention specification. The specification framework is shown in Figure 14.

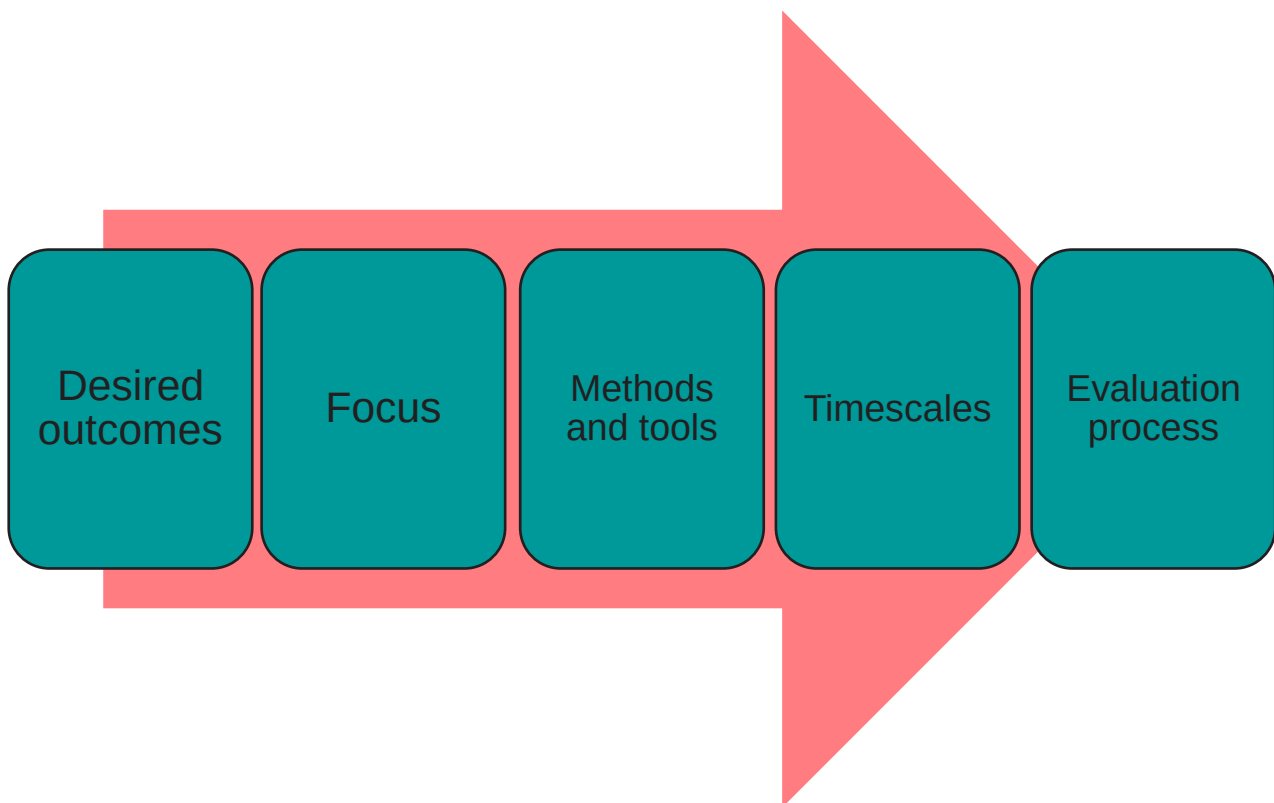


Figure 14

Evaluation of board development is notoriously challenging. Traditional benchmarking approaches rely on either comparisons with other boards which can be hard to assess, or comparisons between self-reported data at the start and end of interventions, which can be difficult because board members are often resistant to being totally honest at the beginning of interventions because of existing dynamics. These complexities need to be discussed before the work starts so that an agreed evaluation approach can be taken.

The methods, tools and timescales need to reflect the focus and desired outcomes. Whichever methods and tools are chosen, the most important part of board dynamics development is the facilitation of honest and potentially difficult conversations between board members. It is therefore vital for the first session to set the scene for this and so it usually includes:

- creating rules of engagement which explore the potentially inhibiting issues of power in the group
- playing back some of the diagnostic themes
- clarifying the purpose of the intervention

- explaining the approach that will be taken
- reviewing the session experience and co-creating the next session

This approach lays the foundations for the facilitator to build trust with the board so that they are able to venture into difficult territory if necessary. The intervention approaches they may then use include:

- exploring the diagnostic themes one by one with the board
- asking the board to complete questionnaires about their functioning then processing the results of their experiences and views collectively
- designing some experiential exercises for the board then exploring the results with them
- doing reflexive reviews during board meetings to enable them to reflect on their dynamics in real-time
- facilitating board to board feedback

Facilitators may also use some tools to help to explore specific behaviours and dynamics, some examples of which are shown in Figure 15. When working with these tools at board level, facilitators will use them as a means to an end in relation to the conversations they trigger, rather than an end in themselves.

Focus (desirable micro behaviours)	Tools
Operating reflexively	360 degree feedback and "On the Spot" check ins
Working with process as well as content	Practising reflexive duality
Listening	Listening exercises
Being curious and facilitating others	Developing a coaching approach
Engaging with difference	MBTI
Understanding power	Power mapping
Possessing and demonstrating emotional intelligence	Emotional intelligence questionnaires
Building strong relationships	Sharing values, drivers, pouds, sorries, hopes and fears
Communicating clearly	Experiential sessions
Embracing conflict	Thomas Killman and MBTI
Knowing how groups and organisations work	Belbin Team Roles, Firo, SDI, Paradigms of organisations

Recognising how change happens	Models of change analysis
Generating ideas	Creative methods
Systems thinking	X/Y game
Making robust decisions and turning them into action	Step Activity State – seven-step model

Figure 15

Many of the approaches and tools described above are used in team group dynamics interventions as well as board ones – so what is the difference between team and board development? Although the approaches and tools may look the same, the context of boards is different in the following ways:

- they have statutory duties and financial responsibilities
- they are responsible for whole system/organisation performance
- they are often formally assessed eg ICBs are assessed annually by NHSE
- the roles and organisational allegiances described in Figure 6 and 7 are specific to boards
- the experience that board members bring to their roles is often huge and diverse

This means that in boards, the scope, complexity and volume of work undertaken is much greater than in teams and individual members' roles and personalities and the group power dynamics are more complex than in teams. Therefore, during development interventions, the range of topics, perspectives and reactions and the presence of power and vulnerability is much greater and more complex in boards than in teams.

This, combined with some of the negative dynamics described in Section 3.3 such as anxiety can result in a reluctance by board members to engage in the process. It can therefore be difficult to get them to buy into interventions and to speak about anything that makes them feel vulnerable or at risk.

The risk felt by individual board members is often very real as is the risk to the whole board, the facilitator and the commissioner – because the stakes are high in this type of work. The risk to boards is that if an intervention doesn't go well, their relationships and dynamic could get worse instead of better which could lead to a reduction in their performance. The risk to facilitators is that just at the point when board members are starting to have honest conversations, some individuals or the whole group may feel too threatened by the exposure to carry on and so withdraw, blaming the facilitator for a process that isn't working for them. The risk to commissioners is that if interventions aren't perceived to be successful by the board, they are blamed for undertaking an inaccurate diagnostic or finding an unsuitable facilitator.

NOTES

