

A Trusted Governance Improvement Organisation

Shaping Governance: A-Z of Governance

Breaking down key governance concepts into clear, digestible insights

B is for Board Behaviour:

Su Turner, our CEO shares her thinking…

The behaviour of a governing board plays a critical role in determining its overall effectiveness. In schools, the stakeholder model of governance, where individuals with a direct interest in the school's success come together, is widely used and offers significant strengths. It fosters a sense of shared purpose and community ownership. However, it also brings inherent challenges, particularly around balancing diverse perspectives and maintaining consistent focus. Rather than dwelling on these challenges, I want to reframe the conversation toward what drives board effectiveness.

A principle that has always guided my thinking is that effective governance is built on inclusion, transparency, and accountability. These aren't just ideals—they are practical drivers of stronger collaboration, better decision-making, and improved outcomes for children and young people. Let's explore how embracing these three elements can help governing boards not only function more effectively but also lead with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

Inclusive Governance

The composition of a board is critical. One of the key benefits of the stakeholder model is a diverse mix of skills, backgrounds, experience, and enthusiasm. However, I've seen many boards struggle to fill vacancies, often appointing anyone who shows an interest rather than strategically selecting the right individuals.

Skills audits are valuable tools for identifying knowledge gaps, but they tell only part of the story. The interpersonal dynamics and behavioural strengths of board members are equally important in determining overall board effectiveness.

Dr. Meredith Belbin, a renowned researcher on teamwork, identified **nine team roles** essential for success. These roles fall into three categories:

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- **Action-Oriented:** Individuals who drive tasks forward.
- **People-Oriented:** Those who focus on collaboration and communication.
- **Thought-Oriented:** Members who bring analysis, creativity, and strategic thinking.

Belbin's research highlights that an effective team needs all nine roles, not necessarily nine separate individuals, as people often assume multiple roles.

This raises an important question for governing boards: **Does your board have the right mix of these team roles?** Many boards struggle with engagement, with only a few governors actively taking on link roles. Could this be due to an imbalance in team roles?

Transparent Governance

Transparency is fundamental to good governance—both within the board and externally. Clear structures, defined roles, and effective communication create an environment where governance is understood and effective.

However, many boards lack clarity around individual and collective responsibilities. This confusion can lead to frustration and poor decision-making.

Key steps toward greater transparency include:

- **Comprehensive induction and training** to help new governors understand their role.
- **Self-assessment and board reviews** to evaluate strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Clear policies and processes** to ensure consistency and accountability.

By fostering a culture of transparency, boards enhance their decision-making and overall effectiveness.

Accountable Governance

Accountability is the foundation of effective governance. The Department for Education (DfE) highlights accountability as a core function of school governors, emphasising their role in:

- Holding school leaders accountable for educational performance.
- Overseeing financial and organisational management to ensure resources are well spent.

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However, accountability goes beyond these responsibilities. I like to consider it in three ways:

1. **Being Accountable** – Ensuring the school operates efficiently and achieves strong outcomes.
2. **Taking Account** – Using multiple sources of information to inform board decisions.
3. **Giving an Account** – Communicating the board's work and actions to stakeholders.

Governors must not only understand their responsibilities but also actively uphold them.

Final Thoughts

By focusing on inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, governing boards can create a strong culture of collaboration and consistency. This, in turn, fosters positive behaviour, leading to more effective governance and better outcomes for schools.

A high-performing board isn't just about who sits around the table—it's about how they work together. By embedding these principles, boards can navigate challenges with confidence and drive meaningful impact.

How we help: Team Development in Governance

Team development is a core focus of our **Shaping Governance Programme**. In just two hours, governors engage in meaningful discussions, share insights, and identify key areas for improvement in both their governing practices and teamwork. This structured approach ensures that boards build stronger, more cohesive teams that drive effective governance.

Contact us: Get in touch if you want to find out more: office@shapinggovernance.co.uk

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