

# REALBOARD™ ADVISOR

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## Board Self-Evaluation



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**I**n this issue we explore board self-evaluation: the board looking at itself and determining if it has governed in the way it said it would and how well it has done the jobs it has committed to doing. We hope these articles help you appreciate that self-evaluation is not an optional extra that the board does if it has time. It is integral to the board's ability to lead the organization towards a meaningful future.

The articles address how a board might undertake self-evaluation of its meetings, its committees, and individual and peer evaluation of board members. Jannice Moore looks at how self-evaluation can assist a board in planning succession. Michel Paulin's article points out the difference between policy review and self-monitoring.

Hopefully these articles will whet your appetite. Our REALBoard Tool Kit™, "Board Self-Evaluation" is a comprehensive guide to integrating self-evaluation into your board's work. It addresses what your board should evaluate, who should be involved, ways of undertaking the process and how to integrate self-evaluation into its yearly plan.

A special feature in this edition is a spotlight on a long-term client, the Nipissing Catholic District School Board, and the recognition it received for its work in equity, diversion and inclusion.

Read on and enjoy.

*Richard Stringham & Rose Mercier*

## Editor's Note

**J**anuary is one of those months we take to refresh ourselves. Perhaps you are changing your diet, or have joined a health facility, or maybe you are taking a class in something new.

Here's where we come in. We're offering individual courses to refresh your knowledge of board governance with plenty of convenient start dates. Take advantage of our January discounts to do some governance reading. Our books are chock full of tips and tools to make your life as a board member a little easier.

Happy New Year! May 2024 be your year of effective governance.

*Marian*

Marian Hamilton  
Editor

# Meeting Evaluation - The Tip of the Iceberg

ROSE MERCIER - PARTNER



I've attended a lot of meetings that were a waste of time. I wished someone had asked: How was the meeting? Do we need to do anything differently? I would have had a lot to say.

These days I attend a lot of board meetings. Boards need to ask themselves: "What about our meetings needs to be improved?" Why do I say this?

First, I believe all boards want to shape meaningful futures. And because of that I believe boards need meaningful meetings. A board needs to make the best possible use of its time together in what is arguably the fundamental backdrop for its work. Otherwise, how likely is it that it will create meaningful futures?

There are three outcomes essential to effective governance - role clarity, risk protection, and future focus. If a board has any hope of achieving these results, it needs to continuously improve everything it does. And this includes how well its meetings live up to their potential. A board needs to regularly look in the self-evaluation mirror. As importantly, it needs to be honest about the reflection it sees. And then, it needs to take action and change what isn't working as well as it could.

## An obvious starting point

Self-evaluation that supports a board's journey to exemplary governance has many parts. You will read about these in others' articles. A board does not need all parts to be in place before it starts to benefit from self-evaluation. An obvious starting point is a focus on its meetings. While a board's work happens at other times and in other contexts, meeting feedback is the tip of the self-evaluation iceberg.

## Meeting evaluation tips

Online surveys and mobile apps have made it easy to get feedback about almost anything. A board can quickly rate its performance at the end of its meeting. Some boards like instant feedback - seeing ratings flash on screen in real time. Other boards like to review the evaluations of one

meeting at their start of their next meeting. Still other boards appoint one member to act as meeting monitor and then report observations at the end of the meeting.

Whatever method is used, consistency and regularity are the keys to continuous improvement. Choose your questions wisely. You want questions to help you learn if the meeting is contributing to the board's effectiveness as a governing body - or not. Use the same questions at each meeting. This makes it possible to diagnose the board's good and bad habits.

## What questions should we ask?

Choose questions that address the essentials of effective meeting performance. Do meetings support the board's achievement of role clarity, risk protection, and future focus?

Here are 5 areas of questioning that your board can use to help it evaluate how well its meeting is contributing to effective governance:

- **Did we keep our focus at the level of the board's work or were we "diving into the weeds"?**
- **Were we proactive or reactive?** Were we simply approving the CEO's plans or recommendations? Were our decisions the result of board-initiated work? Did we need to react to issues that we might have foreseen if we were more attentive to potential risks?
- **Did we use our time efficiently?** Did board members do their homework? Were the agenda and material sent in advance? How much time did we spend on activity reports? How much time was on monitoring operational performance? How much time, if any, did we spend looking at potential risks? How much time did we give to thinking about the future we seek to create for those we intend to benefit?"
- **Did we work as a team?** Did we share airtime? Encourage diversity of views? Listen to each other? Did anyone dominate discussion? Are we able to resolve differences of opinion? Do we make decisions collectively?

# ÉVALUATION DES RÉUNIONS - LA PARTIE ÉMERGÉE DE L'ICEBERG

ROSE MERCIER - PARTNER

(TRANSLATED BY MICHEL PAULIN)

- **Did we make sound decisions?** Did we consider input from our principal stakeholders? Did we have current and relevant data? Did we consider the impact of our decisions on those we serve and the possible risks to the organization?

## Translate Evaluation Results into Action

Learning where there are areas for improvement only has value if you use what you learned to improve.

Review meeting evaluations and identify what needs to change at your next meeting. Keep track of the changes you make as you go.

The real power of meeting self-evaluation comes when the board brings together the evaluations from all of its meetings. Put on Sherlock Holmes' hat. Find the common threads. Can you find the good habits you want to keep? Are there bad habits that need to be corrected or improved?

Then develop an action plan. Maybe the board needs to schedule education to increase skills in decision making, dialogue, or conflict resolution. Maybe agendas and meeting packages need to be sent earlier. Be specific about the changes and include it in board's annual schedule. And evaluate if the changes are making a difference.

Meeting self-evaluation may be tip of the iceberg, but it will pay dividends for the board that wants to achieve the level of performance necessary to shaping meaningful futures.

J'ai assisté à de nombreuses réunions qui n'étaient qu'une perte de temps. J'aurais aimé que quelqu'un pose la question suivante : Comment s'est déroulée la réunion? Devons-nous faire quelque chose de différent? J'aurais eu beaucoup de choses à dire.

Ces jours-ci, j'assiste à de nombreuses réunions de conseils d'administration. Les conseils d'administration doivent se poser la question suivante : "Qu'est-ce qui doit être amélioré dans nos réunions?" Pourquoi est-ce que je dis cela ?

Tout d'abord, je crois que tous les conseils d'administration veulent façonner des futurs significatifs. C'est pourquoi je pense que les conseils d'administration ont besoin de réunions utiles. Un conseil d'administration doit faire le meilleur usage possible du temps qu'il passe ensemble dans ce qui est sans doute la toile de fond fondamentale de son travail. Sinon, quelle est la probabilité qu'il crée des futurs significatifs?

Trois résultats sont essentiels à une gouvernance efficace : la clarté des rôles, la protection des risques et l'orientation vers l'avenir. Pour qu'un conseil d'administration puisse espérer atteindre ces résultats, il doit continuellement améliorer tout ce qu'il fait. Et cela inclut la mesure dans laquelle ses réunions sont à la hauteur de leur potentiel. Un conseil d'administration doit se regarder régulièrement dans le miroir de l'auto-évaluation. Il est tout aussi important qu'il soit honnête quant au reflet qu'il voit. Ensuite, il doit agir et changer ce qui ne fonctionne pas aussi bien qu'il le pourrait.

## Un point de départ évident

L'auto-évaluation qui soutient le cheminement d'un conseil d'administration vers une gouvernance exemplaire comporte de nombreux éléments. Vous les découvrirez dans d'autres articles. Il n'est pas nécessaire que tous les éléments soient en place pour qu'un conseil tire profit de l'auto-évaluation. Un point de départ évident est de se concentrer sur ses réunions. Bien que le travail d'un conseil ait lieu à d'autres moments et dans d'autres contextes, le retour d'information sur les réunions est la partie émergée de l'iceberg de l'auto-évaluation.

## Conseils pour l'évaluation des réunions

Grâce aux sondages en ligne et aux applications mobiles, il est désormais facile d'obtenir un retour d'information sur presque tous les sujets. Un conseil d'administration peut rapidement évaluer ses performances à la fin de la réunion. Certains conseils d'administration apprécient le retour d'information instantané, c'est-à-dire le fait de voir les évaluations s'afficher à l'écran en temps réel. D'autres préfèrent examiner les évaluations d'une réunion au début de la réunion suivante. D'autres encore désignent un membre pour surveiller la réunion et faire part de ses observations à la fin de la réunion.

Quelle que soit la méthode utilisée, la cohérence et la régularité sont les clés de l'amélioration continue.

- Choisissez judicieusement vos questions. Les questions doivent vous aider à déterminer si la réunion contribue à l'efficacité du conseil d'administration en tant qu'organe de gouvernance - ou non.

- Posez les mêmes questions à chaque réunion. Cela permet de diagnostiquer les bonnes et les mauvaises habitudes du conseil.

### Quelles questions poser?

Choisissez des questions qui portent sur les éléments essentiels d'une réunion efficace. Les réunions permettent-elles au conseil d'administration de clarifier son rôle, de protéger les risques et de se concentrer sur l'avenir?

Voici cinq domaines de questionnement que votre conseil peut utiliser pour l'aider à évaluer dans quelle mesure sa réunion contribue à une gouvernance efficace :

- **Avons-nous maintenu notre attention au niveau des travaux du conseil ou sommes-nous "empêtrés dans les détails"?**
- **Avons-nous été proactifs ou réactifs?** Avons-nous simplement approuvé les plans ou les recommandations du PDG? Nos décisions étaient-elles le résultat d'un travail initié par le conseil d'administration? Avons-nous dû réagir à des problèmes que nous aurions pu prévoir si nous avions été plus attentifs aux risques potentiels?
- **Avons-nous utilisé notre temps de manière efficace?** Les membres du conseil d'administration ont-ils fait leurs devoirs? L'ordre du jour et les documents ont-ils été envoyés à l'avance? Combien de temps avons-nous consacré aux rapports d'activité? Combien de temps avons-nous consacré au suivi des performances opérationnelles? Combien de temps avons-nous consacré, le cas échéant, à l'examen des risques potentiels? Combien de temps avons-nous

consacré à la réflexion sur l'avenir que nous cherchons à créer pour ceux que nous voulons aider?

- **Avons-nous travaillé en équipe?** Avons-nous partagé le temps d'antenne? Encouragé la diversité des points de vue? Nous sommes-nous écoutés les uns les autres? Quelqu'un a-t-il dominé la discussion? Sommes-nous capables de résoudre les divergences d'opinion? Prenons-nous des décisions collectivement?
- **Avons-nous pris des décisions judicieuses?** Avons-nous tenu compte de l'avis de nos principales parties prenantes? Dispositions-nous de données actuelles et pertinentes? Avons-nous pris en compte l'impact de nos décisions sur les personnes que nous desservons et les risques éventuels pour l'organisation?

### Traduire les résultats de l'évaluation en actions

Apprendre où se trouvent les domaines à améliorer n'a de valeur que si l'on utilise ce que l'on a appris pour s'améliorer.

Examinez les évaluations des réunions et identifiez ce qui doit être modifié lors de la prochaine réunion. Notez les changements que vous apportez au fur et à mesure.

Le véritable pouvoir de l'auto-évaluation des réunions se manifeste lorsque le conseil d'administration rassemble les évaluations de toutes ses réunions. Mettez votre chapeau de Sherlock Holmes. Trouvez les points communs. Pouvez-vous trouver les bonnes habitudes que vous souhaitez conserver? Y a-t-il de mauvaises habitudes à corriger ou à améliorer?

Élaborez ensuite un plan d'action. Le conseil d'administration doit peut-être

prévoir une formation pour améliorer les compétences en matière de prise de décision, de dialogue ou de résolution des conflits. Les ordres du jour et les dossiers de réunion doivent peut-être être envoyés plus tôt. Soyez précis sur les changements à apporter et incluez-les dans le plan d'action annuel du conseil d'administration. Évaluez ensuite si ces changements font une différence.

L'auto-évaluation des réunions n'est peut-être que la partie émergée de l'iceberg, mais elle sera payante pour le conseil d'administration qui souhaite atteindre le niveau de performance nécessaire pour façonner des avenir significants.

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**“Un conseil d'administration doit faire le meilleur usage possible du temps qu'il passe ensemble dans ce qui est sans doute la toile de fond fondamentale de son travail. Sinon, quelle est la probabilité qu'il crée des avenir significants?"**

## ASSESSING MONITORING REPORTS

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# The Governance Coach Inc. Team



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## Our Team is Growing!

We're pleased to welcome Eric Kapon and Melanie Nelson to The Governance Coach. Both are graduates of the Policy Governance® Proficiency Program and bring years of experience in multiple fields to our consulting team. We invite you to learn more about Eric and Melanie in their biographies on pages 13 & 19.



ERIC KAPONO  
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To learn more about our consulting team or to book a discovery call, visit us at [governancecoach.com](https://governancecoach.com).

# “ROOTED IN FAITH AND ALIVE IN SPIRIT”: HOW A CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD BECAME A ROLE MODEL OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

CONSTANCE SEMMLER

**F**or most Policy Governance® boards, affirmation of good governance rarely comes in the form of professional recognition.

That’s why for Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board (NPSC), being short-listed for a 2022 Governance Professionals of Canada (GPC) Excellence in Governance award came as a welcome surprise.

A loyal client of The Governance Coach, NPSC had been encouraged by the team to apply in the category of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). Paula Mann, who had just transitioned to her current role as NPSC’s Director of Education, had a good feeling about it.

“DEI is a priority for all school boards,” she says, “but NPSC’s board has taken a unique leadership role in this area.”

## Validation at the right moment

At the time of the award submission, the board had been in the process of renewing its term in an election year. Some trustees had been questioning the fit between Policy Governance and NPSC. Others in the community and units within NPSC appeared to have limited appreciation for the model.

Developing their award application gave Mann and the board an opportunity to reflect on all their leadership and the

work invested in Policy Governance.

When NPSC learned they had been short-listed, recalls then-board chair Leo de Jourdan, “We were over the moon about it. Winning seemed like a longshot, but we were confident in our model.”

For current board chair Shawn Fitzsimmons, it was especially rewarding because equity and inclusion are important not just to the board but to him personally. He says that if he’d ever had doubts about the value of Policy Governance for NPSC, this validation from GPC settled them once and for all.

## Walking the talk

The NPSC board is something of a Policy Governance veteran. After adopting the model about 20 years ago, the board has received coaching from The Governance Coach since 2007.

Consistent hard work has paid off. Fitzsimmons, de Jourdan, and Mann attribute the board’s success to long-standing and rigorous adherence to Policy Governance, leadership from the previous Director of Education, Anna Marie Bitonti and Trustees, resulting in continuous improvement reinforced by coaching. Long before a form of Policy Governance was mandated in Ontario, NPSC was ahead of the game.

Though the model can be challenging, the three are agreed that the effort has been worth it. “It took a long time to

convince me about Policy Governance. Now I’m its biggest fan,” de Jourdan admits with a smile.

*“It took a long time to convince me about Policy Governance. Now I’m its biggest fan.” – Leo de Jourdan, Member and former Chair, NPSC Board of Trustees*

The specific benefits have been numerous for NPSC. Mann is quick to point out that, thanks to clear delineation of roles and established policies, key matters at NPSC are dealt with efficiently and effectively through the policies. “That really helps us keep a future focus,” she says.

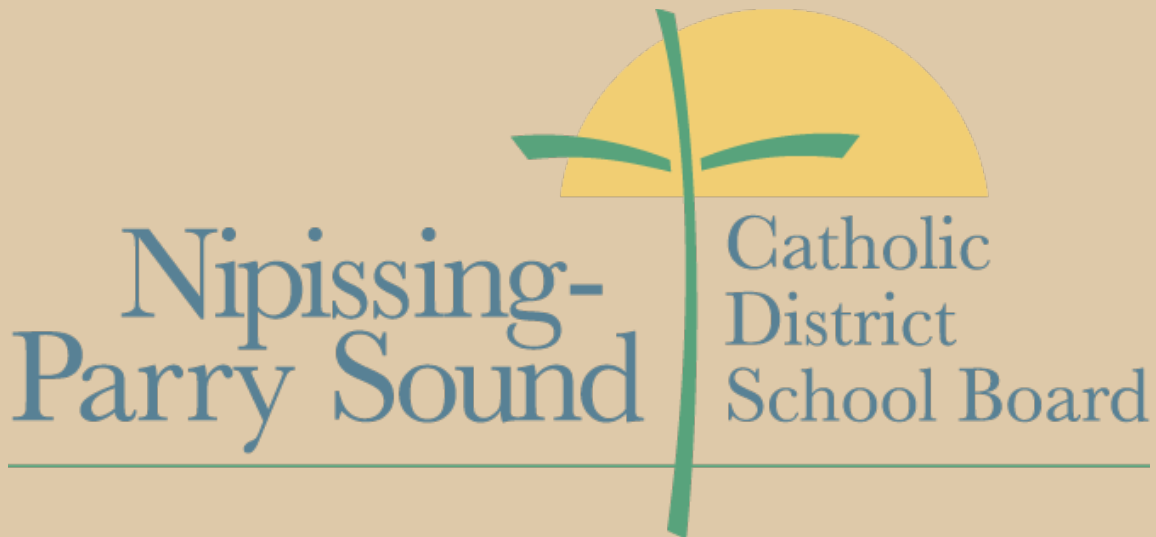
Fitzsimmons and de Jourdan concur, adding that Policy Governance coaching has educated trustees about their role, to the point that they quickly recognize even the implication of getting “in the kitchen” of operations. They focus instead on careful monitoring of progress against Ends and compliance with policies.

## Key policies related to DEI

Early on, NPSC’s First Nation Trustee, Judy Manitowabi helped to support the board in its journey and establish First Nation relationships. Now NPSC regularly gathers insights from owner groups in the community, enabling a well-informed Ownership Linkage plan.

NPSC has a vision and mission to provide students and families with high-





quality Catholic education that is “Rooted in Faith and Alive in Spirit”. In addition to the Ends that one might expect of a Policy Governance school board, NPSC’s policies include an End that “Students are responsible, respectful, and caring stewards of their world,” elaborated as follows:

- Students are socially, digitally, and environmentally responsible within a global perspective.
- Students demonstrate caring, through their actions, for the marginalized and most vulnerable members of their communities.
- Students have a knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Inuit and Métis traditions, history, cultures and perspectives.
- Students demonstrate a respect for and acceptance of diversity.

Fitzsimmons says that in this era, when DEI is more critical than ever, it has already become an integral part of who NPSC is as a community.

### In good company

NPSC was the only school board to be nominated in the DEI category in 2022. Even so, it wasn’t until members of the board attended the Excellence in Governance awards event in Toronto, that they realized the magnitude of the achievement.

“The calibre of organizations that had been shortlisted for DEI and other categories was extremely high,” Fitzsimmons notes.

Being short-listed in such good company not only raised the board’s profile, but it also inspired deeper appreciation of Policy Governance among employees and the community NPSC serves.

### Comparing notes afterward

Following the awards ceremony, GPC invited all winners and shortlisted organizations to participate in its Excellence in Governance Awards Showcase. Held on March 29, 2023, the date was also the inaugural National Governance Professionals Day in Canada.

Judy Manitowabi, recent NPSC Trustee representing Nipissing First Nation, and Paula Mann were part of a panel where they shared the board’s experience while fielding questions about:

- The role and impact of the Policy Governance model on the NPSC board with respect to DEI.
- The role of First Nation’s Trustee in the NPSC board’s journey.
- The importance and impact of the relationship with Nipissing First Nation and Indigenous communities in this important work.

Manitowabi and Mann also listened to success stories and best practices of other panelists in the DEI award category,

including Enbridge, Vancity, ATB Financial, and the British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives. Common themes and practices were cultural awareness and safety training; anti-racism training; equitable recruitment processes; actions and strategies to ensure DEI is a focus at the board level; and implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action plans.

“We were honoured to be invited to participate in this event,” says Mann. “We learned much from listening to other panelists. At the same time, it was clear that NPSC continues to be an innovator in DEI.”

With Policy Governance fueling its drive toward greater excellence in governance, NPSC is on a path to further innovation in the field.

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**“It took a long time to convince me about Policy Governance. Now I’m its biggest fan.” – Leo de Jourdan, Member and former Chair, NPSC Board of Trustees**

# Do your Board's Committees Contribute to your Board's Success?

ANDREW BERGEN - SENIOR CONSULTANT



**C**ommittees, if your board has them, form a very important part of the board's work.

Two premises lie behind the work the board can (or should) do when evaluating their use of committees. First, as mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, evaluation should only be based on pre-established criteria the board has created in its policy. Secondly, since properly constructed board committees help the board do the board's work, any self-evaluation of the board will be incomplete until the committees assisting the board are also evaluated.

Based on the above premises, it follows that the evaluation of committees can only occur if the expectations of the committee are listed in policy. Examine your policies and ensure that each committee has a clear committee charter or terms of reference. These are best when they list specific products expected from the committee. For example, a Nominations Committee may have a specific job product (among others) something like:

*A recommended slate of qualified nominees, consistent with section xx of the Bylaws and the board's GP policy on Governance Succession, and no less than the number required to fill vacant*

*board positions, at least xx days prior to the election.*

Other committees will, of course, have different expected products. But the premise remains the same. When specific products are required from a committee, the evaluation of that committee becomes relatively straightforward. The board can examine its minutes and determine if the committee followed through on the expectations required of it.

If it so happens that the evaluation process uncovers that committees did not produce what they were expected to produce, the board then has a couple of opportunities. First, the board can engage in a conversation to determine if there were any barriers to the committee's work, and what needs to change to allow the committee to be more successful in the coming year. Secondly, the board can also examine its policy requirements to ensure that what is expected from the committee is reasonable and within a proper scope of committee influence.

Several groups I work with have adopted a very helpful practice for their committees. At the beginning of each committee meeting, the chair of the committee reviews the terms of reference, highlighting where the current meeting is focused. This enables committee

members to ground their work in the expectations of the board. And, more often than not, the committee is then able to produce what is required, rather than engaging in an interesting (but not necessarily helpful) conversation.

Further, committees will be well served to set an agenda for their committee meetings that only include items that relate to the expected committee products listed in their terms of reference. If there are agenda items for the committee that don't relate to its terms of reference, undoubtedly the committee will spend time and energy producing something that isn't required or helpful for the board.

In conclusion, when engaging in board self-evaluation, ensure that committees are included in that process. Committee work is board work – so your self-evaluation is incomplete if committees aren't included. Ensure you have set committees up for success to begin with by:

- providing clear job products expected from the committee
- grounding each meeting of the committee in those job products
- creating committee meeting agendas that clearly relate to one or more of the expected job products.

# Les comités de votre conseil d'administration contribuent-ils à sa réussite ?

ANDREW BERGEN - SENIOR CONSULTANT

(TRANSLATED BY MICHEL PAULIN)

**L**es comités, s'ils en existent pour votre conseil, constituent une part très importante du travail du conseil.

Deux principes sous-tendent le travail que le conseil d'administration peut (ou doit) effectuer lorsqu'il évalue l'utilisation qu'il fait des comités. Tout d'abord, comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné dans ce bulletin, l'évaluation ne doit se fonder que sur des critères préétablis par le conseil dans le cadre de sa politique. Deuxièmement, étant donné que des comités bien constitués aident le conseil à faire son travail, toute auto-évaluation du conseil sera incomplète tant que les comités qui l'assistent ne seront pas également évalués.

Sur la base des prémisses ci-dessus, il s'ensuit que l'évaluation des comités ne peut avoir lieu que si les attentes à l'égard du comité sont énumérées dans la politique. Examinez vos politiques et assurez-vous que chaque comité dispose d'une charte ou d'un mandat clair. Ceux-ci sont plus efficaces lorsqu'ils énumèrent les produits spécifiques attendus du comité. Par exemple, un comité de nomination peut avoir un produit spécifique (parmi d'autres) tel que :

*Une liste de candidats qualifiés, conforme à l'article xx du règlement intérieur et à la politique du conseil d'administration en matière de succession, et au moins le nombre requis pour pourvoir les postes vacants du conseil d'administration, au moins xx jours avant l'élection.*

D'autres comités auront, bien entendu, des produits attendus différents. Mais le principe reste le même. Lorsque des produits spécifiques sont exigés d'un comité, l'évaluation de cette dernière devient relativement simple. Le conseil d'administration peut examiner les procès-verbaux et déterminer si le comité a répondu aux attentes exigées de lui.

S'il s'avère que le processus d'évaluation révèle que les comités n'ont pas produit ce qui était attendu d'eux, le conseil dispose alors de plusieurs possibilités. Tout d'abord, il peut engager une conversation pour déterminer s'il y a eu des obstacles au travail du comité et ce qui doit être changé pour permettre au comité de mieux réussir l'année suivante. Deuxièmement, le conseil peut également examiner les exigences de sa politique afin de s'assurer que ce qui est attendu du comité est raisonnable et se retrouve dans le champ d'influence du comité.

Plusieurs groupes avec lesquels je travaille ont adopté une pratique très utile pour leurs comités. Au début de chaque réunion, le président du comité passe en revue le mandat, en soulignant l'objet de la réunion en cours. Cela permet aux membres du comité d'ancrer leur travail dans les attentes du conseil d'administration. Le plus souvent, le comité est alors en mesure de produire ce qui est requis, plutôt que de s'engager dans une conversation intéressante (mais pas nécessairement utile).

En outre, les comités ont tout intérêt à établir un ordre du jour pour leurs réunions qui ne comporte que des points en rapport avec les produits attendus du comité, tels qu'ils sont énumérés dans leur mandat. Si des points de l'ordre du jour du comité ne sont pas liés à son mandat, il est certain que le comité consacrerait du temps et de l'énergie à produire quelque chose qui n'est ni nécessaire ni utile pour le conseil d'administration.

En conclusion, lorsque vous vous engagez dans l'auto-évaluation du conseil d'administration, veillez à ce que les comités soient inclus dans ce processus. Le travail des comités est le travail du conseil - votre auto-évaluation est donc incomplète si les comités ne sont pas inclus. Veillez à ce que les comités soient bien préparés pour réussir dès le départ :

- en définissant clairement les tâches attendues du comité
- en ancrant chaque réunion du comité dans ces produits de travail
- en établissant un ordre du jour des réunions du comité qui se rapporte clairement à un ou plusieurs des résultats attendus.

# EMPOWERING BOARDS THROUGH INDIVIDUAL AND PEER EVALUATIONS

SUSAN MEEK - CONSULTANT



**B**oards play a pivotal role in steering organizations towards success. To achieve optimal performance of the organization, boards must focus on governance excellence, which embraces a culture of continuous improvement and accountability. While the evaluation of the board as a whole must always be conducted, individual board member self-evaluations and peer evaluations serve as powerful tools to enhance board effectiveness and overall performance. In the words of Pete Hall and Alisa Simeral, *“The more reflective you are, the more effective you are.”* The self and peer evaluation processes discussed here are meant to make boards more effective through these reflective processes.

## Embracing Personal Accountability through Individual Board Member Self-Evaluations

Individual board member self-evaluations involve introspective assessments conducted by each board member on their own performance and contributions. These evaluations encourage personal accountability and a deeper understanding of one's strengths and areas for growth. By embracing individual self-evaluations, boards can reap the following benefits:

- **Self-Awareness and Development:** Individual evaluations provide board

members with insights into their unique skills and competencies, facilitating targeted personal and professional development.

- **Alignment with Board Expectations:** Board members can align their performance with the board's defined expectations, ensuring a collective commitment to the board's governance process policies.
- **Identification of Skills Gaps:** Self-assessments can uncover skill gaps within the board, prompting a strategic approach to identifying educational needs and, when feasible, to identifying board composition and recruitment needs.
- **Fostering a Culture of Accountability:** Personal evaluations instill a culture of accountability, inspiring board members to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities.

Tying self-evaluations to existing governance process policies ensures that board members' performance assessments are directly related to their roles and responsibilities. It promotes accountability, consistency, and transparency while facilitating a continuous improvement process. By integrating self-evaluations with Policy Governance® principles, boards can reinforce their commitment to effective governance and contribute to the organization's long-term success.

## Strengthening Board Cohesion and Collaboration through Peer Evaluations

Peer evaluations involve confidential feedback from each board member about their colleagues' contributions and behaviors during board meetings and interactions. This process has the potential of promoting open and constructive communication within the board and may strengthen board dynamics. Peer evaluations offer the following advantages:

- **Objective Assessment:** Peer feedback provides a more balanced and objective perspective on individual board member performance, helping to mitigate potential biases.
- **Identifying Strengths and Areas for Growth:** Evaluations reveal the unique strengths of each board member and identify areas where improvements are needed.
- **Fostering Collaboration:** Honest discussions arising from peer evaluations encourage board members to collaborate effectively, fostering a cohesive team environment.
- **Enhanced Decision-Making:** A deeper understanding of individual strengths and weaknesses can lead to optimized decision-making processes, leveraging the expertise of each board member.



It is worth also highlighting some cautions to consider when conducting peer reviews. Based on the size of your board, the process can be time consuming. In addition, if a board member is not open to receiving feedback from their peers, the process could turn out to be counterproductive. Finally, if significant relationship barriers exist between board members, the peer review process may not be feasible as a certain level of mutual respect and trust empowers the process.

### **Combining Individual and Peer Evaluations for Higher Quality Board Performance**

*Promoting Self-Reflection and Personal Growth:* Individual evaluations prompt board members to assess their performance honestly, leading to continuous self-improvement and a proactive approach to addressing development areas.

*Facilitating Constructive Dialogue:* The combination of individual and peer evaluations promotes transparent discussions among board members. These discussions can result in collective efforts to improve the board's overall performance.

*Addressing Interpersonal Challenges:* Peer evaluations can unveil potential interpersonal challenges or conflicts, allowing the board to address and resolve

them promptly, fostering a healthier board environment.

*Aligning Goals and Objectives:* By combining individual and peer evaluations, boards can identify alignment gaps between personal goals and organizational objectives, ensuring collective commitment to the organization's mission.

Incorporating individual board member self-evaluations and peer evaluations into the Policy Governance model can significantly enhance board performance and foster a culture of continuous improvement. Through personal accountability, board members gain a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities, while peer evaluations promote open and objective feedback. Together, these evaluation processes facilitate a collaborative board environment and optimize decision-making, ultimately leading to higher quality board performance and greater organizational success. Embracing the insights gained from evaluations empowers boards to achieve their strategic objectives, fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities effectively, and shape meaningful futures.



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## **MEET ERIC KAPONO**

Eric has 25 years of seasoned experience as a consultant to non-profits and governments in Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific in particular for indigenous-focused entities and endeavors.

He has a Governance Systems Professional (GSP) designation from Govern for Impact, has successfully completed the accredited Policy Governance® Proficiency Program and recognized by the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) as a certified professional facilitator (CPF). He has a Master's degree in anthropology.

Eric offers collaborative, strength-based approaches for board development, strategic planning, and community engagement.

# The Future Value of Board Member Evaluation



JANNICE MOORE - FOUNDER

**S**usan Meek's article addresses the benefits of self-evaluation of individual board members, including evaluations by peers in strengthening boards. I'd suggest also considering these evaluations to add value to governance succession planning.

Have you ever considered the "future value" of a board member? Borrowing from the financial world, future value is defined as the value of a current asset at a future date based on an assumed rate of growth. If board members (the current asset in this scenario) aren't adding value to the board now, they won't likely add value in the future. If they aren't growing in some way, they certainly won't add value in the future.

Might that not be sufficient reason to seriously consider the importance of looking at data from board member self-evaluations, and peer evaluations, when deciding whether an incumbent board member should be considered for re-appointment or re-election?

Let's assume a board has identified the qualities and characteristics it needs for a well-rounded, effective board. Hopefully, in addition to professional qualifications and experience, the board has included some characteristics like these:

- passion for the purpose of the organization
- willingness to commit the time necessary for meetings, education and preparation
- big picture thinking
- critical thinking ability

- learner mentality
- ability to work as an effective team member.

If self-evaluation and peer evaluation questions have been well-designed, they will consider an assessment of such characteristics. One way to use these assessments advantageously is to provide the results to the Nominating Committee.

## Board-appointed members

If board member selection is by direct board appointment, the committee may be tasked to prepare a slate for vacant board positions. The committee could be authorized to consider the evaluation results for board members who are eligible for re-appointment. Just because a board member is eligible to serve another term should not mean that person is an automatic shoo-in. If needed characteristics have been demonstrated to be missing during the individual's tenure, replacement should be seriously considered.

## Elected board members

For elected board members, the situation is more difficult, as the electorate has the last word. However, a Nominating Committee could recommend the Board Chair have a conversation with an incumbent board member to discuss their commitment to the organization. Some examples of lack of commitment may be that the person has missed a significant number of meetings, or been obviously poorly prepared for them, has missed board educational sessions,

or has not demonstrated the abilities or characteristics the board needs and expects. Such a conversation could be geared toward encouraging that person to consider the needs of the board as a whole and not to seek re-election. A board could also choose to post board meeting attendance records for all candidates standing for re-election. A general informational piece about the qualities desired in all board members could be made available to electors, who must then make their own decisions.

## Externally appointed board members

Finally, for board members who are appointed by an outside agency, such as government, a similar approach can be taken as for elected members, but in this case the board can choose to let appointing authorities know if current incumbents have a poor attendance record, or are missing key characteristics expected by the board, as evidenced by peer evaluation results. Ultimately the appointing authority has the last word, and sometimes politics trumps everything else, but building a good relationship with them, and keeping them well informed of the board's needs and the track record of existing board members can go a long way.

Consider using board member self-evaluation and peer evaluation to best advantage so the future value of your board is greater than the present value.

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# POLICY REVIEW VS. POLICY MONITORING: NURTURING AND SAFEGUARDING THE PATH TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE



MICHEL PAULIN - CONSULTANT

**T**he first principle of Policy Governance® is that the board is accountable to its principal stakeholders to ensure the organization is successful. To establish the accountability links with whom it delegates, as well as to itself, the board develops value-based policies. These express the board's expectations of organizational performance both at the executive level and at the board level. These policies, reflecting the values of its principal stakeholders, serve as the foundation for all decision-making and actions taken by the Board, the CEO or others to whom authority has been delegated.

However, having policies in place is just the beginning. To ensure the impact, effectiveness and relevance of board policies, systematic and thorough policy monitoring and review processes are essential for accountability and effectiveness in governance.

Policy review and policy monitoring are two distinct processes that serve different purposes. The primary purpose of policy review is to assess the, relevance and appropriateness of existing policies. Policy monitoring is focused on policy compliance as measured

against organizational behaviour and performance expectations stated in the board policies.

The scope of the policy review is normally broader to identify areas of policy improvement compared to policy monitoring which is focused on whether the policy expectations have been achieved. From another angle, think of policy review as a future focused exercise in assessing if board expectations are clearly communicated in its policies. In contrast, monitoring is a look at past policy compliance.

## The Gardener

The board's policy review is like the job of a seasoned gardener who nurtures policies examining their roots, stems, and leaves. Just as a gardener would tend to each plant, the board would conduct periodic evaluations of existing policies, making sure they are cultivating the vision of a flourishing organization aligned with the principal stakeholders' values and interests. The board would dig into the soil of each policy, checking for any signs of weakness or inconsistencies, and like a skilled pruner, would trim away unnecessary details, allowing the policies to grow strong and more focused.

Policy review entails a comprehensive analysis of existing policies. Does it say what the board intends? Is the policy still relevant? Is it still current?

Policy review is a periodic process typically conducted at scheduled intervals (e.g., triennially) or when circumstances change significantly.

At times, the board may recognize the need to revise policies without immediately knowing what the revisions should be. The board may need to do a **deep dive** to gain a better understanding of what is needed in policies before it makes policy changes.

When monitoring is focused on the CEO, the board assesses compliance with Ends and Executive Limitations policies. Noncompliance is flagged and the CEO is required to correct the deficiency. The accountability loop with the board's CEO is closed.

Similarly, self-monitoring assesses the board's compliance with its Governance Process and Board-Management Delegation policies. However, the board is accountable for its own performance. Therefore, the board uses its assessment of its own performance to identify what it needs to change in its conduct and makes action plans accordingly.



# AN INTRODUCTION TO POLICY GOVERNANCE® FOR INDIVIDUALS

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Too often, we've seen boards confuse the two disciplines of policy review and self-monitoring. For example, instead of a critical self-examination, the board considers whether its policies need to be changed. The opportunity to improve its own performance is lost.

Both policy review and self-monitoring are needed. Ensure that your board is clear on the differences and that it attends to each with the care they deserve.

# DON'T LET EXTERNAL CRITERIA CONFOUND YOUR BOARD'S EVALUATION



RICHARD STRINGHAM - PARTNER

**A**s I write this article, my wife and I are in the process of buying a used vehicle. When doing so, we have criteria such as size, reliability, cost of operations including maintenance and, of course, colours. Some of those are criteria I can check myself. However, I am by no means a mechanic, so we will require a mechanic's pre-purchase inspection for any vehicle we seriously consider purchasing.

Because this is a challenging marketplace, we're considering offerings from out of province. If we go that route, the vehicle will also need a government prescribed vehicle inspection in our home province before we can license it. That inspection focuses on safety issues. Although the pre-purchase inspection includes safety issues, it will also include other criteria important to us, particularly reliability.

Fortunately, although not completely the same, the two sets of criteria are not in conflict with each other. Unfortunately, we are unable to use results of the pre-purchase report for the out of province inspection. In other words, there will be some duplication of findings.

If your board uses Policy Governance, you might also be subject to an

evaluation based upon an external party's requirements. For example, if you are government funded or have been delegated by government to provide services to the community such as education or professional regulation, you might be required to fill out their report card.

It's an understandable expectation. Those who are giving resources or delegating authority have a right to expect good governance.

Unfortunately, those external criteria can be prescriptive of one approach to governing, while in conflict with other equally or even more effective forms of governance, such as Policy Governance. In other words, unlike our two inspections of the same vehicle, a board may be expected to report practices which are at odds with its own credible system of governance.

If your board is using Policy Governance and is expected to report your governance performance using criteria set by an external source, you may face some challenges.

## **Don't assume that the external criteria are adequate for your board's needs.**

Different approaches to governance require different practices. Some of the

practices of other approaches may not be sufficient when using Policy Governance.

For example, your board creates policies that comprehensively address all aspects of the organization through the discipline of policy sizes. Beginning with the broadest policy in each category, you create more specific policies until you are ready to accept any reasonable interpretation.

Doing so is not merely a matter of grouping related policy statements. Instead, it is a systematic structure which creates benefits other approaches to governance lack.

External criteria might require that you have policies in prescribed areas (e.g., financial matters, staff and client relations, program safety). But if the board only uses those external criteria, it misses a fundamental principle of its governing system. Failure to create policies in sizes leaves gaps in the board's coverage of its concerns. It may also create unnecessary policies, overly burdening both board and management.

If the external criteria require only that you have policies, but do not require that your policies are in sizes, then evaluate both expectations. Defaulting only to the externally imposed criteria will likely leave gaps which put you at risk.

## Where external criteria impose management expectations on your board, use your delegation system effectively.

Boards using more traditional approaches to governance typically adopt strategic plans. The practice is so common, that we aren't surprised to see it show up in criteria from external parties.

However, boards that use Policy Governance do not adopt strategic plans. Instead, they adopt Ends policies and delegate planning to the CEO, because strategic planning is a means of achieving the Ends.

If external criteria view the board's approval of the strategic plan as effective governance, then consider whether any strategic plan compliant with your policies would be acceptable. This is not a matter of developing prescriptive policies, but rather policies that put off-limits plans that would be unacceptable because they are imprudent or unethical. For example, your board would state in its policies that it would be unacceptable for the CEO to adopt strategic plans which are not feasible for Ends achievement, create too much risk, or are insufficiently long-term.

Competent monitoring of compliance with such policies ensures that the board has appropriate control. Instead of reporting approval of strategic plans, the board could report rigorous oversight of planning.

## Don't confuse having policies, plans, and procedures with actual conditions.

In May 2023, the Globe and Mail newspaper reported:

*Several sports bodies that are now under fire for serious problems, including allegations of abuse, sexual assault and financial malfeasance, received high scores from federal department.*

These were sports organizations which received significant funding from Sports Canada, a department of the Canadian government. Sport Canada was examining the governance of sports bodies it funds.

Apparently, part of the problem was due to not checking that actual conditions aligned with the respective boards' policies.

*The high scores suggest Sport Canada missed or ignored problems at several NSOs [National Sports Organizations], grading them on whether they had governance policies, but not examining how they operated.*

The article named names. Specific sports organizations were identified as problematic, even though the initial Sports Canada evaluation was positive.

Again, we're not surprised. Too many boards confuse reviewing their policies with rigorously monitoring compliance. They are not the same!

Monitoring compliance is not confirming that a standard operating procedure is in place. Instead, it confirms that the conditions expected from those procedures have been realized.

Monitoring for compliance is not glossing over uncomfortable areas. Instead, it requires probing, candid, self-disclosure.

Monitoring compliance is not assuming all is okay because evidence to the contrary hasn't jumped up to present itself. Instead, it proactively collects evidence to confirm the actual condition.

How does your board know that all parts of the organization are on track with the criteria, externally imposed or otherwise? If the board waits for evidence to reveal itself, the board is likely to end up being named in the media... for the wrong reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> If an external authority or agreement *requires* board approval of matters delegated to the CEO, then the board would most likely use the Required Approvals Agenda to give its official approval to the CEO's plans.



## MEET MELANIE NELSON

Melanie has a background as an IT professional (analysis, project management, organizational change management) with 25+ years experience working with corporate clients in the following sectors: Electrical Utility, Education, Oil & Gas, Mining, Financial and Government. She has a practical and enthusiastic approach to meeting client objectives. A skilled facilitator who listens to her clients and works diligently to achieve their objectives quickly and efficiently, Melanie holds a master's degree in Christian Ministry from the Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and a Governance System Professional designation from Govern for Impact. She currently serves as Chair of the board on one of the largest evangelical churches in Canada. She also serves on a denomination board and on a parachurch advisory board. She has a focus on churches, parachurch, NPO/NGO and faith-based organizations.

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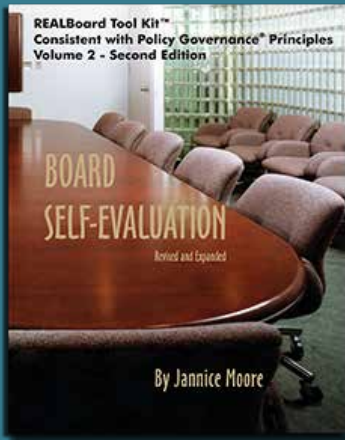
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- John Carver

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