

Topical talk



A board's eye view with **Anna Bateson**

The quick way to identify which issues are preoccupying your board is to ask what the chairman and chief executive discuss regularly. Top topics usually include:

1. What strategic direction should we be travelling in and how do we make that decision?
2. How do we deploy our talent in the most effective manner?
3. How do we agree what good board behaviour looks like?

suggesting that you seek insights from those who will challenge your thinking. Burkan says: 'Your best customers like what you offer today, but your lost and disgruntled customers know what your best customers will like tomorrow.'

The search for wise answers to new strategic questions – such as: how do we create value, what makes us special and what trends are likely to impact our ability to create value in the future? – involve dialogue with many audiences, including the people who work directly with your customers.

talents 'unrealised strengths.'

Business marketing concepts are increasingly applied to individuals seeking to manage their own brand and reputation. Your personal brand is created by every interaction, whether conscious or unconscious. The key questions are therefore: what do I want my brand to be, what is it now and how can I reinforce what makes me special?

Good board behaviour

The recent media preoccupation with News Corporation and Kazakh miner ENRC has illustrated the negative impact that destructive board dynamics can have. Increasingly regulation and legislation seeks to define good governance in most global territories. But fine words and sentiments do not universally translate into compliant behaviour. Setting the bar at compliance level is a low aspiration, which is unlikely to engage disparate stakeholder audiences on a common journey in a defined direction. An effective board review process can surface the development agenda for both individuals and the whole board, but this can only happen with the active sponsorship of the chairman and the involvement of all board members.

The role and profile of nominations committees and their expert advisors are under scrutiny as they seek to build effective boards. Effective board search and selection is increasingly exploring ethical alignment, as well as political and cultural sensitivity. Boards with a common understanding of what 'good' looks like make better strategic decisions. Carrying out due diligence when selecting advisors will establish whether they really understand these dimensions, and also the nature of the service due to both clients and candidates in providing strategic resourcing advisory services.

Among those expert advisors identifying non-executive talent, it is commonly accepted that non-executive roles are not a sinecure. Regulatory advice underlines the responsibilities and liabilities inherent in these roles. The process of educating individuals who seek to build non-executive portfolios is emergent and needs to address often unrealistic expectations. ■



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Strategic direction

In stable times, business leaders generally explore four strategic questions; where are we, how did we get here, where do we want to be and how do we get there? Under such circumstances the process of answering these questions is generally an annual one, led by experts and linear in nature.

In a globally connected, turbulent world, this approach has ceased to be effective. Many commentators, including Don Sull at London Business School (LBS), point to the need for a more adaptive, agile and iterative approach. Most suggest that stakeholders should be involved in sharing their insights. The commentator Tom Peters points to Wayne Burkan's *Wide Angle Vision* in this context,

Talent

Business leaders seek to create and sustain environments in which individuals can deploy their talents, contributing to the creation of value for their customers and consequently for all other stakeholder groups.

The growth in popularity of the school of positive psychology has led to a focus on strengths, in preference to the more traditional desire to correct weaknesses – which is ultimately ineffective. The resultant benefits for both organisations and individuals are well-documented. As well as growing self-awareness of individual strengths and developing a common language in which to explore effective collaboration, the profiling process can uncover hidden talent. Alex Linley terms these hidden

» About the author

Anna Bateson works with boards and business leaders, addressing the challenges of leading strategic change and delivering governance. Through her business consultancy 'Cutting through the Grey' – www.cttg.org – and jointly with global expert, Dr Laurence Lyons, she researches, writes and consults on the development of 'situational intelligence'.