

Nuku Ora Covid Presentation August 2021

The Nine Steps to Effective Governance

A sudden departure from normal times is a signal to the board to reset to ensure it continues to focus on the right things, at the right time in the right way for the circumstances.

My go-to for any guidance is Sport NZ's [Nine Steps to Effective Governance](#).

1. The right people on board

Te tangata, te tangata Te Tangata – it's the people, it's the people, it's the people.

A crisis like COVID-19 puts additional and different pressures on everyone at work and at home and everyone copes differently. Board members are no exception.

The first thing a board should do therefore is reconnect, to determine where everyone is at – what challenges everyone is managing, what capacity constraints they may have to work around, who needs support.

This is also the time to review and if necessary, adjust meeting frequency. Some board may need to host AGMs virtually which may need new processes and planning.

If there are new board members, this is definitely time for the board to stay close and provide guidance and support.

2. The board's leadership role

A crisis is the time for the Chair to step up or a deputy if the Chair cannot. Every chair should consider a trusted advisor or mentor. This is not the time to be going it alone.

The board's role in lived values – culture – comes to the fore. Ethics and integrity are paramount. Issues must be addressed swiftly.

The board must be united and speak with one voice.

3. Define and agree the board's role

Whether a board is voluntary or paid the board has a distinct and different role from the management team – the primary one being the oversight on a very part time basis of organisation performance.

In times of uncertainty or crisis this responsibility escalates. Aspects of the role may be prioritised over others as a result:

- Relationships often have to be redefined – CEO/ management team and staff / members / owners, funders, stakeholders.
- Communication is different – more frequent and focused
- One the key learnings from our first round in lockdown was the need for the Chair to reach out to the CEO / GM and offer support rather than assume they will be fine.
- Priorities need to be reviewed with a heightened oversight on cash flow, risk and compliance, crisis plans, internal controls, people, business continuity.

4. Employ and support a CEO

The chair on behalf of the board must reach out to the CEO / GM and ask the same questions as asked of the board –

- How are they, what challenges (at work and at home) are they managing, what capacity and capability constraints they may have, and how to best provide support.
- It is also the time to reset priorities – what to focus on and what can be left.

This is the time when board members with specific expertise can step up – being very mindful to remove their governance hats first.

It may also be time to review and if necessary, adjust meeting frequency and certainly have a conversation about how to avoid duplicating communications with key people and groups.

If the GM / CEO is new, this is the time for the Chair and board to wrap their arms around them not leave them unsupported.

Whether new or not, the board still needs to maintain its key role in oversight of performance, which includes the performance of the CEO / GM. As with most things the success is in how this is done rather than what is done.

It is important for the board to remember that CEOs are human too – and vice versa.

5. Provide strategic leadership

The key role of the board is to position the organisation for a successful future. Keeping their collective eye on that future and adjusting for any risks and new opportunities is a key priority.

This is not the time to diving into the CEO / GMs business, nor is it time for the CEO / GM to do the boards work.

This is time to agree what needs to be done and who is best placed to do it.

6. Make meetings count

Whether its meeting as a board or the chair with the CEO / GM time is even more precious than normally.

Virtual meetings need more process and more focus to make the best use of time. There is evidence that board members get tired. Sumarising each resolution before decision and having a dedicated minute-taker is valuable.

7. Develop the work plan

The board should have an annual work plan or calendar in place. This outlines the key activities of the board (aligned with its role).

This is a good time to review this and bring forward any mission critical activities that will have the crisis well managed – meetings of the ARC, engagement with stakeholders, risk analysis and strategic priorities.

8. Purposeful induction

While it is probably not the ideal time to be recruiting and inducting new board members, this is the time to ensure everyone is very familiar with board Policies (ideally contained in the board charter).

9. Regularly review board's performance

When the crisis is over the board should lead a formal review to capture lessons learned.

This could be done internally or using an external provider. Developing a term of reference is a good way of ensuring the scope is right.

Sharing this with members /owners as part of the annual report is a very good way to demonstrate accountability.