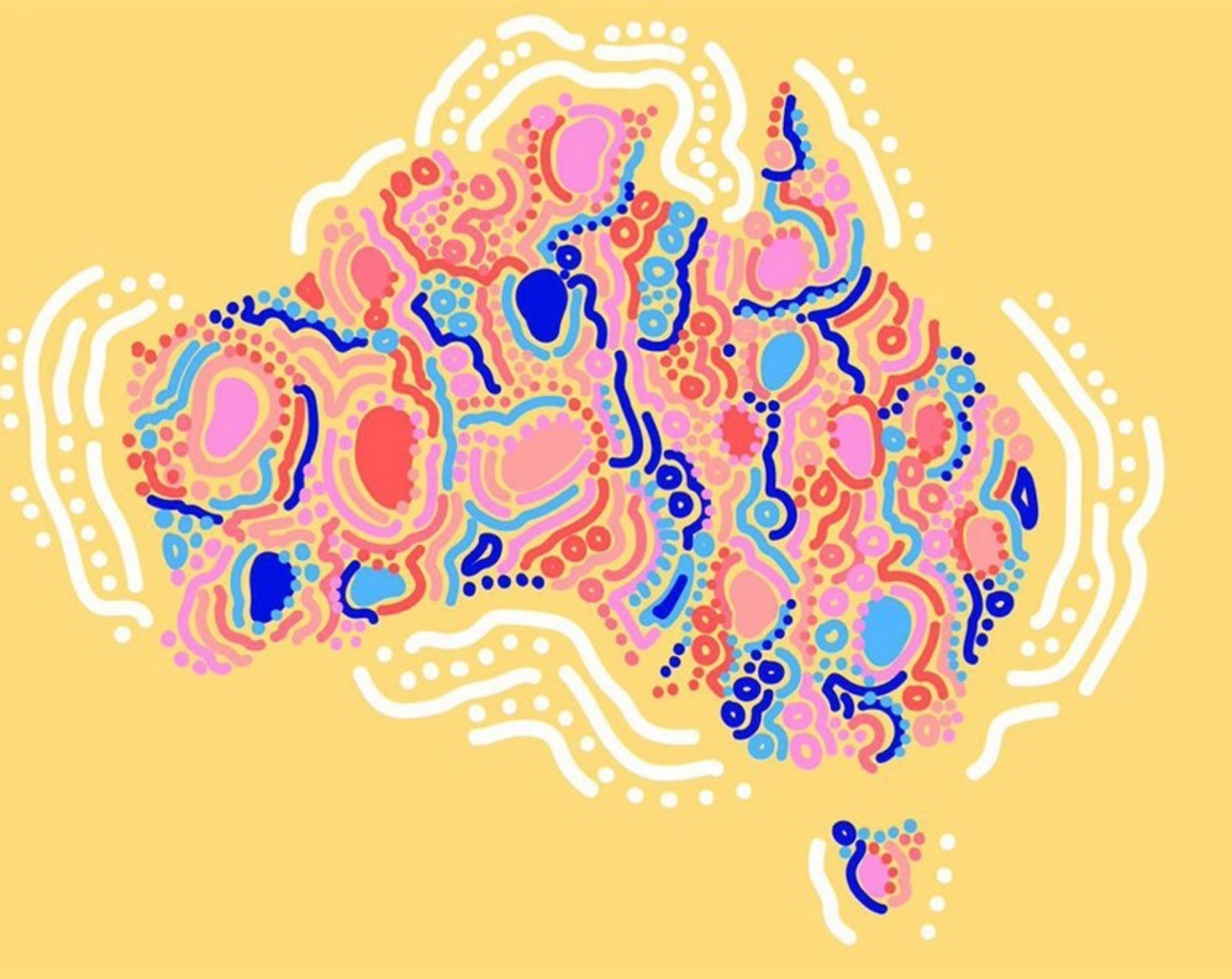


ADVANCED LEADERSHIP FOR CHAIRS

Institute of Community Directors Australia



Acknowledgement of Country

- Image from ABC iview
- Artworks by Arkie Barton

Program overview

- **Strategic foresight for chairs: building for a future that's increasingly uncertain**
 - Dr Dalia Ben-Galim, policy and strategy consultant (Wed. 22nd Oct)
- **Backstage and front of house: using both to make good decisions**
 - Jeremy Stowe-Lindner, educator and school principal (Wed. 29th Oct)
- **The Chairs relationship with the CEO**
 - Sheena Boughen OAM, chair of the Australian String Quartet (Wed. 12th Nov)
- **Ethical board leadership workshop**
 - Jon Staley, ICDA Trainer (Wed. 19th Nov)
- **Strategic funding: developing your case for support**
 - Catherine Brooks, lawyer with expertise in strategic fundraising (Wed. 26th Nov)

Ethical board leadership


‘Chair as compass and wayfinder’

Today’s session

- *Board culture, governance and ethics*
- *Role of the chair in finding a way forward*
 - *Breakout scenarios*

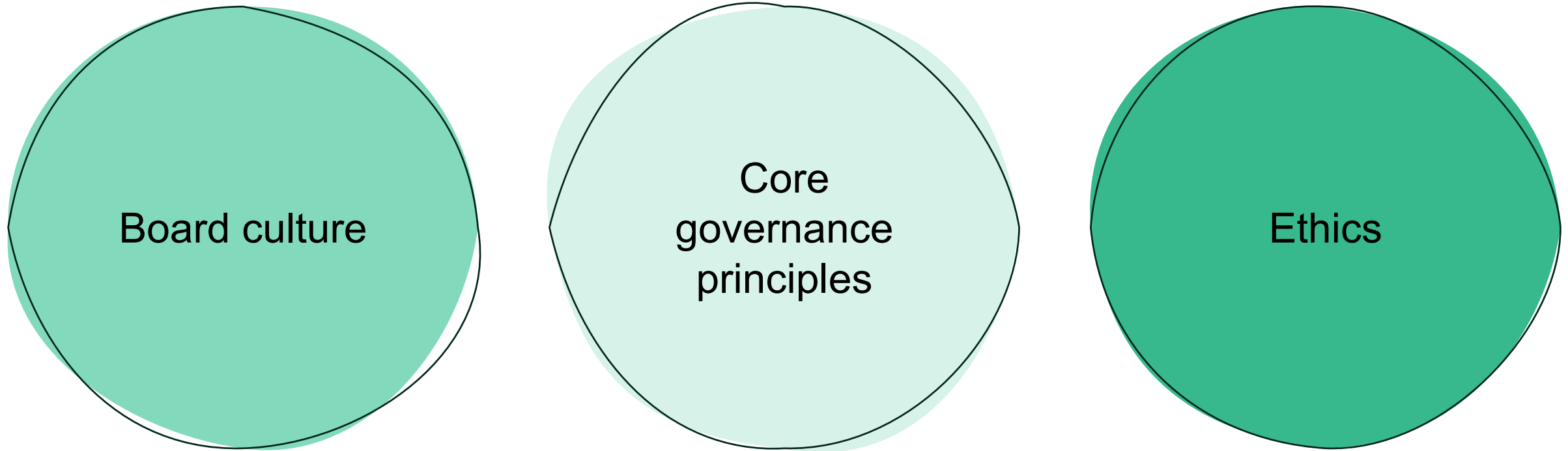
Board/organisational culture and ethics

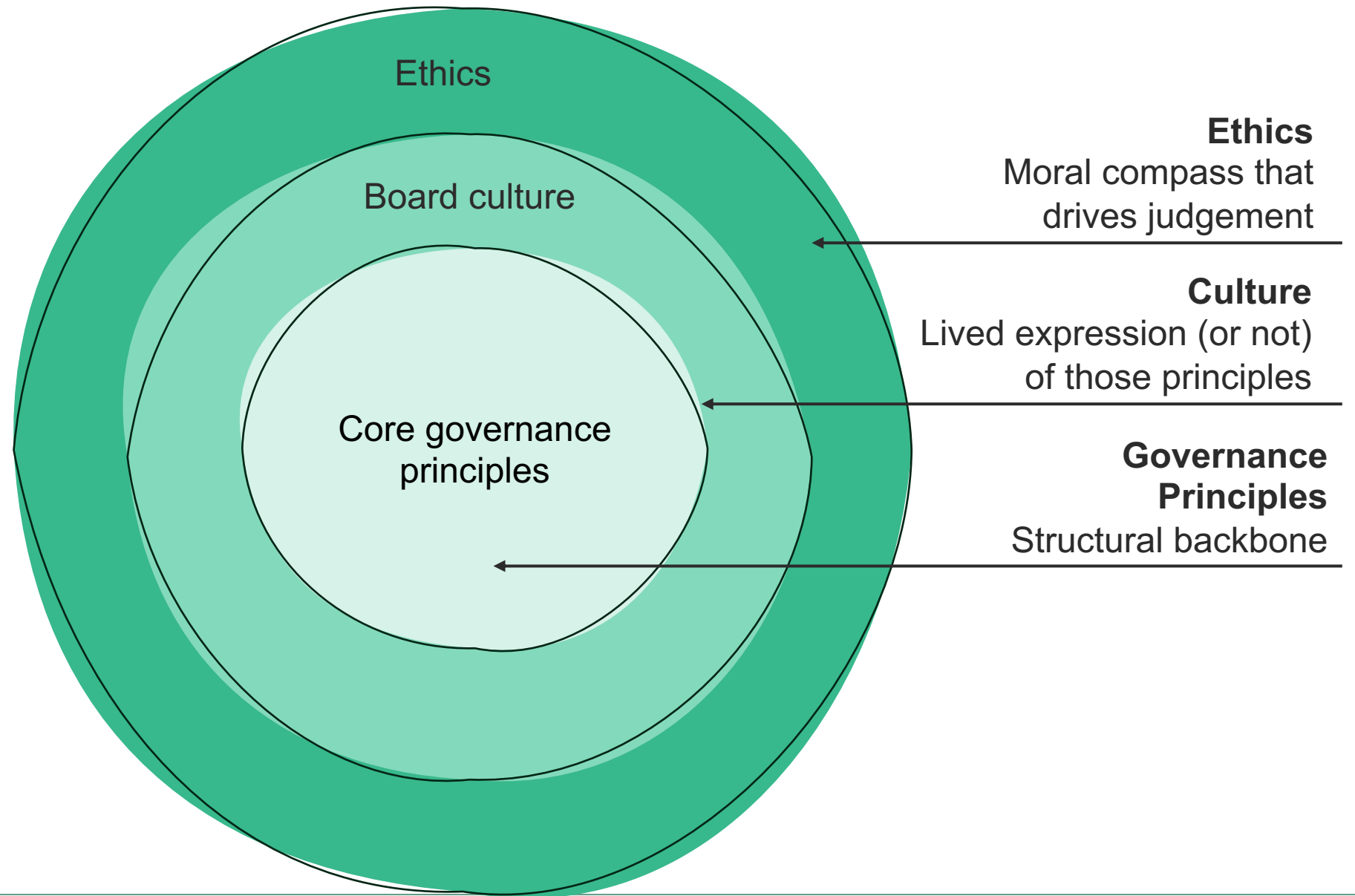
- Think about examples or times when you have seen or been part of what you would describe as a healthy or good culture (board, organisational or team) or conversely times you have seen or been part of an unhealthy or poor culture?
- What were/are some of the distinguishing features of that culture?



How is board culture related to ethics?

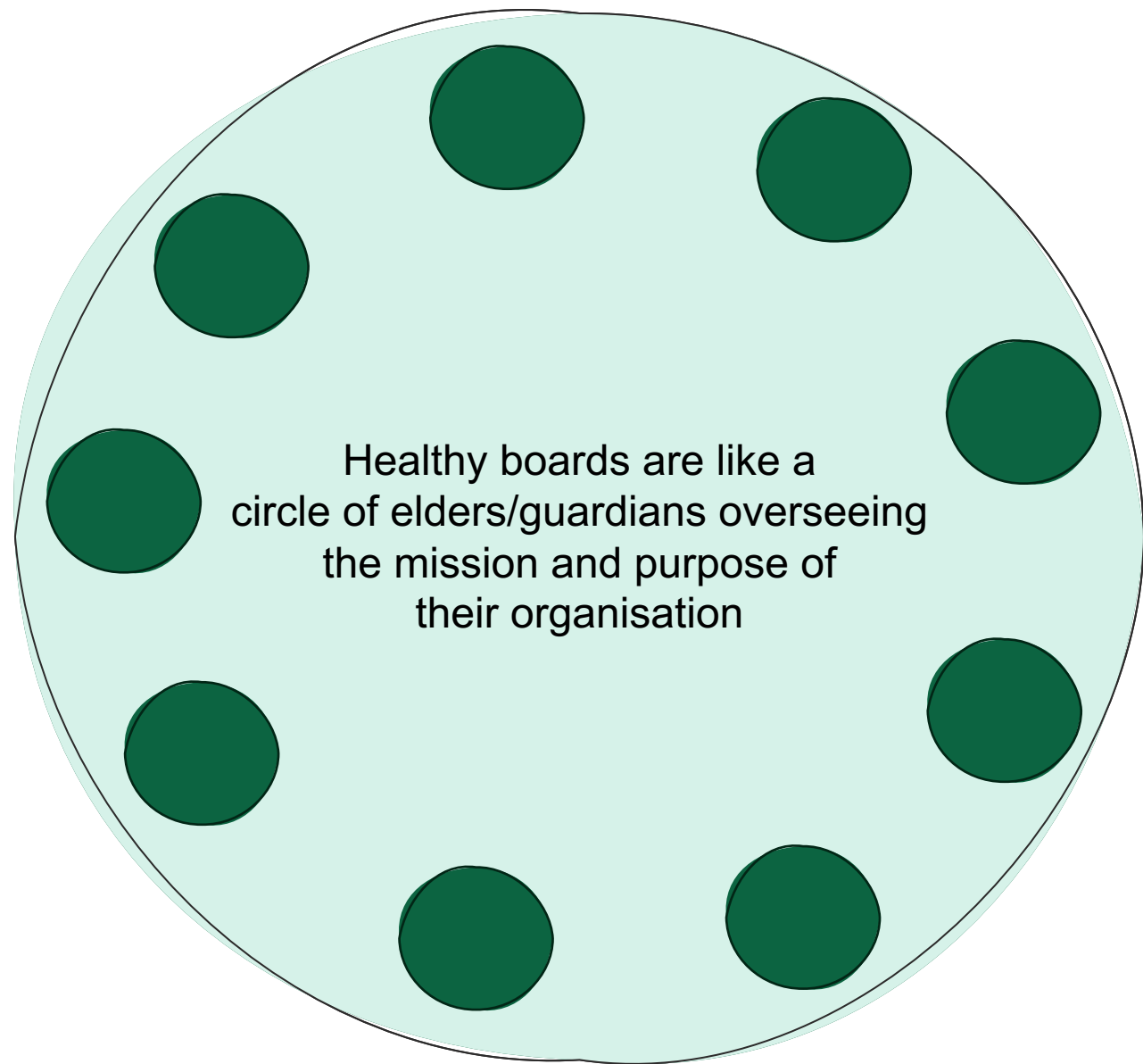
Relationship between ...





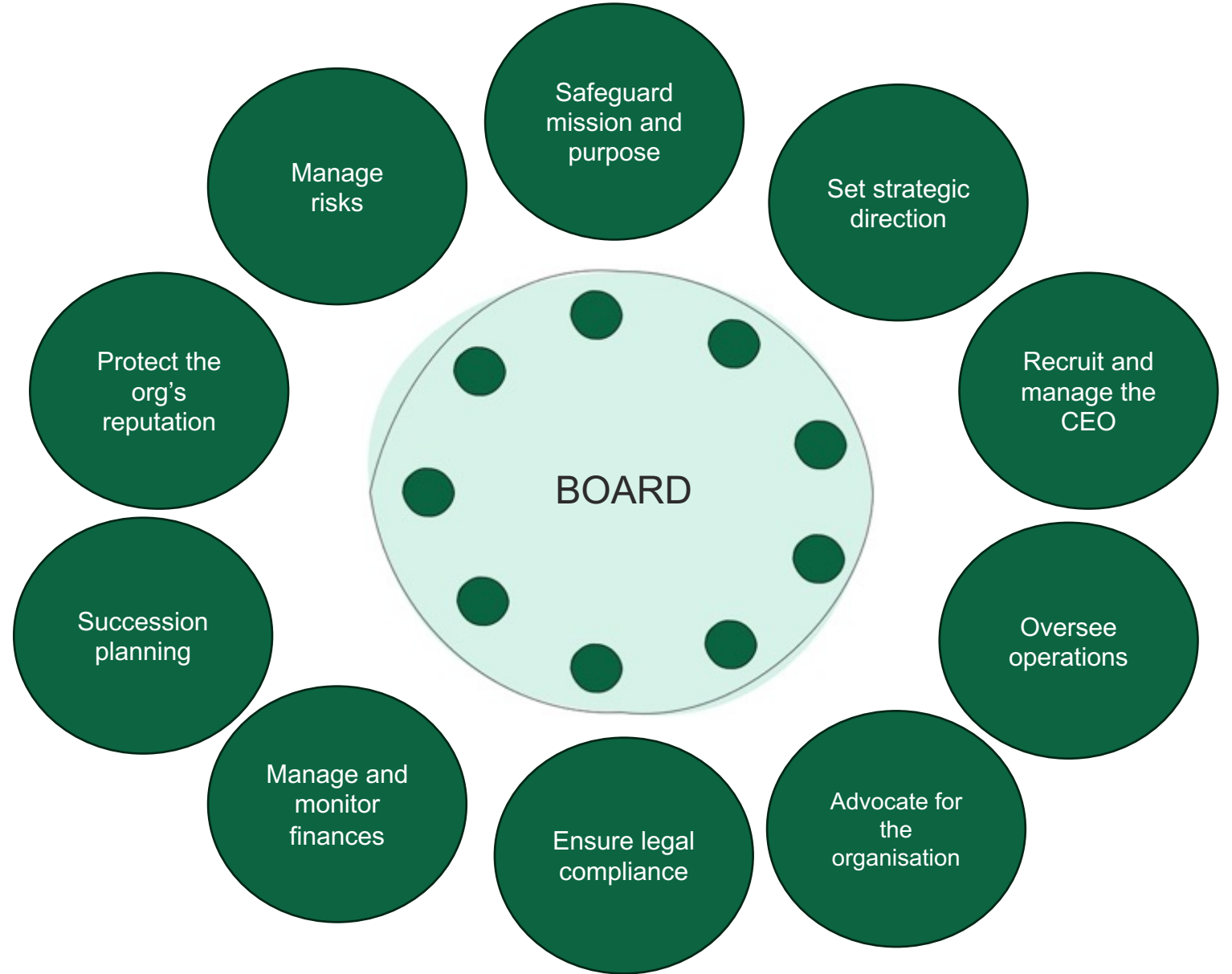
"Governance without an ethic is authority; governance with an ethic is stewardship. At its heart, it calls us to act fairly, decide wisely, and serve the broader community."

What do boards do?



What do boards do?

How clearly understood are these roles by your board?



Compass

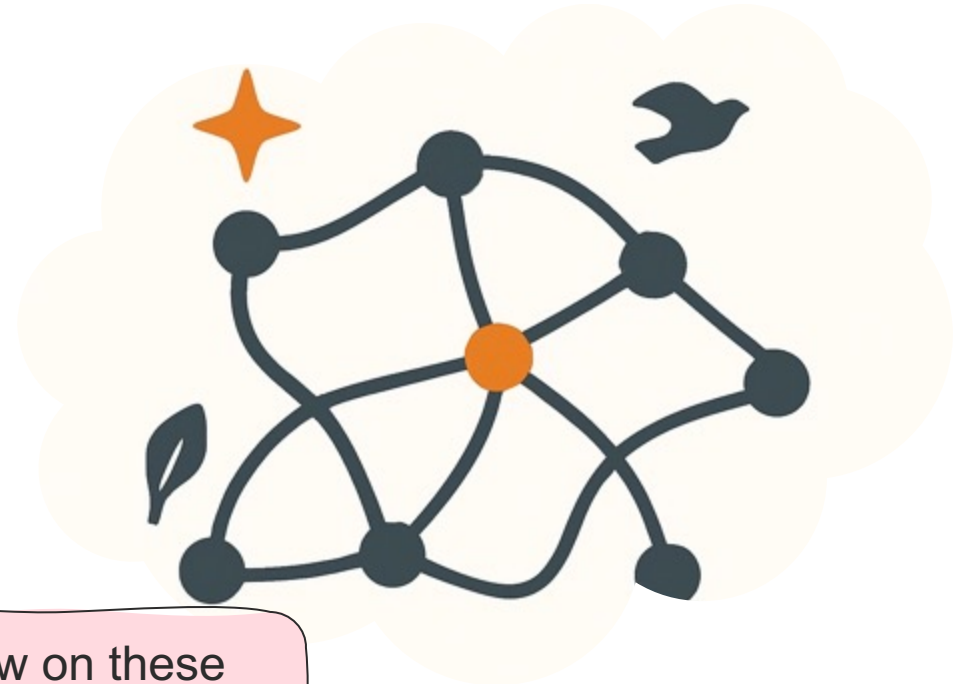
‘Finding direction by pointing to a fixed reference (true north).’



The chair's role

Wayfinding



‘Finding direction through connection, patterns, and context.’



How can you as chair draw on these ways of moving forward to help build and maintain healthy, ethical governance?

GROUP DISCUSSION

*‘The compass reminds us that we need steady principles and clarity about what’s right.
The wayfinder reminds us that ethics is also lived in relationships, context, and responsiveness.’*

Compass 	Wayfinder 
Provides a steady point of reference	Reads patterns and relationships
Always points to “true north” → values, mission, purpose.	Draws on stories, culture, and environment for guidance
Brings clarity in uncertainty	Brings connection and meaning
Keeps the board aligned	Keeps the board attuned
Ensures direction doesn’t drift	Ensures direction remains grounded in context

CEO transition

The longstanding CEO of your NFP has announced they will retire within six months. The news triggers mixed reactions across the board: some members are pushing for an immediate recruitment process to ensure continuity, while others prefer a slower, more deliberate approach. Tensions rise as preferences diverge—some want an innovative new leader, others a steady, familiar hand. Staff are also beginning to worry about the organisation's future, and morale is softening.

Amid this uncertainty, an ethical dilemma emerges. A senior staff member quietly tells the Chair that an internal candidate is interested but fears the board will favour external applicants. Meanwhile, a board member has already begun informally sounding out someone they know for the role, arguing that swift action is essential. Other board members warn that such informal approaches risk undermining fairness, transparency, and trust.

With the **compass** and **wayfinder** analogies in the background consider:

1. What truly matters in this situation?
2. How can the chair help navigate effectively through this change?
3. What do you think the chair should focus on and what practical steps can they take?

BREAKOUT

Ethics in leadership is like the compass that holds us to true north. But leadership is also wayfinding — applying that compass to navigate the shifting winds and currents of real life.

The Chair as Ethical Compass:

Navigating with Principles

1. Revisit and Ground Discussions in Purpose and Values

Bring the board back to the mission, **while explicitly asking about ethical implications**. Encourage reflection: *Are our actions advancing good, avoiding harm, and respecting stakeholders?*

2. Ask the “True North” Questions

Questions like “*How does this decision serve our mission?*” and “*Does this align with our values?*” E.g. *Are we acting fairly, transparently, and with integrity?* True north is not just strategic—it is morally oriented.

3. Model Steadiness in Uncertainty

Show calmness in ambiguity **while making principled choices**. Demonstrate that ethical reasoning—considering justice, equity, and impact—is part of effective leadership.

4. Provide Clarity Around Roles and Boundaries

Ensure everyone knows what is governance vs management, **and how ethical accountability fits within each**. Boundaries support responsible oversight and prevent harm or misuse of power.

5. Curate the Agenda with Intention

Focus on issues that matter for long-term mission and values. Don’t just list items automatically. Thoughtfully select what gets discussed. The goal is to ensure meetings are meaningful and strategic and consider matters of principle/ethics.

Wayfinding with Ethics:

Navigating Responsibly as a Board

1. Scan the Horizon Ethically

Regularly explore external trends, community shifts, and emerging risks/opportunities. Ask: *Who benefits, who may be impacted, and does this align with our values?*

2. Scenario Think with Integrity

Test “what if” pathways and adaptive strategies, considering fairness, equity, and ethical consequences. Ensure flexibility doesn’t compromise principles.

3. Listen to Diverse Voices

Engage staff, community, and partners deeply. Pay attention to inclusion, justice, and underrepresented perspectives—like reading the currents to steer wisely.

4. Govern with Flexible Principles

Allow course corrections when context changes, while staying anchored to mission and core ethical standards. Adaptation is strategic **and responsible**.

5. Celebrate Ethical Course Corrections

Recognise that small adjustments guided by values and ethics strengthen leadership. Changing tack to do the right thing is a sign of wisdom, not weakness.

Take the money?

The board of a family violence support service is approached by one of Australia's largest online betting agencies with an offer to sponsor its programs. The sponsorship includes a significant financial contribution, which could help the organisation expand its crisis support services and community education programs. The betting agency also proposes a joint awareness campaign to highlight family violence issues.

However, the partnership raises concerns among board members and staff. Some argue that the funds could make a substantial difference in helping vulnerable families. Others worry that partnering with a betting agency may undermine the organisation's credibility, as gambling can contribute to financial stress, relationship breakdowns, and domestic violence—issues the service seeks to address. The decision has sparked debate over the balance between financial need and ethical integrity.

Breakout discussion

1. What factors should the board prioritise when deciding whether to accept this partnership?
2. How might the partnership impact the organisation's reputation and relationships with stakeholders?
3. What process could/should the chair lead/support to consider this issue and give it its due diligence?

BREAKOUT

Reflections from today's workshop

- A key takeaway
- Next session

*What does my board
most need from me right
now – to act as a
compass or a wayfinder?*