

Community Sector Chairs

Session 2: Making Healthy Decisions

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Acknowledgement of Country

Tiger Yaltangki, *Malpa Wiru
(Good Friends)*

2016, lands of the Pitjantjatjara people, South
Australia
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art
© Tiger Yaltangki / Copyright Agency
<https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/objects/25757>



Program approach

* **Session 1: Governance and leadership**

* **Session 2: Making healthy decisions**

* **Session 3: Beyond meetings**

How will you stay connected?

Recap from Session 1

To contemplate:

What change in systems and/or culture could help our board govern more effectively?



Decision-making frameworks

Factors to consider

Chairing tricky meetings

Discussion

The board of a not-for-profit organisation, LiveUp, dedicated to supporting youth mental health is presented with an offer of substantial funding from a major alcohol company. The donation could significantly enhance the organisation's programs and outreach, allowing them to impact significantly more young people than they are currently serving, especially in under-resourced communities.

However, the board is divided. Some members see this as a valuable opportunity to expand impact, address urgent service gaps and stabilise funding vulnerability. Others are concerned that accepting the donation could undermine the organisation, given the established links between alcohol use and youth mental health issues.

What elements/factors does the board need to consider when making this decision?

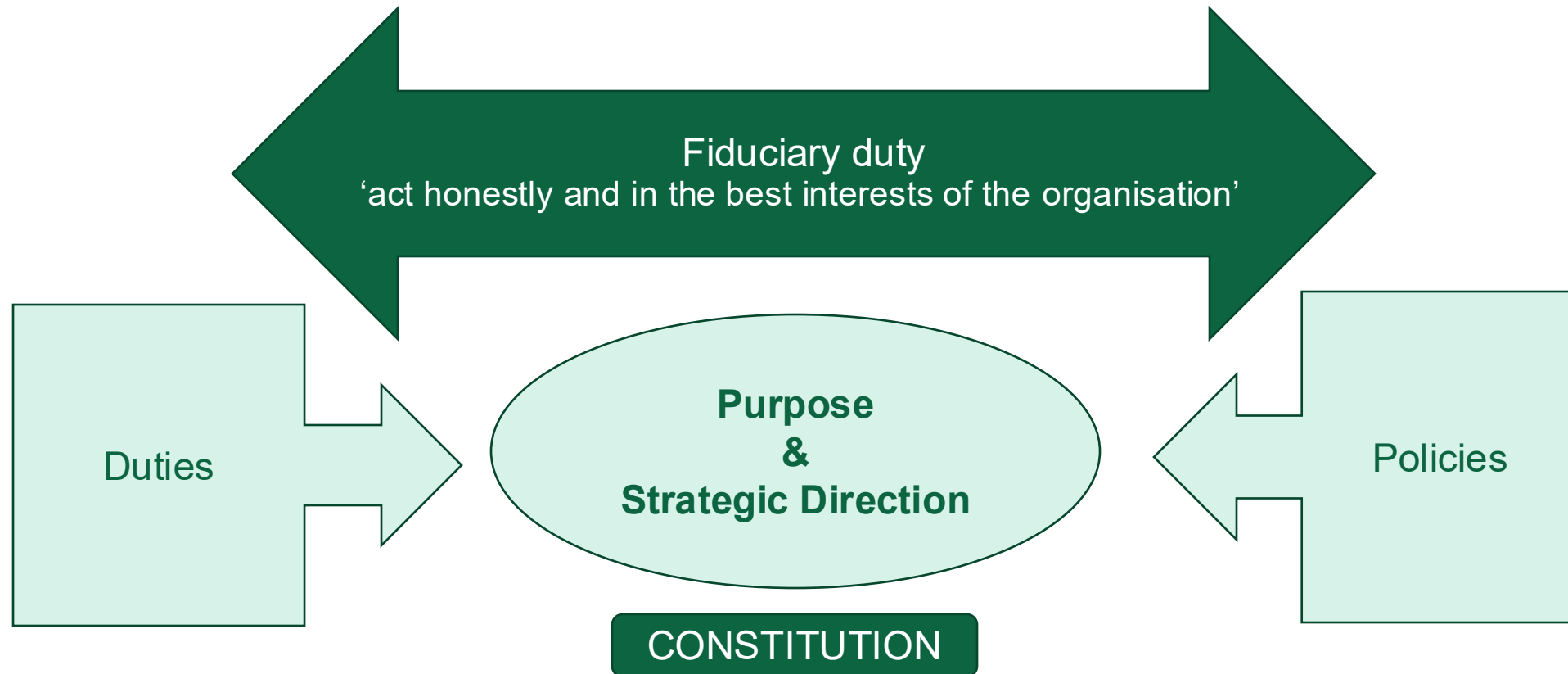


What factors should boards consider when making decisions?

- Purpose and mission
- Constitution
- Policies
- Finances
- Operational impact
- Risks (including reputational)

What else?

Healthy decision-making for boards



'Boards should be building a hierarchy of reason ... as opposed to an aristocracy of position'

Simon Longstaff



Ethical decision-making checklist

- Have we included the right people in the process of making this decision?
- Have we thought about who might be affected, and how?
- Would most people see this decision as fair?
- Are we staying true to our values and purpose?
- Would we be comfortable if this decision was made public?

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/help-sheets/drawing-up-a-code-of-ethics>

Breakout

Bright Horizons, a charity supporting educational pathways for young people in out of home care, has recently welcomed three new members to the board. All the new members, one of whom has recent lived-experience in out of home care, have provided some critical feedback to the board on the organisation's engagement strategy. These new members believe that the strategy needs to go in a different, fresh direction to broaden the reach and impact of the organisation.

The board does not have standing orders or rules about meeting processes and after multiple emotive discussions over a number of meetings, consensus has not been reached within the board. Four longer-standing members disagree that a new direction is required and are resistant to changing what they believe is working fine e.g 'don't fix what isn't broken.'

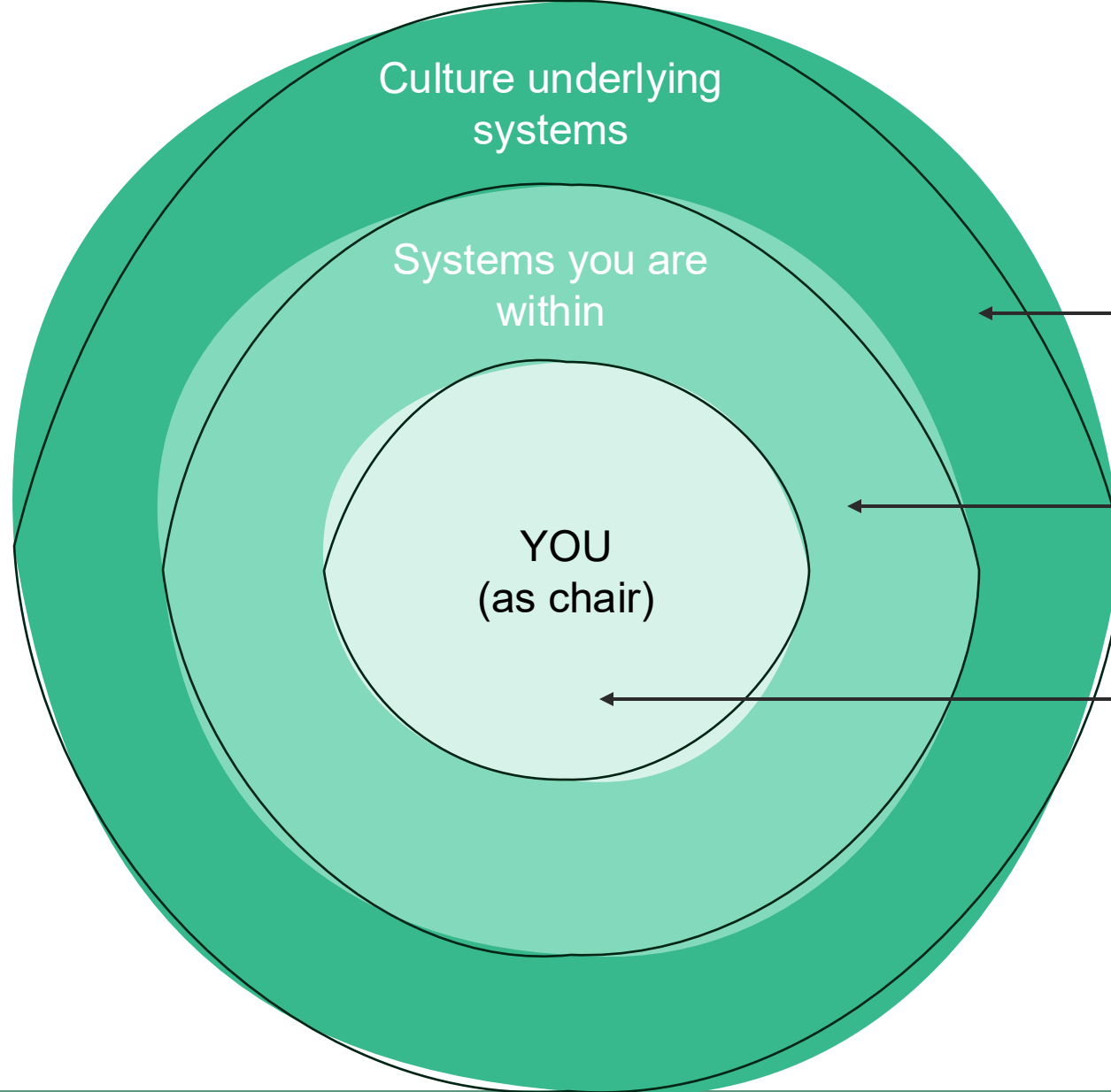
One of the new members has drafted the proposed fresh engagement strategy into a motion and is seeking approval by the board. When the item comes up for decision at the end of the meeting, the long-standing board members opposed to the motion refuse to engage in a vote and walk out of the meeting. This leaves five remaining members including the chair.

Appoint a chair, a scribe and discuss in your group:

- What should the chair do under the circumstances? In the short-term? Longer-term?
- What are the legal/ethical obligations of the chair. Are they the same?

Break!





What is the culture beneath/within the systems?

What are the systems, structures?

You - within an ecosystem

How healthy are the systems and culture you're operating within?

What can you influence or change?



Facilitating constructive board discussions

Diverse viewpoints

Conflict

Groupthink

Tools for inclusive and effective decision-making

- Go around the table before any vote
- Appoint someone to play devil's advocate
- Use frameworks and templates for complex decisions
- Invite written reflections before the meeting
- Have a standing 'empty chair' representing the community and/or stakeholders



Language to promote healthy decision making

Encouraging diverse perspectives:

"Let's explore different viewpoints on this issue."

"I'd like to hear thoughts from everyone around the table."

"What are the potential downsides we haven't considered yet?"

"How might we approach this from a different angle?"

Promoting open discussion:

"Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo."

"There are no bad ideas—let's brainstorm openly."

"It's important we voice all concerns before making a decision."

"Feel free to disagree—healthy debate helps us get to the best outcome."

Seeking clarification and depth:

"Can you elaborate on your point? I want to make sure I understand fully."

"What evidence supports your perspective?"

"How does this align with our overall goals?"

"Could you provide an example to illustrate your view?"

Building consensus:

"How can we integrate these different perspectives?"

"What common ground can we find here?"

"Let's weigh the pros and cons of each approach."

"Is there a compromise that would satisfy most of us?"

Ensuring inclusive participation:

"I noticed we haven't heard from [Name] yet—do you have any thoughts to share?"

"Let's make sure everyone has a chance to contribute."

"I value the input from all members; what's your take on this?"

"Before we move on, does anyone else want to add something?"

Encouraging constructive feedback:

"What are the potential risks or weaknesses in this plan?"

"Let's focus on solutions—how can we address the concerns raised?"

"Can we discuss possible improvements to this idea?"

"What would make this proposal even stronger?"

Indicators of an effective and inclusive meeting	Score (1 to 5)
Everyone had an opportunity to contribute to today's discussion	
Differing viewpoints were welcomed and explored respectfully	
We made space for both data and lived/professional experience	
Our decision process today was clear and transparent	
We avoided rushing to consensus too quickly	
I felt comfortable expressing a dissenting or unpopular view	
Our decisions reflect our mission and strategic priorities	

Breakout

You've just stepped into the role of chair for a not-for-profit arts organisation known for its vibrant community workshops and inclusive local events. At your second board meeting, the group begins discussing a proposal to reallocate a portion of the events budget toward a new digital engagement initiative aimed at reaching younger audiences and those in regional areas. The conversation quickly becomes tense. One highly respected board member, who has a strong track record in delivering successful in-person festivals, dominates the discussion—cutting off others, dismissing alternative views, and insisting that “we should stick with what works.”

A newer board member, who brings professional expertise in digital strategy, offers their perspective but is spoken over and then withdraws from contributing. Several others nod in agreement with the main voice, keen to avoid further tension and “just get through the agenda.” You begin to notice a pattern—decisions are being made quickly, with limited challenge or genuine dialogue. As it is all unfolding in real time, you are not sure what to do.

Appoint a chair, a scribe and discuss in your group:

- How might you encourage a broader range of viewpoints in the moment?
- What strategies could you use to manage the strong board member respectfully?
- How could you prevent groupthink from taking hold in future discussions?
- What tools or practices could support a more inclusive and effective decision-making process?

Discussion prompts

- Who didn't speak today? What might we do differently next time to encourage them?
- Did we rely too heavily on one person's opinion or past success?
- Did any assumptions go unchallenged? Why?
- What perspectives or data might be missing from our decision?
- Did this decision align with our mission, values, and community needs?
- How did power dynamics show up in the room today?
- If someone disagreed, were they heard and respected?



Risk management and strategic decisions

Risks

Balancing mission, values and financial sustainability

**The process
for managing
risk can be
broken down
into:**

- * Establishing context
- * Identifying risks
- * Analysing risks
- * Evaluating risks
- * Treating risks

... while *continuously*:

- Communicating and consulting
- Monitoring and evaluating

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/help-sheets/an-introduction-to-the-risk-management-process>

Risk and your organisation

For each of the following categories, identify a risk currently facing your organisation:

Governance

Operational

Finance

What is currently in place to mitigate the risk?

Is this an appropriate level of mitigation? What further actions need to be taken?

Shared decision-making framework

1. Clarity of purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What decisions are we trying to make? Why does it matter? How does it relate to our mission or strategy?
2. Inclusive input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who needs to be at the table? Have we invited the right voices? Have we created space for quieter or underrepresented members to contribute?
3. Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What data or evidence is informing this decision? Have we declared conflicts of interest or assumptions? Is there a shared understanding of risks, costs, and impacts?
4. Options and tradeoffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are our choices? Can we generate more than two options? What are the benefits and risks of each? Can we blend or phase options to meet different needs?
5. Agreed process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will we decide? (e.g., consensus, modified consensus, vote with thresholds) What's the threshold for agreement? How will we record and communicate the decision?
6. Commitment and follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are we aligned on implementation and next steps? Do we need to check back in or review the decision later? Have we considered how we'll communicate this externally?

Decision Making Tool

Background				
1. What is the issue we are trying to decide?				
2. Is this timeframe dependent?				
3. What are the options available (including no decision)?				
4. What are the benefits and costs of each option? Does it support our mission?	Option	Benefit	Cost	Comment
	A			
	B			
	C			
	D			
5. How do we get information (data) to assist us in the decision?				
6. Who have we consulted?				
7. What are the criteria to decide? (Financial, planned, social, cultural)				

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/tools/decision-making-tool>

Reflections from today's workshop

In the chat:
Share a key takeaway

To contemplate:
Choose a governance risk your board is currently facing. What is something you could do that would go towards addressing this risk?