

BEST PRACTICES IN BOARD COMMUNICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is at the heart of a high performing Board – that has never been more true than it is today.

Now more than ever, effective and transparent Board leadership and governance are pivotal enablers to organizational success. Boards are under the microscope on a daily basis – they have never been scrutinized as they are in today’s world of unprecedented expectations for accountability. This represents a new level of responsibility, and opportunity for communicators and our function.

Clear, transparent and timely communication is vital on three core levels:

Intra-Board Communication: Information sharing, deliberation and decision making among the Directors.

Board/Employee Communication: Effective information and knowledge transfer from the Board of Directors to staff (e.g. on strategic direction) and from staff to Board (e.g. providing briefings and updates on industry or corporate issues).

External Communication: Equipping Board Members to communicate effectively about the organization and its mandate to external constituents.

These operational guidelines seek to provide direction and structure to manage Board Communications across these three facets.

PRINCIPLES

Effective Board communication is based on the following core principles:

Knowledge enables sound decisions. A Board is only as effective as the extent of information that is available to them. Ensure that your organization’s Board of Directors is equipped with high-quality, predictable information products to help inform decision making.

Add value through interaction. Board members should have access to value-added briefings and analyses from senior staff. The focus should be on providing senior staff’s best integrated analysis and thinking, rather than presenting siloed perspectives on issues from various functional areas.

Accountability is key. Board proceedings should be professionally captured and published as part of the organization’s commitment to openness and transparency.

Increase face time. Board decisions should be made based on appropriate, high-quality communications – where possible, this should be based on face-to-face communication, but teleconferences may also be required for more pressing decision requirements. Email should not be used as a forum for decision making.

Clearly identify roles. The CEO should be positioned as the key interface between staff and Board.

Use resources appropriately. Board members may be called upon to help support public communication, for example via media interviews. This would only occur upon approval by the CEO, in cases where there is a requirement for particular expertise, or for a second language spokesperson.



BEST PRACTICES

Best practices in Board communication flow from the principles of good governance – the need for Board Members to work effectively together, with the CEO and with the organizational team. Given the Board’s pivotal role in helping to shape the culture and tone of an organization, a strong commitment to communication is particularly significant at the Director level, in order to create a highly communicative, collegial and transparent climate for the business.

#1: Foster openness and transparency.

We are living in an age that requires a singular, demonstrated commitment to openness and transparency on the part of organizations, particularly in the public and para-public sectors. Transparency is imperative at every level – among the Board, in interactions between the Board and staff as well as the exchanges between Board Members and external stakeholders. While some issues will require confidentiality, they should form the exception, rather than the rule with respect to an organization’s approach to Board communication.

#2: Use communication to foster sound decision making.

Effective communication is a vital success factor for the Board to be empowered to make sound, informed decisions. This encompasses supporting Board members’ decision making by providing the best quality information and data, providing a strong forum for exchange and dialogue and recording past decisions accurately to feed into the deliberative process.

#3: Support Board Members in their role.

Board members deserve strong support to be positioned to succeed and add value through their governance role. This support should be consistently provided through the Director’s continuum of service to the organization – from the recruitment phase, which should be based on clear and accurate information about the role, to orientation, to focused support for particular roles such as the Chairmanship.

#4: Manage effective Board-staff communication.

A respectful relationship should be established between the Board and staff based on trust, and clear understanding of scopes of responsibility. Staff communication to the Board should generally be mediated through the CEO; however it should be made clear that the Board and the staff are working collaboratively toward a common purpose and result.

#5: Position Board members as ambassadors.

Board members play an important role as Ambassadors for your organization at the community level. They should be supported in that role with practical tools such as key messages and updates on important public files.

For more information on how these best practices can be leveraged to meet your organization’s communications objectives, please contact Ingenium Communications at info@ingeniumcommunications.com or 613.729.1721.

Ingenium Communications produces a suite of products, including a collection of best practices, a white paper series and useful tools that help enhance your organization’s communications activities. To access this suite of products visit www.ingeniumcommunications.com.

