



BETTER DISCUSSIONS. BETTER DECISIONS. BETTER BOARDS.

Practical Tools for More Confident Board Decision Making

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INTRODUCTIONS

At your table, share:

- Your name and organization
- How long you've served on your board
- One word that describes a productive board discussion

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PRODUCTIVE BOARD DISCUSSIONS
GOVERNANCE COMMUNICATION
COLLABORATION CHANGE
PARTICIPATION INNOVATIVE
COHESIVENESS LISTENING WELL
RESPECT DIVERSITY
OPENESS EXPERIENCE
TEAMWORK INCLUSION
(BEING) INFORMED
EMPATHY
EFFICIENT
ACCOMPLISHMENT

GROUP GUIDELINES



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- R
- E
- S
- P
- E
- C
- T

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GROUP GUIDELINES



- **R**ecognize personal etiquette
- **E**xpect to learn something about yourself and others
- **S**peak clearly and use personal examples
- **P**articipate honestly and openly
- **E**ngage in the process by listening as well as speaking
- **C**onfidentiality, Curiosity, and Compassion
- **T**ake responsibility for yourself and what you say



What makes (or has made) decision-making
challenging for your board?

Difficult Decisions

Lack of Info-Contextual
Difficult/Uncomfortable Issue/Topic

Differing Participation + Engagement

→ Different Knowledge + Understanding
Of Services + programs of org.



It's About Everything That Happens *Before* the Vote

Did we ask the right questions?

Did we challenge our assumptions?

Did people feel comfortable disagreeing?

Do we know what we're actually deciding?



By the time someone says, "All those in favor," most of the work that determines whether this will be a good decision has already happened.

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WHAT MAKES A BOARD DECISION DIFFICULT?



Reflect on a difficult decision your board has faced.

- You don't need to share what the decision was. Think about the *process*.
- Was the difficulty in the issue, the information, the people, or the process?



Great board decisions rarely happen by accident. Good boards create processes that improve the quality of their collective thinking.

SIX BOARD DECISION TRAPS



1

The First Idea Wins

The first solution anchors everything that follows.

2

The Loudest Voice Wins

Once a strong opinion is stated, others react rather than evaluate.

3

We All Agree... Right?

Silence gets interpreted as agreement — even when it isn't.

4

We've Invested Too Much

The real question: Knowing what we know today, what should we do *next*?

5

That's How We've Always Done It

Precedent is not the same thing as analysis.

6

Too Far into the Weeds

Governance and management blur when boards focus on *how* instead of *what and why*.



Good governance requires more than good intentions. Boards need processes that protect the quality of their thinking.



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BREAK

SIX BOARD DECISION TRAPS



1 The First Idea Wins

4 We've Invested Too Much

2 The Loudest Voice Wins

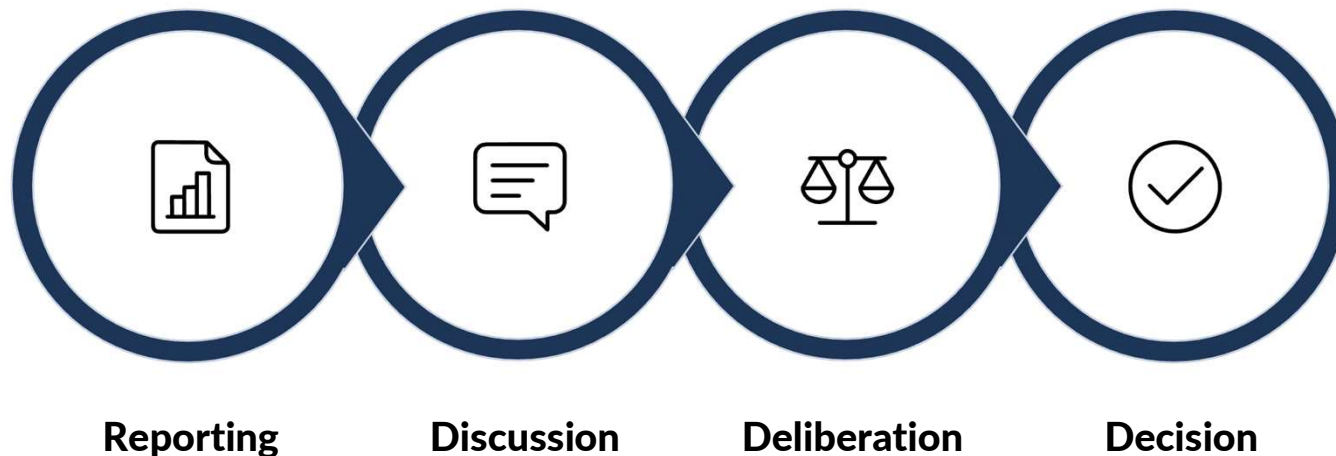
5 That's How We've Always Done It

3 We All Agree... Right?

6 Too Far into the Weeds

Which have you experienced?
Which one is the easiest to trap your board?

A Model to Move from Reporting to Decision



Deliberation is not the same as discussion. It means **intentionally weighing options, criteria, evidence, and consequences** before reaching a judgment.

FROM DISCUSSION TO DELIBERATION



Clarify

What do we know?
What don't we know?



Challenge

What assumptions are we
treating as true that might not be?



Consider

Who isn't at this table?
Who experiences consequences
differently?



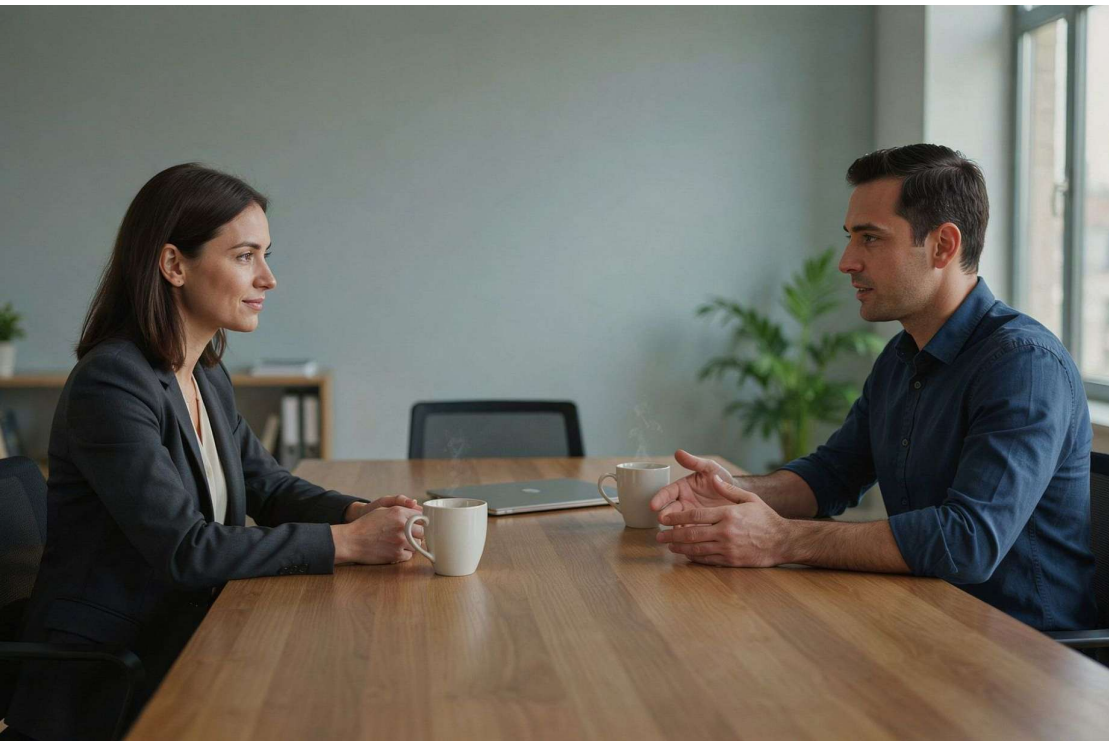
Consequences

If we choose this, what happens next?
What does it make harder?



A board doesn't add value by having all the answers but by improving the organization's thinking.

DISAGREEMENT IS NOT DYSFUNCTION



Task Conflict vs. Relationship Conflict

Task conflict says: "I see this differently." It surfaces ideas, evidence, priorities, and alternatives.

Relationship conflict says: "There's something wrong with you because you see it differently." That damages trust.

Healthy boards don't eliminate disagreement.
They develop the capacity to use it.

Take a Position

Strongly Agree ←—→ **Strongly Disagree**



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5 QUESTIONS BEFORE WE DECIDE:



1 What are we deciding?

Two people can have a smart conversation while answering two different questions.

2 What matters most?

Identify criteria *before* evaluating options — not to justify a choice already made.

3 What are our options?

Beware of false binaries. If neither option were available, what would we do?

4 What haven't we considered?

Assumptions, missing voices, unintended consequences, and the strongest counterargument.

5 Are we ready to decide?

Do we have *enough* information? Will another 30 minutes materially improve this decision?

Boardroom Challenge: Make the Decision

Old Dominion Community Services

\$750,000 in annual discretionary funding.

You are the board. You have competing needs, stakeholder pressures, and limited time.

5 Questions Before We Decide

- What are we deciding?
- What matters most?
- What are our options?
- What haven't we considered?
- Are we ready to decide?



Slowing down the first five minutes may save you from revisiting the same decision for the next five meetings.

Better Discussions → Better Decisions → Better Boards

Slow Down the Thinking

Five minutes to define the decision isn't wasted time — it may prevent 30 minutes of talking past each other.

Make Disagreement Useful

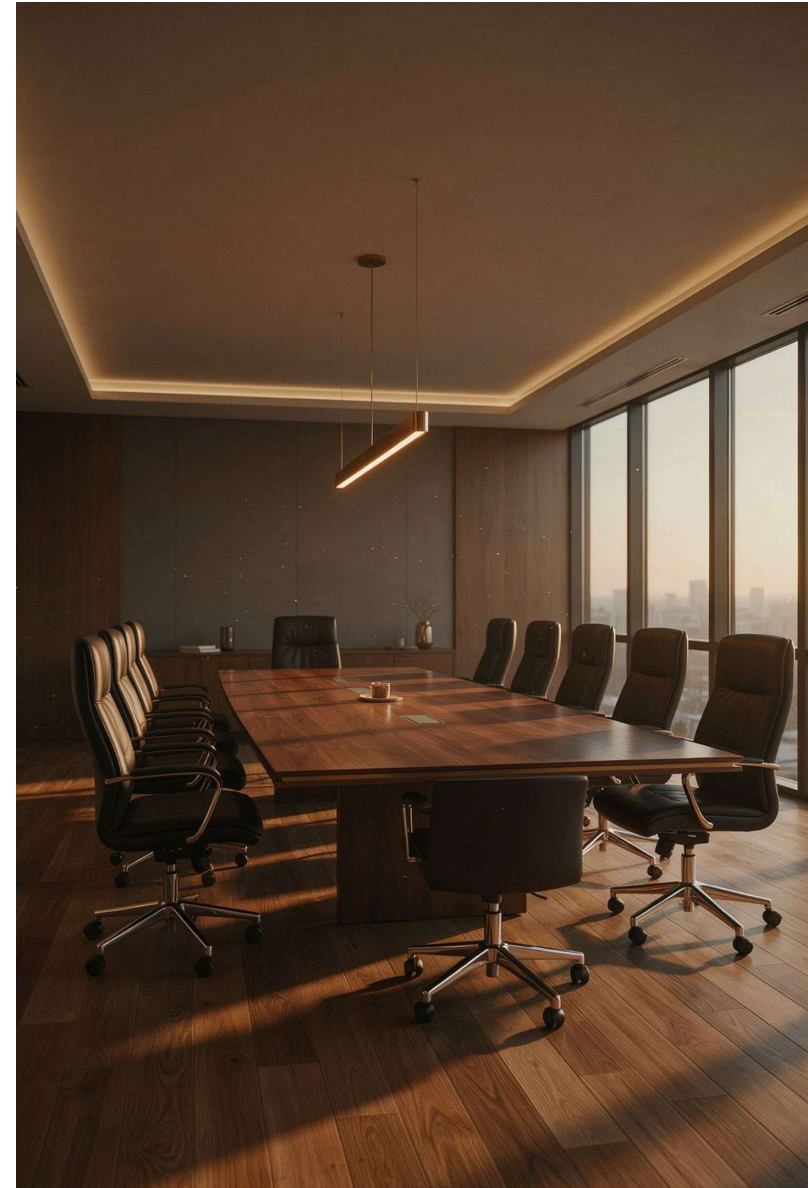
Different perspectives are information. Build conditions where ideas can be challenged without damaging relationships.

Ask Better Questions

The most important contribution a board can make is asking the question that hasn't been asked yet.



Better boards don't need all the answers. They create the conditions for the right conversations — and know when it's time to decide.



WIFLE: What I Feel Like Expressing

