Getting boards to work

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Practitioners Forum 2018

CO-OPERATIVES UK

Context & objectives

Over 14 months a group of 5 (co-operative chairs, a vice chair and myself) explored and practiced how to make boards better

Objectives for session

1. Explain what it is we did and why we felt it mattered

2. Experience some of what we did and get reactions

3. Engage with our recommendations and receive feedback

The objectives

- Create an environment where chairs can talk about their challenges

- Support chairs in their development by experimenting

- Find practices that will be beneficial for other co-operatives;

- Explore the dynamics in a safe environment

What will make this group worthwhile?

Worthwhile for me?

Gain knowledge, ideas, confidence and best practice

Helping to make a difference

Opportunity to experiment and try something new

Worthwhile for my board?

Make by board more effective

Balance between team spirit and ability to challenge

Be more disciplined on managing boundaries between strategy and operations

Worthwhile for the co-operative movement?

Bring out how co-op boards can be different and better

Share our learnings outside of the group

Develop how to engage each other and members

At your tables

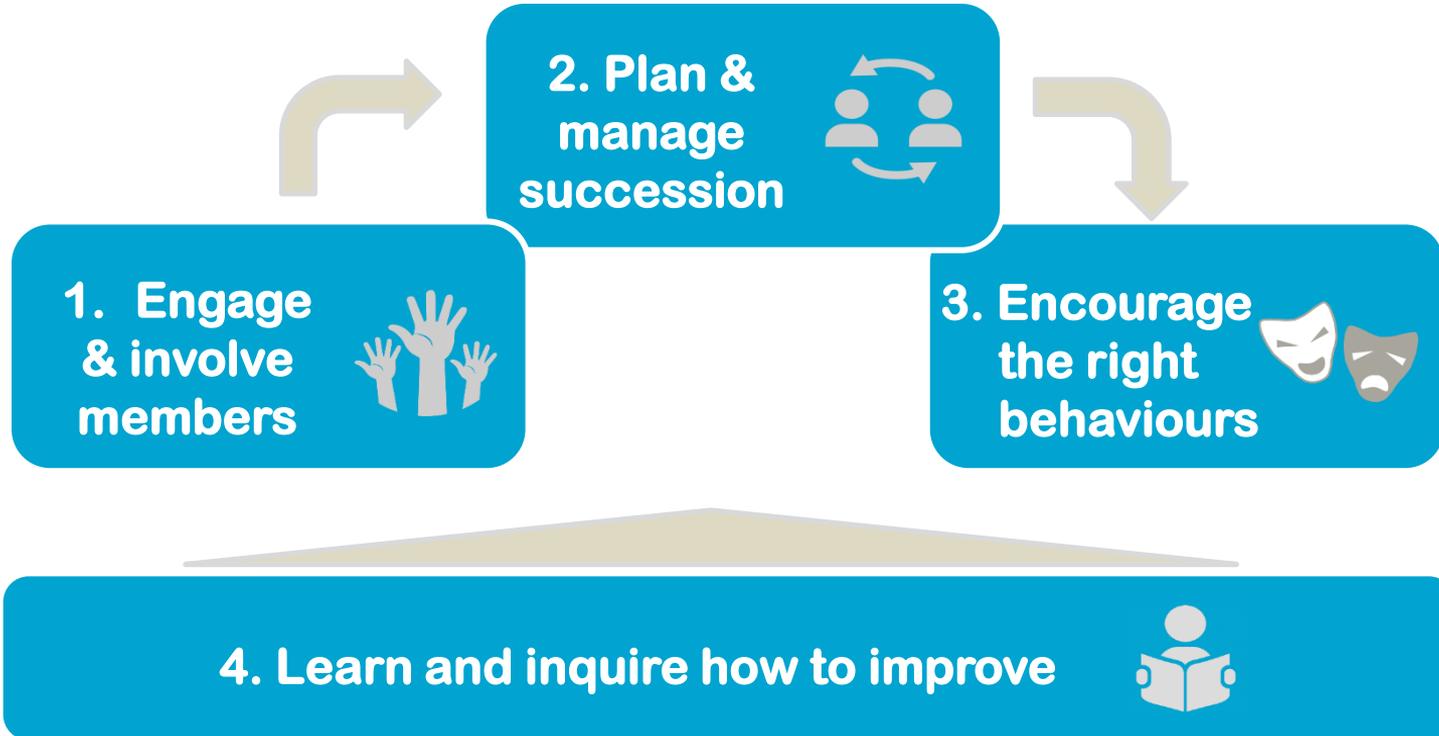Examine the "What it feels like today" cards

- Choose 1 card that best sums up your 'collective experience'

- Write on the card why you chose it

10 mins

Examine the cards "What good looks like"

- Choose 1 card that best sums up your 'collective experience'

- Write on the card why you chose it

10 mins

#PF18

Four areas explored

2. Plan & manage succession

1. Engage & involve members

3. Encourage the right behaviours

4. Learn and inquire how to improve

At your tables

There is a worksheet and detailed recommendations to explore

- **What do you like?**

- **What will make it better?**

- **What is missing**

15 mins

REFLECTIONS & SUGGESTIONS   #PF18

Which recommendation we are discussing

What do we like about the recommendation

What will make the recommendation better

What is missing from the recommendation

DISCUSSION & QUESTIONS

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Appendix

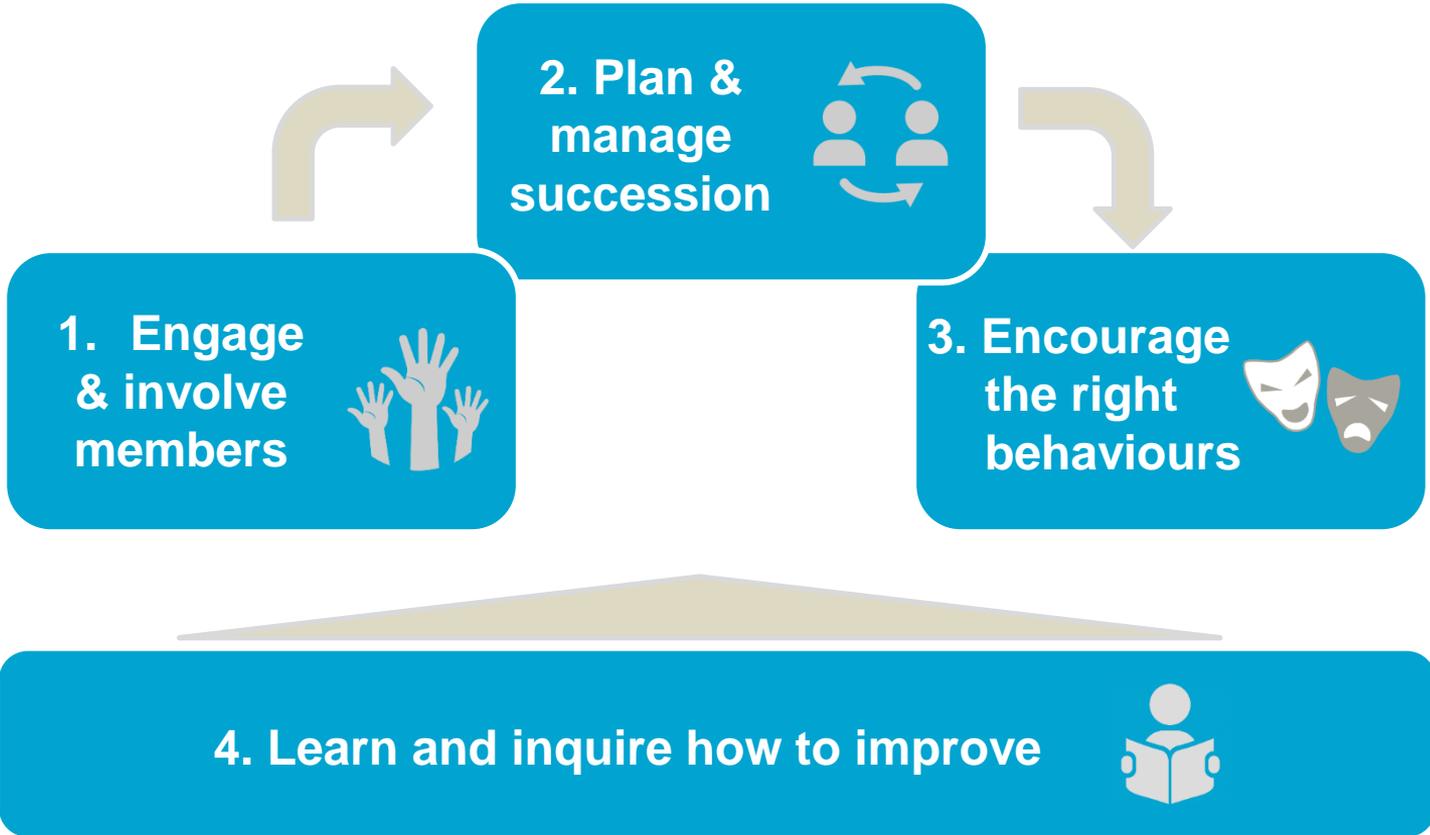## Getting boards to work

CO-OPERATIVES UK

We identified 4 interrelated areas that were important to us to inquire into

#PF18

2. Plan & manage succession

1. Engage & involve members

3. Encourage the right behaviours

4. Learn and inquire how to improve

Against each area we developed a set of recommendations

1 Boards need to actively engage and involve members directly

2 Boards need to determine the capabilities they require and how to manage succession

3 Boards need to be clear what behaviours are expected and how to encourage them

4 Coops UK can take the lead in supporting chairs and vice chairs improve their boards

1. Boards need to actively engage and involve members directly

1. Boards need to have annual membership engagement plans

- Important for members that they understand the board's role
- A plan ensures the board directly engages with the members
- A plan needs to be managed and regularly reviewed to ensure it is being delivered and changes incorporated where required

2. A direct feedback loop with members should be put in place

- Board needs to interact directly with members and hear their feedback
- Feedback creates a dialogue built on trust and transparency
- Recognition that this takes time and effort from board members
- Need to consider how feedback is incorporated into board expectations

3. Mechanisms to creatively engage members should be identified and developed

- There are good examples of creative ways coop boards have engaged members that can be learnt from
- Among the mechanisms have included: use of technology; running interesting workshop topics around AGMs; holding board surgeries
- These is an opportunity to encourage members to stand for the board

4. A key aspect of the role of directors is membership engagement

- Election of directors is an important democratic coop principle
- Directors are elected directly or indirectly by members and have a responsibility to find ways to engage members
- Engagement is one way directors develop themselves and others

2. Boards need to determine the capabilities they require and how to manage succession

1. Boards need to identify and agree the skills and capabilities they require

- The board needs to be clear on the skills and capabilities it requires to function (visual representations might be worth considering)
- Skills and capabilities include relevant experience and softer skills
- Discussions should acknowledge current capabilities and desired ones

2. There needs to be a clear board plan on how to manage succession

- Important the board has a view on planned succession: including proper induction of new directors; board and individual development
- A board plan needs to recognise the required balance between continuity and bringing in fresh perspectives

3. Directors need to have development plans and annual review sessions

- Boards must have a process to review directors development plans
- Directors discuss their plans and progress with the chair
- This is not necessarily an appraisal process – though some boards might want to consider this

4. Find ways to engage members that encourage them to seek election to the board

- Actively share board capabilities and skill requirements with members
- Hold sessions for potential candidates to understand requirements and expectations (may be run directors not standing for election that cycle)
- Consider means of encouraging members with relevant skills to stand

3. Boards need to be clear what behaviours are expected and how to encourage them

1. Deal with poor behaviours in the board immediately

- Our experience is poor behaviours need to be tackled immediately
- Essential to have a process / mechanisms in place to deal with the issue
- 'Behaviours' must not be used to limit debate or dissent

2. Co-produce a code of conduct which is specific and regularly reviewed

- Each board needs to create its own code of conduct which it owns
- As part of this process it needs to be clear on desired behaviours and those that are unacceptable
- There needs to be a safe space for the board to reflect on its practice

3. Have clear escalating consequences for poor behaviours

- Should be made clear what are the implications of poor behaviour on a scale e.g. private conversation, warning, suspension etc.
- Important to consider different ways of educating directors on how to deal with behavioural issues

4. Role of the chair / vice chair is to encourage right behaviours

- Chair / vice chair roles are fundamental in encouraging and promoting the right behaviours e.g. giving everyone a voice
- Chair / vice chair must be empowered to dealing with behaviours without requiring the board's permission

5. All of this is underpinned by clear processes, rules and expectations

- The above work more effectively where there are clear processes
- Important that boards have agreed agendas, meeting structures, pre-reads and timings (with an emphasis on decision-making and oversight)
- There is existing good practice on making boards effective and

REFLECTIONS & SUGGESTIONS

Which recommendation we are discussing

What do we like about the recommendation

What will make the recommendation better

What is missing from the recommendation