



Board Meeting Evaluation

Improve Board Performance through Continuous Inquiry.

Board self-assessment is widely recognized as a fundamental building block of continuous governance improvement. For the past 20 years, many healthcare organization governing boards have engaged in full-board performance evaluations, often on an annual basis. These evaluations are designed to assess the board's knowledge of its roles and responsibilities and how well the board as a whole is discharging them.

More recently, hospital and health system governing boards have added a level of evaluation focused on the performance and contributions of individual board members. These assessments are generally conducted at least once during a board member's term of office and are designed to help individual trustees gauge their own strengths and identify opportunities for improvement. Effective self-evaluations at either the board or trustee level depend on the development of an action plan that identifies areas for performance improvement and specific steps to accomplish it.

While these assessment processes help both boards and trustees to improve their governance effectiveness, they have some inherent limi-

tations. Because they are intended to be comprehensive evaluations, they are conducted infrequently—once every year or two for full-board assessment and once every two to three years for individual trustee evaluation. Therefore, a significant time lag usually occurs before changes in performance take place. For example, by the time board members complete their self-assessment surveys, the surveys are tabulated and analyzed, results are presented and discussed at a board retreat, and an action plan is developed and completed, one year or more could easily go by. While these performance assessment processes typically result in several improvements, changes tend to occur slowly over many months and may lack the energy of ongoing progress generated by more frequent or rapid improvements.

In an effort to maintain the momentum of continuous governance improvement, many best practice boards are beginning to conduct more frequent mini evaluations of board meetings. Here's how the process works: Each board meeting concludes with every board member anonymously completing a brief form evaluating how the board planned for and used its time dur-

ing the meeting. The questions are designed to give a quick (five minute) assessment of the meeting. The results are then compiled, analyzed, and used to fine tune future board meetings. The post-board meeting evaluation forms can be compiled and analyzed by the governance committee, the executive committee, or the board chair and CEO. The aggregate results of the board meeting evaluation should be presented to the full board at its next meeting, along with the proposed changes in the board meeting (if any) in response to the evaluation results.

Prior to implementing board meeting evaluation, the board chair, CEO, or the chair of the governance committee should introduce the concept of the post-board meeting mini evaluation. During this introduction, it should be emphasized that the responses are confidential and board members are not asked to put their name on their completed forms.

Although this type of evaluation is intended to be brief, it should encompass various categories and types of questions. Categories and sample questions might include the following.

Meeting Preparation

- The agenda focused on strategic issues, rather than on management or board committee reports.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- The board agenda book contained useful information in a form that helped members understand the issues.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- All board members came to the meeting fully prepared.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Quality of Discussion

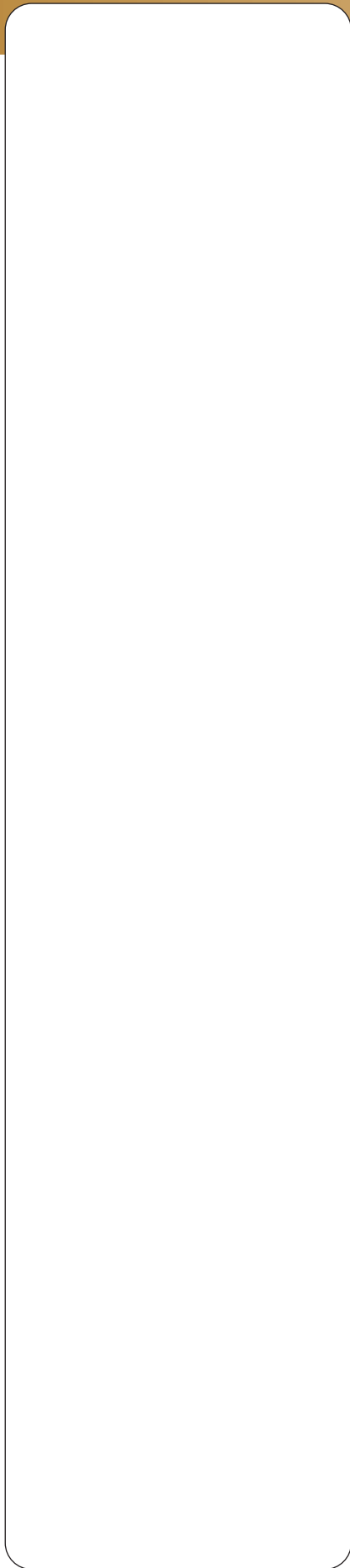
- Discussion focused on issues of importance to the organization.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- Board members offered thoughtful, productive comments and questions throughout the meeting.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- Disagreement and debate were healthy and respectful.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Board-Executive Interaction

- The CEO dominated discussion throughout the meeting.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- Too many staff members attended the meeting.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Leadership of the Meeting

- The agenda was followed and used to guide discussion throughout the meeting.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- All participants were encouraged and given the opportunity to provide input.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- The meeting started and ended on time.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree



General Comments

- What did you like least about this meeting?
- What suggestions do you have for how the meeting could be improved?

The questions listed above are not intended to be exhaustive but to suggest options for boards to consider. Each individual board member (or the committee assigned this task) should review these questions and choose the ones that are most relevant to that specific board, in addition to developing other more specific questions. For maximum effectiveness, the evaluation form should contain both quantitative (multiple choice; check one) as well as qualitative (open ended, requiring a written response) questions.

Boards that evaluate the effectiveness of their meetings report several benefits. Completing the evaluation as the last agenda item of each board meeting helps capture participants' feedback when it is still fresh and at the top of the members' mind. Compiling results and sharing them with the board at its next meeting with recommendations for improvement creates short, frequent cycles within which corrections can occur. Incorporating mini evaluations at every meeting also establishes an expectation among board members that their suggestions will be listened and responded to by board leadership. Therefore, feedback obtained from these ongoing evaluations can be used as additional input for evaluating the effectiveness of the board as a whole as well as board leadership.

Such an evaluation process can help CEOs keep tabs on the pulse of the board and can help identify emerging issues or problems early on. Because these evaluations are frequent and ongoing, they also give CEOs a tool to help their board self-correct behavior or practices that might impede effective governance.

Technically boards only exist and can only govern when they are meeting, so evaluating how the board prepares for and conducts its meetings is one of the most high-leverage opportunities that a board has to improve its performance. ▲

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