

Good governance is about leadership not management

Greg Whateley

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There is so much chatter about governance – ‘good governance’ specifically. A great deal of emphasis is put on the somewhat superficial format of reports and documents – sometimes the emphasis is somewhat childish. Governance is not about the look and feel, it is about the relationship between elements of the business and the supportive nature of that interface.

My observation is that one of the negative elements of governance is ‘staying too long’ in the job. A three-year stint in key governance roles (chairs, committee leads, memberships and the like) is probably ideal. Anything beyond that point usually leads to tensions and losing sight of the actual role specifics – providing support to the business personnel and mechanisms.

Ideal duration of governance roles – three years – and move on.

Importance of good leadership

Leadership and management are not the same thing – which may come as a surprise to many. Good leadership provides ongoing support to those *in* management – and this usually requires support and encouragement as opposed to criticism.

I have on several occasions now seen that line blurred somewhat.

I recall a scenario where the Chair of the Board of Directors believed he could do a better job than his senior staff – and ever so quietly had them removed – one on a ‘trumped up’ charge of misbehaviour (later determined as unfounded) and the other *performance managed* out. The overall result – significant destruction of the business and significantly diminished student numbers - not to mention the harm done to those two senior staff involved.

A second incident occurred when an over-zealous Chair decided that she could do the job better than the CEO. Stealthily and quite inappropriately she manoeuvred the CEO out and assumed the role of acting CEO – with no concern for conflict of interest of course. Ironically, she claimed her particular area of expertise to be ‘governance’. Not surprisingly her role was short-lived.

What was witnessed (on two occasions now) is the misuse (or perhaps misunderstanding) of leadership. Instead of providing support and encouragement – the need to ‘be in charge’ vanquished the logic of the day. I might add – all three displaced managers were considered by their peers to be very good at their jobs.

Good leaders understand the importance of empowerment, team development, communication (there it is again), emotional intelligence, problem solving ability, respect, strategic thinking and active listening – amongst other things.

Importance of good management

Good management is about ensuring systems are in order and people are supported in their working efforts. Management can take on many forms – but at the heart of good management is a clear understanding of the business and a solid grasp of people management and support.

Current thinking (I have taught management and leadership for many years) is that good management involves communication skills (vital in my opinion), empathy and support, strategic thinking, conflict management ability and of course adaptability.

If a manager has these skills – and is prepared to hone them - they will achieve extraordinary things.

So, what is good governance all about

'Governance is the overall complex system or framework of processes, functions, structures, rules, laws and norms born out of the relationships, interactions, power dynamics and communication within an organized group of individuals.'

Good governance understands the importance of supporting and nurturing the people within the organisation in an effort to ensure loyalty and commitment.

Smaller groups are best served by informal structures. The notion of imposing large scale systems on small enterprises is not only inappropriate – it is also counter-productive – and needs to be guarded against.

Emeritus Professor Greg Whateley is currently Chief Executive and Executive Dean at the *Australian Guild of Education*, Melbourne