

## TEAM “BOARD”

### FIDELIO OVERTURE



#### TEAMS – EXECUTIVE & BOARD

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##### PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The recently published [UK Corporate Governance Code](#) included a change in language from Board Evaluation to Board Performance Review and implied the introduction of new criteria by which Boards will be judged.

The Executive Team has long been held accountable based on performance criteria; some of these elements could now be extended to the Board.

The Executive Team will usually fulfil the conditions for what we recognise to be a team. A team is a group of people who share a common purpose (Katzenbach and Smith). Their work together goes beyond simply co-ordinating as a group of individuals to embracing a shared vision and goals, with mutual support and accountability.

#### FIVE KEY ELEMENTS

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There is substantial experience and research as to what makes an effective Executive Team. The key attributes at Executive-level have clear relevance for Chairs who are keen to develop the judgement and dynamic of their Boards to underpin Board performance.

##### 1. CLARITY OF ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY/LEVERAGING STRENGTHS

It is essential to any team that each member knows what his or her role and responsibilities entail. In the best teams, individual members will also understand each others’ respective roles and contributions.

Knowledge of the role is not enough however, and team members need to demonstrate their depth of understanding through their behaviours. [Gallup's extensive research](#) on strengths indicates that a focus on developing awareness of individual and team strengths to use in role is the best way to optimise team performance and to achieve excellence.

## 2. MUTUAL RESPECT AND TRUST

Team engagement should be based on mutual respect for colleagues and bonds of trust within the team need to develop and strengthen over time.

These bonds of trust need to be sufficiently strong to withstand differing viewpoints and challenge to ensure the process generates the best outcome for the organisation.

Within the team, a dynamic of healthy tension, challenge and candid debate is critical for success.

## 3. PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Psychological safety is the degree to which individuals in the team feel able to be vulnerable with each other. [Google's research on teams](#) has correlated a high degree of psychological safety with high performing teams.

A high degree of psychological safety ensures diversity of views and challenge are encouraged. Team members feel free to speak up and raise important issues for the team to consider encouraging a team dynamic that can cope with dissent and drive to the best outcomes. The team leader's approach is critical to creating and maintaining psychological safety.

In the same way a Board's ability to tackle sensitive and challenging issues and effectively address conflicting views is evidently dependent on mutual respect and trust between Board Members, as well as psychological safety.

## 4. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Developing effective communication within a team is key to unlocking its full potential. The team leader, or potentially the Chair or Committee Chair, will play a critical role in setting the tone and cadence for communication.

Regular, transparent and inclusive communications engagement is essential. Listening to team members rather than telling them what to do will often achieve better results as individuals need to feel involved in the work of the team and the decisions that affect them.

[Gallup's research on meaningful conversations](#) indicates that the single most powerful intervention team leaders or managers can make is to have 15-30 minute "meaningful conversations" with individuals they manage on a regular, indeed weekly, basis.

The top five characteristics of meaningful conversations are:

- i. **Recognition and appreciation** for recent work – it is important for team leaders/managers/Chairs to establish and understand how employees or indeed Board Members like to be recognised
- ii. **Collaboration and partnerships** – team leaders/managers and Chairs play a key role in connecting the right team partners
- iii. **Current goals and priorities** at work – team leaders/managers and Chairs need to establish clarity of goals, priorities and expectations

- iv. **Employees' and team members' strengths** i.e. what they do well – conversations about how employees, and indeed NEDs, get their work done are more meaningful if they are based on what they do best i.e. their strengths
- v. **Length of conversation** - 15 minutes is enough for a meaningful conversation but only if it happens frequently. If feedback isn't weekly/regular, research indicates that longer conversations are required.

Chairs and Committee Chairs will not be looking to replicate such regular discussions with Non-Executive colleagues, although the Chair will probably be speaking with the CEO on a weekly basis. Nonetheless some aspects of these conversations are very relevant to Chairs seeking to enhance performance among Board and Committee colleagues.

## 5. CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND FEEDBACK

Teams are in a constant state of flux and this needs to be reflected in their development support. The best teams are continuously learning through greater awareness derived from regular feedback, evaluation, training and development. There is usually a strong emphasis on a growth mindset and developing soft skills, including people and communication skills, to ensure the optimum pathway for success.

Fidelio concludes every Board Review with a consideration of Board learning. We certainly find that the most effective Boards have an appetite and curiosity for learning, as well as an awareness and openness to development.

## CONCLUSION

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An effective team dynamic in the Boardroom is an important determinant of success. A good dynamic is the basis of healthy discussions, constructive challenge and effective decision-making. Boards differ from Executive Committees, nevertheless they are teams and the research and experience about what makes an effective team carries weight and has relevance in a Board context.

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## ABOUT FIDELIO

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[Fidelio Partners](#) advises Chairs and has a clear focus on Board effectiveness and building judgement capability. We have an international track record in building better Boards through Search, Board Review and Development. To learn more about how we advise and support Chairs, including with regard to Board dynamic and team development, please get in touch.

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**BUILDING BETTER BOARDS**

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