Board Culture

Board Work: The Role of Culture

"A culture is a system of beliefs and actions that characterize a particular group. Culture is the unique whole—the shared ideas, customs, assumptions, expectations, philosophy, traditions, mores, and values—that determine how a group of people will behave."

"Leading Change" by James O'Toole, 1995.

Board Culture May Not Be Explicit

Significant beliefs are often under the surface. It is important to identify values, beliefs and priorities at all levels of the organization because they are the framework that determines performance.

Beliefs create decisions. Decisions create actions. Actions create results.

Adapted from www.culturalresearch.org

Board Culture Is Important

How people think, feel, act, and value . . .
is guided by ideas, meanings, and beliefs . . .
that are shared.

Shared ideas, beliefs and meanings lead to coordinated actions which lead to results.

Impact on culture? Governance is a team sport, but boards are often composed of quarterbacks.

Defining the Culture of the Board

What are the desirable characteristics of your board culture?

What observable behaviors would define your ideal board culture?

How does your current culture align with your desired board culture?

What resources do you have to build your board culture?

Board Culture: How Board Members Work Together

• What are the expected norms of board behavior?

• Do board members affirmatively commit to specific board member expectations?

• Is there respect for input from all board members?

• Do board members respect agreed upon areas of priority for board oversight?

• Do the few dominate the majority of the board's time (in committee/full board meetings)?

• Does the board police board member behavior and model the same behaviors and performance expected from others in the institution?

• What other cultural elements define (should define) how the board achieves consequential governance?