

Formin', Normin' & Stormin'

by Caroline Evans

At what point does a board agenda item become so big and so important as to require its own agenda? I had never really thought about how or when a new committee might be necessary until I found myself working with one.

The initiation of a new discreet project might prompt the formation of a sub-group to manage it. However, I had not appreciated how fluidly the need for a new committee can evolve, the decisions necessary for its inception and the practical implications of getting it up and running.

It appears to me that the important components of creating a new committee include the following:

- How is it to be populated?
- Who should be chair? Should this be the person who owns the board agenda item, someone new to the topic, a volunteer or any 'pressed man or woman'? What's the best mix of newbies to the boardroom versus old hands?
- How big should it be?
- What is the skills matrix?
- What are the reporting lines in and out?
- Where and how will it fit within the governance structure?
- How long will it take to reach optimal efficiency and effectiveness?

Formin'

Any organic process is shaped over time but how do you decide when you've hit on the perfect formula? In terms of human factors, it should be evident that each member of the committee is clear on their value and the impact of their role. They must also recognise and respect the contributions made by their colleagues. Communication should be fluent and constructive. Everyone be openly aligned on purpose, output and outcome.

Normin'

What I have experienced so far has shown me that once a committee is formed, it is easy for its remit to grow and grow. What was once a single item on a board agenda, takes on a life of its own. So how do you stop it growing uncontrollably? What's the key to keeping focus whilst retaining agility? What is steady state?

Stormin'

A well-established committee will comprise of individuals with diverse and complementary skills working in sync, each one comfortable bringing their expertise to the table and respectful of the insight of others. They constructively challenge, are rational in the face of disruption and agile in embracing change. They prepare for succession planning or the "end-game".

How many new committees have you seen through the formin', normin' and stormin' cycles? What's been their recipe for success? How long does it take to get to their final goal?

What does an optimally-performing committee look like to you? And what about the end-game? Can there be a successful 'hard stop'? If not, how is ongoing value monitored and complacency avoided? What are the signs that energy may be dissipating? How do you navigate out of a plateau?

Do tell me what you have seen to be the most difficult part of the process and any tips you have for long term success!

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