

Webinar Transcript

How to Harness Conflict in the Boardroom to Optimize Outcomes

So welcome everybody. Welcome to our webinar today titled How to Harness Conflict in the Boardroom to Optimize Outcomes. I'm joined today by Georgia Henry, Fiona McKenzie, Anna Phan. So welcome to you all team.

My name is Sean McDonald, and I shall be your moderator in the background for the next forty odd minutes, forty five minutes. Firstly though, thank you for attending today. We always appreciate the effort you make to be here for our live webinar events.

During the session, if you have any questions, please try and use the Q and A button on your toolbar just like just enables us to keep a track of everything as it's coming through and we hope to answer as many questions as we have time for during the session and And finally, if you stay through till the end, which of course we hope you will do, we have a really short one minute survey and I promise you it is only one minute at the end of the webinar for you to consider. It really helps us put together the breadth of content that we have for you week after week and it enables us to present or organize, I should say, not present the wealth of governance experts that we have for you in the team.

For those not too familiar with BoardPro, we are a board software provider, sometimes called a board portal, and we serve just over thirty five thousand users around the world, around about thirty four different countries, about four thousand boards, and about eight and a half thousand committees, would you believe?

We enable organizations to prepare for and run their board meetings more efficiently and effectively with less time and deliver more impact and value for organisation. And as much as we are a board software provider, part of our wider mission here at BoardPro is to make the fundamentals of governance free and easy to implement for all organisations, but especially those organisations with resource constraints. And one of the many ways we do this is by providing free access to hundreds of governance templates and guides and white papers on our website, which funnily enough, you'll find in the resources section of our website.

And these webinars that we host every week on a Thursday in Australia, New Zealand time, that is a great way of accessing really good governance knowledge from governance experts from around the world without the time commitment and costs associated with in person events.

So let me hand over to the team to introduce themselves starting with Georgia, you first.

Thanks, Sean. Hi, everyone. Thanks for joining us.

I am a culture and leadership advisor. I work with boards and CEOs. And at Henry Reid, we really focus on optimising and resolving complex issues affecting organisation culture, leadership, performance, governance and enabling strategic outcomes. So we focus on navigating challenging dynamics and workplace issues, which is why this topic is such interest today.

Anna, would you like to introduce yourself?

Absolutely. Thanks, Georgia. So my name is Anna Fan. I'm a director at Resolve Consulting. So Resolve was established to equip, sustain, and develop the healthy organizations.

And particularly we work in the not for profit space, and that is across governance, people, and also finance. And so one of the great joys we have is coming alongside boards in particular and helping to establish healthy principles of governance. And I'm really excited about today's topic because it's one that is often not talked about, but in the not talking about it, it then usually becomes present. So I'm really excited to participate in this conversation.

Great. Thanks. Thanks, Anna. Fiona, would you like to introduce yourself?

Hello, everyone. Welcome to this webinar. I'm joining you from the Gadigal lands of the Eora people, which is the central part of Sydney in Australia. I'm a negotiation and conflict specialist. I've got a background in management consulting.

I've spent the last decade and probably decade and a half helping leaders and teams use positive conflict and negotiation strategy to drive alignment. I know it sounds funny, but I actually love conflict. We'll probably talk about this as we go through, not in the heat of the moment, that would be weird. But to the benefits that come from positive conflict are really amazing for leaders, teams, boards, community organisations. The bulk of my work involves teaching negotiation to government universities and industry. And I speak at conferences on conflict skills and I coach leaders. So it's going to be a great session, everybody.

Fantastic, thank you.

It's an interesting topic. When I first started talking to people about, we're talking about conflict in the boardroom and how do we optimise conflict to achieve outcomes. Some of the feedback I got was, should we really be calling this conflict? Should we just be focusing on robust debate and discussion and why is it actually really important? And I think part of this conversation is that we all know in theory that conflict is essential in the boardroom. We know that many governance and strategic risks are caused when we don't have healthy debate and challenge in the boardroom and that the outcomes can be limited.

But I think there's a real difference between the theory of what we know and how we actually achieve that in reality, which is I think why when we look at Anna and Fiona and myself, why we all have roles to play in supporting organisations in actually understanding how to harness healthy conflict and how to create healthy conflict and what to do when it becomes quite negative and destructive.

So what does, I'll just throw it to you both Fiona and Anna, for you, what does healthy conflict look like in the boardroom? What is it the type of things that you think should be demonstrated?

Fiona?

I've seen a lot of boards that think that they're really aligned.

But actually, may they make really quick decisions, but it turns out that they're not aligned at all. There's this sort of fake harmony lying underneath. And I think what healthy conflict is when the conflict is actually about the content or the deeper thinking that's needed.

Unhealthy conflict is when it's about the individual. So I think that's an important distinction.

I really like this list that you've got Georgia on the slide. I would also add that healthy conflict is needed in the boardroom for innovation.

I read this really interesting article about when the Apollo the NASA was doing the Apollo man on the moon.

What do we call that? And the engineers were encouraged to fight with each other, but in a really positive way. And it was all about the mission. And they would point to the moon and say, do we wanna go here? And so they had this really healthy dissent and debate because they were so focused on the mission. And I think that's a really great metaphor for boards.

Yeah. And think it's, you know, when the dysfunction can disconnect can come when you're not continuing to keep focused on the purpose of the organisation, the mission and the vision of where you're wanting to get to. And Anna, what does healthy conflict look like for you in the boardroom and what have you observed?

Yeah, I would absolutely affirm what is being drawn into here because I think it's a really important point foundationally. Organizations are there to serve a purpose. And so seeing that conflict, that diversity of perspective is actually in service of the organization and pulling that perspective away from, I'm not here to serve an agreement within the board, I'm here to serve the broader organization and the purpose that we are gathered here to do. And so I think that that's a really important foundation. I think that therefore having that perspective that different people, we talk about, you know, matrix, when we come in at Resolve and do governance reviews, we're always looking at diversity of experience, diversity of skill, diversity of age, you know, all of the different diversity metrics so that you get a rounded perspective.

When you have healthy conflict, you are actually bringing that diversity of perspective. And so it's essentially that thing of how do we view this issue from a whole lot of different angles so that the board holistically can take a view on this matter. And if we only have one perspective, it's kind of like an orchestra, right?

So if you have only one instrument in an orchestra, like it's great noise, but it's not the beautiful symphony that you will get with the orchestra. And so it's that sense of, you know, the role of the

violin, the role of the flutes, that analogy holds also in the boardroom that each part has a role to play. Each person has a role to play and a different perspective to bring to have that healthy conflict.

Yeah, fantastic. Sean, go to the next slide, please.

Great.

So I think it's really clear when we start to talk and when you're on a board or interacting with a board that there are impacts that arise from positive conflict and from negative conflict. And I think that innovation, focusing on ideas, being able to explore risks is really well understood with a positive conflict.

And one of the things that we know is boards are continually in a situation and an environment that actually requires conflict and is in a situation where directors need to be considering competing priorities, allocations of resources, assessing different strategic options, risks versus returns, and deciding what to do as well as what not to do, particularly around moral and ethical decisions. So some of these things are really important that when I've seen conflict result in negative outcomes, it can either be because there is aggression in conflict or there is a negative impact of conflict.

And as we've already said, that passivity or the lack of engagement and willingness to engage in conflict. So it can bring a board to a point of inaction or it can result in poor decision making based on bias assumptions because things haven't been explored.

Anna, from your experience, why does it work well in some boards and become damaging in others? And there's just a comment and a question there.

Can you speak up a little bit to to Apologies.

Yeah. Hopefully hopefully that's a bit better.

Apologies.

And so sorry, Georgia.

In terms of when I've seen the Yeah.

You have examples of when you've seen it work, you know, conflict work well in some boards and potentially become damaging in others?

Yeah, I think that one of the key foundations is how much a board is expecting there to be conflict. So when you've got a foundation for healthy conflict, that conflict tends to go well. And examples that we would use here are, for instance, talking about the role of conflict within key documents. So your code of conduct, your board charter, but actually having before those documents are written, having a session at the board to talk about what is it that we're wanting

to have? What will characterize healthy conflict? What will allow us to enter into these conversations, these robust conversations with psychological safety, with emotional intelligence, with all of the different frameworks and underpinnings foundations will enable that conflict to go well.

Yeah. Great. Fiona?

Yeah. Look, I I agree with that. I think some things some of the things that we need to put in place are the really structural things, billboards, minutes, expectations, the government governance documents. But a lot of this is around the facilitation by the chair and the way that they provide an expectation that healthy dissent will happen. And I think that's part of when I think about the difference between positive and negative conflict.

I think it's about the difference between embracing dissent or suppressing it. So good conflict is embracing the dissent. It's when we're working really hard to uncover different opinions. And when we have those really awkward conversations, and we know they're awkward, but they clear the air. Bad conflict is when that dissent is suppressed. And when we stay silent, and I think we don't think about silence as negative, but I think that silence also is a form of negative conflict that leads to groupthink. So that's another one to watch.

Yeah, Sean, next slide, please.

And it's all those things, those contributing factors and making sure that we are looking at that our governance, board governance supports challenge and conflict is really important and that we set up the board culture to make sure that it actually encourages that discussion and challenge. And I think it's really important that we focus, the goal is not to eliminate conflict because of all those things that you've just said as well Fiona, groupthink, bias, the inability to make effective decisions, but it's around ensuring that it's focused on issues and not individuals. And when I see conflict become negative, it's when it becomes quite personal and becomes more focused on individuals and their relationship rather than challenging the issue and the thinking and the decision making and the governance.

And this happens for a whole lot of reasons. The main one being we're human. We are emotional beings. We are we are driven by our emotions. We are influenced by our past experiences and how they shape our willingness to engage in conflict, our level of fear of engagement in conflict, as well as our understanding of what is acceptable behaviors in the board that we're working with. And so the board culture here really does impact our ability to challenge our ability to speak up and have a voice.

So I think it's not only about the governance, the experience that you bring the board diversity, but it's around, you know, what might be holding us back based on our emotional responses on past experiences and our emotions that we feel in the boardroom that might lead to the development of conflict situations.

But Fiona and Anna, generally there are some early warning signs when you're working with a board or in a boardroom. What are some of the early warning signs that you've identified may help directors see that things aren't going well and need to have some intervention?

I think the early warning signs are things that we expect the sort of side conversations, some sarcasm or slip in some eye rolling. I think the next sort of step is some of those power games, one upmanship or or information is power. So information is withheld. The hallway conversations are a classic When you know that things are being discussed outside the formal boardroom, that's a real warning sign that something's going on.

Yeah. Sometimes we see pressure to give in when people are really quickly triggered. It's those sorts of things that are the early warning signs. You want to pay attention to those.

Yeah.

And I would add in as well that absolutely those cues in yourself and others. I think that Georgia makes a really fantastic point around, we are human, we are emotional beings. And so having that awareness of, okay, when we're in this circumstance, how am I going? But also how is that other person going, seeming to be going? So noticing things like icy politeness, I think is a great one where there's quite curt or clipped ways of speaking. That's a real indicator that people are not particularly happy and or a refusal to engage and then kind of, you know, like a, you know, one of those senses of like, well, I'm just gonna abstain from this conversation or you guys just have the conversation you're wanting to have, though absolutely that sarcasm.

And the other one that is an early warning sign of conflict is where people, within the board are raising concerns and they're repeatedly being brushed under the carpet. So for instance, when people are beginning to be aware of, oh, look, these conversations are not flowing, we are not getting to the level of governance maturity that we would be expecting, etcetera. And that is being repeatedly dismissed. I think that that's another sign that there's probably going to be some more conflict down the way.

Yeah, I think that's really relevant. I think also when you can see people aren't getting their, aren't being heard, they're not being given the opportunity to explain why they may disagree with a certain decision or the direction that the conversation's going in. So when we look at those early warning signs and then how that transitioned into conflict becoming toxic and damaging, it is usually around the boardroom environment, the board culture, a lack of psychological safety, which can limit our ability to feel that we can speak up or challenge in a safe way.

That there are dominant individuals that you feel like you get a word in or that you're not given the share of voice and time to do that, or that you are spoken over or disregarded.

Sometimes that can stem from a lack of role clarity and accountability, particularly in boards that have, you know, are less mature and less experienced. Some directors may not understand what their role is and how they're encouraged to speak up and participate in debate.

And one I see a lot in very purpose driven organisations is this focus on harmony over healthy challenge. So there's a lot of agreement because we don't want to rock the boat. So we're very passionate about the purpose of the organization. So we think that we will, you know, by being harmonious, we're actually going to be achieving better outcomes, which is not the case.

And we've spoken there also about the unresolved grievances or a lack of trust that may be apparent and have evolved over time. It may not even be evolving you, but walking into a boardroom that there are unresolved grievances or lack of trust between some directors can really mean that conflict then is not healthy and becomes very toxic and damaging.

One other point I was just gonna add in there, if that's okay, was just around because one of the things that I'm very passionate about is providing foundations for these great conversations to take place. And so that's why I talking about things like board charter, code of conduct, etcetera. But another one, which I think is a great early warning sign that conflict may start to occur is when the agendas are too tight. And so when the board is under enormous pressure to move at a pace that doesn't allow full conversation.

And what that means is that dissenting voices, everybody, if the chair is pushing speed of agenda, they're not going to be opening up that conversation, but also the entire board is wanting to move at a pace. And so I think that agenda creation in terms of understanding what topics are more likely to have discussion around them and ensuring that sufficient time is actually allocated to those key and particularly where they're purpose centric decisions that are being made.

Yeah, absolutely agree, Anna. And I think too, in looking at the board allowing themselves time to actually get to know each other and to understand each other, I mean, are generally fairly full. There is a lot of time pressure, But I think that comes into the board culture and those behavioral norms as well in setting the expectation that it's okay to say, we're actually not ready to make a decision on this and we need to push back, we can't rush through.

So all of those expectations for behaviors and ways of decision protocols are really important to having those established and well understood.

And I think being able to make sure that that's embedded in the ways of operating right from board induction and onboarding of directors and setting those clear expectations for behaviors is a really important part as well.

I was just gonna say, there are lots of different ways to categorise conflict. I tend to think of it about tasks, that what we're doing, how we're doing it, relationships, so who we are, those personal ones, and the values. So the why conflicts. But interestingly, we normally experience everything as a relational conflict, and we think it's the other person.

We can't get on with them. They're being difficult. Sometimes fixing the structure and the sorts of things that you were both talking about actually will pull people out of that relationship conflict. And so because we experience everything as relational, fix the other things, the values

alignment and the task alignment and the relational conflict should should not move into the toxic zone.

Absolutely. And I think that comes back to that focus.

We should be focusing on the issue and the mechanisms for resolving issues rather than the person and focusing on evidence rather than assumptions, making sure that we have got the frameworks, particularly governance frameworks that allow us to resolve issues.

For World Cup fans, play the ball not the person. Yes, perfect, perfect.

And I've seen boards though who've had the best intentions of being able to resolve issues in this way, but their governance framework has not been set up in a way that actually gives them effective pathways for resolution. And so that is a really important way to make sure that your frameworks are enabling healthy debate and discussion and grievance resolution or conflict resolution. So we've got a couple of questions that have come in on the Q and A. So we'll just quickly jump to those. The first one's from Isabelle.

As boards increasingly oversee AI, geopolitical risk and cybersecurity, how will the skills needed to manage constructive conflict evolve over the next five years?

A great one, I think when we look certainly at AI and some tendency to explore issues relying on information that is being provided to us.

It's really, I think the personal and interpersonal skills and ability to show emotional intelligence when we're dealing with large issues, particularly issues that have moral and ethical decisions to be made is going to be really important. Having strong emotional intelligence, reasoning skills, critical thinking, these are going remain important over the next five years in dealing with these skills. Anna, what are your thoughts?

Yeah, it's a really interesting point. I think that actually, like you're saying though, Georgia, the foundational skills are the same. And so, yes, you have these very complex matters. I think one of the key risks that I see particularly when it comes to AI is trying to is that we will be potentially, there'll be so much information on a particular topic that it will be a case where we we we need to stay open to the perspective of the other despite having a large volume of information. And so I think that maintaining that curiosity to your point, absolutely those skills to have the curious conversation, to consider the perspective of the other and to notice in ourselves, even if we are absolutely certain we're right, how can we maintain dignity, respect and good communication in those high octane conversations?

Yeah, yeah, fantastic. Sure, we might flick to the next slide. There are a few more questions coming in and we will get to those as well. I think when we look at, this just sort of summarizes what I think we've already said that effective boards really embed that challenge in their governance practices so that disagreement and exploring different perspectives becomes normal, productive and expected. And that's really around creating that right culture and environment.

One of the other questions that we've got here is how should a board respond when conflict escalates into a breakdown of trust, which is quite often what it ends up being, especially when the same concept psychological safety is used by different parties in opposing ways. I love that. Let's weaponize trust in psychological safety to drive our own agenda.

It's an interesting one. And for me, I always see that this, we also need to be focusing on what are the issues, what's underpinning the breakdown of relationship and trust and focusing on strategies for how rebuild that, rebuild a relationship. And for me, I got three main elements. One is authenticity.

So are we actually being genuine? Are all parties who are contributing to this breakdown of relationship through the conflict presenting as authentic and genuine? Are they presenting as credible and providing credible evidence based information consistently? And are they demonstrating empathy?

And I think when we look at those elements of trust, they're generally present, one or all three of those are generally present in a conflict that's become personal and led to a breakdown.

So that does create a psychologically unsafe environment. I would also say how do we respond as a board? Sometimes they need to seek intervention to mediate a situation and make sure that you're able to actually work with those parties to understand root causes and ensure a safe place for resolving the conflict.

Fiona and Anna, any other comments to add on?

Yeah, I agree with what you've said, Georgia. I think the boards that I've worked with that have really devolved into total lack of trust, it's a very long process to get that back. And I think it, you know, it could be done if there's a trusted person on the board.

But as an outsider coming in, the approach that I would take is meeting with everybody one on one and really trying to understand the issues and distill those into some a really core agreement of what they are that everybody would agree with. So a neutral framing of the issues.

And then over weeks and weeks of meetings where we create a safe environment for people to talk to talk and share to actually work through those issues and formalise an agreement. It's a much longer process than you would expect. But you can bring that trust back.

But only once you have an understanding of the issues and you actually take that time to invest in everybody, make sure the rules are very clear, that comes first, about how the exposure of the issues will happen.

And often people are in violent agreement and they don't realise.

I think given that those different perspectives can often really sway our understanding of the other person's position. Sorry, Anna. Yep.

Oh, yeah. No. I think that that's it's an excellent point. The other one is just noticing, and I thought it was a great point that you're pulling out there, Fiona, that you're having these conversations offline. I think that sometimes it can feel tempting if the conflict is in the boardroom to try and resolve things in the boardroom. And actually when it comes to the degradation of trust, like when that's been undermined, that really what you need to do is that that is personal one on one kind of a process and facilitation to affirm what Fiona was saying is so helpful to have an outside perspective. People tend to feel really understood in that space, but I would encourage any board that's experiencing a breakdown in trust.

Don't, you know, it's that whole thing of, you know, you always affirm people in public and, know, challenge in private that there is that sense of not trying to resolve it within the meeting itself because that tends to devolve into further lack of trust.

Great, thank you. Sean, can you go to next slide? We've got a lot of questions coming in now. So we'll keep going through some of those questions.

One of them, when we look at how to avoid a toxic dynamic and a critical role is the chair's role in setting the tone and upholding standards.

One of the questions that has come in from David is how do you deal with a domineering chair?

Quite often when I get approached by directors, is around, there are challenges with the chair's behavior or the chair has an unwillingness to resolve some of the conflicts. So I'm not going jump in on this one first. Fiona, what are your thoughts around sort of how do we how do you deal with the situation when it could be the chair that is part of the problem?

Yeah. I don't think this is a very uncommon situation, to be I think I think for people in that situation, the very first thing to do is to get your emotions under control. You don't want to intervene until you're calmer. So whatever your emotion calming strategies are, breathing and hand on the heart or or, you know, name and normalize those sorts of steps, do those first. I think a really really helpful tip when it's it's a director not a chair who's experiencing this is to use what I would call strategic curiosity as a disruptor. So ask some questions, ask some dumb questions that are gonna restore the conditions to good governance.

So you might say from a board perspective, what's the actual decision we're trying to make today? And you then you're sort of bringing everybody back to to what to the purpose and why you're there. Yeah. I think it's possible to protect the process without without challenging or undermining the authority of the chair, but you've gotta do it using questions, I think, not statements.

Yeah.

Yeah. Anna?

I'd also add in that there's a huge benefit in having periodic reviews of your board. So having you can have internal reviews every year, but they do tend to be managed by the chair. And so

that becomes a bit of a feedback loop. However, if you get an external consultant in, then that facilitation process can be very helpful. One of the things that we say at Resolve is that we get brought in when, you know, and we let our clients know what they need to hear, not necessarily what they want to hear. And so it's really that sense of, look, this is this is the feedback that's being delivered. And it's actually a great way for directors to be able to give that feedback in a way that tends to be aggregated into the board feedback process and therefore become a bit easier, A, for the director to give, but also for the chair to receive often.

I think so. And I think also focusing on the purpose of a review is around continuous improvement and learning and development and support. That, again, aligning that back to purpose of the organization and why are we here and that we're not in this alone. Were actually as a board, we're here to work together and focus on collective outcomes.

So that can be a really effective way to start to address issues. Of course, I've seen it time and time again that, you know, there are, the chair can be a real roadblock to effectiveness of the board. And then it needs to be the board making a decision around what happens next, how is the board going to address this with them, whether that is And some of those are very challenging discussions around stepping off the board or or, you know, really having a bit of an intervention. So really challenging when the the the chair is part of that issue.

The other point I've got there is around establishing clear values aligned behavioral expectations and holding each other to account, and that aligns with one of the other questions, from Peggy who who asks, what are your best tips for dealing with more challenging personalities?

So someone could be a director, a client, an executive who's habitually argumentative and disagrees for the sake of disagreeing. So again, I think having some really clear behavioural expectations and ways of addressing the ways of interacting is important.

But also having guidelines to and having things are becoming very argumentative and nonproductive in a board meeting is to actually say, coming back to agenda, coming back to timeframes, you know, maybe this needs to be taken offline to try and diffuse the conflict in the moment and address it externally at another time.

But I think it's really important to acknowledge different perspectives and points of view, but again, things focused on the outcome that is trying to be achieved and and have those frameworks for behavioral expectations. Fiona, what have how have you seen effective ways for for dealing with, I guess, individuals who are are really difficult in a meeting.

I think thanks, Georgia. I think for me, the very first step is actually to look at yourself when you're dealing with difficult people.

I do believe that we all carry biases that we're not aware of. Yeah. And in negotiation and conflict, I think if you can under uncover your biases, you're more likely to be engaging with that person in a clearer, more honest way. Sometimes I think we bring things to conflict, and we don't realize.

So you want to protect yourself from your own biases is the first step. And the second step is actually be prepared to change your mind. First, understand understand them first before you engage and prepare your rebuttals. So be listening, trying actually listening to understand, not just to hear what they're saying.

So look at yourself and be prepared to change your mind.

Fantastic. Thanks for your Anna, any any other thoughts?

Yeah. I think with that one, it's can be helpful just to have a few phrases in the back pocket to to bring particularly where there is conflict and obstinate behavior is to pull it away. We talked earlier about, you know, playing the ball, not the man and say having a phrase like, you know, instance, I think that we're hearing two genuinely different views on this matter. And that just helps to make it deescalate the emotion that goes alongside it.

And the yeah. That that sense of overwhelm that some of the directors can be feeling. Because I think that making it that there are different perspectives and that is in service of the decision that we're making. So just normalizing that.

And the other thing is not going equal and opposite. So if someone's being particularly aggressive or obstinate, we do as humans have a natural tendency either to fight or flight in those circumstances and fight would look like equal and opposite behavior. So really going head to head with them and that will always escalate. So that energy will rise in the room and that will escalate the process.

So noticing that tendency in yourself and going, okay, well, what does it look like to neither fight nor flight, but actually to find the middle ground and draw this back to the issue?

Yeah.

And, you know, neuroscience tells us that when our emotions are challenged, we're feeling negative emotions, we shut down, thinking shuts down. So we become less able to engage and and able to resolve things effectively.

One of the other strategies I just had in the previous slide too was having purposely allocating a role of a devil's advocate to be the one who is challenging and rotate that role so that you're actually encouraging people to take a contrary position to explore biases and assumptions and, you know, what what good looks like as well. So thanks, Sean. We can go move forward.

So I I I guess when we look at things, the high performing boards, we know high performing boards are not conflict free. They have learned how to engage in robust, respectful disagreement while maintaining trust, alignment, and a shared commitment to success. And that sort of sums up a lot of what we've spoken about. Another question that's that's come in is is around a board of five people for a privately owned company with a managing director, CEO and owner, that's a one role, has accused the board of being his source of stress and anxiety and that's caused a health event. We can't dismiss the CEO, so how does the board move on

from this? This has caused a breakdown of trust and stress around board meetings for all directors. Does this require intervention?

I think for everyone's psychological health and safety, yes, it requires intervention. I would say it requires some external mediation to help resolve this. Fiona, what are your thoughts?

Yes, agree, Georgia. I think that sounds like an external independent person's needed to work through that.

Yeah, I agree. I'll just quickly go to another question.

Very recently come onto a board, the chair is running right. She has her group of eight out of twelve that follow her. They meet as a group outside of meetings, set unrealistic timeframes, shut the CEO out of conversations, dominates conversations. I don't know what to do. Anna, any advice for that one?

That's yeah. What what's being described there is an inherent failure of governance. And so absolutely, I would be bringing in external support at that stage. Because the problem is that when you've got these entrenched behaviors, it can be very difficult for people to actually, these are the waters in which they're swimming and they are probably achieving a lot of the goals that they would like to be through these behaviors. Therefore, they will be resistant to changing it. So bringing someone in that is that external person to provide that guidance, provide that way through and that recommendation would be absolutely where I would be going with that one.

Yeah, fantastic. Another question from Isabelle, have you seen examples where disagreement directly led to a better strategic or risk management outcome? Absolutely. All the time, because when people have different perspectives, a well functioning board will stop and listen and understand and ask questions to clarify why people have a different view or perspective, things that may need to be considered that haven't been considered, we only know what we know.

And so it's really important that these different perspectives are explored and understood because they will support better decisions and outcomes.

And that is really what a healthy board should be and a high functioning board should be doing. So just in summary, when conflict begins to become toxic, it's really important to act as soon as it's apparent that relationships are at risk. You have obligations under Health and Safety Act for psychological and psychosocial safety.

You should really be refocusing again down to why are we here? Refocus on our purpose, our core beliefs, our values to bring alignment in reinforcing behaviours.

Making sure that governance supports the way forward, clarity of roles, decision making processes, governance protocols. As a very clear strategy and a very robust strategy is to seek independent support when you need it. It's very difficult when you are working in an environment, a board environment, to be able to resolve issues. It's different from working in an organization where you're seeing each other all of the time. So in a boardroom resolving conflict

and turning toxic relationships or conflict into something healthy can often require, independent, support. So just onto the last slide there. Thanks, Sean.

So I guess strong governance in summary does require constructive challenge. Fiona, any final comments around this important topic of creating healthy conflict?

Thanks, Georgia. I think actually understanding what positive conflict is is a really good start. I think if a board and I've got a tool that I work through this, but if a ball can place themselves, you know, in a quadrant, Are they concealing things? Are they toxic and combative?

Is it a fake harmony? Are they, you know, just all being complacent? Or actually, are they engaging in positive conflict? So understanding comes first, and then backfilling all of those structural issues.

Fantastic.

And I think it's just recognising that robust conversations are the foundation of healthy governance and so very much normalising that there will be disagreement and being concerned if there isn't actually, think is the other way of looking at that.

Yeah, fantastic. And we have another question. What's an example of independent support? Is there a particular company? I would very happily say you could reach out to Fiona, Anna or myself.

This is what we do and we do provide that independent support to boards.

So please reach out to us if that's of interest. We'd love to help you because we really do see these challenging situations regularly. They are difficult to resolve because they generally become quite personal.

So that's it, Sean. Thank you very much everyone for attending.

Thanks Georgia. So everybody please feel free to connect to our team today on LinkedIn. I'm sure they'll look forward to your connection.

Now just a quick FYI, we have hundreds of our webinars on the library of our website. If you're looking for past content, past webinars, you'll find them in the webinar section of our website.

So you shall receive an email from me tomorrow, which will include a copy of today's webinar, the transcript and the slides. As you leave the webinar today, please try and find time for our quick one minute survey. If you're considering board software for your organization then we'd love to hear from you. Better still, try our free trial. It's a thirty day free trial, no credit card is required and it's really simple to get started.

So thank you again everybody for your time today. I hope you enjoyed the session like I did. Thank you Georgia, Anna and Fiona for your time today.

I look forward to seeing you all at our next webinar. Everybody have a great day.