

Emotional intelligence

In difficult times, third-sector organisations can take a lead in tackling complex issues, through prioritising relationships and understanding the emotional drivers behind behaviours.



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Tesse Akpeki explores the new direction in governance and explains how boards can make the change

The UK is facing democratic, digital, economic and environmental turmoil. So says the final report of the Civil Society Futures inquiry, *The Story of Our Times: shifting power, bridging divides, transforming society*, published in November 2018. But the inquiry is clear that charities can help address key issues such as climate change, social divisions stemming from Brexit, racism, inequality and the automation of work. It calls for a PACT (power, accountability, connection and trust) for civil society that will help the sector successfully tackle the issues it faces, ensuring that it is well prepared for the next decade.

Power – practising shared and distributed models of decision making and control.

Accountability – to people and communities.

Connection – real and meaningful links and relationships: a close connection with history and culture.

Trust – staying true to values, doing what is right, being honest about failures and successes, defending rights and calling out injustice.

The fresh focus is on relationships, not transactions – on the reality of people's lives, not just data. In *Kindness, emotions and human relationships: The blind spot in public policy*, Julia Unwin, who chaired the Civil Society Futures inquiry, writes in her role as Carnegie Fellow. She points out that human relationships and kindness matter enormously in times of change and challenge. Kindness is messy, but essential for individual and societal wellbeing, health and happiness.

A key board challenge is understanding what drives certain behaviours. This understanding can foster greater sustainability, improve performance – especially during disruptive periods of governance – and place the board in a better position to shape and influence leadership drivers and to control emotional responses in a way that can lead to better decisions. At an operational level the focus is on aligning operations with the organisation's culture, enabling positive and productive behaviours.

An emerging theme is a focus on the importance of wellbeing. Governance literacy entails a willingness to tangle with complex emotional responses, and an understanding of the deeply human and frequently untidy motivations that make us the people we are.

A critical board and organisational reflection is how truth, kindness, empathy and connection can successfully feature in navigating this volatile environment.

Key indicators that the board is not employing emotional understanding are:

- an absence of contrary voices;
- lack of openness to challenge;
- lack of access to information;
- lack of diversity;
- tolerance of conduct and code breaches; and
- an unwillingness to change behaviours and attitudes.

Boards can usefully examine their organisation's culture, attitudes and behaviours by considering three key questions:

1. How does the board develop new ideas and ways of thinking while dealing with resistance?
2. How is our leadership setting the tone from the top, leading by example and ensuring good standards of behaviour throughout all levels of the organisation?
3. How do stakeholders engage constructively with the organisation to achieve long-term value and more inclusion?

Find out more

Useful resources on board behaviour are:

[Improving charity boardroom behaviours](http://www.icsa.org.uk) (ICSA, The Governance Institute, 2018) at www.icsa.org.uk

[Corporate culture and the role of boards](http://www.frc.org.uk) (UK Financial Reporting Council, 2016) at www.frc.org.uk