

Making boards more effective

5.1 Committees

The main aim of board meetings is to make decisions. The best decisions are made when people have had good information about all the possibilities. Sometimes this information can be provided by others, such as the CEO. However, sometimes this information needs to be collected by board members themselves.

To facilitate this, it can be useful to set up board committees. These consist of board members, and sometimes additional people who are not on the board, with the purpose of looking at important issues in depth. The committee will then present options to the main board for a decision to be made. Sometimes it may be appropriate to delegate decision-making responsibility for certain issues to the committee itself. It is important that committees are set up sparingly so that board members' time is not wasted and the board's work is not slowed down.

There are various types of committees. Some are permanent committees that meet regularly. These often have a specialised monitoring function. Some committees are active only when there is a need. Others are set up for a one-off, specific purpose and when the work is done, they are dissolved. These are sometimes called ad hoc committees.

Types of committees may include:

- **Finance committee**, which meets regularly. It oversees the organisation's financial status and advises the board on the budget and financial issues.
- **Nominating committee**, which is active when there is a need to recruit new board members
- **Sub-committees**. These committees have a very specific role and report to one of the board committees. For example, there might be an audit sub-committee which reports to the finance committee.
- **Ad hoc committees**. For example, as an organisation grows, there may be a need to find bigger offices. An ad hoc committee could be set up to look at whether it is best to extend the current offices or to build, rent or buy new offices. The committee would oversee the expansion and be dissolved once the organisation moves into the new offices.

Some boards have an Executive committee. This consists of people with vital roles on the board – usually the chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The Executive committee acts on the board's behalf between board meetings when issues arise about which immediate decisions need to be made. This saves time by enabling decisions to be made quickly,

rather than waiting until the next scheduled board meeting. However, it may discourage board members and others from seeing the board as a united decision-making body. It can be seen as unfair to expect the members of the Executive committee to make decisions without drawing on the knowledge and wisdom of the other board members. It can also be unfair to expect the other board members to accept decisions made by the Executive committee when they are all legally and morally responsible for the well-being of the organisation. If a board decides to have an Executive committee, it should carefully consider and agree the extent of its authority.

Every organisation is unique. Governance structures that are appropriate for one organisation will therefore not necessarily be appropriate for another. Some organisations will need more committees than others, depending on their size and mission.

Deciding which committees are appropriate

Here are some key questions to ask in order to decide which committees are appropriate:

- Does the committee add value by performing a specialised function that the board cannot fulfil itself?
- Does the committee add value by researching specific issues and bringing options to the board?
- Does the committee avoid managing or pressurising staff of the organisation with advice?

REFLECTION

- What committees exist in our organisation? If none, would it be helpful to set some up? What would these be? If we already have committees, are these appropriate?

Who should be on the committees?

Board members should be on at least one committee. This helps them to keep involved in what the organisation is doing. However, no board member should be on more than two committees. It is important not to over-burden board members, who often have full time paid work elsewhere in addition to volunteering on the board. The board chairperson is the exception to this because he or she can sit on all the committees. However, the board chairperson would usually not chair any committees.

People who are not board members can be invited to be a member of a committee. These people are recruited because they have relevant expertise and can give advice. Such people could include the CEO, senior members of the organisation's staff, members of the organisation and experts. For example, a nominating committee could consist of two board members and some members of the organisation. This encourages the board to listen to the organisation's members. The board members on the nominating committee can provide useful insight into the kind of people who make good board members.

Committee members are selected by the board chairperson after consultation with the board and the CEO. They should be selected carefully, considering their potential contribution to the committee, particularly in terms of their background and expertise. Some committees may require a larger commitment of time by their members.

Each committee should have a chairperson and a secretary. Usually the board treasurer is the chairperson of the finance committee and the vice-chairperson is the chairperson of the nominating committee. The chair of each committee has responsibility for monitoring the work done by committee members and ensuring that tasks set by the board are completed on time.

REFLECTION

- Is there a good balance of board members and non-board members on our committees?

Roles of committee members

Committees work under the authority of the board. They do not have any decision-making power unless authority is delegated to them by the board. They should not be seen as an end in themselves, but as a way to help the board fulfil its role. The main roles of committees are to:

- study an issue in depth
- identify key points and conclusions
- report to the board with a list of options for the board to consider, or make decisions themselves if this authority is delegated to them.

Specific committees have specific roles. For example, the finance committee oversees the financial aspects of the organisation. This involves, among other things, studying the organisation's finances at regular intervals, preparing financial summaries for each board meeting and contributing to the organisation's annual report. The finance committee should review the organisation's use of funds, assets and other resources, and provide advice to the board.

It is important to write a description for each committee, which outlines their authority and responsibilities. It may also be helpful to develop a work plan to specify when contributions to the board will be required across the year. Systems and processes could also be documented to guide committees and enable new members to quickly understand how the committee works. For example, a nominating committee could have guidelines on recruitment criteria, in what order different activities should be carried out, who the stakeholders are, and so on. All of these documents about the committees should be reviewed by the board every one or two years.

A typical description of a committee is as follows:

- **Name** of committee.
- **Purpose** of the committee.
- **Specific responsibilities.**
- **Meetings** – how often these will take place, and if appropriate, what should be discussed.
- **Chairperson** – who will chair the committee and who will chair in their absence.
- **Secretary** – who will give notice of meetings and record the minutes.
- **Quorum** – how many committee members need to attend meetings to make them valid. The presence of certain members could be specified, such as one board member.
- **Authority** – what authority has been delegated from the board.
- **Membership** – what kind of people should be represented on the committee, such as outside experts, board chair, CEO.
- **Terms of service** – how long members will serve on the committee and how many times they can renew their membership.

REFLECTION

- Do we have clear descriptions for each committee? If not, what should these descriptions include?
- What systems and processes need to be documented?

5.2 Agenda for meetings

An agenda is a list of items that will be discussed at a meeting. It is a useful guide to follow during the meeting to make sure nothing important is neglected. It is also a useful tool for board members before the meeting. It will help them to prepare mentally and prayerfully.

The agenda is the chairperson's responsibility. The agenda for a board meeting should only contain items that are ready for decision-making so that the meetings are productive. For committee meetings, the agenda may include more time for discussion. The agenda should be circulated by the secretary a week before the meeting.

There are some items that should be included on every board meeting agenda. For example:

- Title of meeting.
- Date, time and place of the meeting.
- Prayer to open the meeting.
- Review and approval of the minutes of the previous meeting.

- Verification of the quorum – this means ensuring that there are enough people present at the meeting to make a decision, according to the organisation’s board manual. If there are not enough people, the meeting should be postponed. To avoid wasting time and money, board members should be encouraged to send a written apology in advance of the meeting to the chairperson or secretary if they cannot attend.
- Review of financial report. The report should be circulated before the meeting. The treasurer or financial director should present only the key points. Any important financial matters should be discussed.
- CEO report. The report should be circulated before the meeting. In the meeting, the CEO should present only the key points and take questions.
- Committee reports. This is an opportunity for committees to give updates to the board and ask for advice or decisions where necessary.
- The main part of the meeting – issues that require a decision. These may be new proposals or proposals from the last meeting which still require a decision.
- Reading of correspondence.
- Any other business (sometimes written as the initials AOB). This gives board members an opportunity to discuss any issues that have arisen since the agenda was written and which cannot wait until the next meeting. This item can also be used to share points that do not need to be discussed. To ensure there is enough time, it is helpful if members suggest AOB items to the chairperson at the beginning of the meeting.
- It is helpful to include five-minute breaks in the agenda every hour so that people can get food or a drink, go to the toilet, or make telephone calls. This will have a great impact on members’ ability to concentrate. It will stop people leaving the meeting during discussions, which distracts other members and means that they might miss a vital piece of information or an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
- Agreement about the date, time and place of the next meeting.
- Prayer to close the meeting.

The chairperson should ensure that the meeting follows the agenda closely. It can be helpful for the chairperson to estimate the amount of time that each item will take and try to keep the items to that time. This will ensure that the meeting finishes on time, and that people have energy and the ability to concentrate. At the beginning of a discussion item it can help people to focus if the chairperson tells them how long the item will last.

REFLECTION

- How could we improve our agendas so that they are more useful?

5.3 Chairing a board meeting

There is quite a lot of skill involved in chairing a meeting. People often misunderstand what the role of the chairperson is. At one extreme, the chairperson can be more authoritarian than he or she should. For example, the chairperson may be the person who always has the 'last word' in discussions. The chairperson may widen their responsibility and abuse their power so that it influences decision-making. The chairperson may try to force his or her ideas on other board members. At the other extreme, a chairperson, in an effort to serve the other board members, may want to give everyone an opportunity to share their views and discuss every issue in a board meeting, so that it lasts for hours and does not necessarily result in a decision. The chairperson may not make any personal contribution to discussions at all.



A good board chairperson will get the balance right. It is possible to set time limits on discussions and ensure people's contributions are brief, at the same time as being a good servant. It is also possible to use one's power in a positive way – to encourage the board to work as a team, with joint responsibility for the decisions that are made.

A key skill for chairing a meeting is the ability to facilitate discussion. The chairperson should avoid teaching the board or telling the board what decisions will be made. This does not stop the chairperson making their own views known during discussions, but it should be done so that board members see the contribution as equal rather than superior to their own. A good chairperson:

- draws ideas out of people, as everyone has useful knowledge and ideas to share
- encourages board members and makes them feel valued
- acts as a timekeeper, making it very clear to board members how much time will be given to a particular issue before a discussion starts
- should keep discussions focused and aim for decision-making
- should keep order in the meeting and deal with conflict appropriately
- should be clear. For example, the chairperson should summarise discussions before a decision is made and clearly state the issue or proposal that board members will vote on.

The chairperson does not have to remain neutral during discussions because their first responsibility is as a board member, with their responsibility as a chairperson coming second. However, it is important that the chairperson states that their contribution to discussion is their own opinion as a board member. Once the chairperson has made their contribution, they should allow other people to speak. They should avoid abusing their power as facilitator by allowing themselves to dominate the discussion to defend their point.

Addressing challenges that the chairperson may face

Managing conflict

- Acknowledge the conflict.
- Try to establish the cause of the conflict.
- Lead the group to a place of mutual respect.
- If the conflict is not related to the topic of discussion, encourage those involved to resolve the disagreement after the meeting.

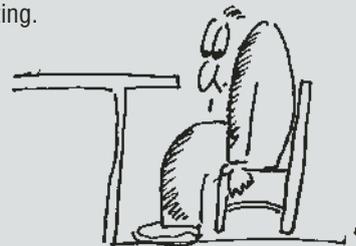


Handling dominant people

- Reinforce alternative behaviour.
- Ask people to lift their hand if they want to speak.
- Limit the number of times each person can speak in the discussion.

Working with quiet people

- Encourage them individually, within and outside the meeting.
- Try to find out why they are not participating more in discussions. Be aware that new members of the board may be quiet for the first couple of meetings while they see how things are done, get to know people, understand their role and develop confidence. On the other hand, some members might not participate because they do not think their views will be respected. The chairperson may therefore have to talk with particular board members who show lack of respect, or the board as a whole to remind them of the rules of debate.
- Invite them by name to give their views.



Adapted from *Facilitation skills workbook* (2004) Tearfund

Once a decision has been made, the chairperson should ensure that someone is chosen to take the action forward.

It can be helpful to have a board assessment session once each year. This will enable board members to consider how well the board has functioned. The chairperson should ensure that weak areas are addressed. This may involve the chairperson making changes to the way he or she carries out their role. Key questions are:

- Does the board function well? In what areas does the board not function well?
- Do we work well as a team?
- Are our meetings productive? How could we make better use of the time?
- Do we spend too long discussing issues?
- Does everyone participate in discussions? How could quieter people be encouraged to speak more and how could dominant people be encouraged to speak less?
- Does everyone listen to others' views? How can we encourage each other more?
- Do we discuss too many issues at each meeting?
- Is the content of the meetings always board business or are there some issues that are irrelevant to the board?
- Do we make decisions? If not, how could we improve our decision-making?
- Do board members vote the way they want to or do they feel under pressure from others to vote in a particular way?

The chairperson should be aware that some board members might not understand some of the issues that the board discusses, but be too afraid to admit it. The chairperson should therefore encourage a culture of openness and mutual respect. The chairperson could do this by:

- setting an example by admitting when they do not understand an issue
- asking people to explain presentations and comments more clearly if they think some people in the room may not understand
- encouraging board members to avoid jargon
- reminding the board that some board members have different levels of knowledge about an issue
- asking individual board members during one-to-one meetings whether they understand everything the board discusses.

REFLECTION

- Are our meetings well facilitated? What improvements could be made?
- Does the chairperson find it difficult to chair meetings? Why?

5.4 Minutes of meetings

The secretary of the board has the responsibility of taking written notes of board meetings. These notes are called minutes. There are many reasons for taking minutes:

- They are often a legal requirement for a registered organisation. Any action that the board takes which is not recorded in the minutes is not a legal action.
- They are a record of the decisions that the board has taken.
- They remind members of what was discussed at the last meeting as they prepare for the next meeting.
- They are a useful accountability tool for members who agree to carry out a task.



Often, minutes are too detailed. Much of the information recorded is not necessary. This means that the secretary is wasting time and effort scribbling down points when they could be participating more in discussions. Detailed minutes also make it difficult for board members to find the actions that have been agreed. Here are some pointers to help secretaries keep good minutes:

- First, write down the title of the meeting, location, date and time.
- Record the people present at the meeting and those who are absent. Also write down names of any guests who attended the meeting. If they are there for only part of the meeting, note the agenda items during which they are there.
- Write down the issue being discussed, the decisions that have been made and actions that will be taken. Do not write everything that everyone says during the course of the discussion. There is no need to include names unless they are important to the item being discussed. Imagine someone who was unable to attend the meeting. Will the minutes give them an adequate understanding of the outcomes of the meeting?
- Ensure that the minutes are correct. Include only facts. Make sure that the actions agreed are expressed as closely as possible to what was said, in order to avoid confusion.
- Number each item according to the number on the agenda. It can be helpful to put the agenda items in a table with one row per agenda item and three columns: one for the item number, one for the notes, decision or action and one for the person who will be responsible for taking the action forward.
- Make sure that any additional documentation, such as reports, plans and budgets that were circulated before the meeting and used as the basis of discussion, is attached and referenced clearly in the minutes.

- Type the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting, check them with the chairperson, and within one week circulate them to all those who were present at the meeting as well as those board members who were absent.
- Ensure that a brief review of the minutes is included as an agenda item at the next meeting to check that they are a correct representation of the meeting. They should then be signed by the secretary and the chairperson at the next meeting.
- Keep the minutes in a safe place, along with additional documentation. Store the minutes on a computer hard drive and a CD Rom or floppy disc. Keep paper copies in a file and store it in a safe place. Auditors may want to view the minutes in the future.

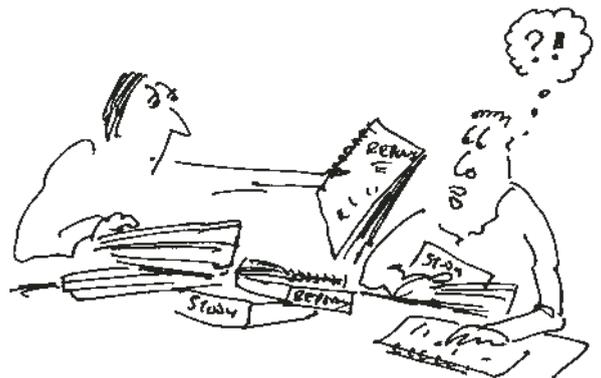
REFLECTION

- Do we keep minutes of every meeting? In what ways could we improve the way we take and store minutes?

5.5 Sharing information²

In order to define strategy and make good decisions, it is important to have access to good information. This information could be provided or collected by:

- board members themselves
- committees
- members of staff through the CEO.



The problem for some boards is that they do not have enough good information. On the other hand, some boards complain that they have a lot of information, but much of it is irrelevant, too detailed or takes too long to read.

There are three types of information:

DECISION INFORMATION – information that is needed so that board members can make good decisions.

MONITORING INFORMATION, such as reports on progress towards meeting objectives or information for reviewing the CEO's work.

INCIDENTAL INFORMATION – information that is for the interest of board members but does not need to be acted upon, such as information arising from committee meetings.

² Drawing on ideas from the Boardsource.org website

Information should be:

TIMELY There is no point having information after it is needed. Information needs to be up-to-date.

CLEAR If information is technical, it should be explained well, so that all board members can understand it.

CONCISE If documents are too long, people will not read them. State the facts and keep explanations simple but to the point. Some types of information can be represented as graphs, which saves space and can encourage board members to understand relationships and engage with the issue better.

RELEVANT Only include information that the board needs to know.

GOOD QUALITY Make sure facts, and particularly statistics, are based on reliable evidence. Try to include different points of view. Board members should read reports critically, trying to 'read between the lines'.

It can be helpful for the board to agree an information schedule which shows what information is required and when. This should be shared with the people who will be expected to contribute information. The schedule could be laid out like the table on page 76. Each year the schedule could be copied and the relevant dates inserted. This shows dates for when information needs to be presented to the board, dates for when information needs to be circulated and deadlines for information that needs to be developed by the board. Information is usually circulated to board members by the secretary after consultation with the chairperson.

REFLECTION

- What types of information do we use?
- Do we have too much information or not enough?
- Is our information timely, clear, concise, relevant and of good quality?
- How can we improve our information?
- Would it be useful to keep an information schedule?

EXAMPLE
Information schedule

INFORMATION TYPE	DESCRIPTION	PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARING INFORMATION	TO WHOM THE INFORMATION SHOULD BE CIRCULATED	DATE																			
				J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D								
Board meetings				YEAR: 2007																			
				DATE OF BOARD MEETING																			
				2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Agenda	Circulate at least two weeks before each board meeting	Secretary and chairperson	Board members and CEO		19		18		17		10												
Information about issues for discussion	Circulate at least two weeks before each board meeting	Various, as relevant to issue	Board members		19		18		17		10												
Financial information	Circulate at least two weeks before each board meeting	Treasurer with Finance director	Board members		19		18		17		10												
CEO report	Circulate at least two weeks before each board meeting	CEO	Board members		19		18		17		10												
Committee reports	Circulate at least two weeks before each board meeting	Committee chairpersons	Board members		19		18		17		10												
Annual budget	Circulate at least two weeks before the board meeting where it will be approved	Treasurer	Board members								10												
Audit report	Circulate at least two weeks before the relevant board meeting	Independent auditors	Board members				18																
Strategic plan	Review annually	Board	CEO						17														
Minutes	Within one week of previous board meeting	Secretary	Board members and CEO	8			9															8	
Notice of next meeting	Within one week of previous board meeting	Secretary	Board members and CEO	8			9															8	

Monitoring information															
Financial report	Monthly – covering previous month	Treasurer with Finance director	Board members and CEO	31	28	30	30	31	29	31	31	28	31	30	24
Financial report	Quarterly – covering last three months	Treasurer with Finance director	Board members and CEO					9					9		9
CEO report	Monthly – summarises main activities and developments	CEO	Board members	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	6	5	5
Published articles about the organisation	Monthly, if relevant	Secretary	Board members and CEO	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	3
Other															
Annual report	Annually	Board and CEO	Staff, donors, beneficiaries, others						29						
Updated material for board handbook	Annually	Secretary	Board members				30								

How to fill in the information schedule

BOARD MEETINGS

First, enter the day of the month for each board meeting in the grey row. In the example above, the board meetings in 2007 will be on 2nd January, 2nd April, 2nd July and 1st October. There will also be a board meeting at the beginning of January the following year, so the table should take account of this so that information can be circulated before that meeting. In December it is important to consider the Christmas break. Therefore, in the example above, the information will be circulated well in advance of Christmas (10th December) to ensure that all board members receive it.

Then for each type of information (white rows), use the description to calculate when the relevant information should be circulated. It is helpful to consult a calendar. Insert the day of the month in the relevant month column.

MONITORING INFORMATION / OTHER

For each type of information, use the description to calculate when the relevant information should be circulated. For monitoring information, allow a few days after the end of the reporting period to enable the report to be written. In the case of financial reports, allow a whole month, because it can take some time for income and payments to be processed. In the example above, the financial report for December 2006 is expected on 31st January 2007, and so on. The quarterly financial report for January to March is due on 9th May. This is because the financial report for March is due at the end of April, and the Treasurer and Finance director need a few days to write the quarterly report.

5.6 Decision-making

BIBLE STUDY

Unity

If boards are to make good decisions, board members must work well together. It is important to work as a team.

- Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.
 - *What does the word 'body' refer to?*
 - *Whose body are Christians part of?*
 - *Look at verses 15-16 and 21. Why do we need one another in the body of Christ?*
 - *Look at verses 17-20. Why are we all different?*
 - *Look at verses 22-26. What should our relationships with each other be like?*
 - *Do people in our organisation feel needed?*
 - *Are their different strengths recognised?*
 - *In what ways can we encourage good team work?*
- Read Romans 15:5-6.
 - *How would reflecting on these verses help during times of conflict within our organisation or within our board?*

The aim of board meetings is to bring together members of the board to make decisions. The best decisions are made when people have access to good information on which to base their decisions. It is therefore important that all the necessary background information is collected and circulated to board members before the meeting. Board members should be given at least two weeks to read the information before they meet to discuss it and make a decision. The agenda should clearly state the issue on which a decision needs to be made. This saves time in the meetings and makes them more efficient and productive.

Another key ingredient for making a good decision is interaction between decision-makers. Board members should use their skills and experience to look at information objectively. They should voice their concerns and views and have a lively debate so that all options are considered. It may be necessary for the board to decide some 'rules of debate' so that the discussions remain focused. It can be easy for discussions to become unproductive, where the same point is made more than once, or where there are personal attacks on particular individuals. These rules of debate could be included in the board manual. They could also be written on to a large piece of paper which is stuck on the wall during meetings. The chairperson should ensure that everyone obeys the rules of debate and remind people of them when necessary.

The chairperson should ask board members to brainstorm and agree the rules of debate. These might include:

- Raise your hand if you want to speak.
- Do not make personal attacks on another individual.
- Do not interrupt each other.
- No person is allowed to speak for more than three minutes at once.
- No person is allowed to contribute to the debate more than three times.
- Respect other people's views.

The board member who is proposing a course of action should put forward options for the board to discuss. Board members should consider whether:

- the proposed course of action will help to fulfil the organisation's mission
- there are alternative options
- the information provided is sufficient to make a good decision, or whether more is required
- the organisation has the right structure and resources to carry out the course of action.

Care should be taken to ensure that decisions do not disagree with biblical teaching. The chairperson should ensure that board members consider issues in the light of the Bible's teaching. If necessary, the decision should be delayed until board members have had a chance to study what the Bible says about the issue, either during the meeting, or before the next meeting. It can be helpful to pause the discussion or decision-making process for a time in order to pray about a specific issue and ask God's help to make a wise decision.

If the board is large, it may be necessary to divide into small groups to discuss the issues and then share ideas with the whole group.

Our values will make a difference to the decisions we make. It can be helpful for the board to spend some time considering the key values that will help them to make decisions. For example, should the board's decisions be based on:

- what others will think or what we want to do better for the sake of the organisation's ministry?
- how the organisation's ministry will be affected or how the organisation's ministry can be expanded?
- how much our decision would require of people or whether it would glorify God?³

³ Source: Becoming a great church board (2004) *Christianity Today International*

Voting

Once the board has spent time discussing an issue it is necessary to make a decision about the action to be taken. The chairperson should make sure that everyone is ready to make a decision. Often the vote will be 'for' or 'against' the proposal. Or board members could vote for one option from a number of choices. They could:

- Approve the action proposed.
- Approve the action with amendments.
- Reject the action.
- Ask for more information to be provided if they do not feel they are able to make a good decision. Someone should be given the task of collecting, or overseeing the collection of, further information for discussion at the next meeting. The minutes should record this and the chairperson should make a note to include the item on the agenda at the next meeting.



There are a number of different ways of coming to a joint decision. Each board should choose the way that works best for them. This should be included in the board manual so that everyone understands how the system works. In the table below are some ways that decisions can be made, with their advantages and disadvantages.

Some methods of decision-making

METHOD	WHAT THIS METHOD INVOLVES	ADVANTAGE	DISADVANTAGE
Consensus	Everyone agrees with the action to be taken for the sake of the group and making a decision, even if they think a different option would be better	Board members are more committed to the decision that is made than after a majority vote	Can take a long time
Unanimity	Gaining approval from all board members	Board members are fully committed to the decision that is made	Takes even longer than gaining consensus. A unanimous decision may never be reached
Majority	This could mean: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than a certain proportion (usually half) of all board members • more than a certain proportion (usually half) of members present at the meeting 	Quicker than gaining consensus	May disempower board members who do not agree

Votes could be cast by raising hands, with eyes open or closed. Alternatively, board members could vote in secret using a ballot paper. The advantage of a secret vote is that members who are less confident are more likely to vote the way they really feel. If the vote is open, some members might feel under pressure to vote the same way as confident members of the group.

Some organisations do not allow the chairperson to vote unless the vote is equal. The chairperson is then required to cast the deciding vote. The disadvantage with this approach is that it treats the chairperson differently from other board members. It appears to give the chairperson more decision-making power than other board members and discourages the board from working as a team. While the chairperson does have an important role, this is in addition to their role as a board member. The chairperson should therefore not be denied a vote. The best way to deal with this situation is to enable the chairperson to vote with everyone else. There are two ways of ensuring a decision is made:

- ensure that there is an odd number of people on the board
- the chairperson could be given a deciding vote, even if they have already voted once with the other board members. It is rare for a chairperson to have to use this extra vote. However, if it is needed, it is usual practice for the deciding vote to be in favour of the current situation, rather than for any radical change.

Once a decision has been made, an action plan is needed. This should include details about what activity will be carried out, who will carry it out, who will be responsible and when it will be completed.

REFLECTION

- How good is our board at making decisions?
- Would it be helpful for us to agree rules of debate?
- Do we ask God for guidance during our meetings?
- How can we improve our decision-making processes?

5.7 Board development

BIBLE STUDY

Living by the Spirit

- Read Galatians 5:16-26.

This part of Paul's letter to the Galatians is about freedom in Christ. We were once living under the curse of the law and were slaves of sin. Christ sets us free.

- *What is the importance of the Holy Spirit?*

Look at the fruit of the Spirit in verses 22-23. Some theological experts have suggested that the first three (love, joy, peace) relate to a Christian's attitude to God, the next three (patience, kindness, goodness) relate to a Christian's attitude to other people and the final three (faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) relate to a Christian's personal qualities.

- *Discuss what these fruits mean in the light of the three categories.*
- *Do we display the fruit of the Spirit? If so, why? If not, why not?*
- *In verse 25 we are encouraged to 'keep in step with the Spirit'. Discuss what this means and how we can do this in practice.*
- *How would keeping more in step with the Spirit transform our board relationships, relationships within our organisation and relationships with those outside?*

Once a board is working well, effort needs to be made to sustain it and even to develop it further. This involves supporting and developing individuals on the board to ensure they are motivated and their contribution is effective. It also involves developing the relationships between the individuals on the board so that they work well as a team.

BIBLE STUDY

Loving one another

- Read Romans 12:9-21. This passage focuses on love within God's family.

- *Write a list with two columns. In the left-hand column write all the things this passage says we should be or do. In the right-hand column write all the things that we should not be or do.*
- *Discuss what each of the items means in practice.*
- *Consider as individuals and as a group: Which of the items listed do we find easy? Which do we find difficult?*
- *What action should we take to love one another better?*

Every time a new member is elected, they should be made to feel welcome and given opportunities to find their role within the team. A good orientation by the chairperson and CEO is vital. This involves:

- enabling the board member to understand how the organisation works. An organisational chart showing departments and relationships can be helpful
- providing information about the responsibilities of the board. The board manual is useful.
- providing opportunities for them to get to know other board members.

It can be difficult to keep board members motivated when they spend most of their time doing paid work elsewhere and when the board meets only occasionally. There are a number of ways to keep board members motivated:

- Ensure there are regular board meetings, which are productive, and start and finish on time.
- Go on a retreat. For example, the board could go away for a few days each year. The time could be used for training, discussing board issues or team-building.
- Encourage board members to meet with staff, both in head office and in the field, and to visit projects. It can be a great encouragement to talk to some of the project's beneficiaries and hear about how their lives have been transformed as a result of the organisation's work.
- Encourage board members to speak to groups about the organisation and write articles for the local press.
- Provide training to keep board members engaged.
- Regularly thank board members for their valuable contribution to the organisation's work.
- Ensure that the board prays for board members on a regular basis and particularly at times when individuals are in particular need.

In addition to keeping board members motivated, the chairperson should ensure that the board members' contribution is of good quality. Even if board members are highly experienced and motivated, their contribution is limited if it is not relevant. To increase their effectiveness, they must be aware of what is happening in the organisation and in the field of its work. It can also be helpful for board members to widen their skills so that they can engage better with board business. For example, someone who has many years of experience as a development worker may lack skills in developing policies, understanding financial statements or understanding the way a board functions. Someone who is very experienced in governance and decision-making may lack understanding of development issues.

CASE STUDY
Developing Help and Hope's board

Before each board meeting, the board members share a meal together with a rule that they are not allowed to talk about board business during the meal!

The chairperson of Help and Hope's board ensures that she meets with, or telephones, each board member every month. She makes it clear to board members that they can approach her at any time if they have any queries or issues to discuss. Sometimes these issues are relevant to the board as a whole, and she ensures that they are added to the agenda for the next board meeting. If the issues are relevant only to that person, she takes time to listen and to provide advice and encouragement.

A common training need that has arisen is the need for training in financial management. The chairperson therefore asks the board members when they have a free half day to attend training. She then finds a suitable trainer and briefs the trainer so that he can provide tailor-made training for Help and Hope's board.

Certain board members could be sent to workshops or conferences so that they can improve their skills. The organisation could also provide internal training for the board as a whole. The advantage of this is that the training could be tailor-made for the needs of the organisation and of the board. Attendance should be compulsory, even for members who know a lot about the content of the training. This is so that, as part of the training, board members can consider the relevance of the content for the organisation and discuss the way forward. It could be very useful to have some training about development just before the board plans to write a new strategy or review its mission statement.

It is also important to invest in the personal development of board members. Among other things this involves developing their inter-personal skills, organisational skills and leadership skills. It is always good to have objectives to work towards, to encourage others to meet their objectives and to celebrate with them when they are achieved. This is the responsibility of the board chairperson and should be carried out with each board member.

Some team-building ideas

- Share meals together.
- Practical games.
- 'Get to know you' exercises.
- Some board members may have official titles such as Dr, Professor or Reverend. It is useful to know that these people have particular expertise and experience in certain areas, which can be very useful during board discussions. However, by calling people by their titles, team dynamics can be affected. Some people might be tempted to respect these people more than others, or take more account of their views. While it can be helpful to write full titles down in the board manual, it is wise for board members to verbally call each other by their first or last names.

Setting personal objectives

Each board member could be encouraged to set some personal objectives for the coming year. This should be discussed with the chairperson. The chairperson should write their own objectives, and could discuss them with the vice-chairperson.

The objectives could be based on tasks (ongoing or one-off) or relationships. It can be helpful to provide each board member with a copy of the table below. They should write the objectives in the left-hand column. After six months they should consult the table to consider their progress. Some objectives may already have been achieved. Others could be ongoing, or may have been forgotten about. After one year, the board member should score how well they have done in achieving each objective by putting a circle around the relevant number. They should discuss this with the chairperson and use the right-hand column to make comments about their progress. These comments could explain why the objective was not achieved, or they could record a positive impact relating to the objective being met.

A new table should then be copied and a new set of objectives for the following year should be added. Some of these objectives might be the same as the previous year if they are ongoing or if they have not been met. There may be new objectives that the board member wishes to achieve.

Personal objectives score sheet

PERSONAL OBJECTIVES SCORE SHEET						
Name:				Year:		
OBJECTIVE	SCORE					COMMENTS
	1	2	3	4	5	
	1	2	3	4	5	
	1	2	3	4	5	
	1	2	3	4	5	
	1	2	3	4	5	

- SCORES
- 1 = Not at all achieved
 - 2 = Some progress made
 - 3 = A lot of progress made
 - 4 = Achieved
 - 5 = Achieved beyond expectation

A helpful tool to promote team work is to ask board members to evaluate themselves as a group after each meeting. This helps to encourage board members' accountability to the group. Board members should agree together how they would rate the following issues:

Board members' self-evaluation form

ISSUE	VERY BAD	BAD	OKAY	GOOD	VERY GOOD
Attendance					
Punctuality					
Time keeping in meeting					
Participation in discussions					
Respect of others' views					
Quality of discussion					
Quality of decision-making					

The group should then discuss the issues rated very bad and bad, and decide why they were rated so. They should identify ways to make improvements.

REFLECTION

- Do board members feel well supported and motivated? What could be done to improve this?
- How good is our induction process? How could it be improved?
- What training do board members need? Who could provide this training?
- Would it be helpful to have personal objectives to work towards?