



**Center for  
Nonprofits & Philanthropy**  
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# ADAPTING TO TURBULENT TIMES

## Understanding and Supporting Board Member Engagement

September 24, 2020

William Brown and Nicole Collier  
Center for Nonprofits & Philanthropy

## Center for Nonprofits & Philanthropy



**Excellence ★ Respect ★ Leadership ★ Loyalty ★ Integrity ★ Selfless Service**

Founded in 2017, the Center operates with the belief that that nonprofits are instrumental in creating opportunities for all. This happens through capable leadership, excellent governance, and engagement of stakeholders. We also recommit to the principles of *public service and democracy* and the value of *diversity of thought and expression* that have helped The Bush School since its inception.

### Our Values

**Nonprofits  
Opportunity for All  
Board Governance  
Leadership  
Engagement**

**Our Mission:** The CNP supports a vibrant nonprofit and philanthropic sector in Texas and beyond, through high quality research, professional outreach and engaged learning.

### **Educational Opportunities**

- Master of Public Service & Administration
- Executive Master of Public Service & Administration
- Certificate in Nonprofit Management
- Certificate in Nonprofit Leadership; continuing and professional education

NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP - ADAPTING TO TURBULENT TIMES  
FALL 2020 ZOOM WEBINAR SERIES

# Understanding and Supporting Board Member Engagement

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Center for Nonprofits & Philanthropy,  
Bush School of Government & Public Service*



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SEPT. 24 | 12 PM CT | [BUSH.TAMU.EDU/EVENTS](https://bush.tamu.edu/events)

## Board Member Capabilities

Recruitment  
Training  
Assessment

## Board Performance

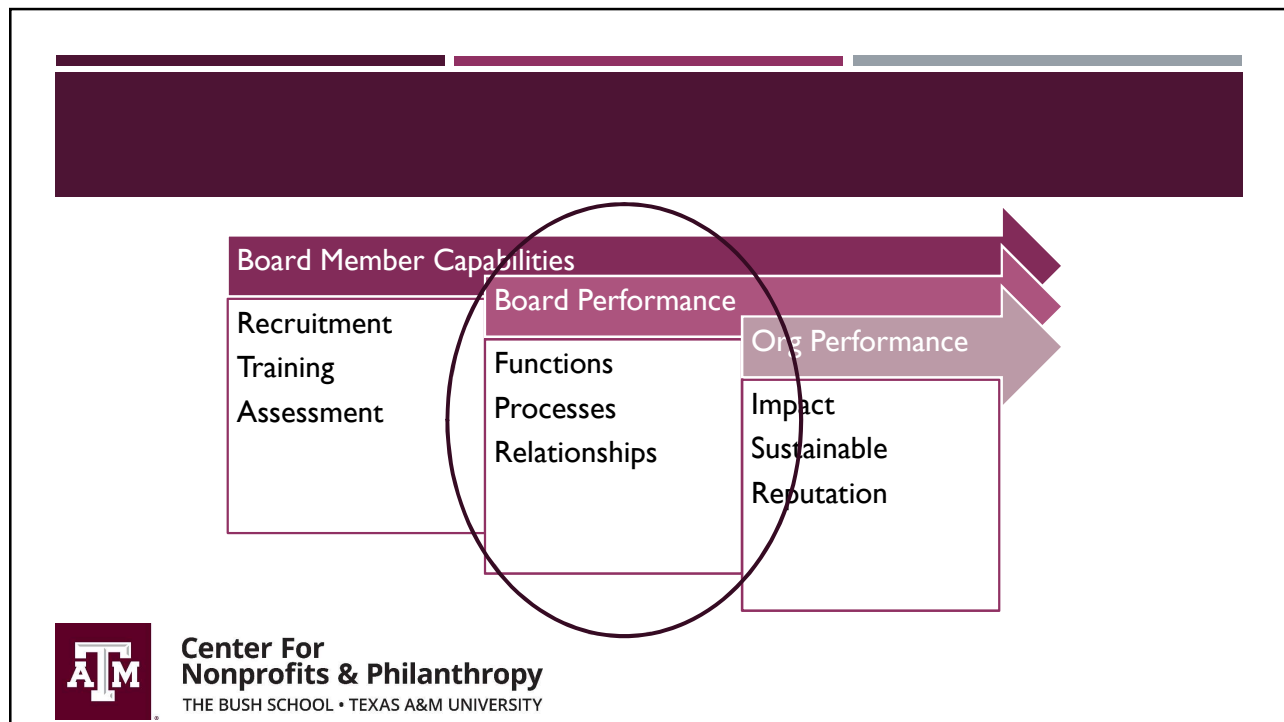
Functions  
Processes  
Relationships

## Org Performance

Impact  
Sustainable  
Reputation



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## OUTLINE TODAY

- Engagement – what is it
- To achieve what? –
  - Dimensions of performance
- Model of Engagement
  - Antecedents
  - Mediators
- Assessment Survey

Based on “Antecedents to board member engagement and participation in deliberation and decision-making” in *New Perspectives on Nonprofit Governance* July 2013, Chris Cornforth and William A Brown (eds.) Routledge.

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## MEMBER ENGAGEMENT: A POTENT PREDICTOR OF BOARD PERFORMANCE

- Cognitive
- Affective &
- Psychological Energy
  
- This reveals itself when individuals are
  - Prepared for meetings
  - Actively engaged
  - Demonstrated commitment & involvement
  - Provide strategic contributions



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Engagement



Performance

ENGAGEMENT IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTECEDENT TO PERFORMANCE, WHICH SIGNIFIES A BOARD MEMBER'S READINESS TO PARTICIPATE.



## PARTICIPATE IN WHAT?

## DISCUSSION & DECISION-MAKING

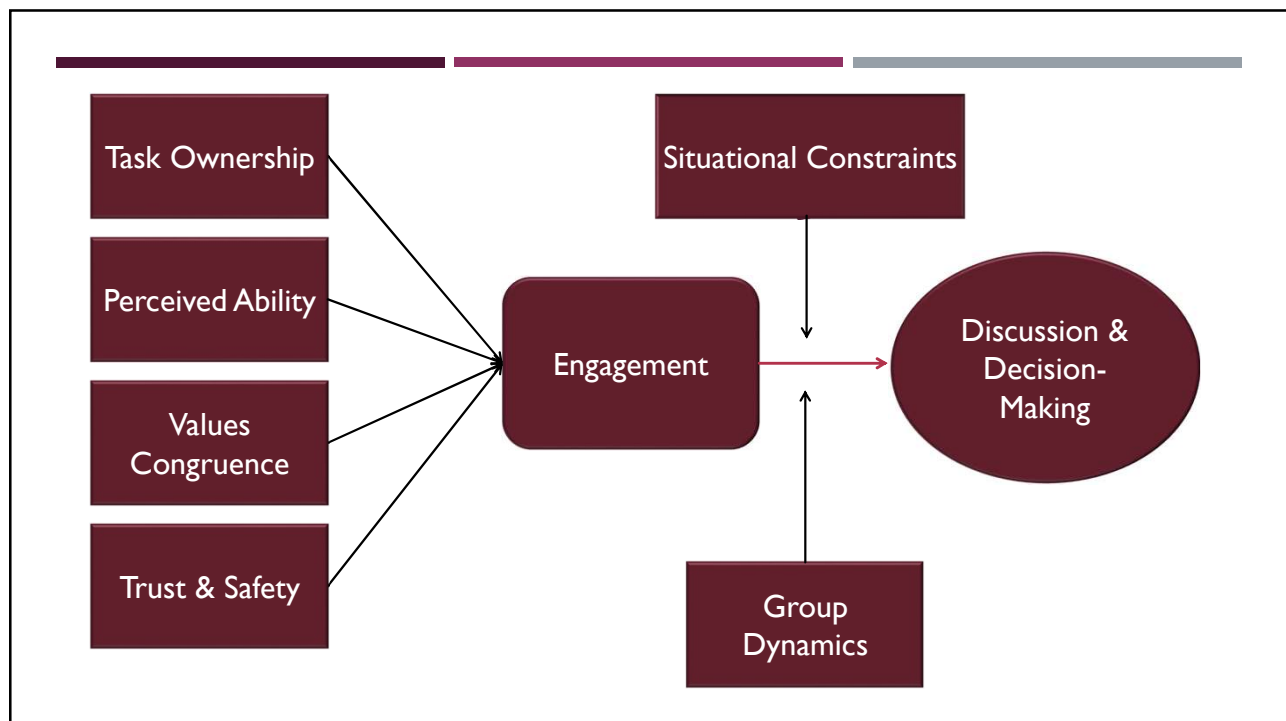
- Managing and processing information to gain sufficient understanding
  - Framing the discussion
- Dynamics of conversation and discussion to provide meaning to the information
  - New ideas
  - Cautions & concerns
- Judgment and commitment to decisions
  - Minimize bias

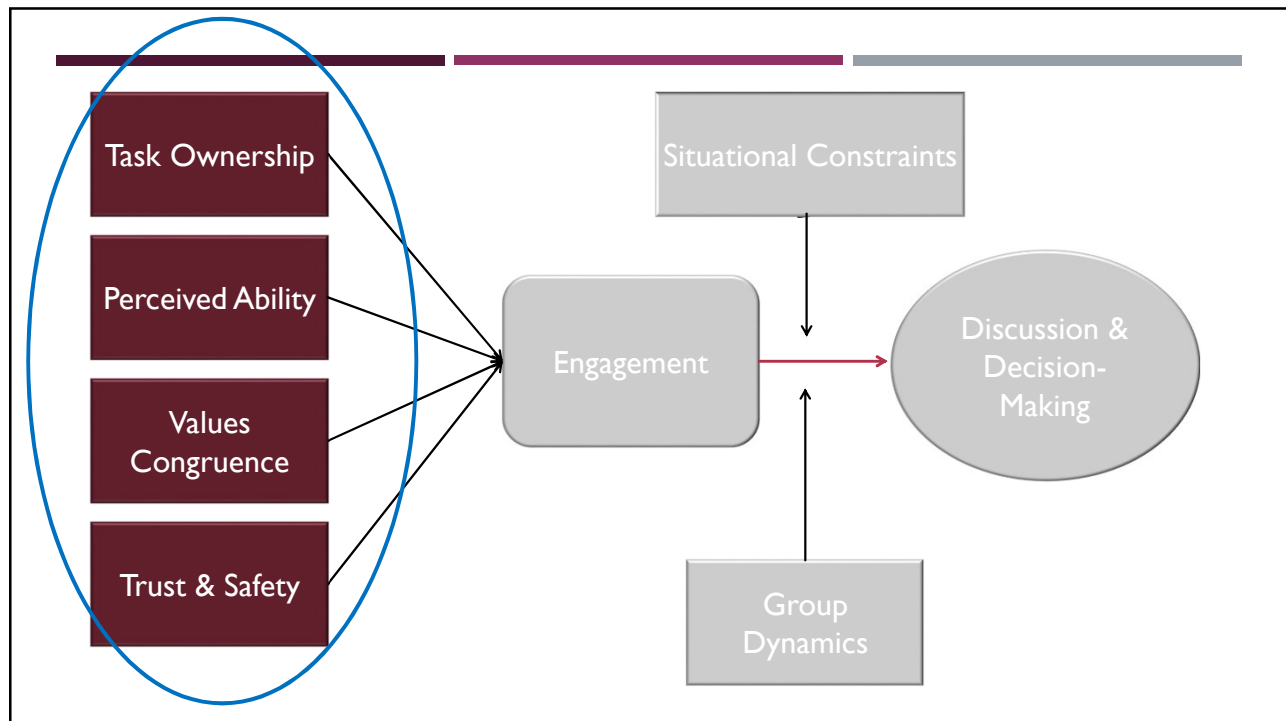
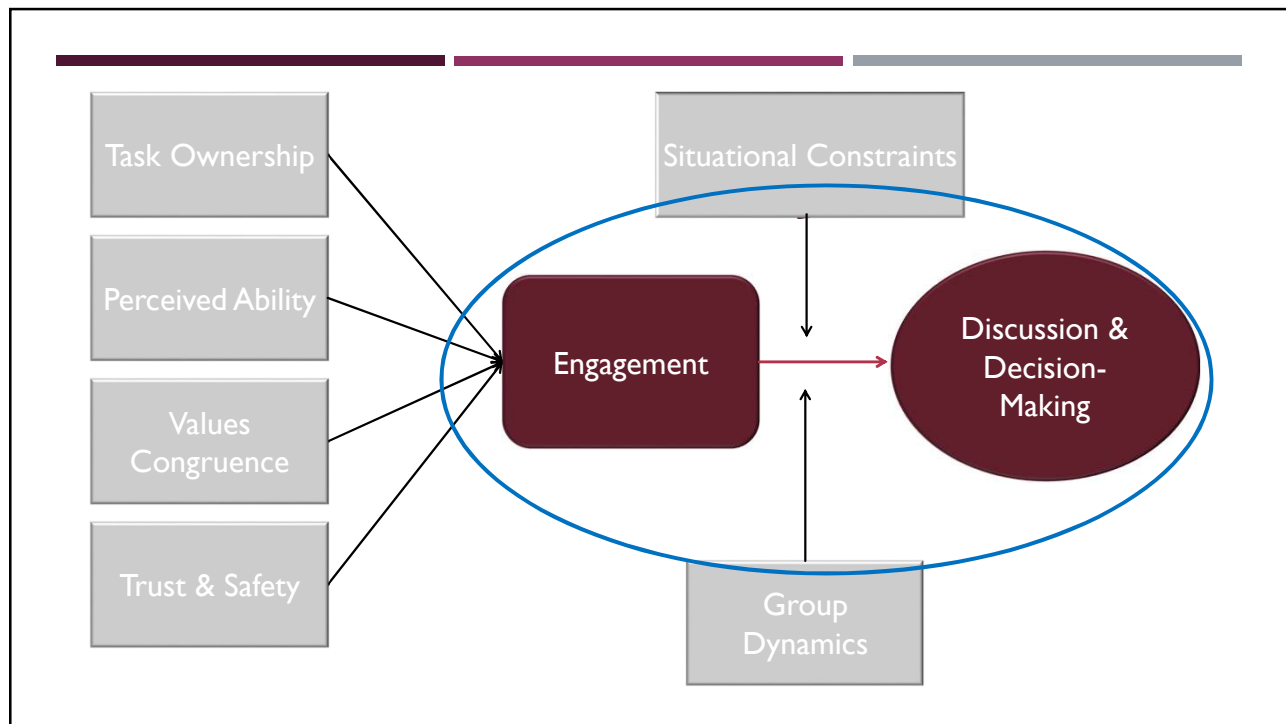


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MODEL TO IDENTIFY  
\* ANTECEDENTS,  
\* CONSEQUENCES AND  
\* MEDIATING FACTORS

TO EXPLAIN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT &  
PERFORMANCE





## ANTECEDENTS

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT?

## TASK OWNERSHIP

ONE

- Know what to do
- Personal responsibility for the activity
  
- According to a recent BoardSource survey
- Just over half of the respondents felt board members were well informed of governance responsibilities



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AT LEAST 40% OF BOARD  
MEMBERS DON'T  
UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE  
SUPPOSED TO DO



## HOW TO ADDRESS TASK OWNERSHIP

### To consider:

- Does the board have clear goals, priorities, and expectations for board members?

### Practical Applications:

- Educate board members on board role and responsibilities
  - Clarify and discuss how they, as individuals, might contribute
- Convey both the challenges of the organization, as well as its accomplishments.
  - Highlight how board members can add value and make an impact
- Have deliberate committee placements for board members
  - Clarify the committee responsibilities



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## PERCEIVED ABILITY

TWO

- Confidence of likely success
- Who wants to start a task when success seems unattainable?
  
- How to help
  - Too big – break into manageable parts
  - Share it!
  - Need to know others working on this – shared leadership
  - Board members need right skills and tools



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## HOW TO ADDRESS PERCEIVED ABILITY

### To consider:

- Do we recruit board members based on competencies and gaps in board composition?

### Practical Applications:

- Engage board members as they are brought on
  - Ask how they see themselves fitting in and how they can make an impact
- Make sure board members have the tools to succeed
  - Do they need any additional support or input?
- Convey the value of each board member during any onboarding processes.
- Have deliberate committee placements for board members that highlight their strengths
- Publicly recognize the work of board members, committees, etc. at the start of each board meeting. What has been accomplished recently?



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## VALUES CONGRUENCE

THREE

- Alignment of personal priorities and organizational objectives
- Mission attachment
- Commitment to values of the organization



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## HOW TO ADDRESS VALUES CONGRUENCE

### **To consider:**

- Do board members feel connected to the mission and direction of the organization?

### **Practical Applications:**

- Ask board members what goals they would like to see the organization achieve
- Ask board members what inspired them to join
- Get to know board members and what is important to them
- Cultivate advocacy for the mission by asking at each board meeting, "What have you done since the last board meeting to advance the mission of our nonprofit?"



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## TRUST & SAFETY

FOUR

- Sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences
- Interpersonal trust among board members
- Trust refers to positive expectations and reduction of uncertainty of others' actions
- Trust is based on shared experiences and positive interpersonal interactions.



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## HOW TO ADDRESS TRUST AND SAFETY

### To consider:

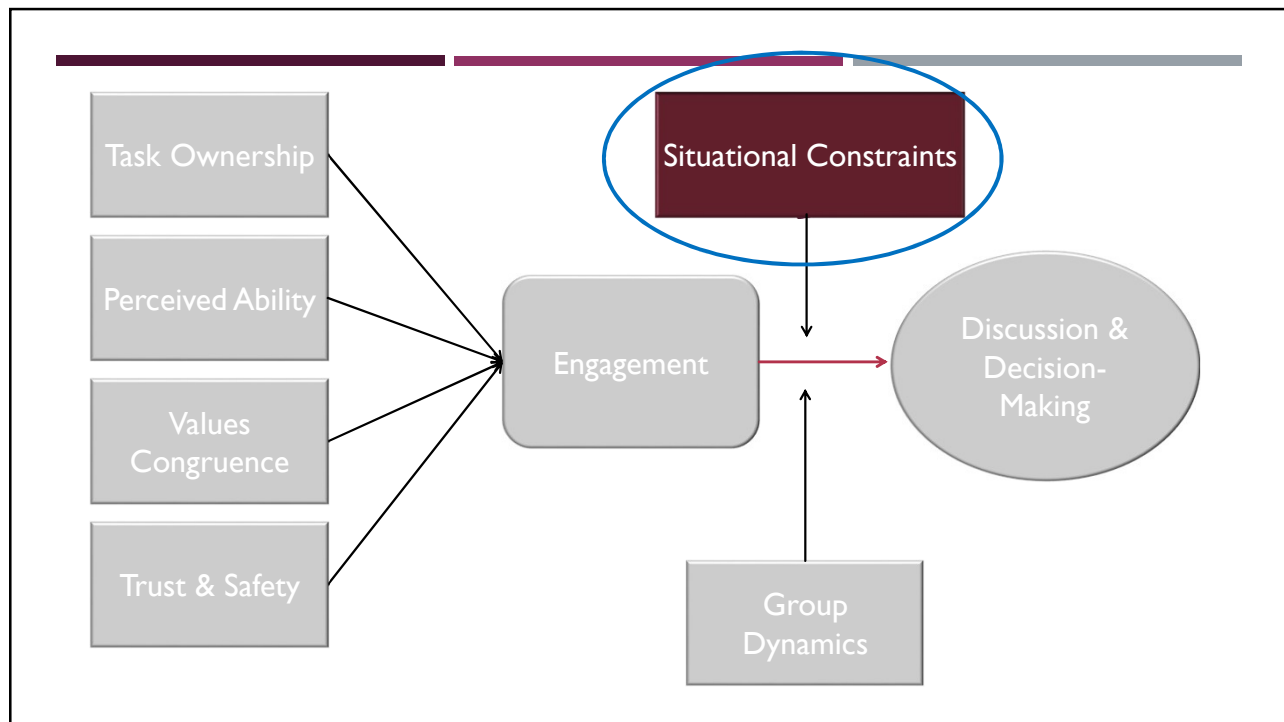
- Are board members willing to express opinions that are not shared by other board members?
- Does the board chair engage all board members in discussions?

### Practical Applications:

- Have an annual board retreat where conversation is not focused on the organization, rather on building genuine connections between members
- Consider a staff/board mentorship program
- Consider pairing board members to build relationships
- At the start of each meeting learn about the board members as individuals
  - Incorporate social time or a “thought-provoking question” into meetings



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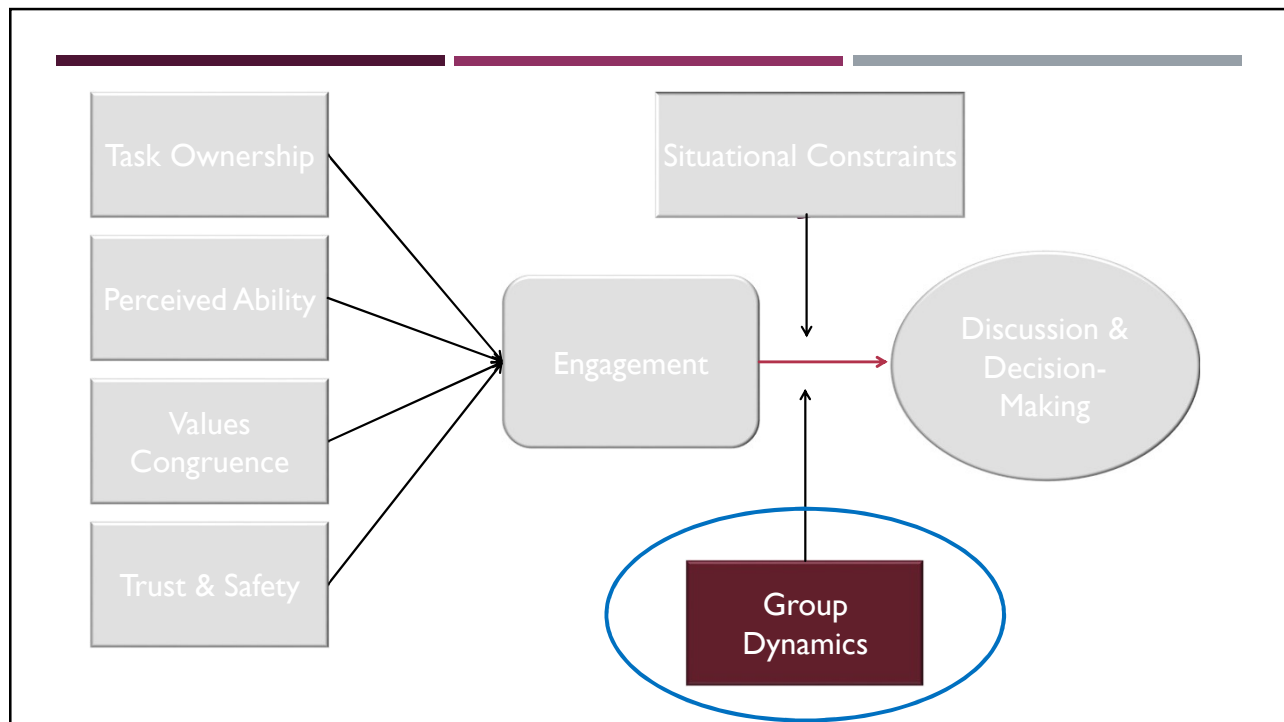


## SITUATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

- Meeting management
  - Time for discussion
  - Facilitation
- Group size
- Information flow
- Framing the conversation
  - Agenda setting

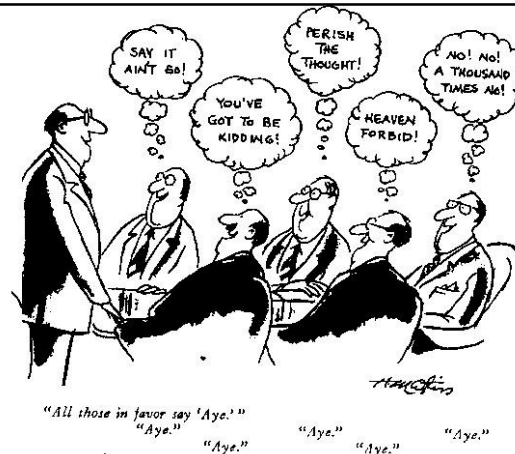


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## GROUP DYNAMICS

- Patterns of behavior
- Group norms
- Social & emotional context
- Group Cohesion
- Fault lines & sub-groups
- Conflict management



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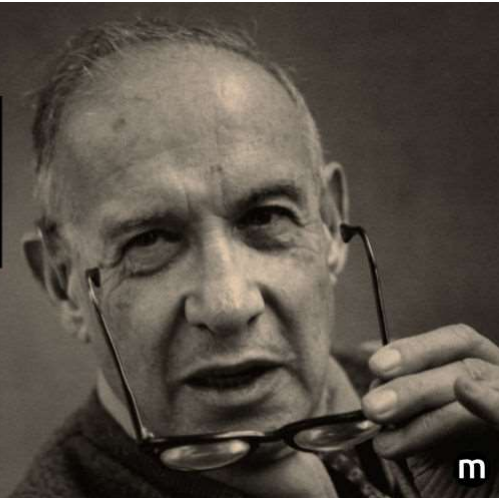
## WHY IS CULTURE IMPORTANT

### CULTURE EATS STRATEGY FOR BREAKFAST

Peter DRUCKER



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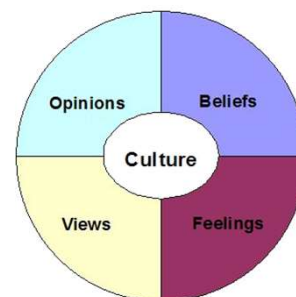


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## SOME THOUGHTS ON WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Awareness of shared culture builds trust, cohesion, and a sense of safety among the members, furthering collaboration and engagement

- People are loyal to culture not strategy
- Culture provides resilience
- Culture more efficient than strategy
- Empowers decision-making
- Culture creates a differentiation
- Culture allows for innovation




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GROUP NORMS THAT SUPPORT CRITICAL DECISION-  
MAKING ARE LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT AND  
PARTICIPATION.



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***“TO CREATE LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS, WE MUST  
UNDERSTAND THE UNDERLYING  
AGREEMENTS WE HAVE MADE ABOUT HOW WE WILL BE  
TOGETHER.”  
MARGARET WHEATLEY***



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Factors	Key Features
Values Congruence	Priorities of the individual align with purposes of the organization
Task Ownership	Perceive link between role responsibilities, priorities, and identity.
Perceived Ability	Task clarity Skills and experience
Trust and Safety	Interpersonal trust of other members creates a safe place to contribute.
Engagement	Cognitive, affective and physical readiness to participate
Group Dynamics	Norms of discussion & decision-making Appropriate cohesion Minimize sub-group effects
Situational Constraints	Information availability Meeting practices to allow for discussion Effective facilitation to manage the conversation

## SURVEY ASSESSMENT

## TOOL TO ASSESS AND LINK ENGAGEMENT TO PERFORMANCE

1. Executive Director
  - Model components
  - Board performance
  - Individual performance of each board member
  - Organizational background
  - Demographics
2. Board member
  - Model components
  - Board performance
  - Demographics

**Two  
Surveys**



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## BENEFITS

- Board-level diagnostic
- Facilitated board session to review results
- Celebrate strengths
- Tips and tactics to address concerns



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## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

1. Contact the center
  - Nicholle Gotham ([nichollegotham@tamu.edu](mailto:nichollegotham@tamu.edu))
2. Complete Executive Director Survey
3. Coordinate Board Member Survey
  - Get majority to participate



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## Learn More about our Center

Our Center's team is committed to strengthening the nonprofit sector; so please contact us to learn how we may help your organization or help you advance your nonprofit career.



For individual CNP staff contact information, please consult our directory under [Faculty & Staff](#).

Email: [bushschool.nonprofitmanagement@tamu.edu](mailto:bushschool.nonprofitmanagement@tamu.edu)

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THANK YOU!!

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