THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES DECISION-MAKING TEMPLATE

... a five-step template to guide decision making at the Board level

Most issues will never reach the Board; that's why they hire a Director. If an issue does make it to the Board, the analysis process can help clarify how to proceed, in particular, determining whether the decision belongs to the Director or the Board. While one would wish for all decisions to be "neat and clear," unfortunately the reality can be a bit messy

Neat and clean: "If it's strategic, it's a Board decision; if it's operational, it's the Director's."

The messy reality: While issues that arise in international schools usually are primarily in the purview of either the Board or the Director, some issues touch on elements of the roles of both.

As the analysis step evolves, it can be useful to explicitly raise the question "Whose decision is it?" and come to an understanding whose decision it will be and why as a guide the decision-making process. For such issues, the analysis process can provide for a healthy "advisory" level input from each side of the Board-Director partnership.

In any event, even if a decision belongs to the Board, the Board should carefully limit its role to deciding the what, why, and to what extent (the ends), leaving the how, who, where, and when (the means) to the Director.

Once the Board's role in the decision making is clear, the following steps can help ensure the process is thoughtful and complete.

Steps in Decision-making

1. Identify the core issue

Often the issue presenting itself is but a manifestation of a deeper issue which should be addressed. Further, typically the issue itself or ramifications of addressing it might generate corollary issues. Best to sort all that out, identifying ALL the issues at the onset

a. Apparent Issue _____
b. Actual Core Issue _____
c. Corollary Issues _____, _____

2. Analyze the nature of this particular case

Most challenging issues are not simple to analyze, however, it can be useful to identify the predominant character of an issue in terms of the following 14 elements:

a. Level of focus
   - ____ Mission
   - ____ Values
   - ____ Policy
   - ____ Regulations
   - ____ Operations
   - ____ Style
   - ____ Communications

   Relevant clause _____
   (explicitly state the wording from the document (Mission, Values, etc.) or brief description of the current practice that is relevant to the issue at hand, thereby establishing a common foundation of the analysis for all Board members)

b. Validity of the "facts" provided in support of the proposal/complaint
   - ____ Validity is certain (evidence is absolutely clear and credible)
   - ____ Validity is probable (report is from a source seemingly reliable, yet not yet verified; multiple similar, if not precisely aligned reports; seems plausible)

____ Validity is not inherently evident (conflicting reports/evidence; unsubstantiated sources; very surprising)
____ Validity is doubted (lack of evidence; unreliable source; suspicion of ulterior motives)

c. Legality
____ Clearly not a legal issue
____ Aspects may be illegal but school not involved/liable
____ Aspects may be illegal and school might be vulnerable
____ Clearly illegal; school is vulnerable
____ Not sure if legal issue or not

d. Confidentiality
____ No confidentiality issue
____ Not confidential issue but deliberations should be
____ Conventionally confidential (personnel, contract, etc.; breach would be unethical)
____ Highly confidential (breach would be disastrous)

e. Potential impact on future of the school/school's reputation
_____ Clearly would substantially enhance the school's reputation and standing
_____ Potential for enhancing the school's reputation
_____ Short-term impact only
_____ No likelihood of impact on the school's reputation
_____ Definitely will impinge on the school's reputation, warranted or not
_____ Would severely harm the reputation of the school

f. Complexity
____ Simple (straightforward, clear problem/solution)
____ Complex but not complicated (many levels but fairly contained in scope)
____ Complicated issue (many factors intertwined)

g. Breadth and Depth
____ Focused on a very few discrete elements
____ Extends across wide array of policies, operations, or people/institutions involved
____ Straightforward - "what you see is what you get"
____ Deep issue; reaches core elements of the school

h. Prominence of issue and players
_____ Obscure issue; no one really disturbed
_____ Many people involved/interested

i. Influence of pressure group
_____ No lobbying anticipated
_____ No lobbying apparent yet, but likely
_____ Potential for pressure group action exists
_____ Small but highly influential/powerful interest
_____ Large, vocal, influential lobby
_____ Pressure already being applied

j. Human cost/benefits

_____ Many in the school community would benefit
_____ Some individuals would benefit; no harm to others
_____ Social benefit; the decision will be a trust-builder
_____ Some individuals might benefit, but at a cost to others
_____ The human cost would be only at the level of inconvenience, workload, disappointment, etc.
_____ The human cost would be significant; life-changing
_____ Social cost; the decision will be a trust-breaker

k. Financial cost/benefits

_____ Significant benefit to the school's finances
_____ Some financial benefit potential
_____ Low/no-cost issue
_____ Costly but funds available
_____ Costly (immediate and/or recurrent) and no funds currently available

l. Timing

_____ Can be deferred (until when?)
_____ Need for immediate decision but rollout not urgent
_____ Urgent!

n. How disruptive?

_____ Minimally disruptive
_____ Issue itself not disruptive but resolution might be
_____ Disruption might occur if no action soon
_____ Disruption has already started

3. <u>Decision-making process</u>

a. Resources/Channels available to determine the facts:

____ Reports from the administration (including staff, as determined by the superintendent)
____ Outside consultant (lawyer, government official, consultant, etc.)
____ Conduct a "hearing"
____ Direct the Superintendent to investigate further
____ Establish a specific Board Task Force and give it an explicit assignment

b. Basis for Resolution

____ Mission, Core Values, & Philosophy
____ Policy
____ Administrative Regulations/Procedures
____ Precedence
____ Compassion
____ Political
____ Other (whatever basis is used, it should be explicitly identified)

c. Right vs Wrong or Right vs Right?
   ____ Right vs Wrong (usually easier)
   ____ Right vs Right - use the Institute for Global Ethics "Four Way Test"
   [Is the decision legal?] **NOTE: "LEGAL ≠ ETHICAL*
   [Does it "smell" bad; what's the gut feel?]
   [What if it were reported on the front page of the newspaper?]
   [What would mom say?]

d. Consider multiple solutions/responses
   ____ Feasibility of each
   ____ Known consequences of each
   ____ Potential consequences of each

e. Intra-Board conflict
   ____ Identify and weigh the impact, positive or negative, of the process of reaching a decision on the working relationships among Board members and Superintendent and the ongoing effectiveness of the Board
   ____ Ensure that the Board resolves any intra-Board conflict, either as it erupts or after all has calmed down

4. What to do

a. Decide
   ____ Agree on method of decision (consensus, vote, chair decides, referendum, etc.)
   ____ Decide!
   ____ Agree on wording of a statement of resolution
   ____ Minute the resolution verbatim

b. Make a plan
   ____ The Board decides the ends (what, why, and how much) unless further Board action is required
   ____ The Superintendent decides the means (how, when, who, and when)

c. Execute the Decision

d. Communicate... Communicate... Communicate!
   ____ What will be communicated to whom through what channels
   ____ Who is responsible
   ____ When

e. Take appropriate action to prevent/prepare for the next time
   ____ Policy changes needed
   ____ Administrative Regulations needed
   ____ Other protocols needed

5. ***<u>What else?</u> (to be done "after the waters calm")***

   a. Evaluate effectiveness/impact of what the Board did or did not do
   b. Review how the Board conducted itself - lessons learned?
   c. Ascertain accountability and culpability; take remedial action
   d. Ensure that the trust and working relationship within the Board, with the administration and staff, and in the community was sustained. If not, address it. After all is said and done, the working relationship must be maintained