

Strengthening Boards as high-quality decision-making systems

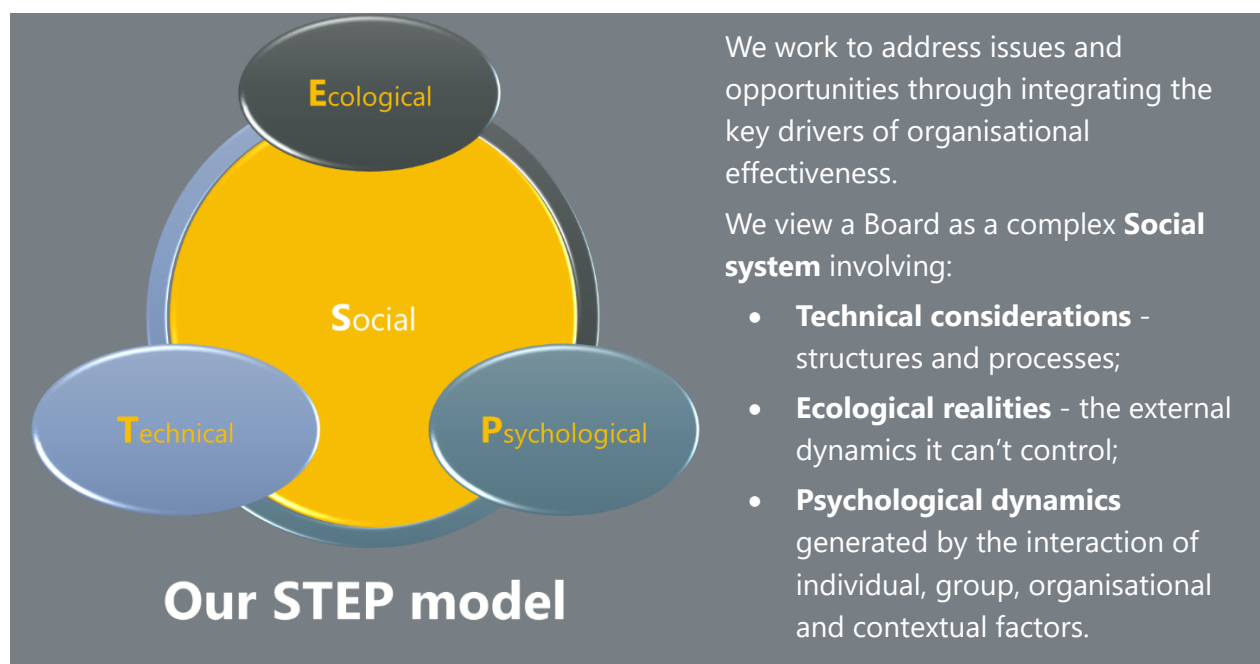
Decision-making for NHS organisations continues to get more challenging: the extent of the pressures they are dealing with and the complexity of the systems they work with have both increased.

It is almost impossible for a Board to know that it has made 'the right' decision. There are operational decisions where the impact of a choice for good or ill can be known relatively quickly. But Boards make decisions with long term impact (which current members may not be there to see), so the focus must be on the quality of decision-making.

The Strategy Unit is uniquely well placed to help you enhance this. You are the experts on the 'what'; we bring expertise and diverse experience around the 'how'. Our core belief is that better evidence within better processes leads to better outcomes – both for healthcare organisations and for the populations they serve.

What distinguishes exemplary boards is that they are robust, effective social systems (Sonnenfeld)

The Strategy Unit is a well-established specialist organisation focused on leading research, analysis and change from within the NHS. Driven by a public value ethos we promote and enable the application of high-quality, multi-disciplinary analytical work, broadly defined. Taking a systems view of organisations, their opportunities, and challenges, we use tools and approaches rooted in multiple branches of systems theory. We best add value to complex situations and challenges. If mechanical solutions are appropriate, then we're probably not.





You may have had a process that somehow went wrong or a general sense that Board isn't firing on all cylinders (being more than the sum of its parts); you may be at a point of major organisational change or anticipating an external review; or there may be things going on that you can't quite make sense of. And though focused on Boards, our approach is equally applicable to other management groups, partnerships, and front-line teams, supporting you in embedding core building blocks of continuous improvement.

In our work with you we will have a relentless focus on what might make a practical difference for your organisation. We ground our work in evidence-based systems theory, but our commitment is to practical change not 'theory for theory's sake'. We will help you to identify and work with all the sources of data and evidence that affect what you do and how you do it as a decision-making body. We aim to be supportive, engaging, and challenging – helping you to have the conversations you need to have. We encourage you to engage with us if you're game for real work together: we're not the ones you want if you're after a quick fix, a silver bullet or a scapegoat.

Board members need...the ability to contest with the other, without this either deteriorating into conflict or being evaded as a way of dealing with fear of conflict...
(Huffington et al)

There are two main ways in which we can help to strengthen your Board as a high-quality decision-making system: diagnostic and/or development activities.

- In **diagnostic mode**, we can help you to understand what is going on at various levels of your current systems. Depending on the issues in question we might suggest some combination of direct observation, 1:1 interviews or role analysis conversations, a group survey, facilitated group discussions and a psychometric assessment.
- In **development mode**, we can provide groups with highly engaging, experiential sessions covering a broad range of topics:

Improving decision making	Working together effectively	Value from analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better quality decision making• Problem solving and creativity• Economic thinking for non-economists• Ethics for decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leading in collaboration• System thinking, system doing• Seeing (and feeling) your organisation in new ways• Working with challenge and conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership for analysts• Improvement science• Analytical concepts for leaders

...we'll be fighting the wrong war if we simply tighten procedural rules for boards and ignore their more pressing need to be strong, high-functioning work groups where members trust and challenge one another and engage directly with senior managers on critical issues...
(Sonnenfeld)

Leading research, analysis and change from within the NHS

The Strategy Unit at Midlands and Lancashire Commissioning Support Unit

6th Floor | 23 Stephenson Street | Birmingham | B2 4HQ

The logo for The Strategy Unit, featuring the text "The Strategy Unit" in a bold, sans-serif font, with "The" on the top line, "Strategy" on the middle line, and "Unit" on the bottom line. The text is white and set against a yellow speech bubble background.

There are commonly a range of ways in which organisations like to use us:

- **Introductory workshops** - from half day on-site to two-day residential - giving an overview of the social, technical, psychological and ecological dynamics high-quality decision systems must work with and through. These can be either 'off-the-shelf' or bespoke to you needs.
- An **in-depth diagnostic** of your current decision-making systems.
- A **combination** of a diagnostic with tailored learning and development activities that respond to what we find.
- **Targeted learning and development interventions** that respond to an existing diagnostic.

For further information about any aspects of strengthening high-quality decision-making and improvement-led delivery, you're very welcome to contact any of the team below:

- [David Frith](mailto:david.frith@nhs.net) – david.frith@nhs.net
- [Fraser Battye](mailto:fraser.battye@nhs.net) - fraser.battye@nhs.net
- [Lucy Hawkins](mailto:lucy.hawkins4@nhs.net) - lucy.hawkins4@nhs.net
- [Mark Thompson](mailto:mark.thompson38@nhs.net) - mark.thompson38@nhs.net

[Board] must become a robust team – one whose members know how to ferret out the truth, challenge one another, and even have a good fight now and then. (Sonnenfeld)