



**10**  
MINUTE  
MANAGER

CONOR  
HANNAWAY

ten minute | manager

# Management or Governance

Our ten minute manager looks at the role of the Executive Management Board

[BY CONOR HANNAWAY

Tracey Wychoime was exasperated. Joseph Grainger, the lead clinician in Obstetrics had just texted her to say that he would be unable to attend next week's meeting of the Executive Management Board. He said he had to meet some colleagues in Dublin. Since becoming General Manager of the hospital, Tracey had made a review of an EMB her number one priority. It now looked like she had to put the review on the top of the to-do list for 2007.

She decided to have a coffee with Joseph to hear what he had to say. He did not put a tooth in it. "Groundhog day" he replied. "Just look at the minutes and you will see what I mean. We deal with the same issues at every meeting and most of the time they are operational issues that should not be on the agenda. We're busy people you know".

Tracey winced as she recalled the December meeting with the never-ending discussion about the position of the Christmas crib. What did he think she should do?

He was quite clear that until the agenda was got right there was no point in thinking about other changes. "We should scrap what we are doing and start again. Ask the big questions and see if the EMB can help answer them. We won't get the best people on the Board unless they feel it makes a difference."

The central issue was that the Board was operating as if it was another layer of management when

there was a much more valuable contribution it could make. In reality, it spent much of its time second-guessing management and delaying decision-making within the hospital. In the majority of cases, all it did was endorse the line manager's recommendation so that there was no obvious value-added contribution.

At first managers and clinicians complained at the unwarranted interference of the Board in their work. However, many came to

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realise that some of the most difficult decisions could be evaded by sending them to the Board. The lack of clarity of the role of the hospital board facilitated this form of upward delegation.

"It's the difference between governance and management." Joseph Grainger got down to practicalities. "The Board can provide leadership by setting out a vision for the hospital and reinforcing the patient-centred culture we all talk about. Of course there are some decisions that the Board needs to be involved in such as strategic decisions like major investments or significant

changes in activities. For the most part, however, the role of the EMB should be to ensure that managers and clinicians are doing their job properly in accordance with the hospital's strategy, ethos, policies and business plans."

Tracey began to see the Board in a different way. "We have enough people taking care of the day-to-day business. I think we'll get people interested in the Board if it can become more externally focused and get involved in aligning our activities with the needs and expectations of our stakeholders. The Board can also be more future oriented and use its know-how to scan the horizon for opportunities and threats."

"Here's what I'll do for the next meeting. I'll make a list of those areas of current performance – key performance indicators – and get them early on the agenda. There are also important programmes that need to be reviewed. Then we can have a look at these areas we've been talking about and ask the Board how they would like to proceed with them. It would be very helpful if you were around for that discussion".

Joseph smiled. "I guess I can put off that meeting in Dublin for another time". **HM**  
*All characters fictitious...*

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