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## **MANAGING GOVERNANCE DURING CRISIS AND CHANGE**

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# Bracing for an Era

Not unlike the WWII era

Ongoing Pandemic(s)

Climate disruptions

Social unrest and demands /  
Overlay Polarization



# Pressurized

- Most challenging time for school leaders ever
- Brought board members deeper into operations than ever before
- Exhausted people across the entire community
- More board members proximate to pain of community pressure



# Excellent and Awful in Governance Right Now



# What is going wrong out there?

- The board or individual board members **need babysitters**.
  - Independent sleuths, problem solvers, investigators, etc.
  - Remember that your role is to be part of a team
- Boards are **revisiting decisions already made**, particularly around how decisions are made relative to the pandemic and / or when it involves their child / family
  - No one wants to buy the same real estate twice.
  - Needs to be a driving fiduciary obligation to go back
- Board members **lose track of the plot lines**
  - Commit to remembering and understanding what is going on
  - Particularly important when launching a new strategic plan and keeping forward momentum
- Boards are getting burnt out
- Admin teams are not getting high level engagement from board on key issues



# What is going really right?

- Board remains calm and steadfast in face of pandemic and other challenges
- Board understands that this is a time when schools are shaking out to mission appropriate families, staff, and sometimes board members
- Board members are practicing heightened self-awareness and school spirit in community
- Capable of partnering at different altitudes
- Boards are appreciating the school's (and school leadership) strengths and journey through this time
- Heads are finding boards useful and engaged





Why do we need to shift?

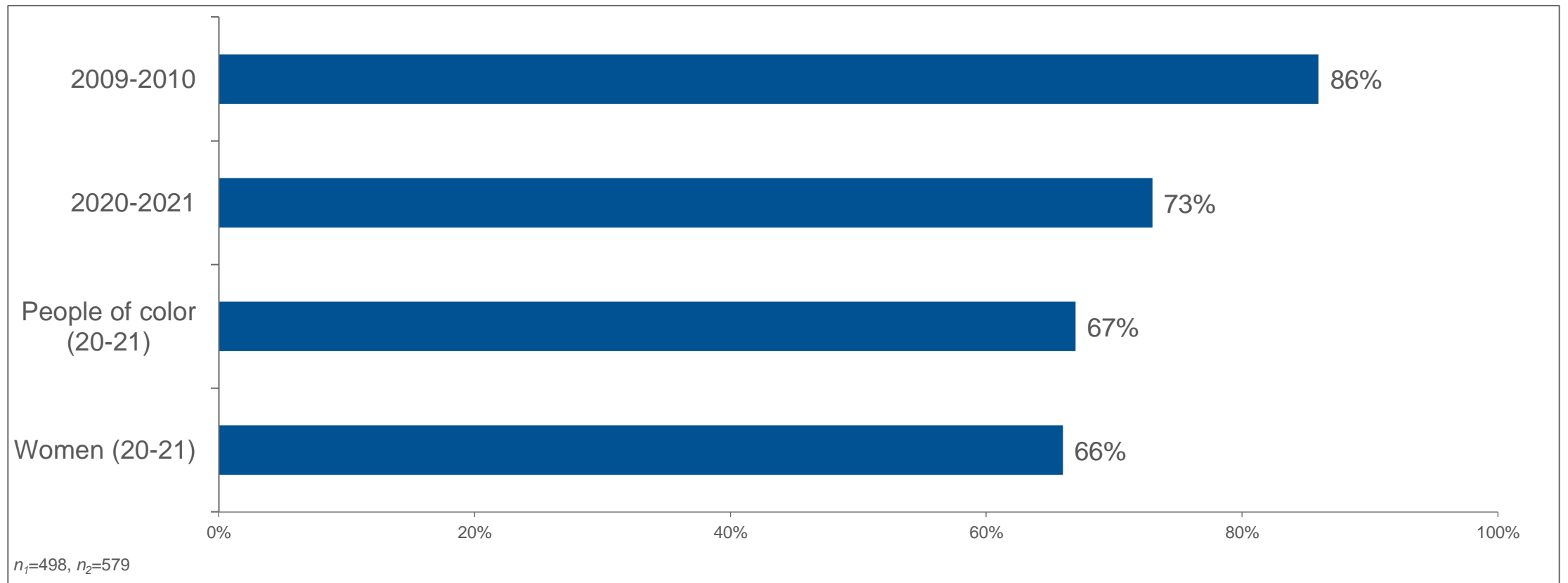


# NAIS Leadership Report: I feel very prepared in...

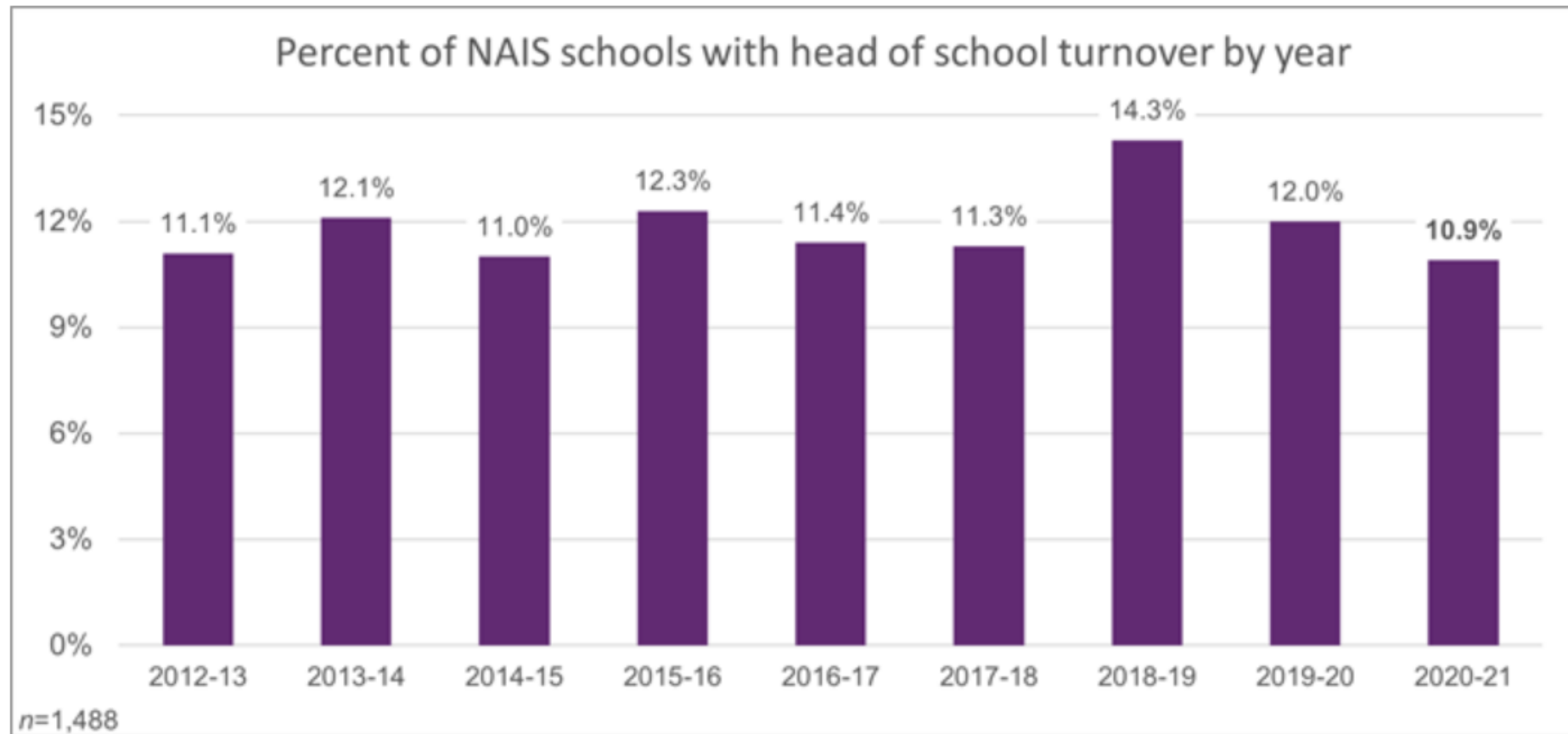
- Working with parents/families: **90%**
- Serving as a community ambassador to recruit new families: **81%**
- Managing school climate/culture: **65%**
- Managing conflicts: **64%**
- Managing pandemic plans: **60%**
- Working with the board: **58%**
- Engaging in crisis/risk management: **51%**
- Managing school's overall financial health: **48%**
- Fundraising: **40%**
- Handling legal issues: **35%**
- Addressing community polarization: **23%**



# Worth the Stress?



# And...



*Data and Analysis for School Leadership (DASL), custom report*

# Looking ahead...

- More than half of NAIS heads intend to transition from their current jobs within the next five years, with most either intending to retire or unsure of what they are doing next.
- The pandemic influenced only 28% of heads' decisions to stay at or leave their jobs. However, 17% of heads are leaving their jobs early, with 9% leaving 3+ years earlier than originally planned.
- 83% percent of current heads who say their school has a search process in place to find a head of school.



# Head Transitions



52 new heads of school 2019-2020 (14% of membership)



46 new heads of school 2021-2022 (12%)



9 Abrupt Departures



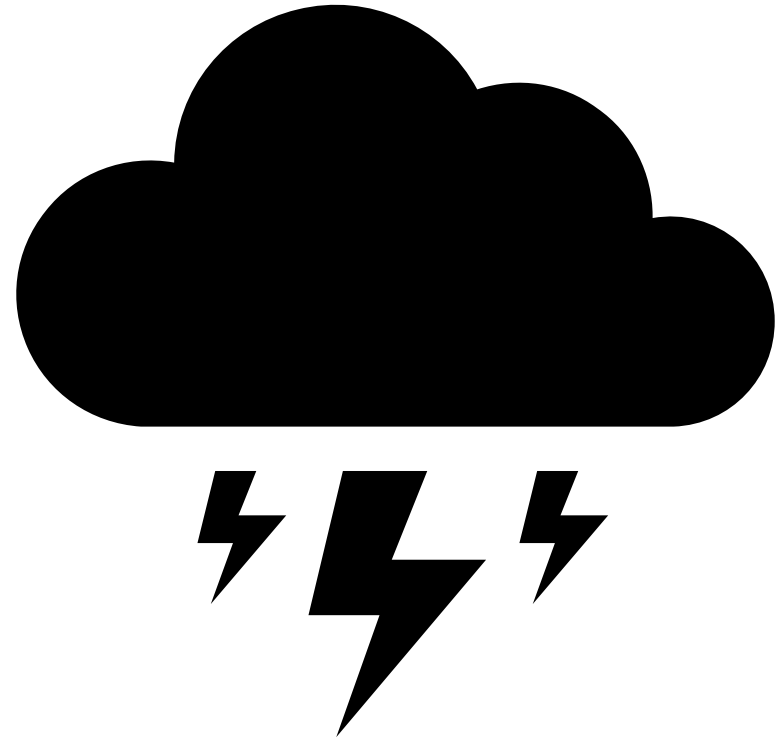
Association averages around 10-13%

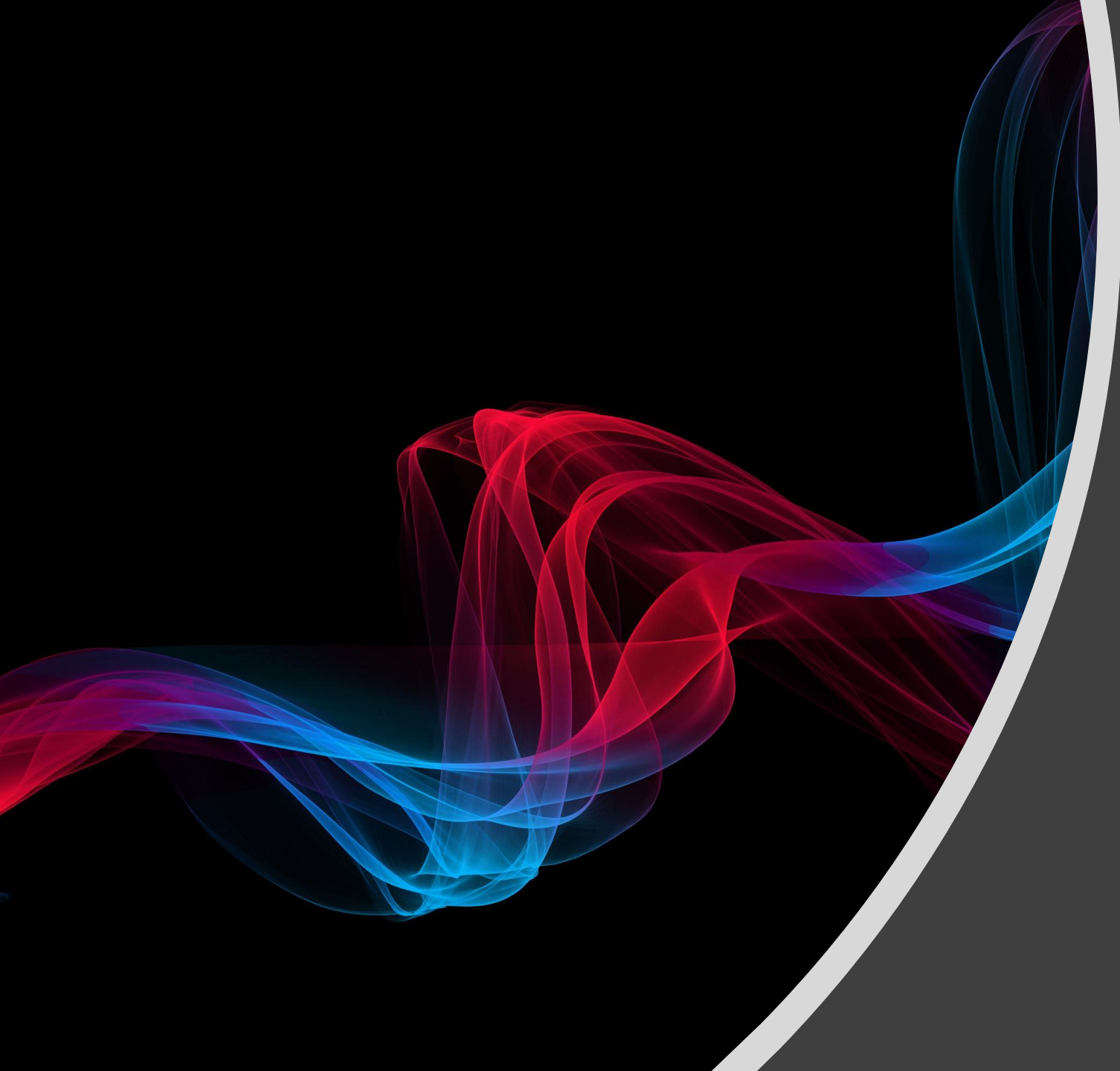


35 new heads of school 2020-2021 (odd-ball year)

# Perfect Storm

- Community / Political Pressures
- Enrollment challenges
- Need for programmatic changes, but lack of information about what and how
- Intense competition with “free”
- Time and culture that need immediate responses
- Relying on board volunteers unfamiliar with and ill-equipped to manage community pressure
- Lots of inexperienced heads of schools
- Inheriting poor systems, often across the board





# Traditional Model



# Process Dependent

- X board meetings a year
- X committees
- Roberts Rules of Order
- Regular evaluations and self-evaluations
- Contracts
- Missions
  - To strategic plans (every 5 years)
  - To goals
  - To objectives
  - Back around

# People Hopeful

- Band of volunteers
  - Some recruited, some volunteer
  - Mostly all laypeople
    - Rarely educators
- Often emotionally conflicted to some degree with board service
  - Many parents
  - Alumni
  - Former staff
- Often recruited because:
  - Connectors within the community
  - Heavily involved at the school
  - Generous donors
  - Skillsets



# Lots of Organization Management

- Calendaring
  - Times, agendas, discussions, etc.
- Managing meetings
- Managing agendas
- Managing process (contracts, votes, etc.)
- Nebulousness around who “owns” or “drives” this process





Lot of Naivete that this will all work out...

- “My board wasn’t following the rules...”
- Process is the narrative. Particularly when things go poorly, they never follow process.
- Ironically, perhaps, as that is the time to call on process and policy






From Yesterday: Partnering in Permanent White Water



# What's wrong with this model?

- Designed for incremental change poorly suited to a highly dynamic environment.
- Designed for consensus-driven decision-making in a context characterized by polarization, disagreement and division.
- Designed to allow trustees to discharge their fiduciary responsibilities and organizes agendas and time to accomplish that end.
- Key issues of the moment (under normal circumstances) are tangentially related to fiduciary duties and may be understood primarily as operational and perhaps (in the case of DEI related concerns) more directly related to matters of mission.

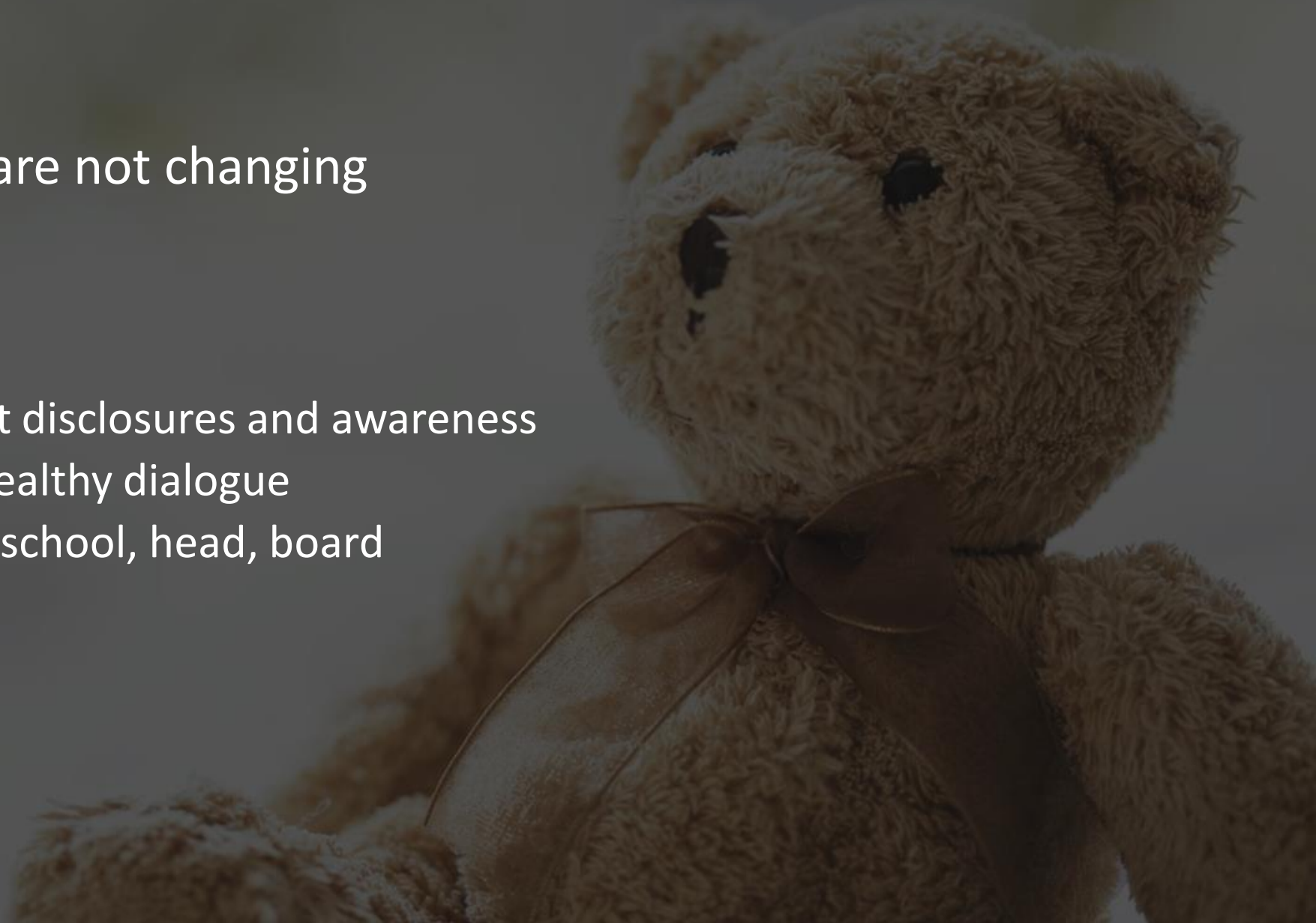




We need  
better tools  
and systems

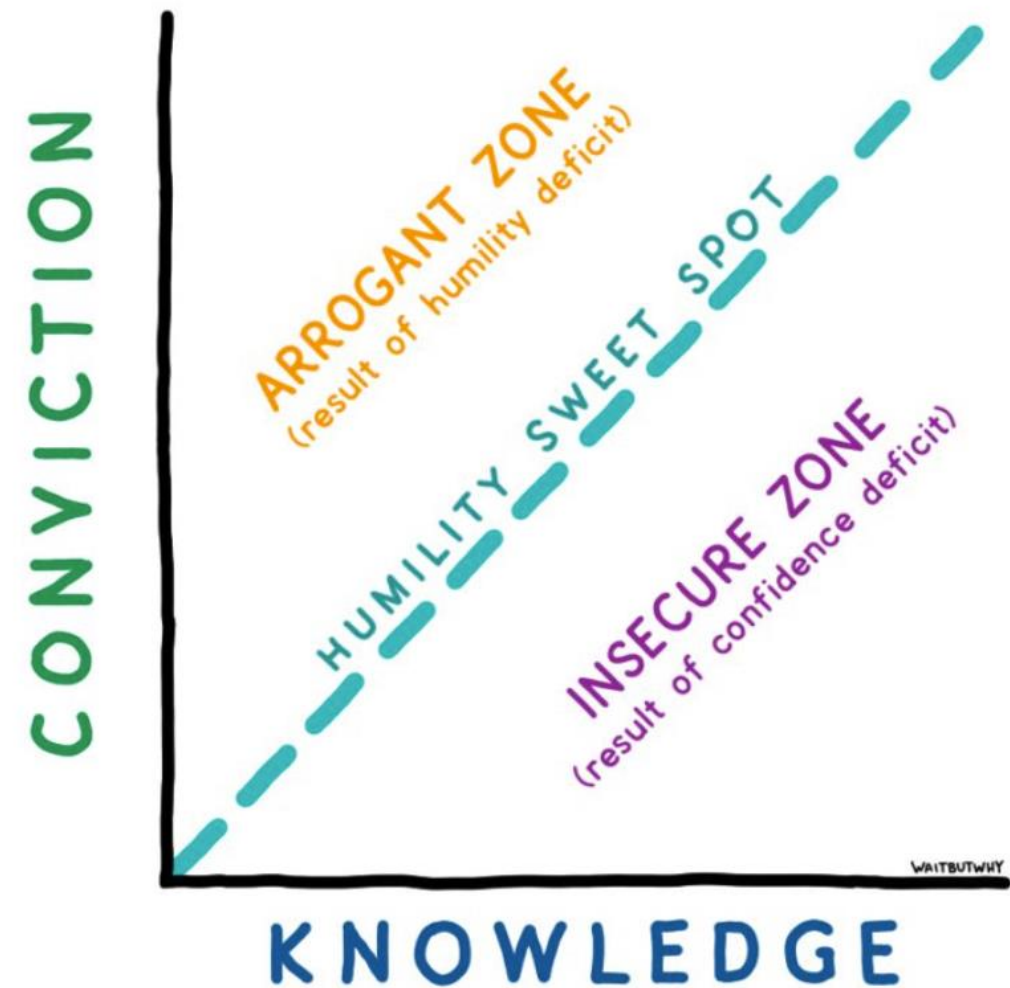
# Not throwing the baby out with the bathwater

- Board obligations are not changing
  - Prepared
  - Engaged
  - Confidentiality
  - Conflict of interest disclosures and awareness
  - One voice – but healthy dialogue
  - Supportive of the school, head, board
  - Partnering



# Finding the sweet spot...

- Arrogance = ignorance + conviction.
- Humility is a filter: it converts evidence and experience into knowledge and wisdom.
- Arrogance is a rubber shield: new information just bounces off of it.
- Doubt = Improve your tools





# Trichotomy of Control

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- Those within our control;
- Those outside of our control; and
- Those we have some control (influence) over

# Authority v. Influence

- In any group there is a polarity between authority and influence.
- The old/current governance model leans toward the authority end of this polarity with "rules" about spheres of responsibility for head and board and then for board leadership in the conduct of board business.
- Current circumstances disrupt these conventional lines of authority and put greater weight on influence.
- The Head's primary challenge is to understand what the drivers of influence are in the culture of the school and the board and then build on those.



# Dynamic World Adaptability





# Building Influence as a Leadership Skill

- When things are not going well...
  - Influence trumps process any day of the week.
  - The ability to bring leverage to bear on how your board functions and what they are focusing on.
- Political reality of the board
  - Why they got on the board / where they are professionally
  - What kinds of power nudges are they used to?
  - What gets them to respond the way you want them to respond?

# Root of Influence with Trustees

- Drivers of influence relate directly to the ongoing solvency and viability of the enterprise.
  - Overlaps with their core understanding of their fiduciary role.
- Heads who are influential in driving capital and operating revenue and ensuring/demonstrating expertise in financial sustainability enjoy an increase in influence.
- Heads who can align their response to crisis to these same enterprise goals will likewise grow in influence.
- Any particular school/board culture will have other idiosyncratic drivers of influence - what are these and how are you positioned as a school head relative to these factors?



# Empathy for the Trustee Experience

- Proximate to pain, especially during crisis
- Consider aligning their interactions with the board in a way that acknowledges the experience of being a trustee in turbulent times.
  - E.g., avoid appealing to process and rules and stay focused on enterprise success.
- Understand that trustees invest reputational equity in the school - be sure they are not somehow embarrassed by their association and further, arm them with information they can be proud of.



What does this look like?

# Good Governance During Pandemic/Crisis Times

- **Fiduciary obligations during dynamic times** get board psychologically closer to the operational side – briefly
- More engagement around thinking / reasoning behind **the process of** operational decisions, as opposed to specific decisions
- Will need influence and trust to lead through those processes

# Modes of Governance for Pandemic

- Fiduciary
  - Liability, safety, sustainability
- Strategic
  - Opportunities
- Generative
  - Opportunities for true shift beyond the model



# Managing Risk Differently

- Risk is usually about getting the risk within sphere of comfort
- Crisis Mode / Change Resistance is different
  - Trade-offs between different risks
  - Much more ambiguity than ever before
  - Going on longer
  - Different phases shift the risk
- Must identify and call out the competing risks, particularly in the time allowed.

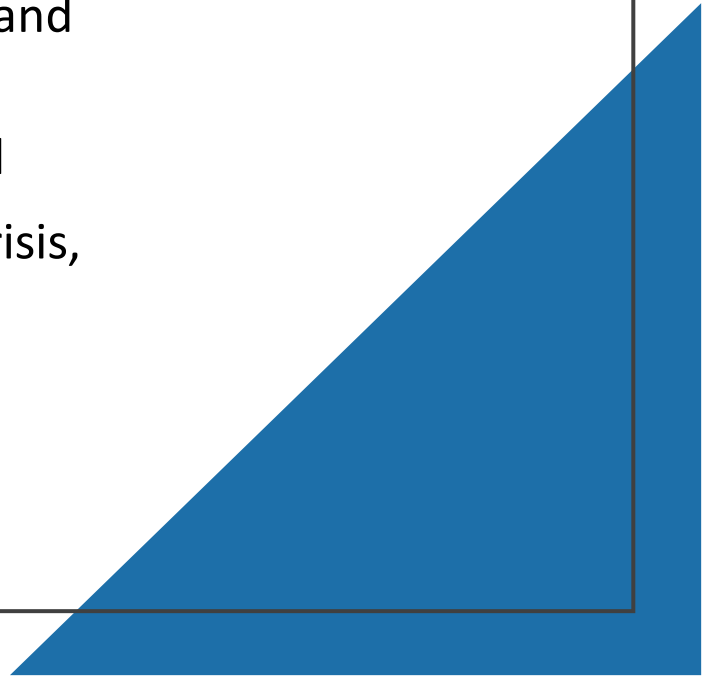


# Owning the Model

- Who drives the conversation?
  - Probably should not be, and often isn't the board members
  - Laying out priorities relative to goals
    - Particularly around board recruitment and **profile of a board member**
  - Mapping through the year
- Who drives organization?
  - They will never organize themselves.
  - Business efficient and consistent with board member professional lives
  - Creating the agendas and the rhythm

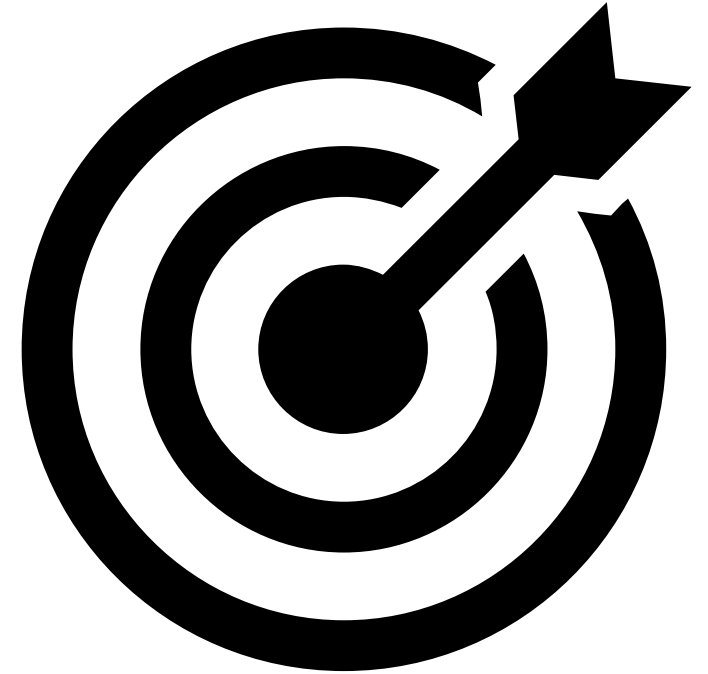
# Committing to Strategic

- Recognizing when to re-trench given new challenges or opportunities
- Pro-active, less reactive
- Constantly learning about the landscape, identifying opportunities and threats
- Regularly looking at the broader landscape to recalibrate as needed
- “How will education and our local ecosystem be reshaped by this crisis, and what strategies should we pursue to emerge as a leader?”



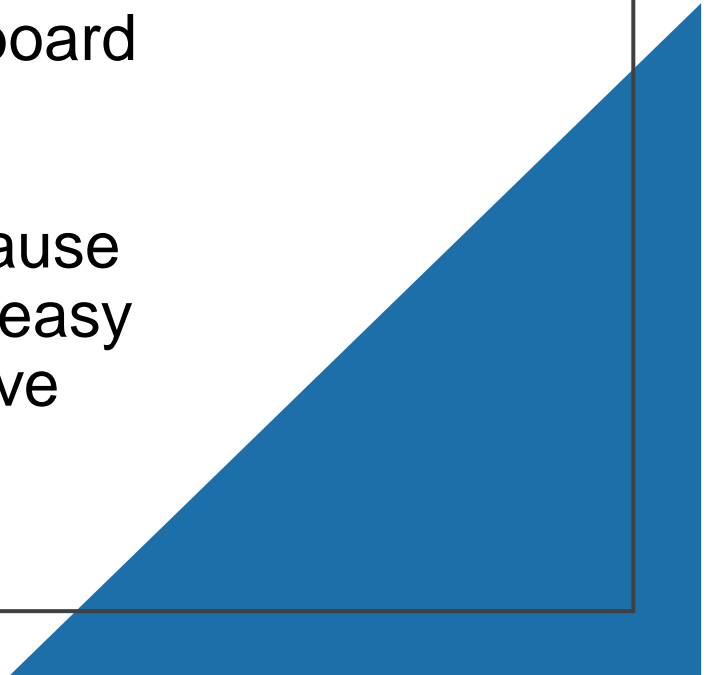
# What do strategic and effective agendas look like?

- Agendas are built around strategic problems
- Boards have a specific “ask” or “mode” for meetings related to the strategic issue
- Boards are informed of on-going business, but that is not the primary driver of the meeting
- Fiduciary work is carried out largely in committees and brought to the board for conversation and vote as needed.
- Time is spent building trust and relationships
- Transparency is fundamental
- **Influence is in play and being used**



# School Finance: Knowledge and Control

- Sophisticated understanding of the school's finances as your CFO and a step ahead of your savviest board member
- You can't sit on the sidelines on this one.
- Develop financial insights into your school that cause your board to say all good - making fiduciary job easy
- Deep and insightful, integrated into comprehensive financial model



# Using Data



Every day



Across the institution

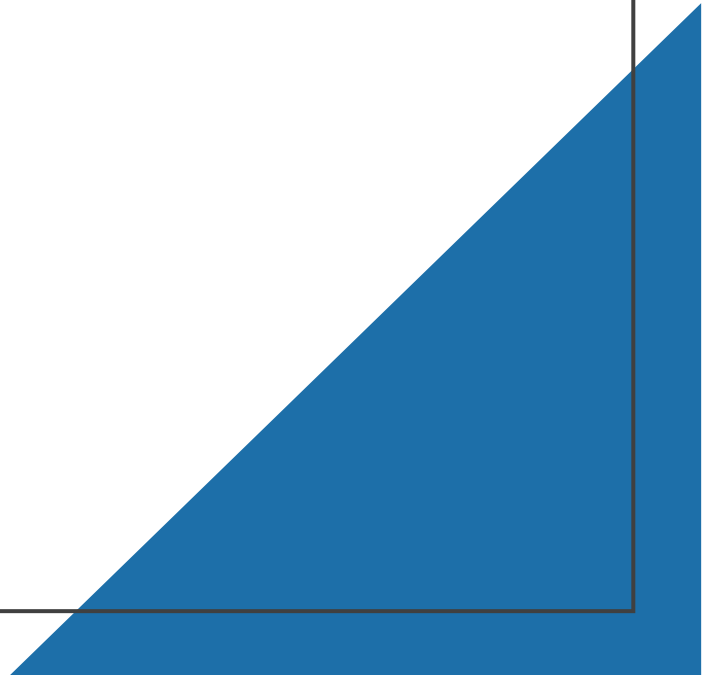


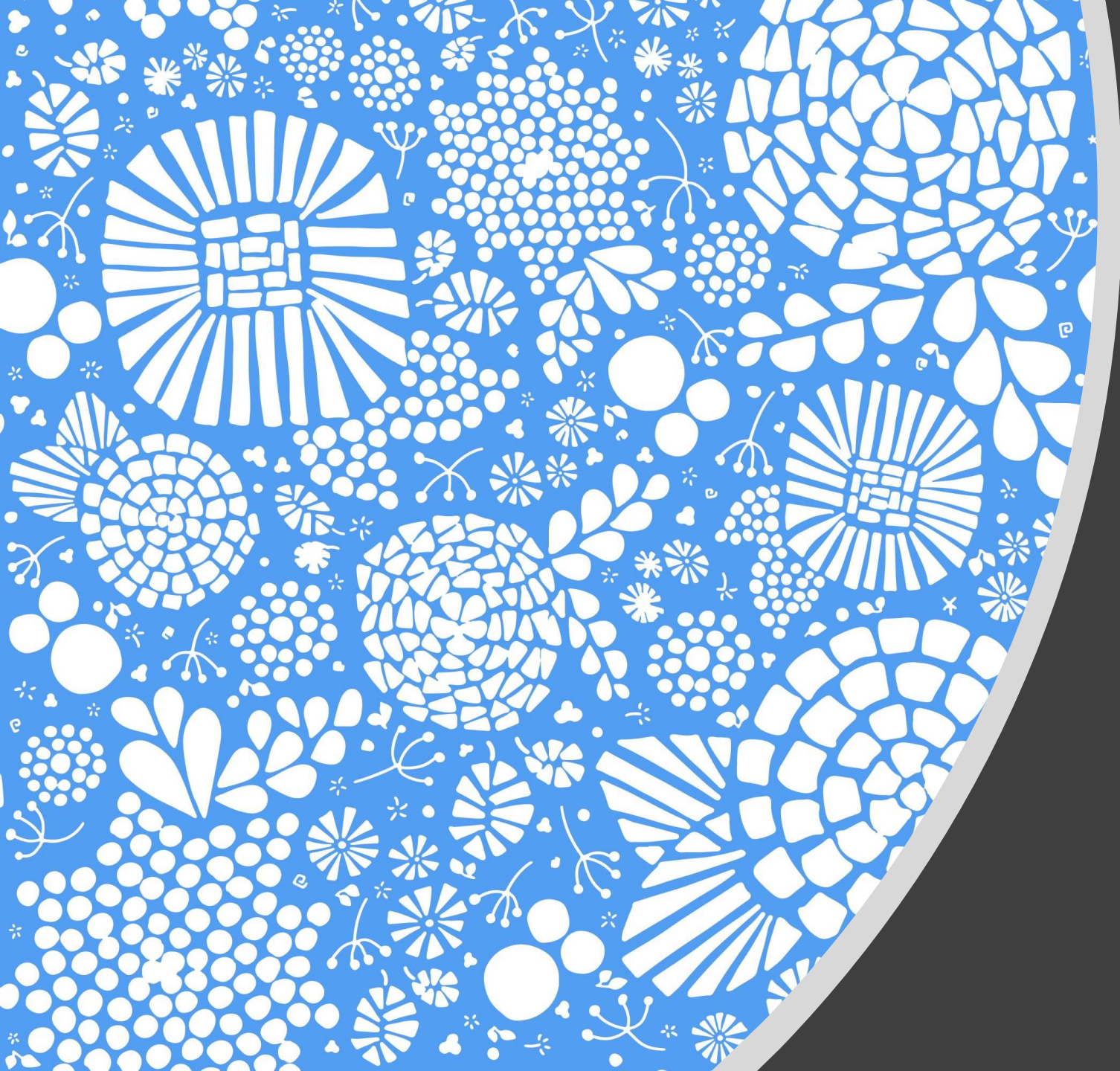
Beyond the financial model



# The board is not your emotional support mechanism

- They are not your first stop personal counselor
  - But they are not totally out of the personal picture
- Can undermine your influence if you are not thoughtful
- Find other supports
  - Exec coaches
  - Co-coaching
  - Cohorts
  - Make sure they are versed in helping you work with the board





Questions?