

A key challenge of being on any board is ensuring the right balance of performance and conformance is met for the business. As chair, you have the further challenge of ensuring that discussions are carried out in a collaborative way and that balance is achieved in relation to the overall planning of the board and its agenda and plan of action.

Another key role as chair is ensuring the correct level of interaction between executives and non-executives. For that to happen, there needs to be clarity around the roles of the chair and the CEO, while the non-executives and the sub-committees all need to be very clear on the terms of reference and their own responsibilities. As a non-executive you need to be very conscious of the fact that you are involved in understanding the business, but you're not involved in the doing side of things.

Having chaired in the not-for-profit and public sectors as well as on the commercial side, I believe these learnings apply irrespective of the business and of the sector.

The same planning tools – organising work, developing a plan and agreeing it – are required right across the board. It's the same for the leadership, communication and negotiation skills that allow the chair to work with various members of the board and the CEO, and to ensure there's collaboration in that relationship so the board can fulfil its role and can support the business.

At the end of the day any board has to carry out its governance and responsibilities in the context of the performance of the business. It's a critical balancing act to ensure that both get done, because your primary role is to ensure the business is sustainable in the long-term.

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