



**Brewin
Dolphin**

Generational diversity - how diverse is your board?

How should charities structure their trustee boards to best address the societal, economic and technological shifts that they face?

We don't know what we don't know, and vision, forward-thinking and diversity of thought, balanced with challenge, perspective, experience and expertise, are crucial to ongoing success. Remaining relevant and current by ensuring tactical and strategic policies are viewed through a generational diversity lens is vital to the future prosperity of an organisation.

We have to change faster than the world outside

Change is incessant and seems to accelerate on a daily basis, so to stay ahead of the game we have to change faster than the world outside. Look at politics and national leadership. Putting aside the fact that we have had four prime ministers in the last five years, many governments have been in turmoil as a result of the significant changes in information availability seen over the last 20 years. Mass communication, social media, 24-hour news and algorithms increasingly shape views and opinions. A failure to adapt to this new environment has led governments and political parties to lose control of the narrative, and their vision, message and identity have become blurred.

The challenge of socio-economic and technological change

As with the rest of society, charities face this challenge of socio-economic and technological change as the world moves from an analogue to a digital society. Seeking answers to questions such as "How does consumerism change in the face of the social and technological change from analogue to digital?" or "What is the impact of data and digital change on our marketing, fundraising and philanthropy strategy?", must be central to their thinking.

Generational diversity can be a powerful driver of challenge and change within this process. Ignoring it and sticking with the well-trodden path of recruiting trustees from the older generations risks positioning strategy in the past.

The benefits of cross-generational outlooks and perspectives

The differences between the generations have come about due to the changing social, economic and technological environment within which they were born and brought up. Each generation has been educated and had its core skills embedded in very different environments, leading to different outlooks and perspectives of the future. This is something we should recognise and factor in when shaping trustee boards as it has the potential to turbocharge a charity's forward-thinking; each generation brings something uniquely valuable to the boardroom which can be harnessed.

The older generations have had to adapt to the accelerating change over the course of their working lives and bring a wealth of technical and managerial knowledge to the boardroom. However, not being children of the digital world has meant they have had to learn this as they have gone along, as opposed to it being hardwired into their brains from birth. On the other hand, generation Y (or the millennial generation), which now constitutes the largest generation within the workforce, and generation Z (or centennial generation) have a built-in understanding of the technological environment; and in the case of the centennials, it is the only world they have known.

Achieving the right blend

Achieving the right blend of generational expertise and experience must be the aim. The older generations have plenty of wisdom and experience, and while their limited lived experience of growing up in the digital world will potentially constrain their ability to vision into the future, their team building and leadership experience will be invaluable. Conversely, the younger generations' lack of experience can be offset by their expertise and embedded understanding of the technological world they live in. By bringing them together, charities gain an understanding of what the data and digital driven world will really bring, along with the tools to deliver within it.

Realising this blend in the charity world poses a slightly different challenge to the corporate world because so much is around volunteering, as opposed to the corporate perspective of profit and employment. This difference leads to the average age of trustees generally being higher than that of corporate directors, and can mean that current technological expertise within the charity trustee boards around change is more limited than their corporate contemporaries. Recent research from Getting on Board's Future Trustees Programme confirms this, highlighting that the average age of a trustee is 60 to 62, while only 0.5% of trustees are aged 18 to 24, despite this age group making up 12% of the population.

Greater social responsibility

Conveniently, the other area of social change, i.e., mass access to information via 24-hour news and social media, has led to greater opportunity for recruitment across the generations. The expectation of greater social conscience across the corporate world has led to a rising trend of corporate volunteering, with companies matching employee charitable donations, giving employees volunteering days, and in some cases matching employee volunteering with monetary donations. Importantly, this is not only at middle or senior management level, but at all levels, meaning there is access to all generations and a sea change in the "giving" world.

So, there is a need for diversity across the generations, there is supply of talent, and there is opportunity presented by changing societal attitudes. Hence, when you consider the composition of your board, has your charity got it right? Does it have the right blend of passion, enthusiasm, knowledge and expertise, and has it avoided the traps of recruiting what is easy – more of the same? Most generations exhibit passion and can find time; some have more knowledge and experience than others, but digital expertise and forward vision are critical, meaning the younger generations bring something very important in terms of technological vision and perspective to the trustee board table.



David Myrddin-Evans

Head of Charities, Wales

David.Myrddin-Evans@brewin.co.uk

02920 347 613

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