Generative Governance for Thriving Communities

Alliance for Healthier Communities

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Objectives

1. Understanding Generative Governance

2. Fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous learning to adapt more effectively

3. Practicing Generative Governance

Reference Material

The Practitioner's Guide to Governance as Leadership: Building High Performing Non-Profit Boards

Cathy Trower

BENEFITS

- **Stronger Stakeholder Engagement:** This approach nurtures active participation from diverse stakeholders (board members, staff, beneficiaries, etc.), ensuring that the voices of those who are directly impacted by the non-profit's work are heard and integrated into strategic decisions.

- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Generative governance helps non-profits develop a vision for the future that is both sustainable and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. It fosters strategic planning that goes beyond short-term goals, ensuring lasting impact.

- **Building Trust and Transparency:** By promoting open communication and shared ownership of decisions, generative governance builds trust among staff, board members, donors, and the communities they serve. This can lead to increased support, greater collaboration, and improved outcomes.

- **Empowered Leadership:** This approach decentralizes decision-making, empowering leaders at all levels to contribute their expertise and perspectives. It encourages a more participatory and inclusive organizational culture.

Developing a Culture of Inquiry –

What does a culture of inquiry look like in the boardroom?

What is its role in Generative Governance?

The Art of Inquiry
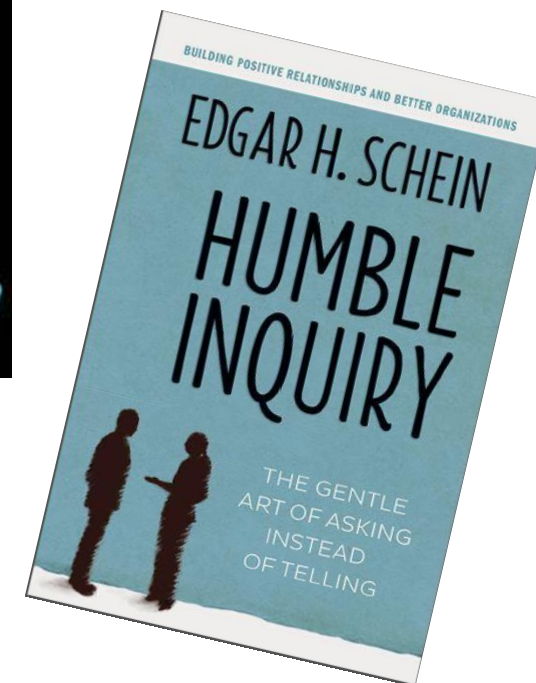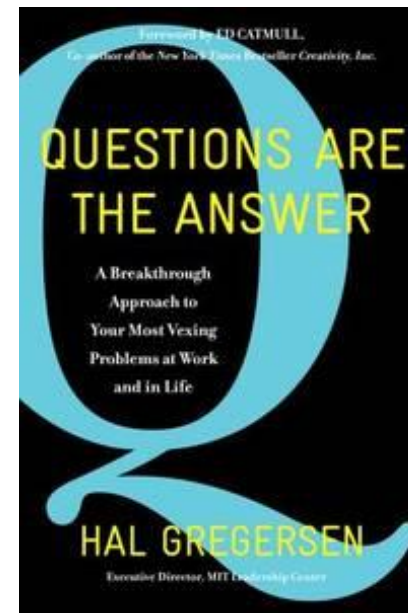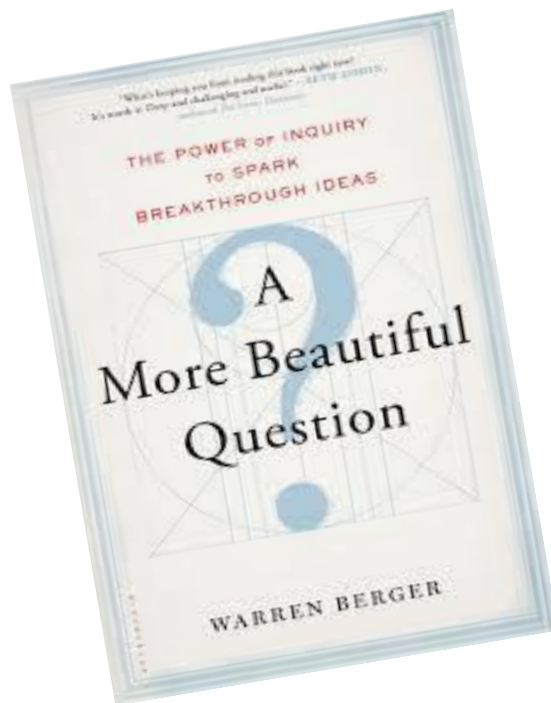
A Beautiful Question

- **A line of inquiry (or critical inquiry) that:**
  - is ambitious + actionable
  - pushes the boundaries of our current capacity & imagination *yet* doesn't impede forward movement
  - is about social justice (Fran Peavey)
  - questions and/or disrupts the status quo
  - pushes edges and depth of change

A Beautiful Question

- *"A beautiful question is an ambitious yet actionable question that can begin to shift the way we perceive or think about something – and that might serve as a catalyst to bring about change."* **(Berger, 2014)**

- *"Humble inquiry is the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person"* **(Schein, 2013, p. 21)**

- *"Well meaning people are often trying to solve a problem by answering the wrong question."* **(Berger, 2014)**

A Culture of Inquiry in the Boardroom

- Govern in multiple modes: fiduciary, strategic, generative.

- Dialogue, deliberation, constructive dissent.

- Curiosity; Ask questions.

- Engage multiple perspectives.

- Sensemaking, discerning, framing.
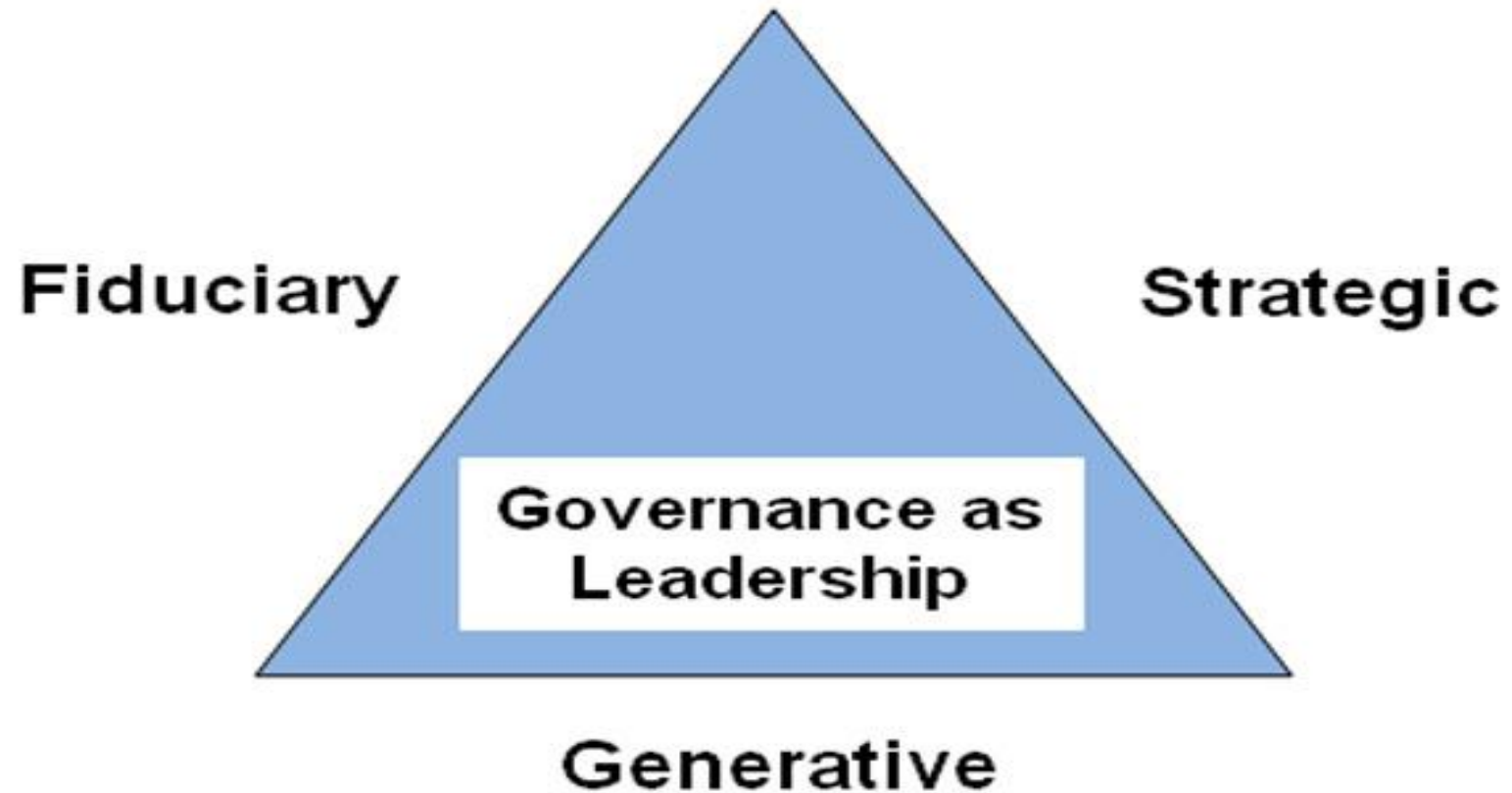
- Continuous, engaged learning.

Working Together

- Not all issues or problems require all modes

- Most effective Boards can operate between all three modes

- Identify situations that require fiduciary, strategic and generative considerations (triple helix)

What Hinders Board Effectiveness

Governance as Leadership: Modes

Chait, Ryan & Taylor, 2005)

Three Modes of Governance

Fiduciary

- Oversight and Policy; stewardship of assets.
- Can we afford it? Does the budget balance?

Strategic

- Prospective and Reactive; strategic indicators or balanced score cards.
- What are the opportunities?

Generative

- Framing Questions; shifting the cognitive paradigm; direct answers not available; meaning matters.
- What bigger purpose is this serving?

Characteristics of Each Mode

	FIDUCIARY	STRATEGIC	GENERATIVE
Nature of Leadership	Hierarchical	Analytical, visionary	Reflective Learners
Board's Purpose	Stewardship of assets	Partnership with management	Source of leadership for the organization
Board provides	**Oversight**	**Foresight**	**Insight**
Board's Core Work	Technical, oversee operations; ensure accountability; select and assess CEO; ratify policy	Analytical; shape strategy; review performance	Reconcile value propositions; manage accountability; discern and frame adaptive issues; think collectively; make sense of circumstances

Characteristics of Each Mode

	FIDUCIARY	STRATEGIC	GENERATIVE
CEO-Board Relationship	Hub and spoke	Strategic alliance	Think-tank peers
Key Question	**What's wrong?**	**What's the plan?**	**What's the key question?**
Strategy	Set by CEO; ratified by board	Board and CEO plan strategically together	Board and CEO think strategically together
Performance Metrics	**Facts, figures, finances, reports**	**Strategic indicators, benchmarks, comparative data**	**Signs of learning and discerning**

Characteristics of Each Mode

	FIDUCIARY	STRATEGIC	GENERATIVE
Agendas and Meetings	Standardized, staff-dominated, passive	Variable formats; strategy-driven; participative	Collective mind of board doing generative work
Group Dynamic	Great minds think alike	Reasonable people disagree agreeably	Great minds think differently
Ways of deciding	**Reaching resolution; protocol and exception**	**Reaching consensus; group process**	**Perceiving, grasping, and grappling**
Communication with constituents	Limited and ritualized, mostly to legitimate	Bilateral and episodic, mostly to advocate	Multilateral and ongoing, mostly to learn

Generative Board Competencies

- Critical thinking

- Broad Perspective

- Open communicator

- Open to new ideas and perspectives

- Curious

- Not defensive

CEO Competencies

- Holds that nothing is undiscussable
- Do not think they have all the right answers/ questions
- Invites dissent
- Shares information, power and leadership opportunities
- Not wedded to the past, nor too far ahead, awareness of history, context and culture

Culture of Inquiry: Generative Governance in the Boardroom

- **Focus on consequential issues.**
- **Comfort with ambiguity.**
- **Generative mode:**
  - Sensemaking
  - Framing
  - Discerning
  - Learning.
- **Generative conversations:**
  - Engaged, robust dialogue
  - Deliberation
  - Constructive dissent
  - Encourage different viewpoints
  - Respectful challenge.

Framing the Issues for Discussion in Generative Governance

Structural	Focus on authority, rules, regulations, priorities, policies, procedures, plans, chain of command, performance and control
Human Resources	Relationship or fit between people and organizations; members needs, skills, fulfillment, commitment, and professional development
Political	Exercise of power, constituents, coalitions, conflict, compromise, bargaining, negotiating and allocation of resources
Symbolic	Organizational culture, meaning, beliefs, stories, rituals, ceremonies, myths, spirit and expressions

Building Support

Opportunity for Engagement
- How do we get the best from each other?

Opportunity for moving from Good to Great
- It's not about what is wrong with our board

Embodiment of Core Organizational Values
- How are we practicing our values in our governance discussions?

Reflection of Best Practices
- Asking thoughtful questions and valuing multiple perspectives

Building Support

Incremental Experiment

- Small steps, evaluate as you go, trial and adjustment, sense-making is at the heart of this
- Shift the agenda, adding consent agenda for "straight forward" fiduciary approvals, add space for discussion

Demonstrating Capacity to Change and Improve

- What spurs growth, fosters innovation, takes advantage of opportunities
- Evaluation within meetings – did we get the right questions?

Ways to Encourage Critical Thinking

- Leaders should take a neutral stance at the beginning of the deliberation process

- Assign devil's advocates (counterarguments) and devil's inquisitors (questions)

- Break the board into small groups (even in 2) to work on the same problem

- Invite outside experts to act as sounding boards

- Hold "second chance" meetings where residual doubts are encouraged

Working with the three modes

- **Working an issue either with the three modes sequentially**
  - Good when the board is not sure it has the right question, or when there is very fundamental questions about mission/markets/values to be settled first

- **Working with the three modes simultaneously**
  - Certainty over the right question and the decision implications
  - Considering operational issues, strategic issues, alternatives to meet the same end

TOOLS THAT YOU CAN USE

Tool – Small Group Discussion "Wicked" Questions

Brainstorm paradoxical questions in small groups and identifying 1-2 key questions to consider.

- Discuss these in small groups and summarize the ideas to the larger group.
- Summarize the key themes for decision making.
- Did we find the key question? What do we notice?

"How do we ensure that there is access to every client who needs our service and ensure that the most vulnerable individuals have the priority access to the care that we offer?"

Tool – Small Group Discussion Using Organizational Values

In smaller groups, half of participants identify how the issue in front of the Board is supported by the organization's values and the other, how the decision to be made is not supported by the values.

As a large group, see what similarities emerge. What information is missing to make this decision?

Tool – Small Group Discussion "Framing"

| DIMENSION	SUMMARY OF ISSUES / CONSIDERATIONS
STRUCTURAL - Focus on authority, rules, regulations, priorities, policies, procedures, plans, chain of command, performance and control	**Affordable Housing Shortage**: Rising rental prices and limited affordable housing options have made it increasingly difficult for low-income individuals to secure stable housing. In addition, a boom in rooming houses has resulted in unsafe living conditions with multiple individuals crammed into small spaces.
HUMAN RESOURCES - Relationship or fit between people and organizations; members needs, skills, fulfillment, commitment, and professional development	**Training and Skills Gaps**: There is a lack of specialized training for professionals in dealing with the complexities of homelessness and co-occurring disorders, which limits the effectiveness of care.
POLITICAL - Exercise of power, constituents, coalitions, conflict, compromise, bargaining, negotiating and allocation of resources	**Policy Fragmentation**: Disparate policies across various levels of government can lead to inconsistencies in how services are delivered, creating confusion and gaps in care.
SYMBOLIC - Organizational culture, meaning, beliefs, stories, rituals, ceremonies, myths, spirit and expressions	**Beliefs About Personal Responsibility**: Many people hold beliefs that individuals should be solely responsible for their circumstances, which can hinder empathy and support for systemic solutions.

Methods for more complex issues:

Mind mapping is a visual thinking tool that helps organize information and ideas. It involves creating a diagram that represents concepts, tasks, or ideas radiating from a central theme. Here's how it works:

- **Central Idea:** Start with a central concept or topic in the middle of the page.

- **Branches:** Draw branches that represent related ideas or categories. These branches can be words, images, or symbols.

- **Sub-branches:** From each branch, you can create sub-branches that detail more specific aspects of the idea.

- **Keywords and Images:** Use keywords and images instead of lengthy sentences to stimulate memory and creativity.

- **Color and Structure:** Incorporate colors, different line styles, and varied shapes to enhance clarity and engagement.

Methods for more complex issues:

- Mind mapping is beneficial for brainstorming, planning projects, studying, and problem-solving, as it encourages a non-linear exploration of ideas and connections.

- Key issues for further exploration begin to emerge as the core of the decision to be made.

Tool – Mind Mapping
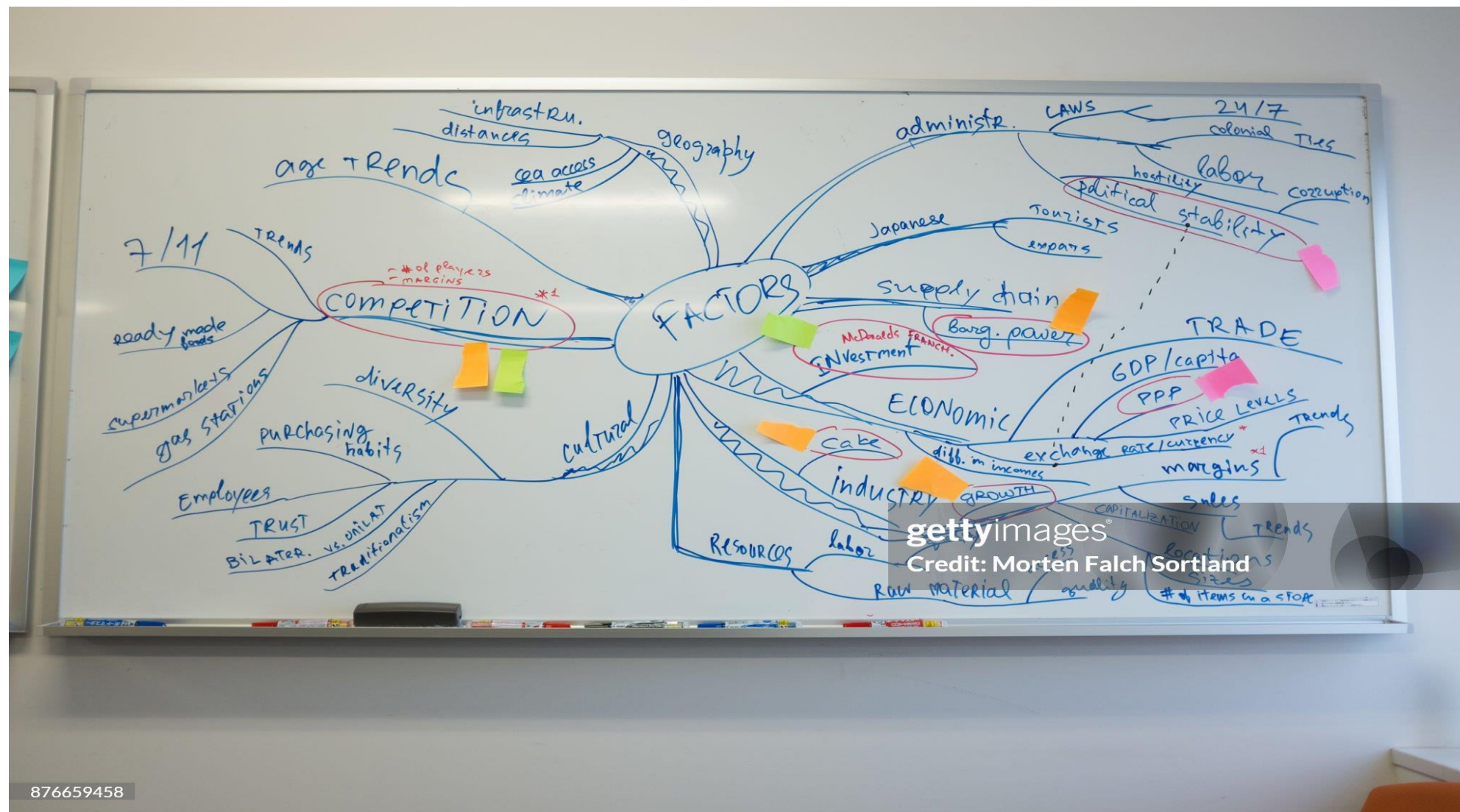
Let's put this into Practice –

Case Study

Your community like many others is experiencing the crisis of homelessness that is closely intertwined with mental health and substance use disorders, creating a complex and urgent situation. Sunny City CHC (SCCHC) is new to serving this population and is feeling extreme pressure on their services.

Substance use, particularly opioids and alcohol, is a critical issue within this population. Many individuals turn to drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism for their circumstances or underlying mental health issues. The opioid crisis has particularly intensified the challenges, leading to increased overdose rates among homeless populations.

Various organizations and advocacy groups are working to address these issues through harm reduction strategies, supportive housing initiatives, and mental health programs. However, funding and resources remain inadequate to meet the growing demand.

Mind Mapping Public Drug Use and People who are unhoused

- Using the mind mapping concept, what are some of the central issues we need to consider for SunnyCity CHC role in responding to this community crisis?
  - And what else?
  - And what else?
- What patterns do you see? What additional information do you need?
- Is there an area that is emerging that is unique for SunnyCity?

Summary Thoughts

- Generative Governance is different in many ways

- Trimodal is not as easy as it seems

- Use a variety of techniques to get started

- Persistence – it requires work and a reflection at every meeting as to how the board is doing and what they are learning (**did we ask the right questions?**)

- Practice. It is a change in behavior and we all like our own status quo; play the devil's advocate

- Critical action is building a culture of curiosity and inquiry

Thoughts to leave you with….

"Boards are less likely to micromanage when they have opportunities to macro govern."

It's all about the questions: "It is more important for directors to ask intelligent questions rather than have brilliant answers".

"A problem well stated is a problem half solved"

"Boards need to make sense before they make decisions"

Reflections

- What can you do to build a culture of inquiry at your Board meetings?

- What do you see as some of the opportunities to better incorporate generative dialogue into your Board meetings?

- What are some of the topics that you think would be appropriate for a generative discussion?

Thank You

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