Replacing Surveys with Discussion for C and D Policy Monitoring

Background
All C (Board Process) and D (Board-Management Relationship) policies are currently monitored using categorical surveys sent out to each Board member with either a "how much do agree with the following statement" type of scale or "With this sub-policy, is the Board in compliance or not in compliance" For each global policy and sub-policy, there is a comment option where a Board member can express their thoughts and can explain why they answered as they did.

The survey tool may work well for the D global policy and a select few of the C and D sub-policies, but it is grossly inadequate for most of our C and D policy monitoring which the Board discussed at the November meeting.

Observations
Firstly, policy language is written so that there is room for thought and determination of what is reasonable, not what is black and white. The C1.1. illustrates this point beautifully.

"To fulfill our governance commitment, the Board will govern in a manner consistent with the Four Pillars of Cooperative Governance (Teaming, Accountable Empowerment, Strategic Leadership, and Democracy). In order to do this, the Board will: 1. Prioritize taking whatever steps are needed to work together effectively. (Teaming)"

Sub-policy C1.1. does not define the steps we should take, but rather, challenges us to consider the steps we have taken and determine if they are appropriate and reasonable. By only using a binomial response survey, there is no room to understand even what steps have been taken, let alone if we comply or not, and if not, how to improve.

Secondly, for new Board members, and members that are not familiar with the Policy Governance approach (which is most of us) it is unlikely we can reasonably and effectively monitor our C and D policies using the survey method. Unless we as Board members have some reasonable sense, or better yet, perfect knowledge, of the actions the Board has taken in relation to its own work and its work with the General Manager, there is absolutely no way we can, or should, be answering these questions. The lack of perspective, knowledge, and information about our own actions can lead to frustrations "I just don't understand Policy Governance" or "what is this even saying," which then leads to guessing, rubber stamping, or abstaining. We require the General Manager to collect and evaluate data and information for both A and B policies so we can accept her assessment of compliance or non-compliance and then ask for plans to deal with non-compliance issues. However, the Board does not require this level of investigation and thought our own C and D policies.

Lastly, frustration with this process then leads to fragmentation and ineffectiveness of the Board, as a whole.

An alternative approach

By using a discussion approach to C and D policy monitoring, we can strengthen our understanding of the policies and the Policy Governance system and build cohesiveness within the Board.

How would this work?

Prior to the monitoring, Board members will be assigned to collect information regarding the actions or lack of actions taken regarding each global or sub-policy. Preferably, information gathering will include teams of members new to the Board and those with some Board experience. In addition, the information-gathering team will discuss the language in the global or sub-policy in the framework of "what would a reasonable person do." The team can then make a recommendation to the Board on whether we are in or out of compliance, and maybe have some ideas on how to resolve non-compliance.

In the Board meetings when policy or sub-policies are monitored, teams will present their findings to the whole Board. The Board can then ask questions, make suggestions, etc., and then vote, hopefully from a more informed position, on the compliance status of the global or sub-policy.

Desired Outcomes

A discussion-based approach can help **all** Board members have a better understanding of not only the individual global and sub-policies but of our jobs, responsibilities, and limitations as Board members. This approach can reduce frustration that comes from lack of understanding of the policies, and can build Board cohesiveness.