

Guide to Next-Level Boards Episodes

#1-39

Lyn McDonell's *Next-Level Boards* series offers lenses for board directors, senior staff, and governance professionals to evolve governance in the face of accelerating complexity, ecological fragility, and social upheaval. Lyn is the Principal of The Accountability Group, Inc., a firm which has been supporting good governance since 2008.

Note: Actual titles of the videos are those are in the index. Alternative topic handles hold the links.

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1. Next-Level Boards

In this inaugural episode, Lyn McDonell reframes organizations as living systems, deeply interconnected and embedded in broader ecosystems: social, economic, and environmental. She asserts that modern governance must adapt accordingly, emphasizing vitality, adaptability, and relational health over mechanistic efficiency.

- ▶ Watch: [Evolution of board governance: from machines to living systems](#) • 2:12 mins

2. How to Ask Difficult Questions in the Boardroom

Lyn shares practical techniques for asking challenging questions without creating tension or conflict. Her guidance centers on framing, tone, and intent, encouraging directors to speak with courage, clarity, and diplomacy.

- ▶ Watch: [How to ask difficult questions in the boardroom](#) 2:30 mins

3. Living Systems All Tied Up

Drawing from Gulliver's Travels, Lyn illustrates how excessive bureaucratic formalism immobilizes organizations. She calls for boards to recognize the informal, creative energies and release them from unnecessary constraints.

- ▶ Watch: [How Gulliver's Travels Shows the Power of Informal Organization](#) • 4:31 min

4. The Three Horizons Framework

Lyn introduces the Three Horizons model, helping boards think simultaneously about present operations (H1), transitional innovation (H2), and future flourishing (H3). This framework helps governance bodies look out beyond business-as-usual and embrace change intentionally.

- ▶ Watch: [How to Talk About the Future with Three Horizons](#) • 4:04 mins

5. Governance as Gardening

Using the metaphor of a garden, Lyn suggests boards must cultivate the conditions for organizational vitality, through culture, communication, shared purpose, and the empowerment of people.

- ▶ Watch: [How Living Systems Can Guide Governance](#) • 3:27 mins

6. Silos and Scorecards vs. Systemic Awareness

Here, Lyn challenges siloed thinking in board governance and our obsession with what are lagging metrics, and not the relational qualities that support results. She urges boards to zoom out to see the broader system, including ecological, civic, and social contexts that influence organizational success.

- ▶ Watch: [How Boards Can Contribute to Systemic Health](#) • 3:12 mins

7. Multicapitals

Lyn invites boards to expand their definition of value to include natural, social, human, spiritual, and cultural capital alongside financial metrics. Governance, she argues, must ensure the replenishment, not depletion, of all capitals.

- ▶ Watch: [Where Are the Multicapitalists?](#) • 3:28 mins

8. What do Boards do?

In this back-to-basics episode, Lyn outlines the three essential domains of board responsibility: leadership, oversight, and accountability. She emphasizes how governance frameworks must evolve to support these roles in a changing world.

- ▶ Watch: [What Does a Board Do? A Beginner's Guide](#) • 4:38 mins

9. The Stewardship of Quality

Quality, Lyn argues, isn't a scorecard, it's relational, cultural, and moral. Drawing from her hospital board experience, she describes how trust, care, and shared purpose underpin the conditions for excellence.

► Watch: [Quality in Governance: A Relational Culture](#) • 3:24 mins

10. A Recap #1-9

Lyn recaps her vlog series on organizational governance. Topics covered include organizations as living systems, asking difficult questions in boardrooms, outdated policies, three-horizon thinking, governance for growth, scorecards and silos, and multicapital prosperity.

► Watch: [Recap #1-9](#) • 3:08 mins

11. Three Modes of Governance

In this episode, Lyn revisits the Chait–Ryan–Taylor framework of fiduciary, strategic, and generative governance defining each mode. She invites boards to move beyond oversight and planning into the generative space of insight, inquiry, and reframing, indeed into a regenerative governance to embrace stewardship of living dynamics, whole systems, and multi-generational impact.

► Watch: [From Generative to Regenerative](#) • 4:10 mins

12. The Governance Shift

With a dose of espresso, Lyn looks to the future and spells out the key moves to enfold fiduciary legal obligation within a deeper responsibility and so steward conditions for well-being. This involves a shift to responsible anticipation, where boards practice future-literate thinking, systems awareness, and regeneration of the commons.

► Watch: [Future Boards Start Now](#) • 3:03 mins

13. Directors Show Up

Lyn asks: "What does it mean for a director to show up?" Truly showing up is to bring voice and value to the table. Lyn describes next-level directors as anticipatory, courageous, grounded, and relentlessly constructive... focusing on what they want to achieve without blame or fault-finding.

► Watch: [The Power of Presence](#) • 3:02 mins

14. The Life Cycle Challenge

Drawing from organizational life-cycle theory, Lyn maps how passion-fueled beginnings often give way to institutional bureaucracy. Boards, she argues, must become conscious midwives of organizational renewal—able to detect when vitality fades and where to re-anchor purpose and support transformation.

► Watch: [Renewing Energy](#) • 3:41 mins

15. & 16. Board Traits for Renewal (Parts 1 & 2)

In these two linked episodes, Lyn introduces a landmark framework: six traits that equip boards to operate effectively in complexity and uncertainty.

#15 Part 1

1. **Situated** – rooted in real context; deep listening
2. **Real** – authenticity over scripted formality
3. **Developmental** – boards as gardeners, enabling emergence

► Watch: [Six Traits for Thriving Boards \(1-3\)](#) • 4:06 mins

#16 Part 2

4. **Relational** – trust across ecosystems
5. **Circular** – feedback loops and flow-oriented learning
6. **Coherent** – aligned principles in voice and action

► Watch: [Six Traits for Thriving Boards \(4-6\)](#) • 3.23 mins

17. Six Traits for Wicked Problems

Building on the previous vlogs, Lyn deepens the application of the six traits to “wicked problems”—those messy, complex, and evolving challenges with no “solutions.” She reframes these as invitations to evolve board consciousness and method. When boards activate the six traits in concert, they gain a better orientation to stay effective in motion, accept uncertainty in design, and be agents of long-view transformation.

► Watch: [Challenges into Evolution](#) • 3:49 mins

18. Why I'm Making These Videos

In this reflective episode, Lyn shares her purpose for creating the “Next-Level Boards” series—as a personal obligation to share what she has learned, and not as a marketing effort. She aims to invite reflection and support boards in reimagining their role for regenerative impact.

- ▶ Watch: [Purpose Behind the Series](#) • 3:35 mins

19. Is ESG Enough?

Lyn anchors the desirable future of ESG in the principle of acting “in good faith”—going beyond compliance to genuine intent, moral imagination, and relational integrity. This ethical foundation transforms ESG into a form of regenerative governance, where boards serve as stewards of living systems and uphold a covenant with the future that extends beyond compliance, metrics, or public ratings. Lyn asks “If not now, when?”

- ▶ Watch: [Good Faith Beyond ESG](#) • 3:40 mins

20. A Recap #11–19

This episode pauses to take stock of the ideas explored in Vlogs 11 through 19. Lyn revisits the evolution from fiduciary and generative governance toward a paradigm grounded in stewardship, foresight, and systems awareness. Key threads include the future orientation of governance, the importance of directors “showing up” with relational presence, the six traits of regenerative boards, and the call to act in good faith in and beyond ESG.

- ▶ Watch: [Reflecting on the Journey: Vlogs 11–19 Recap](#) • 3:44 mins

21. Different Roles of Board and Management

Using a vivid climbing metaphor, Lyn explores the distinction between board and management roles. The board provides oversight, direction, and accountability, while management and staff have to make more immediate decisions and navigate the practical challenges of making progress. Clear roles, mutual respect, and trust keep the rope strong between them—helping the whole organization ascend.

- ▶ Watch: [Distinctions and Connections Between Board and Management Roles](#) • 2:55 minute

22. The Value of Multiple Indicators

In this episode, Lyn cautions boards about relying on a narrow set of fixed, context-free metrics. When boards develop a balanced consciousness that blends quantitative measures with qualitative understanding and lived context, they see more of the organization's dynamic ecosystem. Real governance insight comes from interpreting multiple indicators that reflect reality.

- ▶ Watch: [Right Balance between Indicators and Measures](#) • 3:54 mins

23. and 24. Raising Difficult Issues (Parts 1 & 2)

This is a two-part exploration into how directors can raise difficult issues with courage and respect. Lyn focuses on preparing well before speaking and contributing constructively by framing questions around shared responsibilities, listening deeply, and avoiding blame while still naming what matters.

#23 Part 1:

- ▶ Watch: [Putting Difficult Issues on the Table - Part One](#) • 3:48 mins

#24. Part 2

- ▶ Watch: [Putting Difficult Issues on the Table - Part Two](#) • 3:38 mins

25. Advice for Young Directors

Drawing on her years of experience, Lyn offers guidance for those stepping into board service for the first time. She encourages young directors to ask questions that matter (including ones that look ahead to the future), seek mentors, and learn the craft of governance over time taking advantage of learning opportunities. Fresh voices of this generation can bring needed renewal.

- ▶ Watch: [Tips for Young and New Board Directors](#) • 3:38 mins

26. Stakeholders on Board and Systems Thinking

Here Lyn explores how stakeholder inclusion changes the quality of board dialogue. In systems thinking, boards understand stakeholders as part of the whole—not as competing interests—that help them find coherence amid complexity. True stewardship means listening across the system and integrating diverse perspectives into better, more informed decisions.

- ▶ Watch: [How Stakeholders Help Boards to Think Systems](#) • 3:26 mins

27. From Mechanistic to Living Words

Language shapes how boards see things. In this episode, Lyn invites directors to notice the prevalence of the language of machines for organizations—inputs, outputs, efficiency, etc. While understandable, these terms unintentionally suppress vitality and limit imagination. The language of living systems—growth, connection, vitality—better shifts culture and orients people to possibility. The words we use reveal the world we expect to create.

- ▶ Watch: [Language Matters: Metaphors Shape Governance](#) • 3:59 mins

28. Five Things to Pay Attention to Now

Lyn shares five focus points for boards operating in turbulent times. These include the satisfaction of leaders, the board's own culture and agenda, stakeholder connections, adaptive learning, and alignment of values with action.

- ▶ Watch: [Five Top Focus Areas for Today's Boards](#) • 3:25 mins

29. Not AI: Boards as Wisdom Chambers

Lyn considers how artificial intelligence will transform governance—and why human wisdom must remain central. Data can inform, but discernment, ethics, and empathy must guide. Boards must balance technological capability with the deeper judgment that only comes from human experience and moral imagination.

- ▶ Watch: [Human Governance Beyond AI](#) • 3:26 mins

30. A Recap #21-29

Lyn reflects on the evolution of this content, starting from its definition of board and management roles to rethinking how boards read and respond to complexity. The editions covered the importance of context-rich indicators, the human art of raising tough issues with courage and care, nurturing new directors, and adopting systems thinking that connects stakeholders. Final episodes explored how language shapes board culture, the anchors for governance in turbulent times, and a future where wisdom beyond AI guides decision-making.

- ▶ Watch: [Facing Turbulent Times](#) • 3:21 mins

31. The Optimal Relationship Between the CEO and the Board

Lyn acknowledges the fact that only a healthy board-CEO/ED relationship will enable leaders and directors to go forward together during challenging times. An optimal relationship emphasizes trust, communication, and alignment. This is the critical interpersonal and structural foundation necessary for boards and executives to navigate complexity together effectively.

- ▶ Watch: [A Healthy Relationship](#) • 3:34 mins

32. The Secret Life of Organizations

in this edition Lyn illuminates what is "hiding in plain sight"—the informal relational networks and living cultures that exist beyond the control of formal governance structures. This informal aspect is the source of creativity, innovation, and resilience in organizations. Governance excellence requires attention to this invisible yet powerful relational dimension, as it will determine whether organizations truly thrive or stagnate.

- ▶ Watch: [The Informal Organization](#) • 2:53 mins

33. Five questions boards are asking now

Lyn shares five key questions she is hearing from multiple boards across different sectors. These questions include: How to build foresight into board decision-making? How to govern artificial intelligence responsibly? How to assess whether the board is sufficiently effective? The vlog emphasizes the importance of boards building "a wider sensing circle" beyond the boardroom to understand what matters most in rapidly changing times.

- ▶ Watch: [Five Key Questions Now](#) • 2:57 mins

34. Boardroom MVPs

In this edition, Lyn examines director archetypes using the voice-and-value matrix research by Annie Tobias and Lina Pallotta featured in *The Handbook of Board Governance* (2nd edition). There are recognized patterns that populate boardrooms—the Specialist, Over-Contributor, Advice-Giver, and others. The vlog emphasizes three most valued director archetypes. The central message is that "awareness of how we engage lays the foundation for next-level boards and good governance.

- ▶ Watch: [How Do We Show Up at the Board Table?](#) • 3:49 mins

35. Prepare for Drama: Five Ways

Boards can be catalysts for organizational resilience and adaptability in uncertain futures. Lyn emphasizes situational awareness as critical—understanding future scenarios and organizational and people preparation. The intersection of formal systems and informal relational networks is where new responses and possibilities emerge.

- ▶ Watch: [Things Are Getting Challenging](#) • 3:18 mins

36. What is Regenerative Board Governance?

Lyn explains the concept of regenerative board governance, an orientation that protects and renews the conditions that make wellbeing and resilience possible at every scale. Conventional governance has not had to account for states of well-being and conditions beyond its usual concerns. Regenerative governance represents courageous, constructive leadership that stewards both organizational vitality and systemic health simultaneously. The vlog poses the central question: "Do you think it's possible?".

- ▶ Watch: [Regenerative Board Governance](#) • 3:54 mins

37. From Risk to Relationship: Regenerative Thinking in Practice

Lyn introduces "relational awareness" – a board capacity to understand the health and resilience of the relationships, systems, and conditions their organizations and people depend upon. Organizations are far more connected and interdependent with their ecosystem than governance usually acknowledges.

Lyn uses the metaphor of being "in a fast-moving river of change with turns of events and downward trends likely through 2026 and beyond." Boards must understand their "you are here" location in wider systems and make wise decisions that hold up over time.

- ▶ Watch: [About Relational Awareness](#) • 3:49 mins

38. Conditions, Conditions: Regenerative Thinking in Practice

This edition articulates a framework of organizational conditions that enable thriving. Lyn says here that "conditions are really the main thing and they come before results." Boards hold responsibility for the health and life of the organization itself. Lyn identifies twelve key organizational conditions. The vlog concludes with a regenerative principle: "In nature, living systems don't thrive because someone sets goals and targets. They thrive because the conditions are right. The same is true for organizations."

- ▶ Watch: [Organizational Conditions](#) • 4:10 mins

39. Multicapitals Stewardship: Regenerative Thinking in Practice

Lyn returns to the topic of multicapitals—the stewardship of value beyond financial metrics, including natural, human, social, and cultural assets and the interconnected stocks and flows organizations depend upon. Lyn acknowledges that the term "multicapitals" may sound like monetization of things but familiar language ensures the concepts are noticed. The key question is: "Are our processes and strategy building up or diminishing things?" The vlog references "mutually assured implementation"—the governance function of shared response-ability.

- ▶ Watch: [Recognizing and Stewarding Value](#) • 4:58 mins

Website: [The Accountability Group, Inc.](#) The Accountability Group (TAG) provides professional development in governance across sectors for boards and senior leaders. Based in Toronto, Canada, TAG networks with local, national, and global expertise to support our clients.

Lyn McDonell MA, FCMC, C. Dir.: Principal of The Accountability Group, Lyn has served as CEO, COO, Board Chair, and Director, and is a Fellow of the Institute of Certified Management Consultants of Ontario and a Chartered Director. Lyn is adjunct faculty in the Master of Financial Accountability Program at York University and a contributor to the 2nd and 3rd editions of The Handbook of Board Governance: A Comprehensive Guide for Public, Private, and Not-for-Profit Board Members. Connect with Lyn on [LinkedIn](#).

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