Activity – Sources of anxiety in the Boardroom

There are a number of fears and anxieties commonly experienced in the boardroom. Use the checklist below to identify your own concerns or anxieties in board meetings and those concerns or anxieties that may be shared by your fellow board members.

Description	I have experienced this	I have observed this in others
Fear of looking foolish If I say something others don't agree with or that might be considered silly I won't say it.		
Fear of offending others If I have a point that I think might appear threatening to another board member or to the Chief Executive I don't make it or I 'water it down'		
Fear of not being accepted If I am new to the board I feel I should keep quiet or only speak on subjects I think are 'safe'		
Fear of being alone in my opinion If I have made points in the past that have been ignored or unsupported it can affect how I will speak in the future. I might hold back or only speak on subjects I see as safe		
Fear of not being liked or respected I might go along with things I don't really agree with and then tell others my real views outside the board meeting.		
Fear of not being part of the group If I don't feel part of the group I will either keep my distance (for example busying myself reading papers) or I might pair up with people I think are 'like me' – creating my own faction within the board		
Fear of talking too much I might overthink my involvement in the conversation. I might not share opinions that might be valuable to the board		
Fear of not talking enough I might comment on everything whether or not I have something to say to avoid people thinking I am not making a contribution.		
Fear of conflict I might keep quiet, or do everything to smooth things over, even where a lively debate might be valuable. I might avoid conflict in the meeting but talk about the person I feel conflict with out of the room.		

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Questions for Reflection

Think of a time in a board meeting when you have not said what you wanted to say. What stopped you? Did one of these fears / anxieties get in the way, if so which one?

Which behaviours have you observed in fellow board members that might indicate that they are experiencing some of these fears or anxieties?

What have been the consequences – for you and for the Board as a whole?

If your board meets in public, what difference does that make?

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