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Emotions in the Boardroom: The Case of NHS Foundation Trust

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore emotions in the particular setting of governance and board decision making in the public sector. Here we look at the board as a social space where emotions emerge due to the many interactions and negotiations taking place in the boardroom and beyond. It is often referred to as a 'black box' as we do not know much what happens inside the boardroom. The fieldwork for this study is currently being conducted in the NHS Foundation Trusts as part of a doctoral research. This paper focuses particularly on an ethnographic case study of the NHS Foundation Trust in London over a period of six months. In this period, the first author has observed the board's public as well as the non-public meetings going ahead 'beyond the scenes'. It will thus be possible to make sense of the board's lived emotions rather than just relying on reported experiences about them. This research aims to understand how emotions emerge in meetings as an effect of the interaction among different stakeholders. This research primarily contributes to a better understanding of emotions in the context of the board room, but may also help boards to improve their processes for strategic decision making in the public sector.

Keywords: *emotions, governance, board process, ethnography, public sector, NHS.*

Introduction

The study of emotions has been overwhelmed by the 'pejorative' view - emotions seen as irrational, unproductive (Styre *et al.*, 2002; Fineman, 2000), feminine (Mumby and Putnam, 1992), related to 'weakness and instability, unwanted and undesirable characteristics' (Muchinsky, 2000; p. 802) and an unnecessary part of human life but we view human beings as 'multidimensional emotional beings' having feelings, sentiments, desires and emotions (Hartel *et al.*, 2005; p. 39).

Organisations too are inherently emotional (Fineman, 2000; Küpers and Weibler, 2008) but the very structure of organisation is built upon 'rational' foundations, where human beings have to act, behave and perform in a certain prescribed way, to maintain order and to achieve efficiency, the underlying purpose of which is to 'control' (Weber, 1946). The deviation to these 'prescribed' ways is not acceptable even today in the traditional bureaucratic organisations as it challenges 'human perfection', predictability and the organisational output (Clegg, 1990). Indeed, emotions can be chaotic and can disharmonise the organisational order (Domalgski, 1999). Over the years, this old fashioned 'mechanistic' view has shifted towards a more 'human side' view of the organisation which recognises human feelings and emotions in the organisational processes. This shift in attitude opened up the doors for scholars to view emotions as important for the organisation and worth exploring them in the organisational context.

Emotions have never been easy to explore due to their underlying complexities in defining what they are and how they should be explored. The way researchers define emotions depends upon their disciplinary and philosophical backgrounds that further suggest how they can be studied and explored. They are also considered to be essentially 'elusive-private, intangible, transient, unmanageable, and even 'unknowable'-and is a complex that spans disciplinary divides and attention' (Sturdy, 2003; p. 81). The view that emotions are 'private' often conceals and disguise them (Fineman, 2000; Sturdy, 2003) as it creates a fear of intruding the private domain of the research participants. People would either be unaware or would not want to accept emotional experiences unless and until they are placed in a context that they perceive is 'safe' to be expressed (Ellis, 1991). This makes the study of emotions even more difficult.

Emotions are thus no longer considered as inappropriate for the organisation or non serious topic to study (Tran, 1998) but there is still a dearth in the empirical investigation of emotions within the organisational context. Organisational tools, such as, performance appraisal and assessment, policies and rules etc produce a lived feeling of either controlling others or being controlled by others (Fineman, 2000). The modern bureaucratic institutions are 'iron cages' that are able to control members' thoughts, actions, and subjective experiences through powerful control methods of monitoring and coercion, which are apparently not visible, designed around cultural and structural elements, which redefine one' sense of self and morality (Nugent and Abolafia, 2007; p. 210). Organisations have a long history of exploiting human emotions in pursuit of achieving their own rational benefits (Peters and Waterman, 1982).

The rational view of the organisation still dominates the managerial practices and leadership styles of the governance processes. The atmosphere of the organisations is machine like and is occupied by the 'myth of rationality' (Mumby and Putnam, 1992). And are in the continuous process of creating and recreating the myth of rationality usually in organisational spaces where 'rational' decisions are made, such as the boardroom (Samra-Fredericks, 2000). The boardroom is central to the governance process as board members are considered of having the highest authority in the organisation (Sonnenfeld, 2002).

The literature on governance is rich with financial and economic perspectives that treat actors of the governance process as 'rational beings' to maximise rational outputs. The human aspect has been mainly kept aside as emotions are still considered to be inappropriate in the boardroom. This article builds upon the argument that emotions exist in the boardroom as a routine practice. They can be appreciated and used as a resource for decision making process (Fineman, 2000), as 'invisible asset' (Eide, 2005), and can be acknowledged as a centre for all human experiences (Muchinsky, 2000) rather than something to be neglected, suppressed or controlled.

This study therefore attempts to break the ice further and explore the way emotions are enacted and produced in the board room in one of the largest public sector organisation - the NHS Foundation Trusts. Attention is paid to emotions as board members engage in negotiating their interactions in board meetings, either during decision making or accountability. This paper is a part of the ongoing doctoral study and concentrates on one of the NHS Foundation Trust in London.

This article is structured as follows: First we build the rationale for studying emotions in the context of the boardroom. This is followed by a discussion on the public sector governance with a particular focus on the NHS boards. The next section gives a background of the research context and methodology. Finally, we provide empirical illustrations of how emotions emerge in relation to different issues in the two interrelated spaces of the governance process of the NHS Foundation Trust- the directors and the governors meetings.

Emotions in the Boardroom

Human beings cannot act without feelings (Fineman, 2003) and therefore no decision is unemotional (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007). It thus becomes crucial to explore emotions in the board process and the way decisions are made. Boards are important as they are always at the centre of scandals (Pettigrew, 1992).

The study on boards has been mainly dominated by the agency theory and cross sectional studies that concentrate on the structural aspects of the board (Pettigrew, 1992; Roberts et al, 2005; Petrovic, 2008; Brundin and Nordqvist, 2008). This perspective is not sufficient to have a better understanding of the 'inner working' of the boards and the 'actual behaviour' of the board members (Forbes and Milliken, 1999; Maitlis, 2004; Pye and Pettigrew, 2005). The empirical literature on boardrooms is dominated by quantitative methods using secondary data and based upon the samples taken from North American companies that increase the probability of having a North American bias (Huse, 2009).

Studies on the behavioural perspective of the boardroom are still rare mainly due to the inadequate access to the 'managerial elites' (Pettigrew, 1992; Huse, 1998; Clarke, 1998; Leblanc and Gillies, 2005). Researchers who have used qualitative methods to study the behavioural aspect of the boardroom mostly rely on 'reported' experiences (e.g. Pye, 2001; Pettigrew and McNulty, 1995; McNulty and Pettigrew, 1999) of the board members. Also, in the recent years some of the researchers have explored the 'lived' experiences of the board members that points towards the existence of emotions in the board room (e.g. Leblanc and Gillies,2005; Huse, 1998), but only a few (e.g. Brundin and Nordqvist, 2008) have explored emotions in particular. Furthermore, emotions in the boardroom have been studied during intense situation of crisis or change (e.g. Brundin, 2002; Brundin and Nordqvist, 2008) that triggers strong emotions, which can be easily observed. It is not necessary that emotions emerge only during intense situations rather they exist every time, everywhere with varying intensities (Fineman, 2000). Emotions in every day practice have received

less attention and still need to be explored further (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Briner, 1999) particularly in difficult spaces (e.g. boardrooms).

Researchers argue (e.g. Pettigrew, 1992; Robert et al., 2005; Petrovic, 2008; Brundin and Nordqvist, 2008; Huse, 2009) that the future research on boardrooms should focus on the actual behaviour of the boardroom and this should be explored by being there and sharing the same time and spaces as that of the board members. This will further help to understand what the board members actually do and how decisions are made (Pettigrew, 1992). It has been pointed out that this will support the theoretical development in this field (Pettigrew, 1992; Huse, 1998; Petrovic, 2008). Also, the board does not work in isolation and is influenced by what happens in the other social spaces, both formal and informal (Huse, 2009). Hence, a 'holistic' picture (Pettigrew, 1992; Huse, 2009) will be more useful to understand how various voices of actors are managed and 'controlled' in the governance process.

Public Sector Governance and NHS Boards

Our understanding of the public sector boards is even less than that of the private sector boards (Clatworthy et al., 2000). Research on the public sector boards is basically informed from the results of the private sector boards even though they are different- justified as most of the public sector boards now have a private sector model (ibid). The main difference between the private and the public sector boards lies in public sector's 'process of bureaucratisation' which is their key feature (Wilson, 1991). The public sector is based upon public law and public finance which are 'important bureaux of the state' (Schofield, 2001; p. 79).

Boards in the health sector too have a private sector model (Ferlie et al., 1996). They have undergone major transitions that aimed to make them more robust and active. The major wave of change, also known as the 'New Public Management' began in 1979 and gave rise to a 'managerialist model' against the 'public administration model' in the NHS (National Health Services) (Schofield, 2001). The intention behind the reforms was to increase privatisation, delegation to localities, competition, the promotion of enterprise, deregulation, focus on service quality and the curtailment of trade union powers (Thomson, 1992). These changes attempted to introduce board of board members, flatter hierarchies and extensive network structures (Schofield, 2001) that turned out to be 'real' rather than mere 'superfluous relabelling exercise' (Ferlie et al., 1996).

These reforms have led the private realm to penetrate in the public realm which presents a challenge in itself. NHS boards are thus encouraged to appoint a high profile CEO from the private sector instead of elected and staff representatives (Ferlie et al., 1996). All these structural and compositional changes made the boards more business-like with the purpose of attracting senior and skilled personnel providing strategic direction and shaping the passive roles of the board members (Farrell, 2005; Ferlie et al., 1996). Such reforms made the boards more active that were previously extensively criticised for being a 'rubber stamp' (Day and Klein, 1987). Yet structural changes alone are not sufficient to have an effective board. The behavioural side of the boardroom had to be improved as well to have an effective board.

It was expected that the reforms in the public sector will replace bureaucracy by post-bureaucracy, but it created an extended or flexible form of bureaucracy rather than post-bureaucracy (Budd, 2007). Even today NHS remains a public sector organisation with its hierarchical control structures and bureaucratic practices as reflected through the bureaucratic behaviour in the NHS in daily life (Schofield, 2001).

Boards in the NHS Foundation Trusts are more independent than the other NHS Trust boards. However, they are more under pressure as compared to the private sector boards. They have to meet the standards set by the government and are continuously regulated and monitored by the government bodies. Also, the political climate creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and stress in the boardroom as NHS is always a main public issue for elections.

Similar to the private sector boards, studies on the NHS boards also indicates the presence of emotions in the board room and its influence on the work processes and the decision making process (e.g. Bevington *et al*, 2005). Their study over 250 NHS boards indicate the significance of culture, characterised by 'constructive' challenges and trusts that shapes interaction and produce various emotions in the boardroom (ibid).

Context and Methodology

The study lies in the interpretive paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). We take a social constructionist perspective and view emotions as a socially and culturally constituted phenomenon, the experience and expression of which is determined by 'feeling rules' (Hochshild, 1979, 1983); reflected in everyday language as they are 'lived' and 'performed' during board meetings as part of their daily practice (Sturdy, 2003). The performative role of emotions is more profound at the top level (as indicated by most of the studies on leaders emotions e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; George, 2000; Humphrey, 2002) as emotions expressed by a board member can guide others towards a certain action. Emotions are also a 'process' that changes over time and space (Barbalet, 1998; Fineman, 2000), which makes them to be a dynamic, emergent, and interactive phenomenon (Fineman and Sturdy, 1999; Sturdy, 2003, Riain, 2009) and hence creates more difficulty in defining and exploring emotions. In order to conduct this study, we take an ethnographic approach as we aim to explore emotions in the 'real time' settings where they are lived and performed and where their close relationship with daily interactions, events and processes can be explored in depth (Sturdy, 2003).

This study is being conducted in one of the Foundation Trusts in London. Foundation Trusts are not for profit public benefit corporations that were created in the NHS Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 (Dixon *et al*., 2010). The Foundations Trusts are assessed and authorised by Monitor. They have a unique governance structure which is divided into three levels: community members, board of governors, and board of directors. The community members (local residents, patients, staff and nominated representatives from key stakeholder organisations) elect the board of governors who then appoint (and can remove) the chair and the non executive directors (National Audit Office, 2001). Governors are volunteers and hence not paid. The purpose of having governors is to make sure that the public interest is safeguarded. Their composition can vary but as per the general guidelines of Department of Health (2005) there should be at least one governor representing the local NHS primary care trusts; one governor representing local authorities in the area; three governors representing staff, and if possible, at least one from the local university, if the trust's hospitals include a medical or dental school.

Directors are divided into executives, non executive directors and the non voting directors. There are six executive directors, five non executive directors and three non voting directors. This Trust is currently short of two non executive directors. The executive directors are responsible for the routine management of the Trust. The non executive directors bring their expertise to the board and ensure that the governance in the Trust adheres to best practice through critical accountability. The chair and the non executive directors appoint (and can remove) the chief executive with the approval of the board of governors (National Audit Office, 2001). The board is responsible for the overall performance of the Trust and is also accountable to the governors, local communities,

government, national regulators, partner organisations and department of health. The board of directors meetings in this Foundation Trust are held monthly while the board of governors meeting is held once in every quarter. Both the meetings have a private and a public session.

The purpose of this 'radical' and unusual governance structure is to shift 'control' to the local communities (Klein, 2003) and to increase accountability of the board members. In principle, the governance structure of the Foundation Trusts seems very ideal, but in practice it is 'seriously flawed' (ibid). It poses a substantial challenge to the effectiveness of the governance process as there are a large number of actors involved. However, it is yet to be explored to which extent 'control' has been transferred to the general public or whether or not the governance structure has proved to be futile. Such debate has yet to be based on sound empirical evidence. The way different voices are managed becomes a matter of concern. This could be the main reason behind why the survey conducted by ACCA (May 2007) in collaboration with the department of health revealed that the understanding of governance by the board members is very much focused on 'control' rather than 'direction'.

The data is being collected by the first author through observation of two inter-related spaces of the governance process; the board of directors and board of governors meeting, over a period of six months. Six board of directors meetings have been attended so far that also includes two private sessions. The private session of the meeting is for one hour and the public session is for two hours which all together makes three hours. Also, three public sessions of the board of governors meeting have been attended that lasted for two hours. The first author does not have an access to the agenda of the private session which creates difficulty in understanding the context of discussion. The observations of the meetings have been followed by in depth interviews from the board members and the governors. Three interviews have taken from the board members and ten from the governors that were tape recorded. The observations helped to understand the atmosphere, gestures and body language of the board members that signifies emotional dynamics (Brundin and Nordqvist, 2008). The in depth interviews explore the way board members give 'meaning' to their emotional experiences (Gold, 1997).

The boardroom where the director's meeting is held is located in a secure location that can be accessed only by staff. Members of the public have to request the receptionist or the security to access the boardroom. The first author had a bit of difficulty in getting an access to the first public meeting. The receptionist referred her to the security who allowed her after a bit of explanation that she is a member of the public and wants to attend the public session. Later, the practice was established to report to the receptionist who was informed beforehand by the PA of the chair.

The boardroom is bright with photographs on the wall which creates a pleasant atmosphere. The board members sit in a circular form all facing towards each other. The seats for the public are kept at the back towards the wall. Some of the board members participate more in the private session as compared to the public session. Others don't participate at all while a few are outspoken. As soon as the public session begins the chair reminds the behavioural protocol to the members of the public that '*this is a meeting held in public and not a public board meeting*'. Paradoxically, the public are excluded from the discussion. However, unlike many other Trusts, the chair has been generous and can allow the public to speak. Other chairs may never give public the chance to have any direct participation as their participation is seen to distort the proceedings and interaction among the board members. Their participation also creates a likelihood of unpleasant situations which makes the chair say '*you may have speaking rights as long as you are respecting the chair*'.

The data has been analysed by using thematic analysis by looking at emerging themes of emotions in relation to different issues. The initial data analysis can be divided into two sets. One set focuses

on the emotions of the first author whilst interacting with the board members in terms of getting access and conduct in the field. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it gives insight to the complexities involved in gaining access to the NHS Boards. Secondly, her presence stimulated emotions among the board members very strongly. The second set focuses on emotions from the point of view of the 'actors' of the governance process (i.e. directors and governors) during governors and directors meetings. It further gives a picture as to how the directors and the governors and the governors among themselves are related to each other. Table 1 summarises the emergence of emotions in relation to different situations during the governors and the directors meetings that will be discussed in detail in the following empirical evidence.

Table 1: Emotions of the Main actors during Board Meetings

Stories from the Field	*Meetings*	*Main actors Involved*	*Emotions*
Getting Inside the Boardroom	Board of Directors Meetings: *Public session*	First author Chair	Frustration Anger Anxiety Embarrassment
The Executives '*Fear of Unknown*'	Board of Directors Meetings: *Private and Public session*	CEO Executive directors Non executive directors	Fear Resent Frustration Anger contempt Bewilderment (surprise)
Passionate debate in the governors meeting: '*Generation of a Lot of Heat and not much Light*'	Board of Governors Meetings: *Public session*	Chair CEO Governors Board members	Helplessness Anger Frustration Apathy Disempowerment Discomfort Contempt

Getting Inside the Boardroom

Getting inside boardrooms is a difficult process that requires the researcher's courage and patience. The experiences shared by other researchers could be a useful guide, but may not be taken as an absolute solution to all the problems encountered whilst negotiating access as boardrooms are not alike.

The experience of the first author shows that 'confidentiality' is not a key issue in gaining access as it can be dealt in several ways, for example, by having an ethical approval for the study or by signing a confidentiality agreement. The actual problem is that the board members do not want to have an 'outsider' in their board who is seen as an 'intruder' to their privacy or 'a fly on the wall' (Leblanc, 2001). However, getting an access to the boardrooms is relatively easier if the board members know the researcher, either because they are renowned scholars having expertise in the governance processes (e.g. Pye, 2001) or they are practitioners and have been a board member (e.g. Leblanc and Gillies, 2005; Huse,1998, 2009). For an alien overseas student who hardly has any personal contacts with the 'organisational elites' in the host country, the whole process can turn out to be a 'nightmare'.

Our primary strategy for gaining an access was to attend the public sessions of these meetings that not only helped in understanding of 'cultural practices' but also opened up the possibility of speaking with the chairs regarding the research project. Very few chairs were interested in academic

investigation which is strange as most of the Trusts encourage research practice and research culture in their board meetings.

Another strategy for gaining access could be to attend community events that are arranged by the Trusts for the community members. This provides an opportunity for informal networking with the board members. The first author did not attend the community meetings for 'practical' and 'theoretical' reasons. Firstly, she did not qualify to be a community member of this particular Foundation Trust. Secondly, the study does not focus on the voice of the community as such as they do not directly influence on what happens inside the boardroom. Their influence in the board meetings is through their representatives (i.e. governors) that have direct influence on what happens inside the boardroom. Hence, this study concentrates more on the board of directors and governors as crucial 'actors' in the governance process.

Initially the first author chose to have a 'covert' research to gather data. She wanted to be 'disguised' as a general public but when she reached the boardroom the entire idea of being 'invisible' disappeared within seconds, as the first author 'stood out' as being totally different from others. The absence of general public was noticeable. The only members of the public who attended the board meeting were either staff or governors wearing a formal conservative attire. The situation became very uncomfortable rather embarrassing as everyone was staring at her. She wanted to run away but conducting this research was a matter of being brave and courageous in a group that made her stand out as different and 'unacceptable'.

The situation turned out to be similar in all boards but the prior experience prepared her for future actions. The general atmosphere of boardrooms is very formal. Members of the public who attend the board meeting are only staff, governors or stakeholders and their number can be counted on finger tips. Sometimes there is not even a single member of the public in the board meeting. It was notable in all the meetings that the general public (or community members) do not attend the directors and the governors meeting. This is a matter of concern as it is a 'public board meeting'. There could be number of reasons for this lack of participation; the public has been unaware of public meetings, they are not interested to know how the Foundation Trust is being managed and what decisions are being made; they completely rely on governors; or they might feel that it is useless to attend meetings as their voice will not be heard.

The first author met the chair of this Foundation Trust after the public meeting who turned out to be a bit 'strange' as unlike many others he was very supportive. People at the top do not appreciate the study of emotions, particularly using ethnography as a method. After the introductory meeting, it took about a month time to have a detailed meeting with the chair in which the entire research process and the methodology was explained and discussed. There were few concerns about methodology as organisations prefer to have immediate quantifiable outcomes which this study does not offer. However, it did not become a major issue for the chair. Also, the chair wanted to check if this study required an ethical approval from the NHS. In the next conversation with the chair after the public session, he made it very explicit that he might have to refuse access to the private meetings, if even a single board member disagreed. He suspected that even her presence can influence the participation of the board members.

After waiting for two more months, the first author was finally allowed to attend the private session of the board meetings. Before granting access the Foundation Trust made sure that the ethical approval from the university has been obtained. This period of waiting was indeed a 'test of patience'. It was quite frustrating for a doctoral student as there are time and financial constraints.

One major obstacle was overcome but there were more hurdles waiting in the field. The board members were not interested to participate in the research. It took time to build rapport and trust in the field. Another distressing period was the issue of having an ethical approval from the NHS which was emerged after having a conversation with Health and Human Sciences department of the university. This was quite an intensive moment as the first author was already in the middle of her fieldwork. The matter was resolved when she got the written permission from the Foundation Trusts for this study but one of them has put the first author in a difficult position as she have to show the material every time prior to any publication to ensure that the confidentiality and anonymity of the Trust is maintained. However, the entire episode made her understand that people in the NHS lacks serious understanding of research in social sciences.

The next section further outlines the emotions of the first author and from the point of view of the board members while accessing the private meetings. It also reflects the attitude of the board members towards research and their view on emotions.

The Executives 'Fear of the Unknown'

Fear of Public Disclosure

Having a board meeting in public is a new experience for the board members. The underlying 'fear' of 'public exposure' makes them careful in what is being said and how is it being said in the public. This is decided either by the chair or the CEO. The chair may interrupt the discussion during board meeting:

> *'there shouldn't be any further discussion (on this) in the public meeting'*

If the board member leaks out any private information (unknowingly) during discussion, or require any further details that should not be discussed in public, the CEO stops the director:

> *'I am not sure whether we should give this answer in public… this is not the time and place to discuss about it. There are issues that should not be talked in public'.*

The board members avoid the discussion of certain issues that can damage the public 'image' and 'reputation' of the Trust. This fear of 'exposure' is not only confined to what is being said in the board meetings but is also there when talking to researchers.

The research in the Trust can be conducted only when the director of strategy ensures that the research is *'bonafide'*. The first author had taken the permission from the chair to interview the board members and the governors, which he agreed would be subject to their consent to participate in the study. She had assumed that it was enough to seek his permission, but it turned out to be a different story when the director of strategy came looking for the first author after the public meeting and asked:

> *'Can you please tell me the names of the people you have been interviewing?'*

This created an 'unpleasant' situation both for the director of strategy and the first author as she refused to disclose any names. For the director of corporate strategy, it was a matter of 'knowing' everything and for the first author it was a matter of being ethical. The demand of disclosure of the research participants clearly violated the basic principles of research ethics.

The curiosity of the director of strategy of knowing the research participants could be due to the fact that the governors and the board members have to inform or seek her consent before participating in any research. In this case, the first author had consulted the chair and perhaps the director of strategy was not informed about the details. His role basically 'controls' the conduct and behaviour of directors and governors in the boardroom by assuring that they adhere to best practice. However, the excessive control can subjugates the absolute independence of the board members and the governors to participate in research.

The first author also had to pay attention to this unusual incidence in the field as she could have been easily used as a 'tool' for their internal squabbles. Governors too were curious to know the board members perception and opinion in relation to different matters discussed in the meetings.

Studying Emotions in the Boardroom

The presence of the researcher in the board meetings stimulates strong emotions among the board members as well. The moment the first author entered the boardroom to attend the private meeting the board members became 'concerned' and surprised. Their eyes wandered who the first author is. The chair was not there and the vice chair had to chair the board meeting. She had assumed that the board members would know that she is there to observe the meetings but to her surprise the CEO asked the director of strategy:

> *'Who is she?' (with a harsh tone).*

The director of strategy replied:

> *'She is a researcher and the chair wants her to attend the private session of the meeting'.*

The CEO gave expressions of 'contempt' as he did not wanted the researcher to observe their private meetings. Furthermore, his 'unawareness' of having a stranger in their private meeting could have added fuel to the fire. Throughout the board meeting the board members turned around to give a 'glance' to the first author to see what she was doing. At the end of the board meeting she wanted to speak to the board members, but one of the non executive directors explicitly said:

> *'I don't have time for researchers'*

The first author was not prepared for such an unwelcoming attitude and was emotionally intensive for her to manage the situation. The presence of the chair in the board meeting might have influenced the attitude of the board members towards the researcher in a different way. The encouragement to have a research culture in the Trust appears to be a mere 'talk' and is supported mainly by the chair.

Furthermore, the other reason for the lack of participation is the 'denial' of emotions in the boardroom by the board members It is seen as a 'threat' to the 'illusion of rationality' that the board members constantly struggle to maintain by 'denying' or 'controlling' emotions (Nugent and Abolafia, 2007). The CEO said in an interview:

> *'There can't be any emotions. This is business. You have to deal with different people's opinion, disappointments and frustration, and you just have to be professional about it'.*

The executive director had 'similar' views:

'I think the emotional life is a little suppressed on the board actually. It is more formal… by sticking to your role, making your thoughts and action much more considerate, than they would be in a less formal sitting. I think some of the emotions are actually driven out of the way. And good emotion, bad emotion, don't know because there are much bad emotion around'.

In the quest of denying emotions, directors too agree that emotions are there in the governance process as reflected from the above statement. However, they attempt to bifurcate rationality and emotionality that is constructed on the belief of 'objectivity' in decision making (Hatcher, 2008). Recent studies indicate that rationality and emotionality are intertwined and interrelated (Leventhal, 1980; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Fineman, 2000; Hartel, et al., 2005) which the board members do not understand as they cannot see beyond the 'myth of rationality'.

The next section explores emotions in the context of the board of governors meetings which is another crucial space of the governance process. It creates a heated debate as the governors meeting is more about accountability rather than decision making.

Passionate Debate in the Governors Meetings: 'Generation of a Lot of Heat and not much Light'

Board of governors meeting is a large social space which is created by the two main groups of actors (i.e. governors and directors) of the governance process. The central actor is the chair in these meetings. Other crucial actors are the CEO, governors and the board members (particularly executive directors) who sit as a member of the public in these meetings. The CEO is not a member of the governors but sits besides the chair and speaks with 'power' and 'authority' that not only comes due to his position but also because the Foundation Trust is performing well. The CEO said in an interview:

'They (board of governors) like to think that I am a mem(ber) ☐⌐if I speak, I am speaking with enormous authority because I am the chief executive… but actually I am not even a member of the board of governors'.

The governors meeting can turn out be a 'chaos' as it is composed of a large spectrum of people who have different backgrounds, experiences, vested interests and agendas on board. some governors are too eager to participate in the discussion that others do not even get the chance to speak. Others might be reluctant to participate as they feel incapable or have a 'fear' of public speaking. Some may just sit there and 'watch', either they are not interested or they do not understand what is going on. The governors meetings are very 'emotive' as there are underlying feelings of apathy, frustration, discomfort, disempowerment and helplessness. The governor in his own words defines the governors meeting as:

'I think the board of governors meeting is a little bit like being in a communist party of the soviet union in the 1930s in that we a re fed, what we are meant to read and to make a decision on…'

This creates a challenging situation for the chair whose role not only becomes more of a 'coordinator' (the chair himself says), but also continuously struggles to manage his own 'emotions' and 'identity' that emerges due to duality of roles, that is, being a chair of both the directors and the governors meetings. A slight change in this balance can create 'suspicion' in the minds of the governors, as they see him as a 'spokesperson' or representative of the directors. It shows the lack of trust of the governors in the chair as one of them said during the meeting:

'I am concerned whether the viewpoint of the board of governors will be communicated to the board of directors'

The havoc in the governors meetings is mainly created due to two main reasons. Firstly, when the governors have a feeling of 'exclusion' from the governance process, and 'disempowerment' on the decisions that are taken at the top. Their frustration is expressed as:

'They just see it (governors) as a necessary evil in order to become a Foundation Trust. In order to tick the box they have to have one, they have one. But because it actually has very few powers, they have to sort of, treat it as... (pause). Yeah! What's the point of board of governors?'

Secondly, Some of the governors bring the same issues that are '*close to their hearts*' again and again which is also a matter of frustration, discomfort, dislikeness and even suppressed anger by the fellow governors:

'Well! Each individual governor has their own particular hobby horse and you can expect them to pipe up at the appropriate moment...'

Governors sharing the same interests and agendas have formed 'covert alliances' which also breeds discontentment. As one of the governor's expresses her hidden anger and frustration during the interview:

'they might be meeting outside or they might be emailing and whatever so if one says something two three come up in support of that person'.

The tension that creates out of the entire situation disrupts the smooth proceedings of the meetings, its organisation and ultimately effectiveness. This creates a difficult moment both for the chair and the governors. It not only creates 'frustration' and 'annoyance' among governors but also questions the 'competency' of the chair in chairing the governors meetings. The leadership style becomes a centre of attention and is easily blamed for not having effective meetings. One of the governors said:

'I have seen our chairman in action chairing the board of directors. I think he is excellent. He drives it very well. I feel that to him the governors are a necessary inconvenience. I don't think he prepares sufficiently well for our meetings. I don't think he knows how to handle them, and I find board of governors meetings very frustrating. I was close to resigning one day on very small issues that proves to be waste of time...I think there is a lot ego in there and you have got to be very very careful how you handle it'.

Governors also 'suffer' from lack of clarity of their roles. In this sense, they continuously compare themselves with the board members as one of the governor said in an interview:

'Directors are paid. We are not paid. I still don't understand why. We should be paid as well. We are doing the similar type of work'.

The board members (mainly the executive directors) are another group of actors who are present in the governors meetings. Non executive directors do not say much in the board of governors meetings. Paradoxically, their presence helps the chair to 'act' like a chair as they are there for reporting and accountability. The style of accountability is more like a 'parliamentary' accountability' which creates a highly emotive atmosphere. It appears that the directors do not want to be held accountable to governors as it is a matter of being 'superior' as one of the director said:

'Theoretically they (governors) are superior, but practically they are not'

This view of their selves is an outcome of having more powers that creates friction between the two groups. The relationship between the two groups becomes at stake which is crucial for effective

governance. At an individual level, the governors and directors get along with each other very well. The tension begins when they become representatives of their respective groups. However, to an extent, the lack of understanding among the two groups can be improved further as recommended by one of the governor:

'I would like to see a much closer relationship between (the directors and the governors). I would like to see a close coordination ... I don't see enough of governors and directors sit together and work together and I am sure if that happens there will grow respect between the two.'

This entire picture of the board of governors meetings raises serious doubts about the effectiveness of their board meetings. Paradoxically, the experience and their eagerness to participate in governance can be used effectively. There should be a greater coordination among all these actors by keeping personal egos and the 'superior' view of themselves aside to improve the functioning of the Foundation Trust.

Discussion

In this study we have shown how emotions are enacted and produced in the two crucial and interrelated social spaces of the governance process in the NHS Foundation Trust– the board of directors and the board of governors meetings. It explores emotions in context of the boardrooms by sharing the same time and space (by the first author) as that of the main 'actors' in the governance process.

The empirical evidence suggests that the existence of emotions cannot be denied and ignored in the governance process. The way board members and governors' experience and express emotions depend upon the way they 'interpret' situations. Secondly, it shows that there is a lack of trust and respect among the governors themselves and between the governors and the board members. Thirdly, this research also helps to create an understanding of the point of view of these actors in relation to different issues. For the practitioners, this research offers an understanding and significance of emotions in the governance process. We suggest that they can consider designing ways for improving governance in general and the board practice in particular.

Furthermore, this study also endorses Samra-Fredericks (2000), Huse (1995), Leblanc and Schwartz (2007), Brundin and Nordqvist (2008) that it is possible to study boards in real time settings, though gaining access to boardrooms is a challenge is extremely difficult. This study can be improved further by gaining access to the sub-committee meetings of the directors as these are other crucial social spaces which are further 'behind the scenes', and directly influences the way decisions are made in the board meetings. The unwillingness of the board members to participate in the study particularly non executive directors is yet another issue that limits the understanding of emotions in the boardroom. However, the important contribution is to observe the lived emotional experiences of the key actors in the private and the public meetings as against simply relying only on reported experiences. This research also develops a better understanding of emotions in the context of the boardroom by making sense of the multiple voices in the governance process. It will also be an important contribution to the literature on public sector governance.

Future research can also be conducted on the emotions underpinning the relationships of the community members and the governors. The voice of the staff and the health partner institutions can also be included as they are the key stakeholders of the Foundation Trusts.

Conclusion

The significance of an emotions in the boardroom cannot be denied. The board members accept the existence of emotions but deny as it is considered to be 'inappropriate' for the board practice. In light of the above discussion, it is important for the practitioners to understand and appreciate emotions as it is crucial for effective governance.

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