

Take on Board podcast - transcript

Transcript – Zora Artis

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the take on board podcast, I'll be speaking with Zora Artis about being an effective board member and risk oversight. Zora is the chair of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), on the Asia Pacific regional board. She was formerly on the ABC international executive board from 2016 to 2019. And IABC Victorian chapter board from 2012 to 2016, including a stint as president from 2013 to 2015. Zora is the CEO of Artis Advisory a strategic advisory practice focused on helping clients succeed, whether it's solving a business problem, or leveraging opportunities through better organizational alignment, engagement and communication. Zora has almost three decades of experience in business marketing, communication, advertising and branding. Welcome to the take on board podcast, Laura.

Zora Artis 0:52

Thank you Helga.

Helga Svendsen 0:54

So Zora, before we explore being an effective board member and risk, I'd like to explore a little bit more about you. Can you tell me something that you're proud of from the last month or so?

Zora Artis 1:05

In the last month, it's been a bit of a whirlwind, I've stepped off the international executive board at the IABC. And I've stepped into the role of chair for Asia Pacific. So it's it's been a month of lots of activity, lots of goodbyes, lots of hellos, all that sort of thing. There's also been a whole new board for Asia Pacific. So I have nine new board members out of 13 and bringing them on board doing the induction process with them. I also had the opportunity to present at the IABC World Conference in Vancouver where we had 1400 delegates from 42 countries attending. And I ran a three hour session on being a strategic advisor with 100 senior professionals. And that was an incredible experience. It was lots of fun. And it was really pleased to be doing that.

Helga Svendsen 2:01

How fantastic to be able to share your wisdom in that way internationally as well.

Zora Artis 2:05

It was really good because we had quite a lot of senior people in the room. And interestingly, people are really looking at how can they deliver better value to their organizations through what they do? How can they bring the executives along, make them more aligned focused on on the real purpose and values as well as the goals of the organization so they can actually work better from a cross functional perspective.

Helga Svendsen 2:30

So is there a particular moment or something in that workshop with those hundred people that stands out for you?

Zora Artis 2:37

Well, the opening was interesting, because I was trying to bring home the point of alignment and do it in a creative way. So the opening was me playing "We Will Rock You" by Queen at Wembley Stadium extremely loud, just the audio video. And interestingly enough, the executive board was having their meeting, the new board was having their meeting just down the hall, I was trying to disturb them, which is quite funny. During that song going off, the people in the audience just started clapping, tapping their feet. I danced on stage. So yeah, it was pretty fun.

Helga Svendsen 3:12

Fantastic. It's not often you get somebody dancing on stage for that. But that music is so addictive. So

Zora Artis 3:19

I mean, the whole point was everyone knew everyone came together. So they all knew what their role was. Yeah, the alignment piece was perfect. It was a metaphor for it. Yeah, unfortunately, I didn't see.

Helga Svendsen 3:32

Fantastic. If you got any video of that, if you're dancing on stage?

Zora Artis 3:36

Now there are photos.

Helga Svendsen 3:39

I might have to steal one of them and share it.

Zora Artis 3:41

Perhaps not.

Helga Svendsen 3:43

So you've been involved with the International Association of Business Communicators? That's quite a mouthful.

Zora Artis 3:49

That's right, we have an acronym

Helga Svendsen 3:50

And it might not be with the script might be it with another but can you tell me about your earliest experience of governance?

Zora Artis 3:57

The earliest experience goes back to my time at the Warwick Cancer Foundation, which was a not for profit a couple of years prior to IABC. And I joined that board as as a board director. And that's where I first experienced governance, you know, properly run board meetings, board papers, preparing for meetings, all of that sort of thing, the agendas and minutes and etc, etc. So they did it well. And that was the very first time I encountered that.

Helga Svendsen 4:27

The International Association of Business Communicators. Can you give us a nutshell about what the organization is about so people know what it is you're involved in.

Zora Artis 4:35

The IABC is a nonprofit membership based Association for business communicators, which means communicators who work across a whole range of disciplines, it could be marketing could be Corporate affairs, PR, change, communications, internal communications, employee comms, that sort of thing. Across a whole range of different sectors. It's it's global, we're in 70 countries, we have 100 chapters. We have over 700 volunteer leaders across those chapters, 10,000 paid members and community of more than 50,000. So we're 50 years old next year. We started earlier in different guises before that, but most of the members are located in North America. And the third largest cohort is in Australia, the local chapter here in Melbourne IABC Victoria is the fifth largest in the world. It's a very energetic community, people who are in IABC feel like they're part of a tribe. It's the most incredible sense of belonging that I've ever seen. I could as an IABC member, I could call anybody anywhere who's a member in the world without knowing them, and say, I have an issue with x, you're in that space? What are your thoughts on that? Would you be able to help me and I will, they'll give you time. So if you're connected, someone on LinkedIn I dare say that wouldn't happen. Whereas with our IABC that does, and we're pretty much looking at how communication can be a force for good in business and in society.

Helga Svendsen 6:06

It's interesting in a membership organization, there's lots of membership organizations around but not many have that real connection that you're describing for IABC. So it's a real credit to the organization that is created. And in fact, I'd be interested in, do you think there's something in the governance of the organization that really supports that engagement with the membership?

Zora Artis 6:25

Well, everything we do looks at decisions from the perspective of the member. So the membership is our key stakeholder. So when we're looking at the sustainability of the organization, when we looking at risk, we look at what would our stakeholders accept? So decisions are made with that lens? And is it delivering on true value to the members? Is it delivering for the sustainability of the organization is the way we operate is that the best way we can actually operate? Is there a different model we could look at, there's a whole range of different things that we're take into account. From a governance perspective at global, we're very, very good at that. We have a governance manager, we follow governance principles, non profit governance principles, US based, which are different to Australia, not as stringent as Australia, nevertheless, but they do follow them. And we do have best practice principles that we then share with all our chapters and regions to try and ensure that they also follow us

Helga Svendsen 7:28

I'm on the board of the Royal Women's Hospital and we, you know, it's patient centered care and consumer centered care. So whether you're a membership organization or not keeping those stakeholders whoever your key stakeholders might be being front of mind is really important. And it sounds like it's something that IABC is doing magnificently.

Zora Artis 7:45

We do do it. Well, we also need to think more broadly as well, because not everyone in our membership base, or should I say there are more people that are part of the community that aren't members. So we do take into account the non members as well. So because we are looking at how do we give back to the profession? How do we advance the profession globally? So we take on board that leadership role at a global scale, and look at that as well. So one of our core pillars is advancing the profession.

Helga Svendsen 8:18

And of course, they're all your potential members. Of course, you talked about through that membership lens or stakeholder lens, keeping them at the forefront of everything you're doing. You talked about risk in there. And I know risk oversight is something you wanted to talk about today. What are some of the things that you've seen at IABC that have worked well, and maybe some of the things that have not worked so well?

Zora Artis 8:39

It was probably a year before I started on the board. There was a gap between when I finished on the Victorian chapter board and joining the global board. I worked as the chair for the Policy and Governance Committee. So IABC has a lot of committees that are outside the board and it's usually a board member whose liaison is in some fashion. Yep. And that involved me reviewing with the committee reviewing the policy framework for IABC, say how everything's done the bylaws, etc, and looking at what change needed to be done for the board to approve that and if necessary, take to the AGM for approval. But one of the things that was really key was that the chair at the time asked me to look at how we can introduce better risk oversight into the organization. So we had an audit committee, we didn't have an audit and risk committee, we didn't have a risk committee. So IABC, at that point, although they did take risk into account when they're making decisions, they didn't have a risk appetite statement, they didn't do risk tolerance. So all those things, you know, we should be doing. And we're taught to do when we do the company directors course, hadn't been happening. So I was involved in putting together the onboarding kit for incoming board members, because I was a certified company director. So they looked to me and said, so what would you recommend we do? So that's what I did with him. And then the following year, I was I was asked to step in and nominate for the board for the global board. So for quite a while I was the only certified board director on that board.

Helga Svendsen 10:29

And onboarding kits, you talked about that, what is that?

Zora Artis 10:31

It's all the things that you know, you're looking at we we start that process a few months before the directors join the board. So because we already know who they're going to be have gone through the AGM etc. So the slides have been approved. So we will go through that process of introducing them to what we expect of them as directors, all the usual things with regards to board papers, how they need to be prepared, so many days in advance, all that sort of stuff, how they need to be read before the meetings, you know, to take note of stuff that's actually for noting or for discussion or decision, etc, etc. To be aware that we have a consensus portion of the meeting, board meeting consistent agenda. So anything that's going outings and a consensus and you can pull those things

out if you've got issues with it, that sort of stuff. So all those expectations are covered off in there. Over the last few years, the audit committee became the order and risk committee, I joined that committee and was chair of the committee for a year and then was a member of the committee after that, that it was a process where we looked at introducing a proper risk framework to the board. And my last, at the last board meeting what to do was run a session to define the risk appetite for the board. So that was my outgoing piece.

Helga Svendsen 11:56

Take us through that process of how you introduce both the risk framework to the board. And I'd be really interested to hear how the board developed their risk appetite statement.

Zora Artis 12:06

There was a paper that we had to write at the beginning, this is before I even joined the audit and risk committee. And because of my interest in risk and governance, I helped pull that paper together. And then I managed to get a two hour time slot for one of our face to face meetings. And we have two face to face meetings globally. And they run over a couple of days. And in that session, we looked at risk tolerances, what would we tolerate? What from and to and all that sort of stuff in a number of different areas. And that really opened up people's eyes to what risk is about and how they take that on board. And we just continued with that process driving that home. And then we actually asked from head office perspective, as well as every single committee and each board liaison and each chair of each Committee was involved in identifying risks for their specific areas. And then that came back to the audit risk committee and we pulled that together into a framework presented back to the board and then the board work through it. And we looked at all those risks that you know, you could classify as high high or high medium or medium high, that sort of stuff and basically looked at what we call red, yellow, and green. And follow that through. And each year, we would address that twice a year and look at that. And then we said okay, so the next step now is this is why we need a risk appetite statement. So went through that experience. But we looked at things like you know, in the past, for example, if there were scenarios that a board decision was made on if we looked at that, and we had this risk lens on it, what sort of decision could have been made without looking at who made that decision? Or was there blame or anything like that? That wasn't the point it was like, if this is a scenario, what decision would you make if you had a framework in place? Because it didn't exist? Then

Helga Svendsen 14:10

Did that result in some what would have been slightly different decisions? Or even vastly different decision?

Zora Artis 14:15

A massively different decision? Interesting, wildly different decision?

Helga Svendsen 14:19

Are you able to give us some examples of what some of the risks - the red are the big risks for you right? Can you give us some examples of what some of the big risks would have been for you?

Zora Artis 14:29

Probably not in detail. But for example, IT. IT could be a massive risk. So cyber risk is obviously an issue. But for example, it's a membership based organization, its global GDPR coming into Europe,

and impacting privacy, and how you communicate with people on a database, or in any any way shape or form because they control the data has a massive impact. Because that means that you had to completely change your whole approach to communicating with your members and your non members. And you pretty much have to clean your whole database. Yeah. And so you're going to lose a lot of people all of a sudden, so you're going to have a shorter pipeline was a smaller pipeline. So the likelihood of that potentially happening in other parts of the world is reasonably high. So from a compliance perspective, if you don't follow those rules, you're potentially got major issues financially, reputational, strategic, it all comes to the fall, people in Australia wouldn't necessarily think about GDPR.

[Helga Svendsen 15:41](#)

Yeah, absolutely. Only if you're an international organization like yours

[Zora Artis 15:45](#)

If you're a brand, yeah, that deals with any potential customer that is based in Europe, you're impacted by it and the cost to you is massive.

[Helga Svendsen 15:56](#)

With risks like that, whether it's, you know, the data protection rules, or others that are on your risk framework, I think you mentioned that, it comes back to the board twice a year, the risk framework for review. And also you talked about how you kind of retrofitted for want of a better word, some of that scenarios around what the risk framework would have meant for those decisions. What about for the future into the future? How is it built in and embedded in the work of your board?

[Zora Artis 16:23](#)

So when board papers are put forward for decision or discussion risk is addressed on those each time. So it's now just part of the process.

[Helga Svendsen 16:34](#)

I just want to spend a couple of minutes on being an effective board member. But before we move on to that, is there anything else about risk that you really wanted to... Because that risk oversight is such a key role for board members? Is there anything else you wanted to outline in relation to that?

[Zora Artis 16:48](#)

I think it's important to understand that it's risk oversight. So you're not actually managing all aspects of the risk, because you need to identify what what is your role, and what is the role of the management and the staff in the organization. So you need to be quite clear about that. That process.

[Helga Svendsen 17:08](#)

And so in relation to being an effective board member, what are your tips there?

[Zora Artis 17:13](#)

You know, if you're joining a board, you have a responsibility as a board director, and part of that is to ensure that you're prepared for the board meetings. So being prepared for the board meetings is, is ensuring that you've read all the board papers. As a board director, if you if you are presenting something to the board, either for noting discussion or decision to make sure that you follow the

process that needs to be followed and have written the board paper in the appropriate way. So with the relevant information, for someone to be able to pick that up read it and be able to make a decision or, or have a discussion about it. That doesn't mean having 100 page document, because that doesn't help anybody. And having that done in a timely fashion. So making sure that it's submitted far enough in advance. So there would be a standard processes or procedures at different boards for that. So making sure that you're following that and giving yourself enough time to do that. The other part of it is in the actual meetings is to ensure that you're quite, comfortable being able to offer your opinion. And by offering your opinion. I mean, it's one that you as I said, you'd have to have prepared for the meeting. So it's not just an opinion, it's actually you know, something where it's evidence based. And you can actually put forth your opinion and say why you don't agree with something or you agree with it, and what else would you suggest? So I think the probing aspect is really, really critical. So being comfortable to be uncomfortable, even if you're disagreeing with everyone else in the room.

Helga Svendsen 18:54

Yeah, absolutely. It's a key task for board members to speak up and say what's on their mind, if you're not sure if it's on other people's mind, or even especially if you're not sure if it's on other people's minds so it's a great tip to have that courage to be uncomfortable.

Zora Artis 19:09

If you do see in a meeting, if you do see that there is some someone else feeling uncomfortable about something, I think it's important to actually have a chat to them on make people aware that there is there is because sometimes you can say that just by facial expressions, someone just doesn't feel right about something. It could be just that their personality or whatever. But it might be something that's quite valid and might contribute to the discussion or conversation. And it's not about having one person be the dominant person in the room.

Helga Svendsen 19:41

Yes calling others out on that as well, just to find out what's on their mind. Yeah. That's not just the chairs role. It's the role of everybody in the room. Can you think of a time that courage to be uncomfortable? Can you think of a time?

Zora Artis 19:55

Yeah, my first board meeting at the global?

Helga Svendsen 19:57

Can you tell us about that?

Zora Artis 19:59

There was someone who was being cut off, who was speaking and I made sure that they weren't being cut off, I stopped the meeting.

Helga Svendsen 20:09

And in the future, things went a little bit more smoothly after you'd made that intervention?

Zora Artis 20:17

I was the one that they said, I don't know if anyone's going to pose a question or be the one who's going to confront or whatever, it'll be Zora

Helga Svendsen 20:29

You are that person in the room?

Zora Artis 20:30

I'm that person in the room? Yeah. So

Helga Svendsen 20:33

Which is great.

Zora Artis 20:34

I don't do it to be rude or make everyone feel uncomfortable? I do it because I think it's it's important that everyone does have a voice. And it's also important that if you have a question you should ask it.

Helga Svendsen 20:48

You've chaired boards before as well. So you've been a member of the board and you've chaired the board. That skill in being able to look around the table and ask people what they think is key for chair, but also important in other board members. But what do you say is the when you've chaired meetings versus just just inverted commas been at the meeting, what do you see is the difference in roles?

Zora Artis 21:09

I think the chair has to have that ability to be able to sense the room to or if it's a virtual meeting, the virtual meeting, to have a sense of what people how they're feeling and what they're thinking. So the chair has to have that relationship with each person and make an effort to actually understand each individual and where they're thinking and what basically, could potentially be going through their mind about a particular issue.

Helga Svendsen 21:39

So that's interesting. I'm wondering at your first board meeting, where you intervened in some way to ensure that people in the room had their say, did the chair check in with you later?

Zora Artis 21:50

The chair and I got along really, really well. So I think he did give me one of those looks, but no, he no, he's absolutely fine. And he's, we get along incredibly well.

Helga Svendsen 22:00

And often one of those looks, it's not a bad thing, it's actually a good thing for when having those robust conversations are a lot harder to have, but they're better to have. So whilst it might be a bit more difficult to chair that type of meeting, it ends up being a much more valuable meeting. If this were a board meeting, the conversation that we just had, and you were chairing the meeting, how might you summarize it? What are some of the key things you want people to take away?

Zora Artis 22:26

Be prepared for the board meeting, definitely make sure that you understand what's being put forward to the board for decision or for discussion. Also, make sure that when you are prepared, that means that you do understand what sort of questions you might ask, understand the different types of risk that are important in making the decision, what's the lens that you're putting across, across the decision. And think about the what are the consequences of what you're actually doing, and have you got the stakeholders at heart and also, so not just shareholders, but stakeholders at heart and think about the relationships that are happening in the room, the well being of the people in the room to make sure that they're everyone feels quite comfortable about the discussion that's happening. And if there is disagreement, that's okay. And ultimately, the decision is a shared decision. So even if you disagree with it, at the end of the day, it's the decision that the board makes, and you support it outside of that room.

Helga Svendsen 23:34

And again, if this were a board meeting, and you're putting together the action sheet, what might be some actions you would suggest for people to take around either the risk oversight area or being an effective board member?

Zora Artis 23:47

I think it's important to read as much as you can, in terms of like, so company directors have quite a lot of information that comes out, governance Institute, that sort of thing. But there are other areas as well, we can look at how boards are run, and how you can be a better board member listening to this podcast is that is a key thing as well. Also, being brave and curious is important. So curiosity is making sure that you're open to learning from all sorts of areas. So being across what is happening, what are the trends? So at the moment, if you look at boards, and where the trends are going, everyone's talking about AI, for example, how's that going to impact how boards run people looking at culture, so they're looking at a whole range of different types of things that traditionally, you know, might not have necessarily been within the, the expected parameters of the board, but they're definitely there. And also thinking about how can you develop your skills bit further, and going out and doing that certification program or joining the additional study? I think it's really important to make sure that you are better at what you do. I remember I was, when I was at IABC Victoria, I took on the role as the board chair or board president at the time. And partway through, I had finished my company directors course. And then I completely changed how we operate it. Because I realized that I thought I had hadn't done the knowledge. And then I went and did that. And then I thought, Oh, no, no, I need to change what we do. So I completely change it from that point. And that's when I became the governance gig.

Helga Svendsen 25:34

Love it. Love good governance gig. So can you recommend a resource to the take on board community? Is there a book or a podcast or a TED talk, or anything you'd like to recommend?

Zora Artis 25:48

I do like three, not necessarily just, they're not really just about boards or anything like that. It's more about leadership. And one is, you know, the old faithful one, Simon Sinek's one, 'how great leaders inspire action'. So really understanding your purpose, which I think is a really key thing. And purpose is one of those words that everyone is throwing about at the moment. But it's really

understanding why the organization exists and how everyone else connects to that. And they're aligned to purpose in in an organization. There's another one by Angela Duckworth, which is the 'power of passion and perseverance'. So it's really about grit. And sometimes you really need to have that to succeed, to get through the various obstacles and challenges that a put forward in particularly crises that come up because sometimes those can really challenge you and, and as a board, you really need to be prepared for a crisis, and have a crisis plan. And the last one is one that I'm listening to at the moment on Audible 'Dare to Lead' by Brene Brown. So being a much more compassionate leader, and one that's open to, you know, the opinion of others and respects people.

[Helga Svendsen 27:04](#)

Key leadership traits for people around that passion, grit and compassion. It's a beautiful little trio to have in there. So I'll make sure we put links to each of those in the show notes for this one as well. So thank you so much for coming in today to have this conversation with us about risk and about being an effective board member. Your experience at IABC both at the local chapter and the regional chapter on the global chapter is incredible experience. So thank you for sharing with us today.

[Zora Artis 27:31](#)

Thank you very much.