



## Take on Board

# Transcript – Trish Hansen

Trish Hansen 0:00

Adelaide is on Kaurna country. And I'd like to pay my respects to elder's past present and emerging leaders and thank them especially for their custodial care of this land and these waters.

Helga Svendsen 0:15

Today on the Take On Board Podcast, I'm speaking to Trish Hanson about purpose, culture and diversity. First, let me tell you about Trish. Trish is on the boards of the South Australian Living Arts Festival, and she established Kindred Australia. She was previously the president of the Australian Institute of Urban Studies, the interim Chair of Altogether Now and a director of the Australian Institute of Patient and Family Centered Care. Trish is the founding principal of Urban Mind Studio as a strategist and systems designer in the fields of health, wellbeing, arts and culture. Trish works to enrich the culture and cultural life of places, neighborhoods and cities. As a natural collaborator, complex systems thinker and regenerative practitioner. Trish has provoked, pioneered and managed social enterprises, projects, programs and quests in the tertiary adult and pediatric health, urban arts and cultural sectors. Currently a Good Design Australia ambassador, fellow of the Center for conscious design, board director of the South Australian Living Arts Festival, as well as serving on the other committees, including good design Australia. Welcome to the Take On Board Podcast Trish.

Trish Hansen 1:24

Thank you, Helga

Helga Svendsen 1:25

It's so fabulous to have you here. Or for you to have me here as the case may be. So Trish, before we talk about purpose and culture and trust. Let's dig a little bit deeper about you. Can you tell me what was your earliest experience of governance?

Trish Hansen 1:43

My earliest experience of governance was as the chair of the Norwood High School charity committee. So it was really selling cakes, and finding other ways to raise money in a high school environment that were then presented to different charities at the end of the school year. That's my

very earliest experience that went on to being on school councils, student representative, and even things I hadn't thought about for decades, the school captain, and I wasn't particularly sporty, I didn't see myself as particularly sporty and not very competitive, which is school captains. Probably not very helpful.

Helga Svendsen 2:21

Well, maybe it's a, it's probably what more school captains should be like, and maybe a more regenerative leadership approach than the competitive approach. So maybe it was just coming out in the very early?

Trish Hansen 2:31

Yeah, I think it was, I think I've always been of that mindset, of understanding that a distributed power of capacities is much more helpful and strong than a hierarchical old power, if you like. Yes. So new power is something that I guess has been in my mind forever, as long as I can remember. And especially when it comes to dignity, and how do we embed dignity in in all that we do, including our decision making?

Helga Svendsen 3:02

Yeah. Well, you know, thinking about the shifting dynamics of how you talk about all power and new power, explain old power and new power to us. And and but let's explain it first. And let's see where that goes.

Trish Hansen 3:15

Okay, well, it depends who you ask. I mean, there's more writing recently, around old power and new power, I think there's a book by Jeremy Hymens and Henry Tims around old power, new power, which defines it really nicely. And that's where I'll start. But of course, in his first nations considerations of old power, which is enduring models of power, which kind of turn that a little bit on its head as well. So the contemporary thinking of all power, new power is that all power is very hierarchical, where the power and the influence sits at the top, and is in service to the hierarchy. New power is much more distributed, where the nodes of power, flatter and well distributed. So that a bit more like an electrical circuit, where if the nodes are strong, then everything's stronger. If a node is weak, then everything's weaker, so that there is an inherent and intrinsic investment in the health of the whole ecosystem. Now, when we think about that, from a First Nations perspective, in speaking to First Nations, friends and colleagues, of course, what we now might call new power has been around since the beginning of humanity. And there are several tenants that seem to be common, which I think when we ask our first nations leaders, about decision making, it's really quite different to what we've established in the industrial era as good governance. So and I'm not a First

Nations elder, so I can only ask and listen, but there are some commonalities. And it's fascinating when we start thinking about what that means for our governance structures. So things like moving at the speed of trust. That's something I first heard from The Black Space Alliance in the US, which is interesting, isn't it if we were to stop pouring concrete, for instance, if it was an urban decision, because we hadn't got trust. Another one, which is intriguing is putting the relationship before the task, thinking in generations, multiple generations, and being open to different perspectives. Here, Uncle Lewis O'Brian on Kurana country here in South Australia speaks of hearing in two ways. There's two small hills in the Adelaide Hills, which is Adelaide, as you know, is nested on the planes between the ocean and the hills and the hills. There are two hills, which for since the beginning of humanity have been called your Riddler means two ears. And it's a it's a symbol, and a reminder to think in two ways, as uncle Lewis would describe,

Helga Svendsen 5:52

For the boards that either you're on or been on, how has that played out? How is that shifting dynamic of power played out in the boardroom for you?.

Trish Hansen 6:00

And it's changing, I think, immediately, I'd say over the last five years, I've noticed that I can finish a sentence more effectively. Whereas for years, it was really difficult to find it in any meeting really, including some board meetings. What I'm most excited by is the recognition of needing to hear the voices at the table. And also a recognition of the importance of challenging questions. And several chairs, and including myself, have over the last several years, really valued that diversity on boards, and acknowledged that the strength of a board will be determined by its diversity, that distributed power, we can still see boards, of course, that are completely in service to a hierarchy. And I think that is one of the greatest challenges of governance of our time, is really getting to the guts of what is it in service to deeply asking ourselves that question, what is it in service to beyond our obligations, and beyond performance, but what is it in service to in relation to the broader community and our natural environment? I think we are at a really interesting time for for boards, where all boards, especially over the next decade is how the UN's describing it that decisions we're making in this next 10 years will determine the future survival of the human species. And that means that we need to transform the ways that we inhabit this place. And boards are a crucial part of that ecosystem. So the decisions we make will either regenerate this planet for a thriving future for people and the environment, or extract and will only be able to fake it for so long.

Helga Svendsen 7:53

So as the chair of a board, what's in your practice what's in your toolkit to ensure that there is that regenerative practice regenerative leadership and new power? You know, and even you know, you're now able to finish the sentence, although it is often easier to finish a sentence from the chairs

position than it is for others, but what's in your practice as the chair to ensure that that space is held?

Trish Hansen 8:18

I think honoring where you've come from, so that there have been leaders in the past that have achieved extraordinary things, and very often are still seeking voice. And I think one way that I've found quite effective to encourage former leaders to embrace whatever's next is to honor what they've done. And formally, so I've had the opportunity to do that in a ceremonial way, and create a structure for a board to to have an honoring system of past leaders.

Helga Svendsen 8:55

Tell me more.

Trish Hansen 8:56

So that was with the Australian Institute of Urban Studies. It's an established South Australian organization that exists to provoke conversation, discussion and debate around all matters to do with urban life. It started out very much as in an urban planning, setting, and it was funded federally, I think there's still a couple of chapters around the country, but South Australia is still still established. The planning profession, which was primarily driven by legal professions, was incredibly robust, as you can imagine, in the conversations and debates were rigorous and lively. And when I was the president of the Australian Institute Urban Studies, I wanted to honor that. So we had the privilege of being hosted by the governor Hugh van Le here in South Australia at Government House for a reception where we could provide former leaders of this institute with a lifelong fellowship.

Helga Svendsen 9:56

Right, fantastic. So it's building that bridge, isn't it between the history In the future?

Trish Hansen 10:01

Yeah.

Helga Svendsen 10:02

You talked about the responsibility of boards over the next 10 years, you know, boards always have a big responsibility. But as you said, the next 10 years are probably key in terms of all of our futures.

But what's your advice to boards around that accountability for the impact that their organizations are making?

Trish Hansen 10:21

I think starting with being really honest about what you're in service to, we become so tangled in the noise of operations and risk, that we actually even miss the real risks. And if we look, for instance, at climate change, it's a major risk. And we've been treating it in some sectors as even a non entity. It's got me to thinking that we're actually not risk averse. But we're change averse. So I think genuinely and deeply considering the question, what is this in service to? And if it is not in service to flourishing humanity on a thriving planet, then it's part of the problem. And so asking that question, first up, and always, constantly, what is it in service to, then I guess, being really clear about doing no harm. So that's as deep as you want it to be. But if you are part of the extraction story, that is part of the problem. Now, it's not only a problem in terms of continuing to destroy the planet, the assets that we have, and the essence of place, and the well being of people. But it's going to be shameful. And we've got a generation of young people emerging that will not outlive the shame of inaction. So the other thing I would suggest is except where you find yourself and make incremental change, just do the long, hard work of incrementally transforming probably most of what we're doing. Yeah. To be more regenerative, and really asking that question, is it regenerative, deeply regenerative? Or is it extracting?

Helga Svendsen 12:10

Okay, so I want to, you know, what, am I in service to do no harm? In a practical way? How can boards incorporate that into their conversations into their board papers into their strategy days into their thinking? How does your board do it? How does it? Is it part of the board papers? You know, what is this in service to? Have I done no harm? Or is it questions that are asked at the strategy day? How is that incorporated in practical ways?

Trish Hansen 12:35

Yeah, I think using every instrument that's available to you to do that, and working out how you incentivize, and how you reward, regeneration, over extraction, even understanding what that means for your organization is crucial, and quite unique. So having that mindset, and heartset is really, it's not just a shift in mindset, it's a shift in heartset and what's important to you and what's important to the future, and really earnestly honoring that in your decision making. Now, of course, there's some very practical tools around environmental impact around reducing carbon around using circular materials. It's so broad, there's so much and it's so big, depending on your organization, you really need to find for yourself what's relevant. But in terms of culture, we humans have evolved from the same status, mushrooms, apes into these complex cultural thinking creatures, considering what the impact on culture will be, what is the impact on cultural richness for people on people's sense of trust, and connectedness and belonging, and capacity to interact

capacity to contribute capacity to flourish and thrive as a human being? What's the impact of that decision on the vibe of the organization, but also on the impact that's being had. So if you're working towards a goal, that's actually destroying the vibe, you are being extraction just even if your board performs perfectly? Yeah, so what we've done, of course, is designed the perfect conditions for what we've got now, which is destroying the planet as we know, and we could talk a lot about what that damage is. But ultimately, we've got this incredible model, this platform of boards and governance, where it's crucial that we take on these decisions at the board level. And in fact, the only way so even though we know that we will see this this shifting of power and new systems emerging and and more distributed power paradigms coming to the fore. We've got boards the board structure, as it exists right now is a crucial platform for transformation.

Helga Svendsen 14:53

So did you have in their culture, how does culture link in to that they're not at either ends extractive and, and regenerative there's a whole bunch of stuff in there, but how does culture fit in?

Trish Hansen 15:05

So we are often talking about culture in terms of organizational culture. But really, if we go one deeper than that it's the culture you have within yourself. Yeah, how you choose to be as a human being. And then if we go out, concentric circle, if you like to, what does that mean for your family home? What does that mean for your street and neighborhood? What does that mean for your city? What does that mean for your country? What does that mean as a planet? So considering the impact of your decisions on human culture might be helpful in you working through what is it in service to? Yeah, so if you are asking yourself on every decision, what is the impact of this decision? On, for instance, people's sense of connection to each other? People's sense of connection to place people's sense of connection to nature? There's no one answer to that. It's something that you need to ask yourself as a board director, and and then let that play out with all the wisdom and knowledge and information that you have have around you. I think coming into that also is, is transcending data, you know, we've got more data in our phones than we can ever hope to digest in a lifetime. But there is something that transcends data and information. And it's using that discerningly for wisdom. Yes, data is not enough. It is important, and it's something but it's not enough. So how might your decision, strengthen wisdom? And once we start having these conversations, which are really ambiguous, and will lead us into all sorts of uncertain territory, but being able to harness that ambiguity and hold space, and hold the space, to navigate that ambiguity, and to allow whatever to emerge, will lead to better decisions. Yeah.

Helga Svendsen 17:00

And it's such a key role for boards, isn't it like crucial? If things were black and white? You wouldn't need a board? Would you? The executive team could just run off and do it. But the idea of having a

not always independent board, but independent people to bounce things around is getting those different perceptions of things, which are often mostly gray. So there is no right and wrong.

Trish Hansen 17:21

Yeah. And I think too, we've come out of a generation where the board is the instrument of reinforcing old power. You know, we've used boards to progress our own self interest, professional self interests, rather than thinking about what is it in service to what is really deeply important to me as a human being, to my family to my place? And how do I be in service to that, it's really struck me interestingly, more recently, talking to First Nations people again around working on country, and Bill Gammage who's published a brilliant book, called the Greatest Estate, mentions early in the book, he uses the sentence, First Nations people work on country in fear of their spirit. And it got me thinking about how there is no choice in that, that it is a deep commitment to nourishing the conditions conducive to your own survival. And if boards are there for that purpose to actually help humanity flourish, then working on a board is a potentially a contemporary act of working on country. And we should be doing that in service to humanity, a dignified humanity, a dignified human future, and especially a nourishing planet, and nourished planet a thriving, flourishing planet. Otherwise, what's the point? If we are in the extraction world, we are essentially counterbalancing everything, every action of regeneration. And if you can imagine all of those competing forces sitting in a ball, if you like, because there's so much competition, one's drawing one way one drawing the other way. But essentially, the balls bouncing off the cliff and is watching the ball bounce off the cliff. What's the point?

Helga Svendsen 19:17

So it makes so much sense for individuals and boards to ask themselves what what am I in service to what are we in service to? Why doesn't it happen?

Trish Hansen 19:28

Ego. Somehow, something happened a couple of I think, you know, a couple of 100 years ago, but especially in the last 50 years, where self interest has become dominant. And if we think about this lovely exercise if we look at all of Earth's history over since 4.5 billion years ago, to now in the context of one calendar year, so let's condense all of it history into one calendar year 4.5 billion years ago, is when it formed from rock and gas and formed a planet 3.8 billion years ago was the 25th of February. And that's when life began. First simple celled organisms. 28th of March is when those cells started a primitive form of photosynthesis. By mid July, those cells had a nucleus, which allow them to have sex in September. And so in September, we get this explosion of diverse and complex life. So by November, we've got insects and fungi. And by December, we've got reptiles and land plants and early mammals, mid December, dinosaurs 25th of December, dinosaurs become extinct. 31st of December, the last day of the year at lunchtime, 11:30am, hominids, apes walk while we stand up by 11:36pm 24 minutes to midnight, homosapiens. Wow. 11:58pm is the end of the last

ice age, the last 10,000 years, which is when we started most formal forms of agriculture, even though that we know First Nations cultures globally have been cultivating land since the beginning of human evolution 11:59pm and 58 seconds two seconds ago, industrial revolution. So we've only been at this extraction business really for two seconds. Wow. Now, of course, in those two seconds, we've developed telescopes that can see back to the beginning of time, we've done extraordinary things. We've got microscopes that look at the very DNA and core of life, we know that we've got 14 months until the sun burns out in 5 billion years. So we are at this moment, which various leaders have talked about as a rite of passage. And like any rite of passage, we don't know the outcome. We are right here. And it seems to be really focused on this decade. So I don't know which direction we're going in whether humans will survive as a species or not. This is the ultimate test. And we're in it. So of course, we have established boards, they are our governance structures that exist at the moment, how do we use them to the full force of service to humanity and the planet?

Helga Svendsen 22:19

Oh, that is such a beautiful way of just exemplifying where we're at and where it's been beautiful. Thank you. I know, I knew this would happen this time goes way too quickly. What are the key things you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Trish Hansen 22:36

Consider what you're in service to consider it deeply and fearlessly and determine which side you're on because you can't extract and regenerate at the same time. You're either doing one or the other. And I think asking ourselves, what am I in service to? What is this in service to you? And we really can apply that question to a conversation or relationship, a friendship, business, a project? What is it in service to?

Helga Svendsen 23:03

And is there a resource that you would recommend for people either in exploring this or in other governance thinking? Is there a resource you'd like to recommend to the take on board community?

Trish Hansen 23:15

There's a long list, I've developed a cultural compass, which I'd be very happy to share and that's on my website. But I think there are so many wonderful resources Gyre education's got resources, Regenesys are incredible company have wonderful frameworks to consider. Daniel Christian Val is a biologist now with a PhD and based in New Yorker who has a terrific book, there's there's so much information. But I'd just start with regeneration. Yeah. And a regenerative board is, is really the instrument. It's the heart set and the mindset of being regenerative. Which we all need to, to embrace. And for us in Australia, that's fairly easy to do in relation to being connected with nature



and starting to really learn from nature. Instead of learning about nature and learning from First Nations instead of learning about First Nations, learning from diverse cultures, instead of learning about first cultures. I'd say, learning about regeneration is really important. The other thing, of course, from a board perspective is, is have a good look at diversity. Yeah. And who has voice? And how do we sometimes be quiet and give voice to the quiet and allow time to even recognize who and and what that means. And also giving voice to the vulnerable so that we can actually understand the depth of what we're in service to.

Helga Svendsen 24:53

Oh, as always, what a fabulous conversation. Thank you so much for giving your time and opening your house to me here in Adelaide to have this fabulous conversation. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with the take on board community today.

Trish Hansen 25:07

Thank you