



Transcript – Su Jella knows how to report against strategy and has tips for you

Helga: [00:00:00] Today on the Take On Board podcast, I'm speaking with Su Jella about reporting against strategy. Before we start the podcast today, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we record. For me, I am on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, and I pay my respects to Elders past and present.

I also acknowledge any First Nations people who may be listening today. I acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters, skies, culture, and country. I support Voice Treaty and Truth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and I encourage others in the Take On Board community to do the same.

Now, let me tell you about Su. Su is on the board of the Women's Tennis Foundation. Su helps to drive data and AI revolutions and opportunities. A visionary in data analytics and AI, Su doesn't merely confront the question, what do we do with all this data? She transforms this challenge into an enlightening journey of discovery, deriving [00:01:00] actionable insights that fuel smarter business decisions.

Su's expertise is anchored in a groundbreaking approach. She integrates her leadership with a human centric perspective, blended with data driven strategies and a deep technical acumen. Her collaborative work with boards and C suite executives aligns data strategies with overarching business goals, paving the way for impactful, ethical decision making.

Su's influence extends far beyond data. She's a passionate advocate for community building, a champion for women in leadership and STEM, a mentor and avid contributor to podcasts like this one, and writing about leadership data and AI. She was recently awarded a winner of Women in AI in Asia Pacific and also recognized as Australia's top 25 analytics leaders.

Welcome to the Take on Board Podcast, Su.

Su Jella: Thanks so much, Helya. What a pleasure to be here. I'm really honoured by the privilege to speak with you.

Helga: Well thank you [00:02:00] for answering the call, I guess. The Take On Board community will know that I put out a call recently to do a deep dive into strategy and nominated a couple of different topics, of which reporting against strategy was one.

And Su very kindly answered the call on LinkedIn and said, Hey, I'm here. I think I've got some things that will contribute to that conversation. So here we are. So thank you. Thank you for answering the call and making the time to have this conversation.

Su Jella: No problem at all. It sounded like a really exciting topic on a different scale, so I was keen to contribute.

Helga: So, before we dive into that topic, before we dive into reporting against strategy, as always, I would love to dig a little bit deeper about you. Can you tell me a story about young Su that tells us a bit about how you got to where you are today, and even maybe how that links to your earliest experience of governance?

Su Jella: Thanks, Helya. It's an interesting story. Hopefully it'll resonate with others. But yeah, I actually didn't really know what I wanted to do. I just grew up thinking I'll always do something in the science field. And [00:03:00] interestingly enough, I did not. I ended up doing something in the commerce field and I didn't realize how much there was actually to learn in any field that you take on.

Right. And I wasn't as exposed to commerce as I was to science and I ended up loving it. I ended up enjoying every bit of it. Doing commerce and the subjects and marketing was actually one of my favorite subjects, but in practice, it was a very different experience. Of course, you know, what you study and what you end up practicing are very different things.

What I did really enjoy was the exploration aspect of the marketing work that I did and I studied. And so I ended up doing a lot of market research work, which was very data driven. And so some of my earlier roles were in data driven marketing, and that basically led to all the opportunities I've had in the last 10, 15 years around data management practices, and more importantly, strategy.

So, of course, a lot of the work that I did was around measuring impact [00:04:00] on whatever you're delivering based on strategic initiatives. And that was really about what's the return on investment? How much are we investing versus benefit cost analysis? And what's the return that we're getting? And can we actually measure that impact?

And as much as it was around a marketing capability, it actually ended up being a lot more of strategic capability. And that, ended up leading me to lead enterprise level analytics and work in different areas around analytics, not just centered around marketing, but as an organization as a whole. And interestingly enough, as much as data grew from a marketing remit, it actually ended up becoming more of an organizational remit, which is what leads us to AI technology and all the jazz that's happening in the world right now.

Helga: All the jazz. Makes it sound much more fun than all the AI that's happening in the world. I immediately thought of jazz hands. But anyway, maybe that's just where my brain goes. Well, that is [00:05:00] a beautiful segue hearing how that all came together for you. And I love that, you know, data driven strategy, measuring impact.

All of these things are so important. So where should we begin this conversation? About reporting against strategy. What should boards be thinking about in the data that they look at, that they ask to look at? Where should we start?

Su Jella: Ultimately goes back to the overarching objectives and goals we want to achieve, right?

I mean, that's what strategy is. What do we want to be seen as? What do we want our customer to view us as? What's our brand? It all comes down to all those strategic goals that we set ourselves up to achieve. And of course there's a trickle down effect from strategy at the board level to then the next executive level, C suite and then management, mid management.

And then of course those who are individual contributors and how we communicate that back up to them. So at the end of the day, I say, [00:06:00] much at what does the board want to achieve and what do they want to see evolve within their ecosystem in the next few years? And how can we then measure that? Do we have any past historical contextual data to measure that for our current state?

And then of course, actually have a great story to tell in the future, where we at 10 percent resource allocation, doing it manually, for example, without any automation, without any tools. And then five years down the line, we actually can measure effort. We can measure automation and then be able to say, we've increased our resource, for example, by 20%, but we've also implemented 30 percent of automation capabilities, isn't that a great story to tell where you haven't sacrificed Manpower you haven't sacrificed human intel, but you've actually improved the ability to meet strategic outcomes so That would be a place to start but then also I would say another area to look at is who are you serving?

[00:07:00] Is it a customer? Is it a middleman? Who's actually the key of revenue generator for your business? It'll come down to those basic questions of who, what, when, where, more importantly, how are we going to do this?

Helga: Oh, well, indeed, how are we going to do this? I'm wondering, I mean, you're on the board of the Women's Tennis Foundation.

I'm not sure where your organization is at in its strategic cycle, or even when you joined the board, but I'm wondering if you're able to share with us, in as much detail as you're able to share, I'm wondering what you can tell us about that organization's strategy and how the board there kind of wrestled with, I guess, the data that needs to come to the board.

Su Jella: So maybe just, I'll give you a little bit of context as to how I even got into the role at women's tennis foundation. So we currently in the process of refreshing our strategy and working out how we want to reach out to audiences and grow our capability. [00:08:00] So interestingly, I was approached to fulfill this role, to actually manage the technology pillar within women's tennis foundation.

And the reality behind that and why I was approached was because they wanted to take on the approach of becoming more. operations, but also more importantly, resonating with the audience. So at women's tennis foundation, there's a lot of work that goes on with supporting and developing female players in the sport.

And part of that is sponsoring them, coaching them and mentoring them. And interestingly enough, a lot of the female players when they are ready to retire, or when they're ready to move on from the professional aspect of the sport, they don't really know what they want to do. Because they've dedicated such a huge

part of their lives to the sport itself, that they now need to find a way forward from there.

And so part of the Women's Tennis Foundation is to provide that coaching and support. But part of the strategy is, how do we resonate with our audience? Who are our actual customers? [00:09:00] How do we build a revenue feed? How do we actually understand Interactions and mentoring and support for the communities that guide us, not just as players, but as fans as well.

So it's been a very interesting journey because a big part of that, if you think about it in this day and age, is actually the optimal use of technology. And part of that is data. And of course, AI comes after that. But if you don't improve those processes within your strategic output, you're kind of not resonating with the right crowds and the right audiences.

But at the same time, you're not engaging fans as you should. And so it's a really important piece of that strategic deliverable. And that's how I ended up getting into this particular project. was to drive the technology capability, but then at the same time, be able to harness the data we do have and identify gaps that can then help to support more of the community as fans, as well as players.

So women's tennis foundation is pretty much run by the board engagement. Everyone who's. [00:10:00] To effectiveness of a women's tennis foundation are board members, and so obviously we have different roles and different capabilities to help support the foundation.

Helga: So, all right, so you've joined the board. You are leading their technology function, which by the sounds of things is both an input in a way into the strategy.

What do we know about the people, the supporters, the customers, all of those sorts of things? What do we know about what's happening? Then there is the strategy itself. And then presumably it is also a, um, a way of you measuring your success against that strategy.

Su Jella: Correct. Exactly. Because one of the things is the strategy needed to be refreshed.

So a part of that is okay. So how do we bring the strategy back toe current environment and the audience that we want to engage with? And how are we going to measure that? So the good thing is, we have quite a bit of contextual information as to what the previous state was and how we're going to actually

Action some of the learnings we have and some of the information that we have [00:11:00] to then build out our future state.

It is a long process. I wouldn't say it's been an overnight capability that we've been able to lift and shift. It has been an ongoing process for the last Six to eight months perhaps and we're still working out key pillars There's a philanthropy piece that we're still working on But we can actually measure that now because we have the tools in place to help support that And then of course we also have the aspect around Monitoring and measuring the number of players that we now are starting to help and support.

So we do have Places where we can measure, but then there's also a large aspect of it that still does not have a baseline. So we'll be creating those baselines for measurement. So we can start to look at that in the future and say, we were here in 2024 and now three years down the line. We've actually got a baseline against which we can measure.

So when it comes to actual reporting, it does mean that there are going to be some ground level baseline measures that we're going to have to create or observe. And then there'll be a certain level [00:12:00] of contextual data, or I guess, points of measure, that we can compare to. But in our case, I would say a lot of it is very new.

Helga: When somebody like you comes in that knows the tech and knows the data, I imagine what could happen at the board is the board very quickly feels a little overwhelmed at the amount of information and data that comes to them. And I'm wondering then how you work with the board to determine what is the information that really needs to come to the board?

What is it that the board really needs to know as opposed to the other data that is important but it's not so much for the board? How do you separate that out? Because with data and technology there is so much of it out there now, but we want to make sure there's not You know, this tsunami coming into the board and just making them become overwhelmed.

How do you manage that and how do you, I guess, lead the conversation with the board to ensure [00:13:00] that they are constructively engaging with it and that decisions are being made on the most relevant data?

Su Jella: Yeah, it's really tough because one of the things at the board level is that you're not on the ground level.

You don't necessarily know what's actually happening in the front office. Sometimes it's not also easily understandable what's happening in the back office. So a lot of it will come down to the level of granularity you want to provide to the board in terms of reporting. But also what do they really know?

The key thing when we do report at that level is the how. So how did we do this? What was the impact? And was there a specific incident or capability or a specific campaign, for example, that influenced the way we received an outcome? And that's a huge part of our strategy. Sometimes they could be factors outside of what we've actually delivered that influence it.

So for example, there could have been maybe a news article or there could have been all of a sudden a lot of [00:14:00] information around tennis and its importance and how female players are being supported in the sport from a media outlet that could influence, you know, the way philanthropy works within our strategy or the way we attract more members and donations into our foundation.

So they could be the how aspect, but then there's also, what did we really do? What impact did we generate and how did we drive that roadmap to achieve the outcomes that we did? So the Harvard and being very clear about that is really important, but then the next bit around measuring successes. So what have we actually done that's actually influenced impact that's led to an outcome that's positive for us and has generated more value.

And the biggest part for an organization like Women's Tennis Foundation is really the whole aspect around, I would say, improving philanthropy. Improving visibility and ensuring that we are providing the support, the community collaboration for our [00:15:00] actual players, our customers, who are the coaches, who are the players who want to stay in the game and then want to work out what they want to do after the game.

Helga: So, Su, in thinking then about how that comes to life, I guess, for the board, now I know Women's Tennis Foundation is in the midst of reviewing your strategies, so this might be hypothetical rather than real, but I'd be interested to hear for some of the strategic strategies, priorities of your organization.

You've talked about philanthropy and about the support and mentoring and so on to the players. What might be some of the data that comes to board that gives the assurance to board for you to know that you're achieving your strategy? Like, what does that look like in, in real life? Even though it might be

hypothetical real life for this, what might be some of the things that come to the board?

Su Jella: Yeah, no, good question. So some of the things we would really be looking at, um, return on investment. Sometimes we go out and we do a lot of campaigning. We do a lot of [00:16:00] exposure based exhibitions or providing ways in which we can be more visible. And. We have to obviously look at what is our spend for that and what's our return on that.

And our biggest form of return is really what our actual revenue feed grows to be from a philanthropic perspective. So we look at that from a revenue aspect. But then the other measures that are really important are things like engagement. engagement scores and how we actually keep our community, not just our players, engaged.

The more engagement we have, the more information we provide to our community, the better our chances of creating that visibility but also supporting our players. And the other big ones that we would look at our customer satisfaction scores. And the customer is both the people we serve, which are the players and the coaches and the community that we serve, those who are fans and want to be engaged and want to really be a part of this organization as well as alumni, as well as philanthropic providers.

So measuring those things. Specific KPIs can give us a [00:17:00] really good indication. If any of the initiatives we actually driving, uh, contributing to an uplifted strategy or contributing to the actual visibility of our brand and how we're perceived by our community, your strategy again is only as good as its reach.

So if we are not using a strategy to reach out to our community and our audiences, then we're probably not gaining. The traction as well as the returns that we want part of those isSus are also more importantly, what are the call to actions we want to have from here? So once we've got this reporting in order, once we've got the scores visible and available, what are our call to actions?

Do we need to do more? Do we need to do less? And what is it that we want to increase our revenue feed by? And how are we going to do that? Are we socially engaged? And one of the big aspect of the reporting. As well as the data information that we have available is the social impact and measuring social impact.

Are we actually able to make a difference [00:18:00] to the lives we serve in a positive way? And that's one of the things we need to start using a lot of our data around, is the social impact that we provide. But also, in some way, shape or form, we'll also be able to talk about environmental impact. And that's some of the measures we need to start integrating into our strategy.

Helga: I mean, measuring social impact, measuring environmental impact, I hear that's the next thing on the list for you. But what are some tips for people in that? How do you measure that social impact?

Su Jella: Social impact can be measured very much through technology at the moment. And that would be, you know, through our social pages, for example, our social media community.

How engaged are they? What are the sentiments? That we see coming in based on the work that we're doing. And the reality is the customer will never hesitate to share with you what they think about your organization beat. Mostly negative. If it's negative, they want to voice it. If it's positive, maybe not, but yeah, you will start to see that sentiment coming through because the generation of [00:19:00] audiences we're dealing with right now are the ones who are very active.

on social media. And so from there, you'll be able to start measuring sentiment from a digital perspective. But if you start to look at it in the physical environment, which is now what we call physical blended with digital, which is the digital environment, it's to see how many players you're growing.

How are you actually growing players for the positive impact of the sport? And how are you actually getting more people to be involved in the sport, supporting and empowering women from the community? So that's how we start to measure societal impact. So if we know what our current state are in terms of numbers, how many people are actually engaged on both levels, on both audience levels, and how much we grow that by either by 10, 20, 30%, we can easily measure how the community has grown.

But a lot of that again is data collection. And how we storing and managing that data to actually then be able to validate and provide trustworthy analysis [00:20:00] on the impact that we're having, but societal impact is really always about people most of the time. And then now, of course, the environmental impact aspect comes into play.

Helga: There's loads of data that we can be using. There's loads of data collected. Some of that data comes in terms of reporting against strategy, helps us to assess how we are going. This might not be the right question to ask somebody who's here about technology and data, but what about beyond data? What else do boards need to really be able to assess and report against their strategy?

What else might there be beyond the data? What's your advice there?

Su Jella: That is such a tough question asking a data person. So I would say other things to consider at the board level would be very much how are we managing Challenging situations and challenging environments, which honestly, we may not necessarily have data for.

So if we think just about COVID, it was an uncertain, [00:21:00] challenging environment that we all had to endure. And there was no playbook. There was no way we could measure, Oh, what did we do last time? No idea. We never had a last time. So I would say those are the other emergency crisis situations we need to plan and prepare for.

Whether it's actually measurable. Is a different question because you can only measure if you have some data, but in terms of uncertainties and how you crisis manage these uncertainties should be a part of the strategy, of course, but also should be something that's documented so that you have a reference point if you have either a severity level of extreme to low, actually, that impacts your organization.

And this is something which is a bit of a gray area because crisis management. is something that happens when you least expect it, or you have to apply it when you least expect it, but then you only have a point of measure based on the baseline for current state. You don't really have any historical data to say, [00:22:00] Hey, we actually managed this 20 percent better than we did five years ago, but we don't know.

So disaster recovery and managing uncertainties, even just this environment that we all go into an economic, economically uncertain environment, how are we going to measure that? And how are we going to embed that into a strategy? What does it mean for our people? And how are we going to help them? So we're looking at ways that we can steer and support them in terms of this economic crisis that we potentially are going to be going into.

So those are other things that I would look at in terms of the strategic initiatives. When you can't measure, when you don't have data and you have a very low base level of information other than what the external environment provides to you.

Helga: Although it's interesting, isn't it? You know, I was working with an organization just last week and we were working on exactly this, working on identifying their measures and targets for their strategic plan.

and It's in line with what exactly with what you've been saying is that when you really think about it, there is so much data that organizations collect [00:23:00] already. So look at what data is being collected, line it up with your strategy, chunk it up to what the board needs to know. And generally speaking, the data will be there.

You've just got to sift through it and work out what it is that the board really needs to know. Because in most organizations, there's just so much being collected already.

Su Jella: Exactly. I mean, one of the other things that's, I guess, more real as well to really consider when you are in a situation like this are all the breaches that are taking place across the world.

I mean, just in the last, I think, six months or so, there's been 5, 000 breaches that have taken place in Australia alone. And it's not a matter of, you know, If I will get affected by it, it's a matter of when. And so that's a big part of a strategic plan that we need to start preparing for, because you can have robust solutions in place.

You can have great security, but there's always a hacker or a bad actor out there. Who's. 10 steps ahead of you and it could be a 13 year old. It could very easily be a 13 year old [00:24:00] and you would not have seen that coming. That is definitely a form of crisis management. But more than that, it is actually a security isSu that we have to embed in our strategy.

We may not necessarily be able to embed it. In terms of measurables, but we will be able to have a plan so that we can start to track and measure and see, Hey, we had a breach. How did we handle it? And what was the response and what was the outcome that we had? And at the end of the day, it is about outcomes.

Even if you don't have defined quantifiable measurables in place, it's about the outcome you generated.

Helga: Oh, Su, so much in here about reporting against strategy and reporting on the strategy that boards need to consider. What are the key things you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Su Jella: I would say it's really important as we enter this new era of technology, data, AI, and a very uncertain space, really, to start documenting what [00:25:00] you have. That is one of the key things in terms of securing your strategy. It may not be a hundred percent something that you can secure, but it is a capability measure that That you can start to evaluate.

You can start to bring in some measurables around that documentation around that strategy. So what I would say is collection of information storage and management of that is really important. And it's not from a customer analytics perspective as such. It is from an actual strategic perspective. The more information you have.

The easier it will be to navigate some of those uncertainties and we need to be aware of what that uncertain market is and we know it's going to hit us, we don't know how, but uncertainties will hit us and how we navigate that through a crisis management capability will also help us to build out some measurables as a baseline.

And then the other key thing is let's start ensuring we embed technology, AI and data into our strategic initiatives at the board level. We really need to start bringing in those governance [00:26:00] practices at the board level so that we can now start to be aware of the audiences we work with, as well as the audiences we are attracting into our organizations and how we need to operate with them.

The world is moving really quickly in that space. And boards need to keep up with that. So I would really encourage boards to start having expertise in those areas as part of their strategic initiatives. It'll also be easier to measure and report on your strategy once you start building that out.

Helga: And is there a resource you would like to share with the TakeOnBoard community?

Su Jella: Yeah, I would be more than happy to share a resource that is definitely not data or AI. So it's a bit of a newish one to the data field that I try

to advocate for, but I would encourage reading the book *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. And as much as it was written a very long time ago before technology was around in the state that it is, it's actually such a great book to teach you about strategy, [00:27:00] defenses, also managing uncertainties, and more importantly, it's, I found it a really good book for management practices.

Everyone, no matter what level you are in your career or in the organization, it's a great book on decision making. So that's one of the resources I always like to share.

Helga: Oh my God, that is awesome. I've heard of the book a million times and I've never read it. I'm going to pop it on my reading list. So thank you.

Great stuff. Oh Su, thank you. Thank you again for answering the call, for saying you've got some wisdom to share about this and for taking the time to share that wisdom with the Take On Board community today. I really appreciate it and I'm sure others in the community do as well. So thank you for being with us today.

Su Jella: Thank you so much, Helga. It was such a pleasure to chat with you. Loved all the questions. I've learned a lot from this episode as well. So thanks again for having me.