

This article imagines a series of questions to put to your board members, to assess how well they are prepared for the future challenges and changes which may occur.

How future proof is your board?

One of the most important responsibilities of a board of directors is to ensure the longevity and continued success of the company, even as technological, social, regulatory or environmental developments change the landscape in which it operates.

Boards must be forward-looking and prepared to adapt to whatever the future holds.

We've identified 7 key questions to ask board members (or for them to ask themselves), to assess how future proof they are.

Are you spending enough time discussing strategy?

All too often, much of the board's time is spent discussing business-as-usual, looking over reports, addressing immediate issues. It's important to ensure that a portion of the time in each board meeting is reserved for longer-term strategic thinking and planning. Strategy shouldn't be reserved for an annual meeting, it should be discussed, developed, and updated regularly, to allow the business to respond to changing trends and events.

Are you asking open-ended questions?

A good way to encourage creative thinking is by posing questions that sit outside the usual paradigm. Asking "What would we do if we had an extra million dollars in the budget?", or "Who would we merge with if we could pick any company today?" can seem irrelevant or ridiculous at first sight, but they're an effective way to open up new lines of thinking, which can often lead to valuable insights.

Are you interrogating the status quo?

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking the way things are done now is the way they should continue to be done in future. Familiarity can breed, if not contempt, then a dangerous level of comfort. It's important to periodically review your business model and justify any assumptions you have. Looking at how competitors or partners are making changes may highlight areas in your own business which might need a rethink.

Are you accessing expert advice?

Boards vary widely in the level of expertise their members bring to the table. But even the most forward-thinking boards can't assume that all the knowledge they need will be represented in the boardroom. Industries, markets and customer expectations change fast, so sometimes it makes sense to bring in

an expert or two with the up-to-date knowledge your directors may not have.

Are you talking to your customers?

Directors can often be quite isolated from the customer experience, with executives, managers, and workers sitting between them and the people who ultimately buy their products or services. In order to be more responsive to changing customer trends, needs, and opinions, and therefore spot future opportunities, it's important for board members to find ways to access this group. Consider commissioning surveys, arranging focus groups, or even inviting selected customers to participate in a meeting.

Are you listening to your management team?

While there may be formal channels in place for management to communicate performance data and sales results with the board of directors, it may not be as easy for informal advice and recommendations to get through. Boards should take advantage of the ground floor view which their management team has, and proactively seek input on upcoming challenges, new trends which could be exploited, or areas requiring investment for the future.

Are you plugged in to innovation?

Although many board members would describe themselves as good networkers, it's easy to fall into the habit of talking to the same contacts at the same events, month after month. If your immediate network is restricted to people at a similar level of seniority, working in the same industry, and doing a similar role, the scope for learning will be limited.

Try moving outside your natural circles to meet people from different niches, in different positions, and at different stages in their careers. If you're on the board at a multinational engineering firm, there might be something you could learn from a local tech startup, for example. Look at the industries where people are innovating, and taking risks, and find out what they think the future holds.

The importance of openness

There's a common thread running through most of these questions—is your board open to new ideas, and willing to learn? That's the most crucial element of futureproofing. Boards that are willing to adopt new ways of thinking, learn from stakeholders and embrace diverse ideas, are better positioned to ensure future success.

At MEIoD, we offer a number of training programs to help boards and individual directors develop their skills and become more effective in their roles.

Our Corporate Directors Program provides the skills you need to be an effective board member, the Sustainability In The Boardroom Program offers practical frameworks to assess and manage ESG issues, and the Diversified Leadership Program helps increase the diversity of skills, ideas, and viewpoints represented at the board level.

You can find out more about these, and our other programs, [here](#).

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