

Is Your Board Built for the 21st Century?

If you sit on a board, ask yourself a simple question: Where does your energy go? Is it spent meticulously reviewing past performance, ensuring compliance, and managing risk? Or is it spent forging the future, challenging assumptions, and leveraging risk for purposeful growth? For most boards, the answer tilts heavily toward the former. And in today's world, that's not just a missed opportunity—it's a strategic risk.

We are operating in an era of unprecedented disruption. Technological leaps like AI redefine entire industries overnight. Geopolitical instability and climate change inject volatility into every long-term plan. Stakeholders—employees, customers, communities—now demand more than shareholder value; they demand values. And trust, once slowly earned, can be obliterated in a single tweet exposing an ethical blind spot.

The traditional model of directorship—passive, reviewing, compliant—is no longer sufficient. A board that only asks, "What did we do?" is destined to be left behind by those that ask, "What could we do?"

This is the imperative for the Disruptive Director.

The Disruptive Director is not a critic or an antagonist. They are the board's most valuable strategic partner. They understand that the greatest value they can provide is **constructive disruption**—the courage to

challenge the status quo for purposeful, ethical, and resilient growth.

This shift requires a new mindset, a framework that moves governance from a retrospective audit to a forward-looking catalyst. Imagine a model built on impact - a framework designed to **actively transform** boardroom dialogue and catalyze decision-making.

A New Framework for a New Era

This shift requires a new operating model. We call it the **A.C.T.I.V.E. Framework**—a blueprint for moving the boardroom from passive oversight to strategic partnership.

It's a six-pillar approach that transforms a director's role from reviewing the past to actively shaping the future. It challenges you to become the guardian of your organization's purpose, to foster essential and challenging debate, and to transform accountability into your greatest strategic advantage.

This framework provides the critical questions you should be asking to not just manage risk, but to leverage it for purposeful growth.

How Could This Impact You?

Think about the last major crisis or strategic dilemma your board faced. Perhaps a supply chain scandal at a key supplier, a disruptive new competitor, or an ethical dilemma around data or AI.

Did the conversation quickly default to legal compliance, reputational defense, and risk mitigation? This is the traditional playbook. It contains the problem but rarely transforms the organization.

Now, imagine wielding a different toolkit. This is the role of the Disruptive Director: to ask the profound, uncomfortable questions that unearth root causes and unlock transformative solutions. For instance:

- Are our incentives *truly* driving the behavior that matches our professed values?
- What assumption are we making about this market that could be our biggest blind spot?
- How can we see this crisis not as a PR problem, but as a strategic opportunity to reinforce our ethical core and build deeper trust?
- What data do we need, not just to prove we followed the rules, but to prove we are who we say we are?

The difference is everything. One approach protects the past. The other builds a more resilient and authentic future.

The Imperative to Lead

The disruption on the horizon will not wait for governance to catch up. The choice is no longer between good and bad governance, but between reactive and proactive leadership. A board that merely oversees is a board that inadvertently cedes the future.

The disruptive director is not a far-off concept; it is an urgent necessity. It is the embodiment of a board that chooses to be an active force—aligning actions with purpose, challenging comfortable assumptions, and transforming accountability into a engine for growth. This is how trust is built, how resilience is forged, and

how organizations don't just survive but meaningfully thrive.

The final question is not if your board will change, but when, and how deliberately. The energy you choose to invest today—in the future or the past—will define your organization's trajectory for the next decade.

About the Author:



Maali Q. Khader is a highly experienced, effective, and trusted lawyer. Today she is a luminary in the corporate governance, sustainability, legal training, and advice sectors.

Maali holds a few concurrent roles, chief of which is CEO of the influential Middle East Institute of Directors (MEIoD), delivering advanced environment, social and governance (ESG) advisory and training to several prestigious organisations.

Since 2012, as Founder and Board Member, Maali has driven change and excellence across a number of leading organisations.