

HELPING BOARDS THRIVE: THE EVOLVING ROLE OF GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONALS

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As we enter the last quarter of 2025, Boards are looking back on an eventful year. Economic, market, and geopolitical uncertainty rank amongst the top issues for Boards and CEOs, although these are the areas where Boards feel least confident¹.

Earlier this year, we shared that [Boards can take 5 actions](#) to build this confidence. These include re-grounding on values, business models, and strategy; scenario planning; staying alert to opportunities; and building Board leadership capacity to navigate ambiguity. However, these actions are not simple fixes. They involve changes in Board focus and the possible introduction of new processes, such as more robust talent and risk oversight activities.

Fortunately, Boards need not take on these changes alone. Governance professionals have a key role in supporting Boards and their role is evolving. Governance professionals can consider incorporating the following three dimensions into their role:

1. **Build Trust to Serve as a Board Advisor:** Governance professionals can build influence to achieve the full potential of their role. Building deeper relationships with the Board Chair and Directors through 1:1 check-ins, or bringing valuable knowledge and insights on relevant topics can elevate the governance professional role to one of a thought partner and trusted advisor.
2. **Enable Effective Meetings:** Governance professionals can have a unique impact on the effectiveness of the Board. They can support the Board's functioning during meetings in three major ways:
 - a) **Materials:** Partnering with Management to craft focused materials which are clear and concise, have suggested reflection questions for Directors, and link to strategic priorities.
 - b) **Meeting Environment:** Ensuring that the meeting conditions and environment are conducive to productivity and that needs, supplies, connections, and comforts are available so that Directors and Management can focus on what matters most.
 - c) **Documenting Action Items:** Ensuring that next steps, follow-up activities, and accountability are clear.
3. **Support with Board Skills and Renewal:** The governance team can help the Board take a forward-looking approach to skills. The team can look ahead to what the Board will need in 5-7 years based on its strategy and ensure the level of maturity needed for key skills is reflected in Director renewal and education plans. To support this, the skills matrix can reflect the level of expertise each Director has on each skill, highlighting gaps that may appear once upcoming term and age limits are reached.
4. **Offer Curated Director Learning and Education:** Curate learning programs that deliver just-in-time learning on strategic issues relevant to upcoming Board meetings. Governance professionals can liaise with Management to discern upcoming priorities and ensure that Directors have proactive information and context to be prepared for conversations.

Governance professionals have tremendous potential to serve as trusted advisors, guiding the Board towards value-added behaviours and supporting the Board in staying elevated. However, this requires governance professionals to build trust and wield influence in strategic activities, beyond ensuring Board materials are uploaded and meeting minutes are complete. Boards with empowered governance professionals can find themselves with more time to focus on Board priorities and more chances to raise their game so their organizations can thrive.

¹ Heidrick & Struggles CEO and Board Confidence Monitor, 2025.