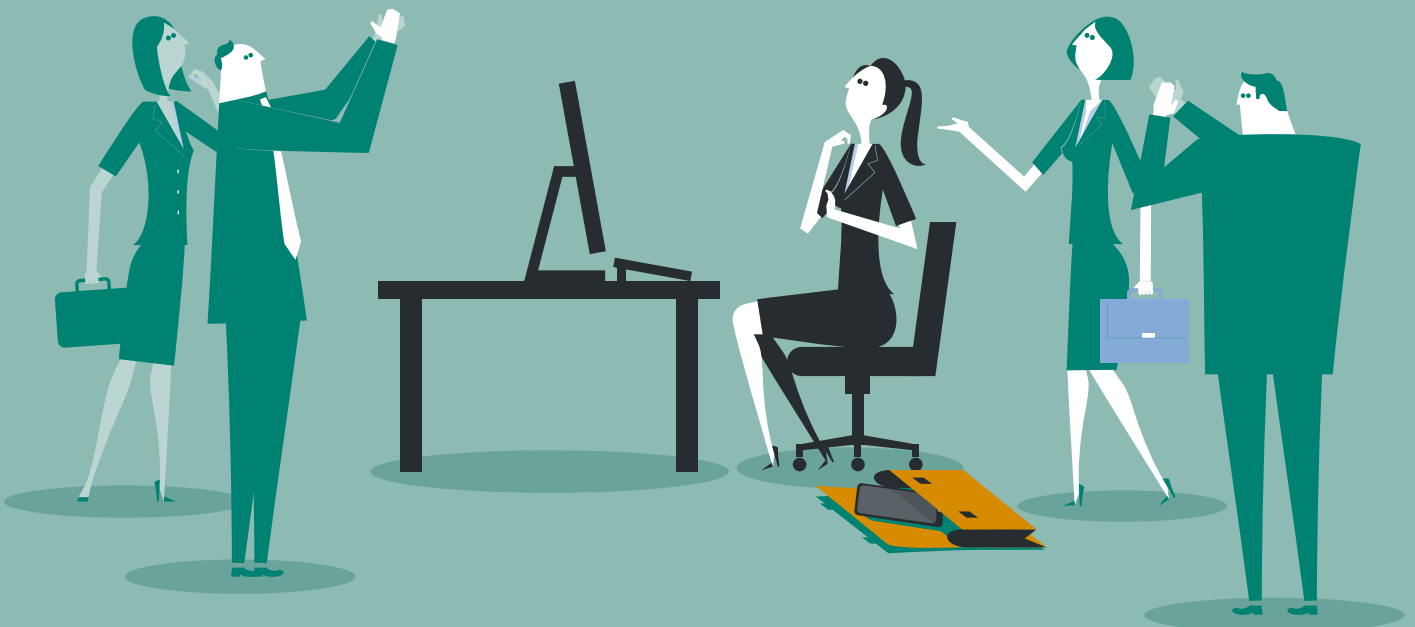


BOARD INTELLIGENCE EBOOK

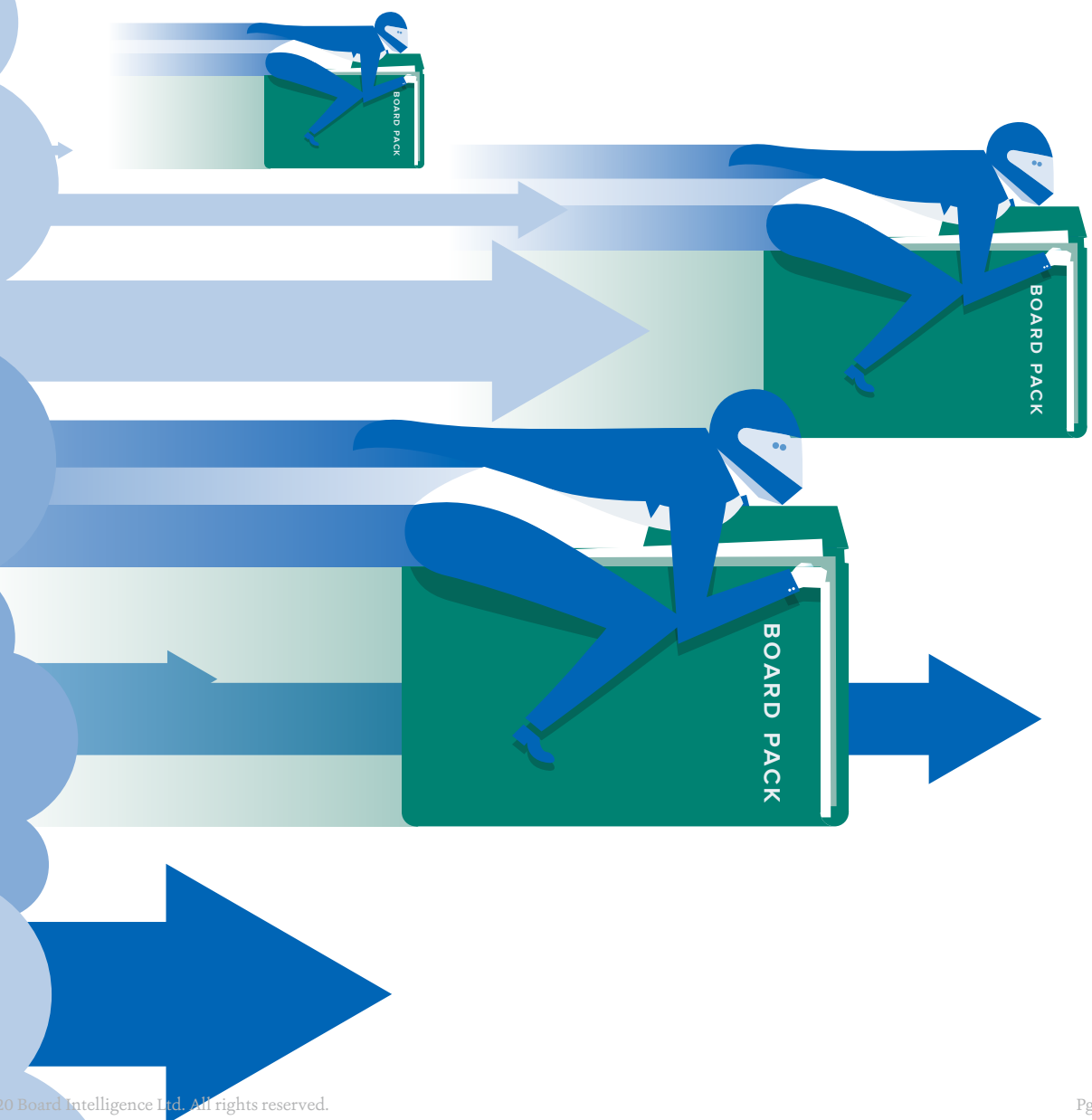
5 Simple Steps To Board Pack Success



BOARD
INTELLIGENCE

Introduction

Your board pack is integral to the overall success of your board meeting. Its structure, size and contents all contribute to the ability of your board to make informed decisions for your organisation.



5 Simple Steps To Success

PROBLEM 1: INFORMATION OVER INSIGHT

When writing a board paper, management need to put themselves in the shoes of the board. The board don't just want an update of what's been happening in the business — they want to know the “Why?” and “So what?” .

Solution: Report writing training and report briefing

Great board papers cover the context, facts and figures in as few words and data points as possible, and focus their attention on what's driving the results and the implications for the organisation. However, this is easier said than done and not everybody has been trained in how to write (or present data) holistically and succinctly in a business context. Short training courses that cover how to structure information, with journalistic tips and tricks, can make a world of difference.

The briefing process is an essential and often overlooked part of preparing board papers. Report writers need to be clear on the specific questions that the board needs answered. Structuring the report around these questions helps to ensure the paper is focused on what matters and that it contains neither critical gaps nor reams of irrelevant information. Before your report writers put pen to paper, encourage them to sit down with their paper sponsor and agree on the brief — in particular, agreeing on the purpose of the paper and the high-level questions it needs to address.

PROBLEM 2: TOO BACKWARD-LOOKING

In any report, whilst it's important that relevant metrics are acknowledged and discussed, it's essential that at some point the discussion moves forward to outline which actions need to be taken next.

Solution: Ask the right questions

This requires a mindset change for many report writers to step away from their comfort zone of retrospective financial metrics and KPIs, and put forward their view of what's around the corner. Management need to focus on the underlying drivers of the business in order to explore what might be about to happen, rather than focus on what has already passed.

We recommend considering the following questions to help prepare a more forward-looking report:

- What's driving the results and what does this mean going forward?
- What risks and opportunities are on the horizon — and what should we be doing about them?
- How confident are you in delivering the plan?

PROBLEM 3: TOO LONG

The average board pack is around 288 pages long, yet board directors only spend around 3 hours reading their packs, which suggests they're only reading about 100 pages in the available time.

Solution: Get prescriptive about length

3 to 5 pages is plenty for almost any topic. We recommend being specific about the length allowed for each paper. In fact, some boards will automatically reject any paper that creeps over the page limit. If you can combine a strict page limit with a rigorous brief to ensure report writers focus on the correct questions, boards can avoid missing out on critical information. Finally, if the topic is particularly complex and extra pages seem to be unavoidable, the report length should be agreed with the Chairman to avoid the 50+ page reports that can be commonplace in many board packs.

**PROBLEM 4: NO CLEAR IDEA OF MATERIALITY OR THE INPUT REQUIRED**

One of the most common issues arising from board packs is lack of clarity over materiality: why is this in front of me, and why does it matter to the board?

Solution: Better executive summaries

At the very least, the executive summary should clearly identify whether the paper is to be noted, discussed, or acted upon.

A good executive summary, should in a single page answer the following questions:

- Why they are receiving the paper
- How material the issue is
- The main questions the report addresses
- The main conclusions it draws
- What they are expected to do next

We recommend using a template for this to ensure the board consistently receive high-quality executive summaries across the organisation.

When crafted well, an executive summary becomes the most critical part of your board paper. Asking a report writer to start by drafting the executive summary is a great way to check that the brief has been properly understood, before time is spent writing the body of the paper.

5. PROBLEM: NOT ENOUGH STRATEGIC DISCUSSION

There are many important issues to be covered in a board meeting, and it can be difficult to pin down which points need to be first on the agenda, and understood by various members of the board even before the meeting begins.

Solution: Get decision and discussion papers on the agenda

This is really two solutions in one.

The first is to be strict about your planning and to start each meeting tackling the items of most strategic importance, so everyone debates these whilst they are feeling fresh. The best boards map out the

most important discussions 6 — 12 months ahead and work hard to ensure time is safeguarded for those items, even in the face of the urgent distractions that arise. We recommend using our Six Conversations Model to identify the important discussions your board needs to have this year.

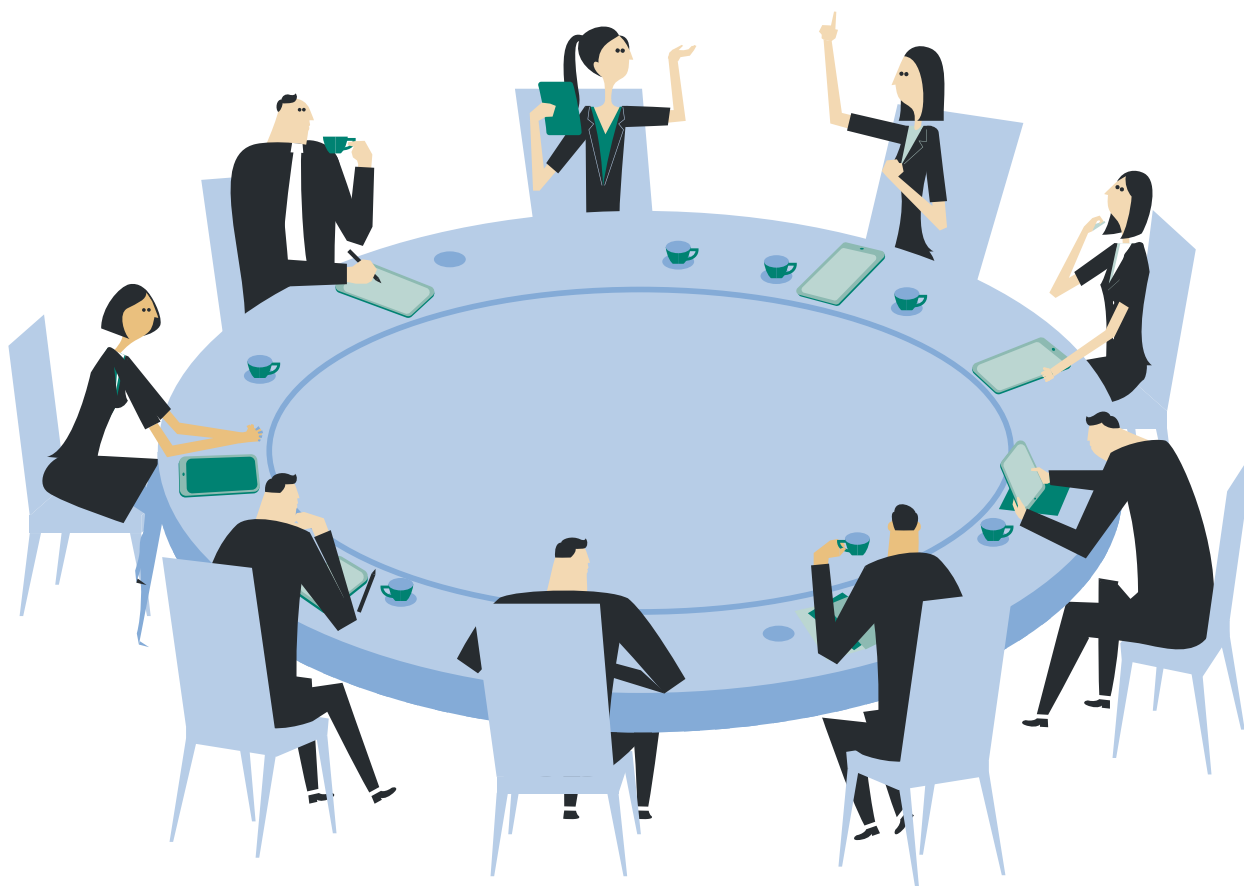
The second is to ensure that when these items come to the board they are accompanied by a clear and concise decision and discussion paper, so that the main issues are well understood by everyone before the meeting begins. A good way to do this is to plot out the decision criteria that matter to the board, for each type of decision, and to ensure that report writers ruthlessly focus on answering those questions.



Conclusion

Now that you're on your way to a better board pack, the next question is — what does best practice look like?

In the meantime, if you would like to discuss any of the solutions above or see how Board Intelligence could help your organisation get the most from their board packs, get in touch.



Who are Board Intelligence?

Board Intelligence is the world's only platform that enables boards and leadership teams to focus on what matters the most, ensuring smarter meetings, decisions and actions. We work with a variety of businesses, from FTSE 350 organisations to public sector and government departments, to help create better reports that resonate with board members.

[Get in touch with us and book a free demo](#) to discover how your organisation can be transformed by better decision making in the boardroom.

WHO DO WE WORK WITH?

We review hundreds of board packs every year and support listed, privately owned and public sector clients. Including:

- Over 15% of the FTSE 100
- Over 20% in financial services
- Central government departments
- Health and education organisations
- Almost every governance model (mutual, partnerships, trusts, corporates) and in multiple geographies

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