

A BOARD INTELLIGENCE ACADEMY SPOTLIGHT REPORT

# The Hybrid Boardroom

A new dawn for directors?



BOARD  
INTELLIGENCE

THE DISCIPLINE OF FOCUS

# Contents

Introduction	3
Key findings	5
Going “hybrid”	7
Why does the mix matter?	11
Are you ready?	11

## With thanks to



KEITH SKEOCH

*Chair, Aberdeen Standard Investments Research Institute; Interim Chair, FRC*



SIR ANTHONY HABGOOD

*Chair, Preqin; former Chair, RELX, Whitbread, Bunzl*



ALISON MUNRO

*Chair, NCATI, TfL's independent investment advisory group; NED, OFWAT*



PAUL LESTER

*Chair, McCarthy & Stone, Essentra*



MARTIN GILBERT

*Chair, Revolut; SID, Glencore*

### REFERENCES

Board Intelligence research, *April 2021*  
Professor Lynda Gratton, London Business School: *“Four Principles to Ensure Hybrid Work Is Productive Work,” MIT Sloan Management Review, November 2020*

Luba Mandzy Herring & Kevin Murphy, Bain & Company: *“The Virtues of Virtual: How Executives Are Successfully Designing Remote Work and Meetings,” www.bain.com, March 2021*

Board Intelligence & The Chartered Governance Institute UK & Ireland research, *March 2019*

# Introduction

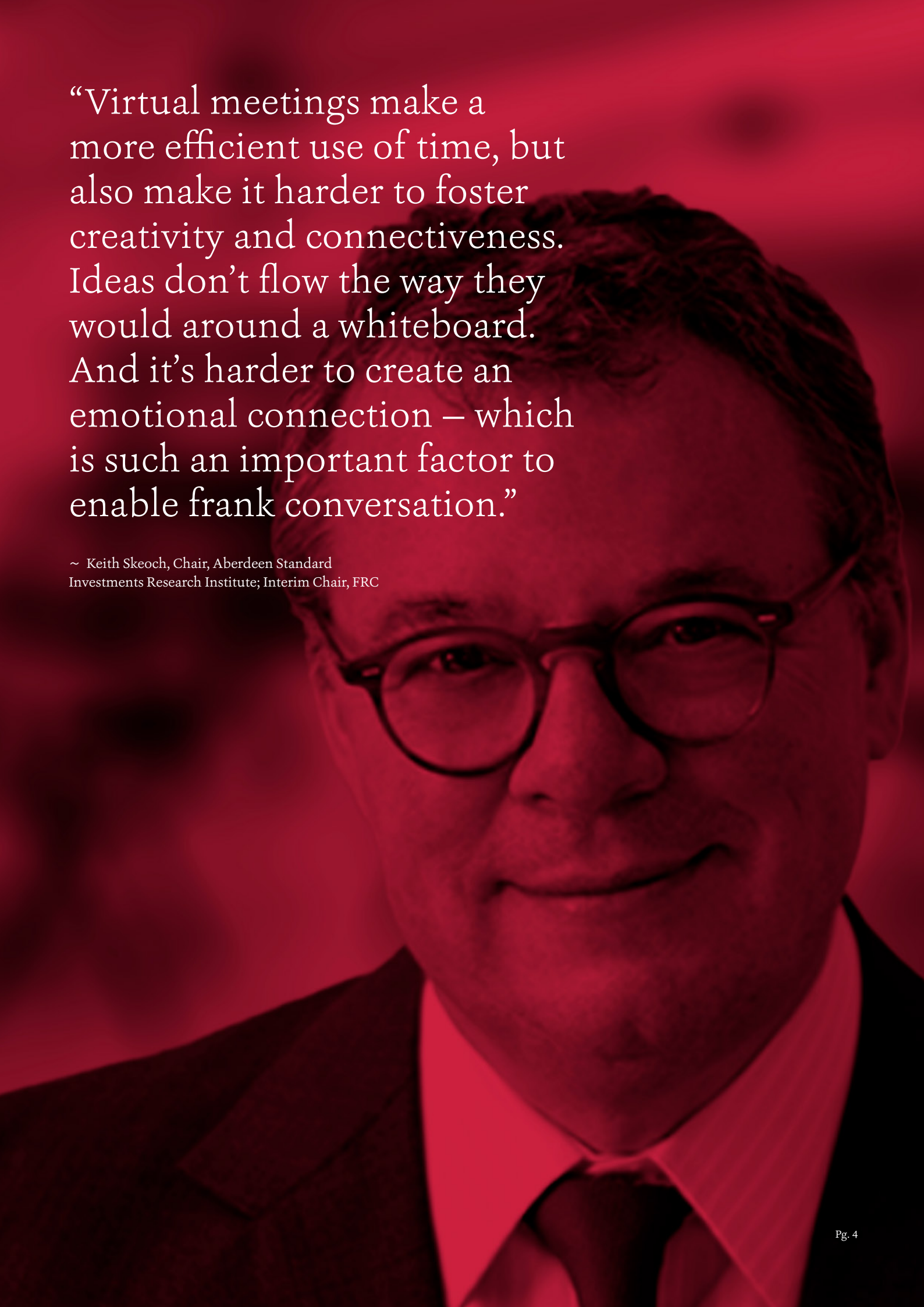
As workplaces reopen, the question of where and how we'll work is front of mind for many. But how does this thinking apply to boards?

Our research with chairs, chief executives, and governance professionals shows an appetite for change, and a desire to adopt a "hybrid" board model combining the best of on-site and remote working.

With a mindset shift and new processes, this "hybrid" model can deliver both convenience and a higher-performing board. Without this, your organisation risks being outpaced.

So, what does this new approach look like? And how do you know if your board is ready for the change?





“Virtual meetings make a more efficient use of time, but also make it harder to foster creativity and connectiveness. Ideas don’t flow the way they would around a whiteboard. And it’s harder to create an emotional connection – which is such an important factor to enable frank conversation.”

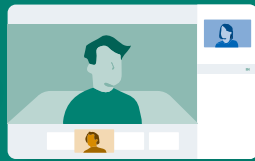
~ Keith Skeoch, Chair, Aberdeen Standard Investments Research Institute; Interim Chair, FRC

# Key findings

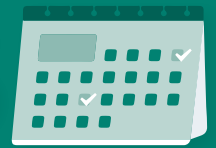
Will boards revert to their pre-Covid ways? **78% NO**  
**22% YES**

Most aren't done with digital

**2/3** OF BOARDS WILL MEET ONLINE **≥ 50%** OF THE TIME



**1/3** are yet to confirm their post-Covid calendar



Online beats on-site when it comes to



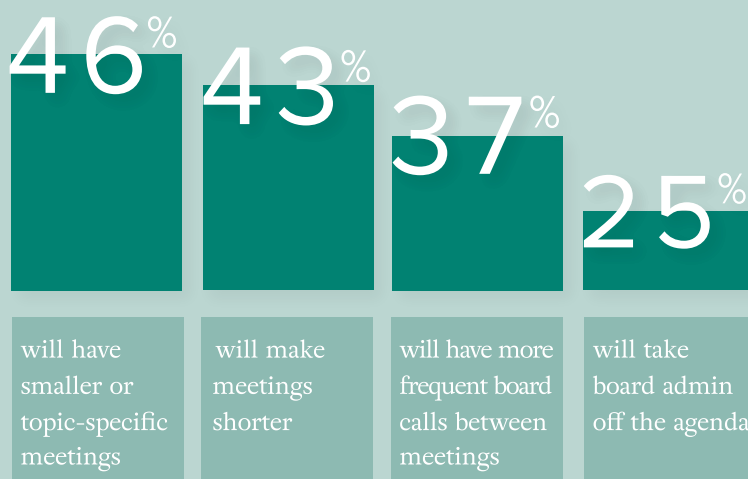
**78%** Better **TIME** discipline



**87%** Enables **POSITIVE** behaviours

## THE FUTURE

Shorter, more focused meetings



Topics will drive format

**PHYSICAL MEETINGS** will be used for

**90%** Strategic discussions

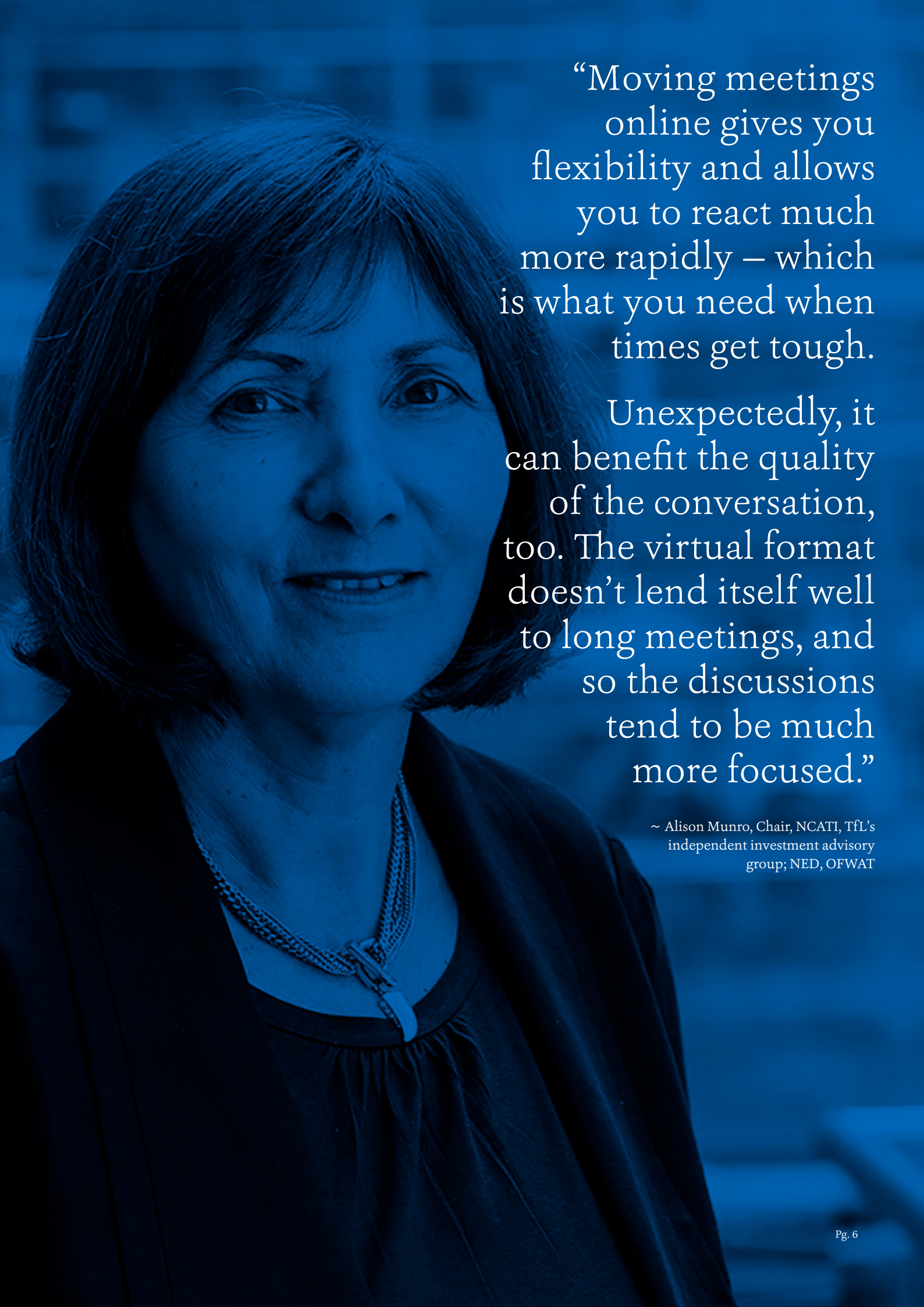
**81%** Presentations from non-board members

**VIRTUAL MEETINGS** will be used for

**83%** Performance updates

**58%** Monitoring strategic initiatives, deep dives





“Moving meetings online gives you flexibility and allows you to react much more rapidly – which is what you need when times get tough.

Unexpectedly, it can benefit the quality of the conversation, too. The virtual format doesn't lend itself well to long meetings, and so the discussions tend to be much more focused.”

~ Alison Munro, Chair, NCATI, Tfl's independent investment advisory group; NED, OFWAT

# Going “hybrid”

## Hybrid meetings or hybrid calendars?

Hybrid board calendars aren't hybrid board meetings, with some attendees joining remotely while others are on-site. A hybrid calendar means there is a mix of (entirely) remote and (entirely) on-site meetings through the year.

Why is this distinction important?

Because hybrid meetings take extra effort — especially from the chair — and could lead to a two-tier board where some directors are unable to fulfil their duty of challenge. In the words of the former CEO of a large insurance company: “Everyone who has had to attend a board meeting by phone because of a cancelled flight knows that it doesn't really work.”

*“There's an appetite to go ‘all or nothing’ – where we're all physically present, or all virtual, on a meeting-by-meeting basis – to avoid situations where those who are remote end up being observers.”*

~ Trustee, large UK charity

*“We've started weekly board calls, which we keep to under an hour. During these, the ‘board of directors’ is primarily a ‘sounding board of directors’ – it's more about providing reassurance and support than directives.”*

~Paul Lester, Chair, McCarthy & Stone, Essentra

## Why hybrid calendars?

So, if boards are looking to treat everyone the same way, why bother with a hybrid calendar? Because, **according to London Business School Professor Lynda Gratton**, each format has clear strengths and weaknesses.

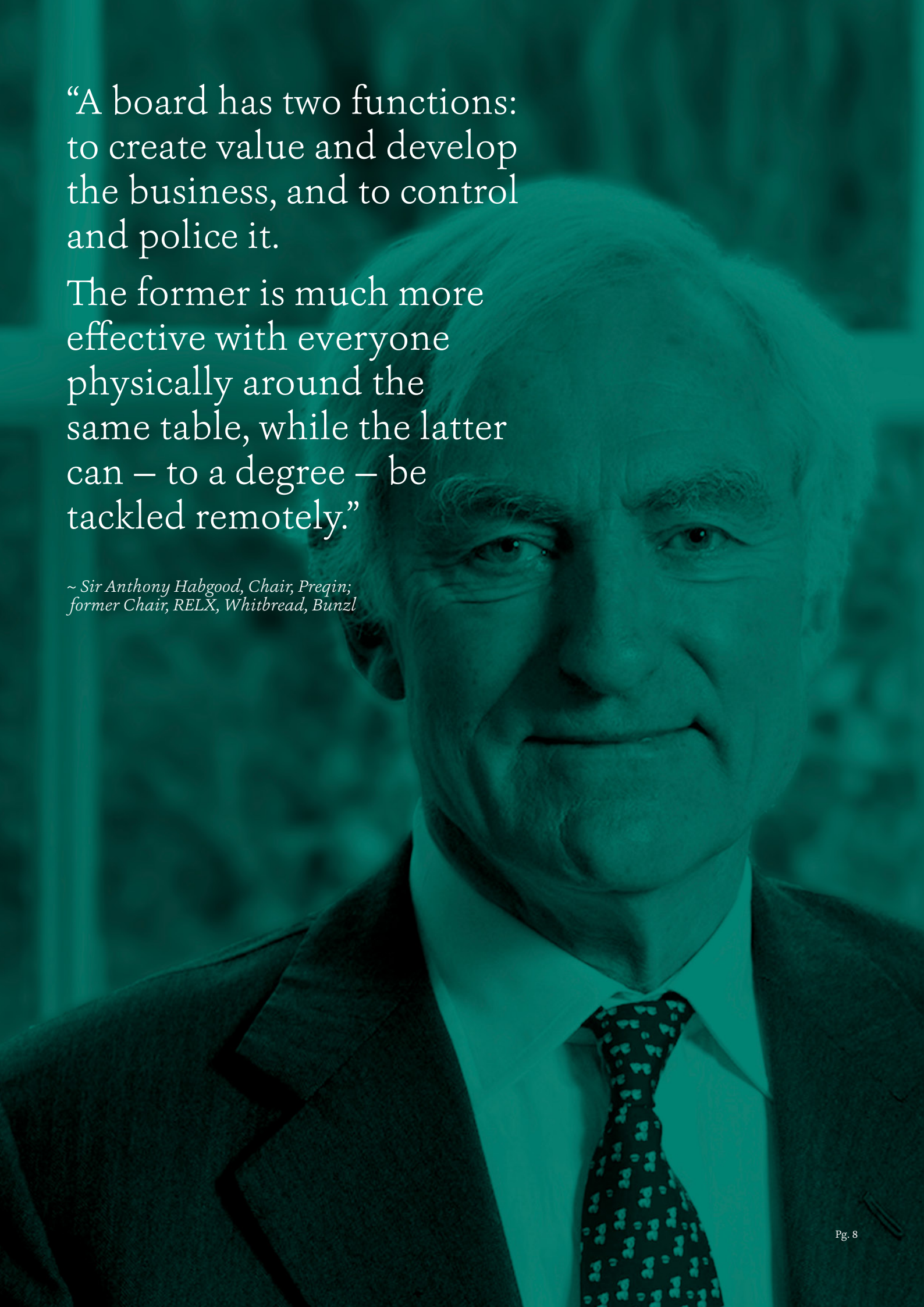
Physical meetings excel at two things: fostering relationships, and stimulating creativity and blue-sky thinking. Both are pillars of a well-functioning board. And both have been sorely missed during the pandemic — not least by new joiners.

Yet, despite — or perhaps because of — these advantages, physical board meetings consume a lot of time. And, in that regard, online meetings have been a welcome surprise for time-poor directors.

As **Bain & Co puts it**: “There is an unspoken social contract in virtual: ‘We won't keep you on Zoom/Teams any longer than necessary, but in return we need to have a focused, sharp discussion.’” And this is reflected in our research — amongst directors who saw time discipline vary with the medium, 78% found it to be better in online meetings.

The introduction of remote meetings is also an opportunity to rethink what boards should be discussing. Should everything be covered by the whole board over a long, formal meeting? Or can certain items be tackled in online, topic-specific meetings or with smaller groups? Here, going hybrid gives boards a chance to experiment.





“A board has two functions:  
to create value and develop  
the business, and to control  
and police it.

The former is much more  
effective with everyone  
physically around the  
same table, while the latter  
can – to a degree – be  
tackled remotely.”

*~ Sir Anthony Habgood, Chair, Preqin;  
former Chair, RELX, Whitbread, Bunzl*



# What should your hybrid calendar look like?

There's more to a hybrid calendar than holding half your meetings online: it's about matching the discussion to the medium. But just because a paper has "strategy" in its title doesn't mean it needs to be discussed in person. A handy way to plan your hybrid calendar is to use our [Six Conversations Model](#):



In general, "Steering" conversations will be better dealt with in physical meetings; "Supervising" ones will suit a digital setting. In fact, over 75% of boards agree on the following split:

## ON-SITE MEETINGS

- **Strategic decisions** (e.g., approving acquisition proposals, setting strategy).
- **Presentations by non-board members** (e.g. by external advisors, stakeholder representatives, local market heads).

## ONLINE MEETINGS

- **Monitoring strategic progress** (e.g. project deep dives, macro developments).
- **Performance updates** (e.g. financial reports, operational, customer, or people updates).
- **Governance updates & board administration** (e.g. risk & compliance, reviewing & approving minutes, reappointing directors).

Also consider meeting length and frequency. Make on-site meetings longer — so the extra organising they require is worth it. And take advantage of the flexibility of virtual meetings: deal with a handful of items at a time, and meet more often if needed.

“A hybrid model is probably the future.”

*~ Martin Gilbert, Chair, Revolut; SID, Glencore*



# Why does the mix matter?

Although 85% of boards plan to continue operating remotely at least some of the time, one in three hasn't yet decided what its future calendar will look like.

For these boards, time is running short. Boards that cling to the “old ways”, or delay too long, risk missing out on the opportunity to introduce a more efficient — and effective — way of operating. And what might that cost your organisation? [Research](#) has revealed the startling financial cost of board reporting, but factor in missed opportunities and delayed decisions and the true cost could be even greater.

## Are you ready?

To ensure your board is prepared for a hybrid future, there are five questions you need to ask.

### 1. Are the ground rules clear?

For your board to enjoy the best of both worlds, all members need to know — and follow — the rules of the game. The hybrid board will fail if the group isn't either 100% remote or 100% present.

Importantly, 100% present also means making the most of the time everyone is together. Factor time into the calendar for the board members to get to know each other — and invest in activities that will support this. In a hybrid world, “organised fun” will take on a new significance.

### 2. Is your boardroom technology more than a quick fix?

Many organisations switched rapidly to sharing board papers digitally in the first lockdown, which required quick fixes and pragmatic corner-cutting. A year in, is that working? And what impact has that had on the team?

If you're going to adopt a hybrid model, support your team with the best tools to make it a success in the long run.

*[Find out what has made Board Intelligence the portal of choice for over 500 organisations](#)*

### 3. Does your board calendar unlock the potential of hybrid board meetings?

A hybrid calendar is only effective if there is a clear understanding of the type of discussion required by each agenda item. And your calendar should do more than give you an overview of what's planned throughout the year — it should also give you confidence your board is fulfilling its duties.

With Board Intelligence's Agenda Planner, you'll be able to unlock the potential of hybrid meetings by putting the Six Conversations model into practice. You can also update forward calendars with ease, and monitor where your board is spending its time.

*[Start planning your hybrid calendar](#)*



#### 4. Are your board papers helping the board conversation?

Short, focused discussions are where online meetings shine. But that can only happen if the material for these meetings is concise and focused too.

There's a simple formula for this. First, give your report authors an actual brief, not just an agenda item's title — so they know what questions are on the board's mind. Then, provide them with templates, guidance, and training to help them produce great papers that support the discussion — without excessive detail, but with the vital insights that help board members make smart decisions.

*See how Board Intelligence unlocks better reports and smarter decision-making*

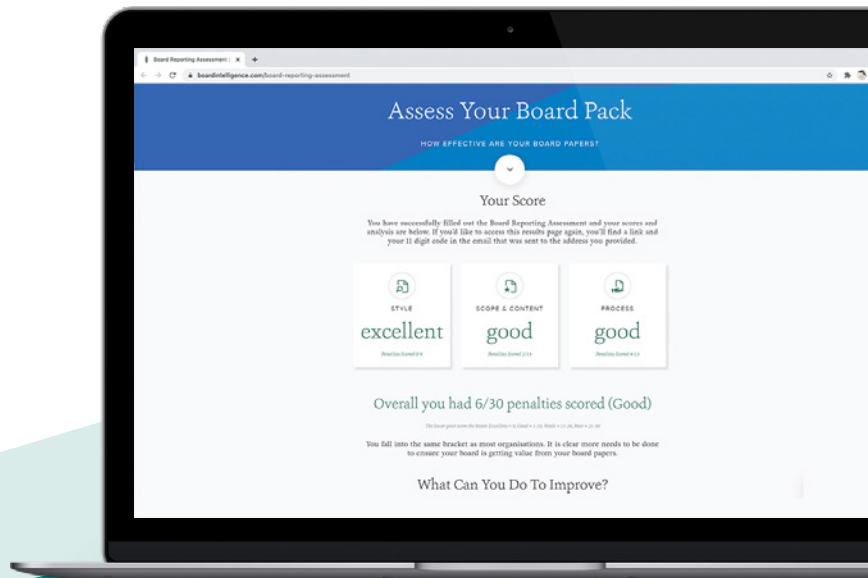
#### 5. Is your board getting information, or just data?

A narrative shines brightest when it's accompanied by insightful data. But, too often, boards are blinded by numbers and KPIs.

To see what really matters, it's not "big data" your board needs — it's "big insight". Done well, a one-page organisation dashboard will provide a holistic, "at-a-glance" view of the health of the organisation, highlighting up-front what's going well and what's not.

*Learn how to describe the health of your business on one page*

To help you answer these questions — and find out if your board is ready to move beyond the virtual boardroom and thrive in a hybrid world — *use our free self-assessment tool.*



For more information or to request a demo, contact us on:

+44(0) 20 7192 8200

BOARDINTELLIGENCE.COM  
[info@boardintelligence.com](mailto:info@boardintelligence.com)