

BOARD INTELLIGENCE E-BOOK

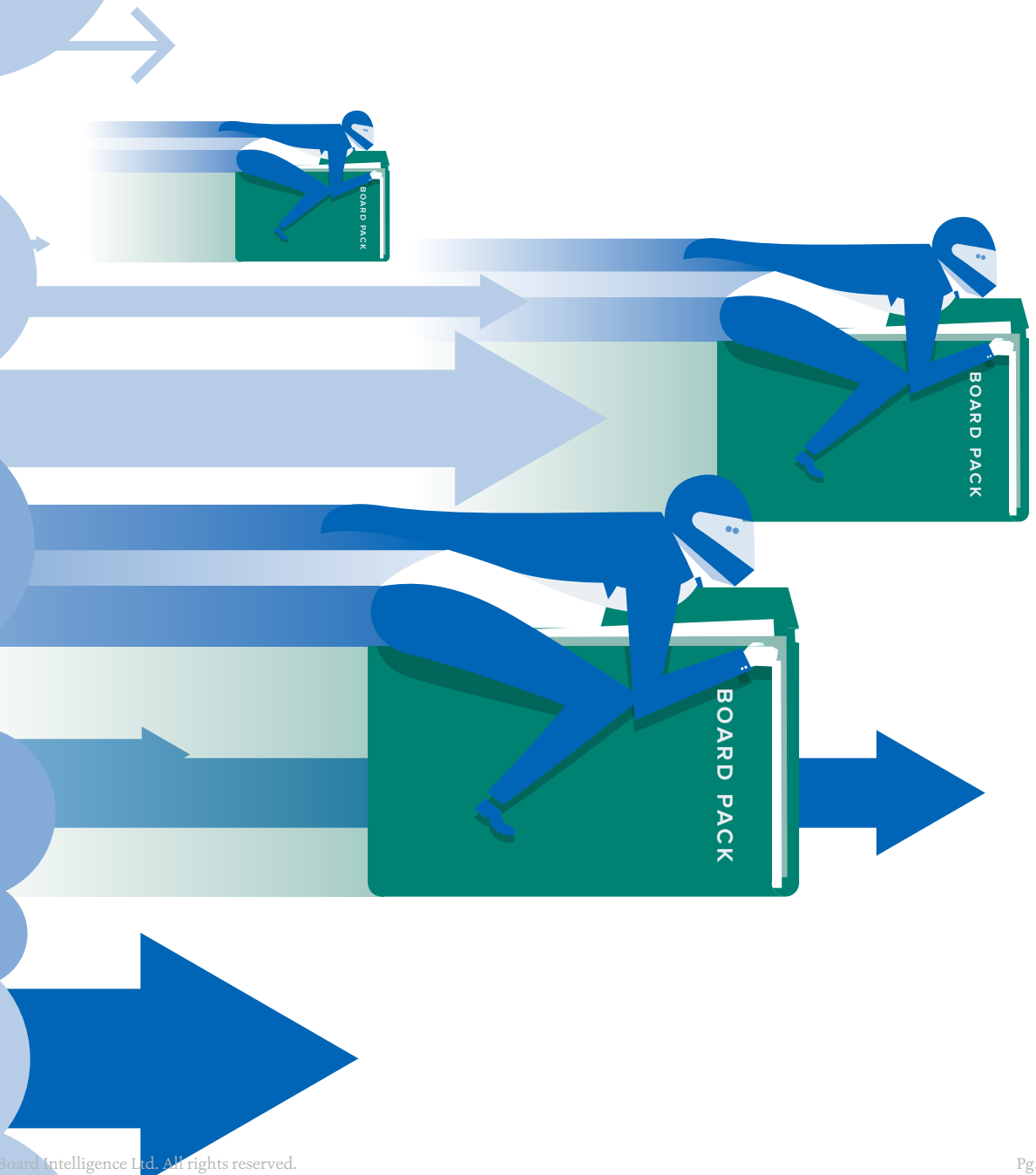
5 Simple Steps To Board Pack Success



BOARD
INTELLIGENCE

Introduction

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



5 Simple Steps To Success

PROBLEM 1: INFORMATION OVER INSIGHT

When writing a board paper, management authors must put themselves in the shoes of board members. The board doesn't just want an update of what's been happening over the last period — it wants to know the “Why?” and the “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 what it all means for the organisation. 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.

On the other side of the equation, the briefing process is an often-overlooked part of preparing board papers. So, before your report writers put pen to paper, have them sit down with their paper sponsor and agree on the brief — in particular, define the purpose of the paper and the high-level questions it needs to address. Once report writers are clear on what exactly the board wants answered, they can structure their reports around these questions, which helps ensure the papers are focused on what matters and contain neither critical gaps nor reams of irrelevant information.

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 needs 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

According to research, 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 board's chair 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 a lack of clarity over materiality. In other terms: “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 for its readers:

- Why are they receiving the paper?
- How material is the issue?
- What main questions does the report address?
- What are its main conclusions?
- What are they expected to do next?

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

When crafted well, an executive summary becomes the most critical part of your board paper. And 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 should be 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 most effective boards map out their key

discussions 6–12 months ahead and 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 require 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 report writers 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?

If you would like to discuss any of the solutions above or see how Board Intelligence could help your organisation get the most from its board packs, [get in touch](#).



About Board Intelligence

Board Intelligence is the world's only platform that enables boards and leadership teams to focus on what matters most, ensuring smarter meetings, decisions, and actions. We work with a variety of organisations, from FTSE 350 businesses 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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