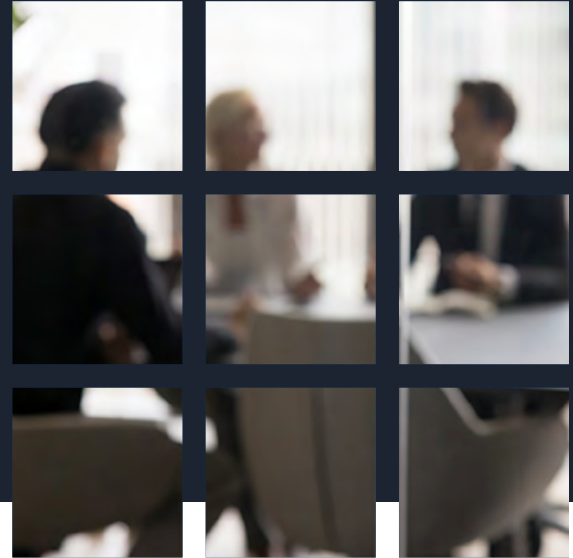




How Leaders Can Strategize Their Board Culture

By Jane Firth & Rachel Slattery



A company's culture is a prominent part of its corporate makeup, from both an internal and external lens. An effective and inclusive culture is a hugely valuable asset, but it needs to be driven from the top.

Forbes states: "The board of directors plays a pivotal role in ensuring the success and longevity of an organization. More than just attending meetings, a well-functioning board is deeply involved in shaping the organization's strategy, overseeing financial health and ensuring legal compliance." As organizations strive to adapt to complex challenges and seize new opportunities in an ever-changing commercial environment, we explore the importance of a well-defined culture led by the board.

Cultural Consideration

The importance of the board in establishing culture and purpose has been reinforced by the emphasis on environment, social and governance (ESG) factors.

The "S" in ESG, which encompasses aspects such as diversity, equity and inclusion, has received particular attention. There is now a leaning for more organizations to respond to social issues, which extends to their board culture - these expectations are continually evolving, particularly in response to societal and generational shifts.

Younger generations are demanding greater transparency and accountability from organizations on issues such as environmental, sustainability and ethical governance. Meeting these expectations requires boards to be agile and responsive, continuously assessing and adapting their culture to align with changing societal demands. One of the primary responsibilities of leaders is making sure the behaviors and values advocated by the board are embodied throughout the entire organization. This is crucial for creating a cohesive and purpose-driven culture.

Challenges in Cultural Changes

Transforming an organization's culture is a complex and ongoing process and not without challenges. Companies can face resistance from employees who are accustomed to existing ways of working. Overcoming this push back requires a thoughtful and strategic approach, including clear communication, training and support for employees as they understand and adapt to new cultural norms.

The Importance of Succession Planning

Succession planning is a critical consideration for boards as they strategize their culture. Identifying potential leadership gaps and developing a pipeline of leaders with the right 'fit' to carry forward the board culture is essential for its longevity and success.

The Role of Chief People Officers (CPOs)

With expertise including organizational effectiveness, change experience, right-sizing, scaling and modernizing, CPOs are progressively in demand for their skills in driving cultural alignment. CPOs can also integrate the company's values into promotion processes, job descriptions and performance evaluations.

"In doing so, firms can ensure their values are not just words on a wall, but instead are actively practiced by all employees."

Operationalizing board culture is a multifaceted effort that requires a holistic and proactive approach. Leaders must prioritize cultural alignment, ensure values and behaviors are lived throughout the organization, and address challenges with thoughtful strategies.

“A 'top-down' culture not only enhances organizational reputation, acting as a differentiator to competitors, but also attracts market leading talent and cultivates a sense of belonging among employees.”

About the Authors



Jane Firth
Principal, People & Culture & Head

Jane Firth is a Principal within the People & Culture Practice. Based in the London office, she has a national remit.

Prior to joining Odgers Berndtson in 2016, Jane spent fifteen years working for a leading global recruitment agency becoming a

Director and managing the HR recruitment team for London Financial & Professional Services. Jane has specialised in recruiting purely for the HR market since 2012.

She brings a successful track record in delivering high-end HR leadership and board level appointments on behalf of FTSE, AIM and Fortune 500 clients, as well as private equity backed, family owned, founder led and publicly funded organisations. Jane has a particular interest in HR within financial & professional services as industries and is a functional lead for talent & learning across all sectors.

Jane has a strong reputation in the HR community having built trusted relationships over time. She regularly hosts networking events bringing together diverse groups of HR leaders.



Rachel Slattery
Partner, Board, Chair & NED

Based in London, Rachel Slattery is a Partner in the Chair & Board Practice, specialising in non-executive appointments, including advisory boards.

For more than a decade she has advised boards across sectors, size of business and ownership structure and offers the experience of working with

international clients from FTSE 100 to AIM-listed as well as privately owned businesses.

Much has changed during her board advisory career amidst increasingly rigorous corporate governance, enhanced investor scrutiny, improved workforce engagement and ongoing reflections on the role of business in society. Keeping ahead of these macro impacts whilst maintaining and extending relationships at board level is critical to success. Odgers Berndtson is accredited by BEIS under the Enhanced Code of Conduct for executive search firms, in recognition of our efforts at the forefront of helping boards enhance their gender diversity. Diversity of perspective is critical to achieving a well-functioning board and Rachel's focus includes enhancing both ethnic and functional diversity in the boardroom.

She joined Odgers Berndtson in 2005 as a member of the industrial markets practice and has developed particular expertise in this sector whilst continuing to advise more broadly. Rachel began her executive search career in 2000. As a career headhunter, she has delivered successfully across the whole project life cycle. Following graduation with a degree in economics from Cambridge, Rachel began her career with Arthur Andersen in the private client services practice.