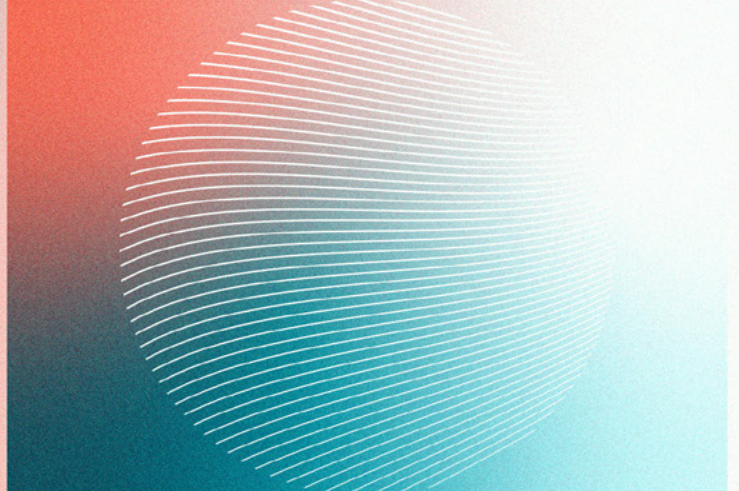
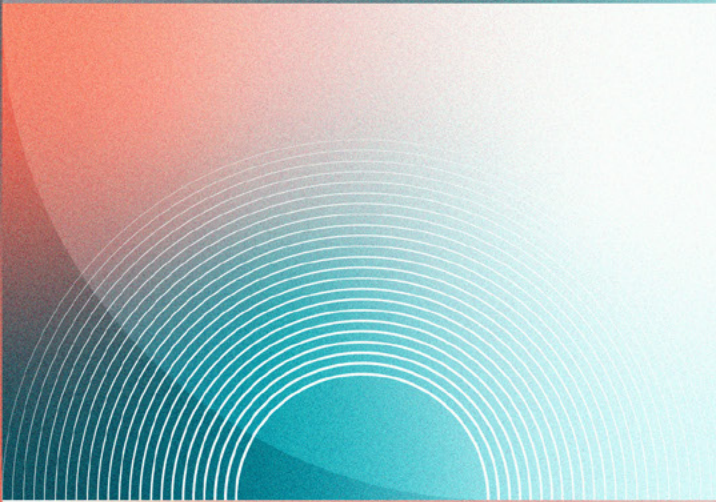
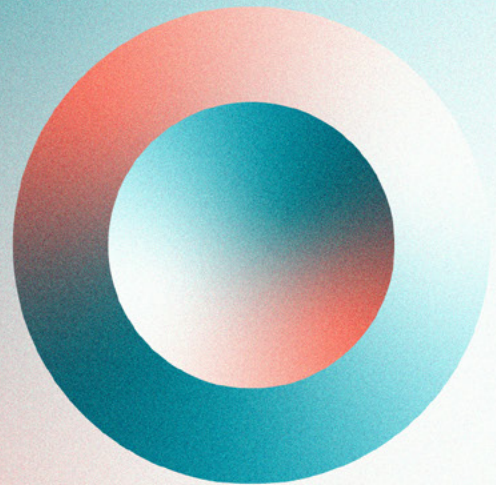
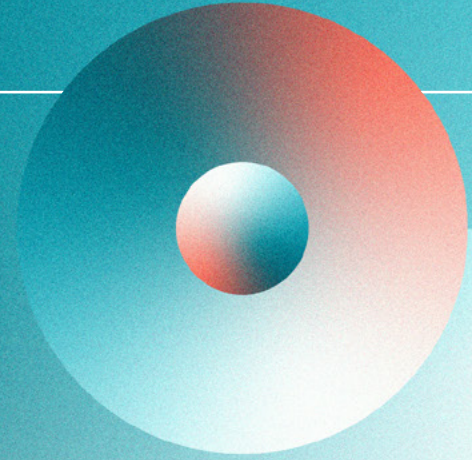


Board Monitor

UAE 2024

Navigating shifting sands:
Six ways boards are reshaping
their processes to thrive now



Welcome to Board Monitor UAE 2024

5 Who is influencing the board agenda today—and are board members happy with that?

8 Where does the board spend its time—and are those the right places?

11 How are boards addressing the widening risk environment?

14 Are boards more operationally involved?

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25 Methodology

Our analysis of the newest class of directors added to ADX and DFM boards as well as historical trends in the backgrounds of people being added to boards is available here:



Explore the data

For many years, Heidrick & Struggles has been tracking the trends that have shaped the global governance arena including important long-term changes in board independence, diversity, financial oversight, risk management, and in the shareholder base the directors serve.

More recently, we have been helping our clients understand the expanding environment in which they are operating. How is the role of business in society changing? What are the implications for directors? What does the future hold?

Clarity has been hard to find as directors struggle to draw reasonable boundaries and consider their responsibilities in the midst of a rolling global pandemic, geopolitical uncertainty and conflict, emerging technologies, cybersecurity concerns, and a long list of social and environmental concerns. While there are important industry and regional differences—indeed, differences from one company to another, most accept that the role of the board is expanding. More is at stake. More is uncertain. And more is expected now of directors.

New approaches are emerging for boards and individual directors who see promise in this shifting landscape. In what follows, we draw on the results of two recent surveys of CEOs and directors around the world, and our experience, to describe how directors and CEOs are answering six questions that are reshaping the boardroom.

Six questions reshaping the boardroom

1. Who is influencing the board agenda today—and are board members happy with that?
2. Where does the board spend its time—and are those the right places?
3. How are boards addressing the widening risk environment?
4. Are boards more operationally involved?
5. How are boards engaging with the workforce?
6. How are boards thinking about diversity today?

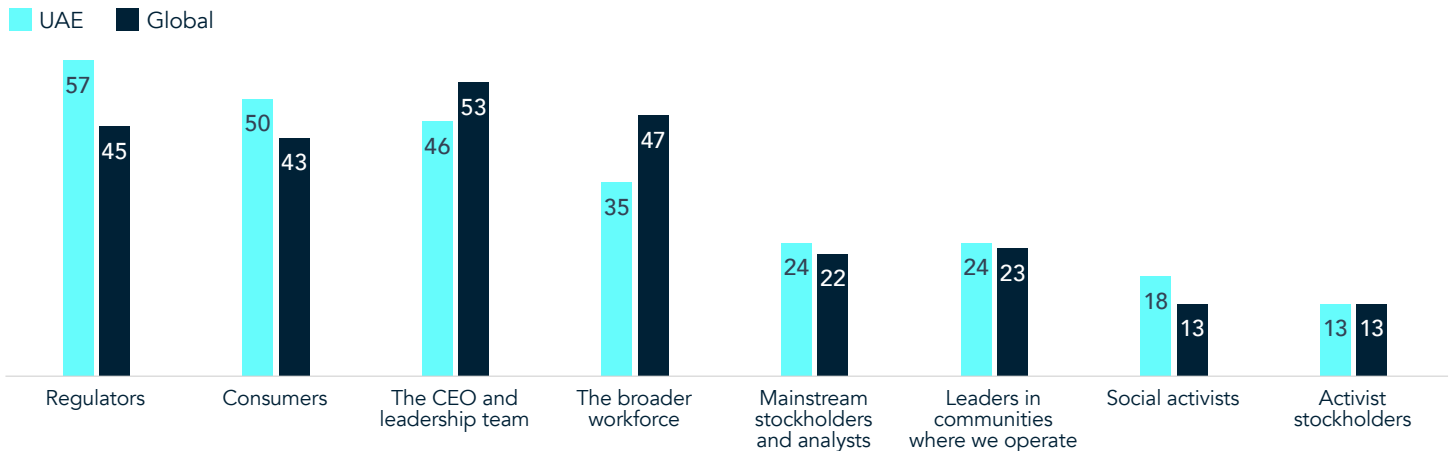
Who is influencing the board agenda today—and are board members happy with that?

One of the key themes shaping global boardrooms today is that *more* stakeholders want access to boards today and have increasing power to influence boards. Stakeholders include investors, regulators, workers, employees, internal leaders, communities, and civil society stakeholders, forming a very diverse group for boards and organizations to manage. Boards, from their point of view, are also engaging more with external stakeholders and becoming more mindful of their role in society.

To better understand the relative influence of stakeholders today, we asked directors and CEOs to stipulate which stakeholders have accelerated their influence most in the post-Covid environment. For the UAE, specifically, we can see that regulators have certainly accelerated their influence on the board’s agenda and decision making, with 57% of respondents highlighting this, versus only 45% of the respondents globally. Consumers are identified as the second stakeholder group that has more influence on boards in the UAE today, with 50% of respondents selecting this versus only 43% globally. Globally, the CEO and leadership team and the broader workforce have also become more influential in driving board agenda and decision making.

UAE and global: Stakeholders who have accelerated their influence most in the post-Covid environment (%)

(Somewhat more and significantly more)



Source: Heidrick & Struggles’ survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,568

The increasing influence of regulators in the UAE and in the GCC region more broadly is a continuing trend, driven in part by the changing regulatory landscape and the demand on boards to constantly stay abreast of and respond to regulatory changes with focus on improving board governance.



We are seeing regulators strongly supportive of advancing good governance, board effectiveness, and introducing best practices around board training and development, board evaluation, and board diversity. This is extremely encouraging.”

H.E. Eng. Abdullatif A. Al-Othman

Governor, GCC Board Directors Institute

Increasing influence from consumers is a new emerging trend and seen more prominently in the UAE, as compared to global average. Growing consumer influence requires boards to develop a deeper understanding of their consumers’ needs and preferences, requiring more diverse voices on the board that reflect those of the consumers.



With a new generation of consumers to factor in, boards need to be attuned by being adept at listening and being closer to their consumers. This means supporting executive management in their role of being in the market, understanding the market, and relaying market feedback to the board. In addition, the voice of the consumer can be heard through use of independent experts and surveys that can act as a useful sounding board for boards. Finally, to have the voice of the consumer on the board itself through a seasoned practitioner would be a boon for any consumer-facing board.”

Mohammed Al-Shroogi

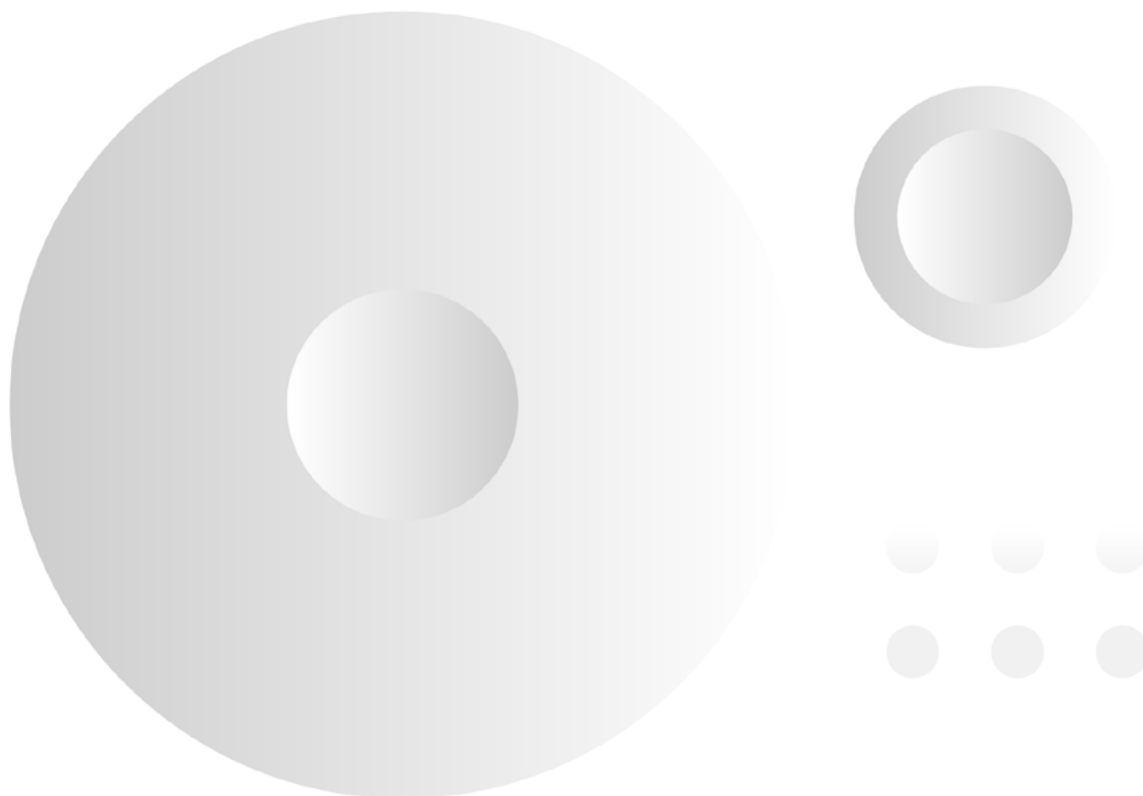
Chairman, GCC Board Directors Institute

Satisfaction with level of influence

We also asked respondents how satisfied they are with the current influence of stakeholders, generally and on a relative basis. A majority of respondents globally report a high level of satisfaction (76%).

- Those reporting the highest level of satisfaction with the current stakeholder mix also report spending increased time understanding emerging technologies such as AI, as well as cyberrisk. They also most often report that the leadership team has more influence post-Covid.
- Those who report less satisfaction with the stakeholder mix also report increased time spent on financial performance and stakeholder concerns. And they are more likely to say that regulators, activist shareholders, and social activists have more influence on the agenda.

We can expect more access to, and influence on, boards from a range of stakeholders as a growing trend over the next few years. Boards in the UAE and around the world need to prepare to engage with this broader stakeholder group while also balancing competing demands and effectively managing their time spent on stakeholder engagement. The focus should also be on adding more diverse voices on the board to better reflect and respond to a diverse stakeholder group.



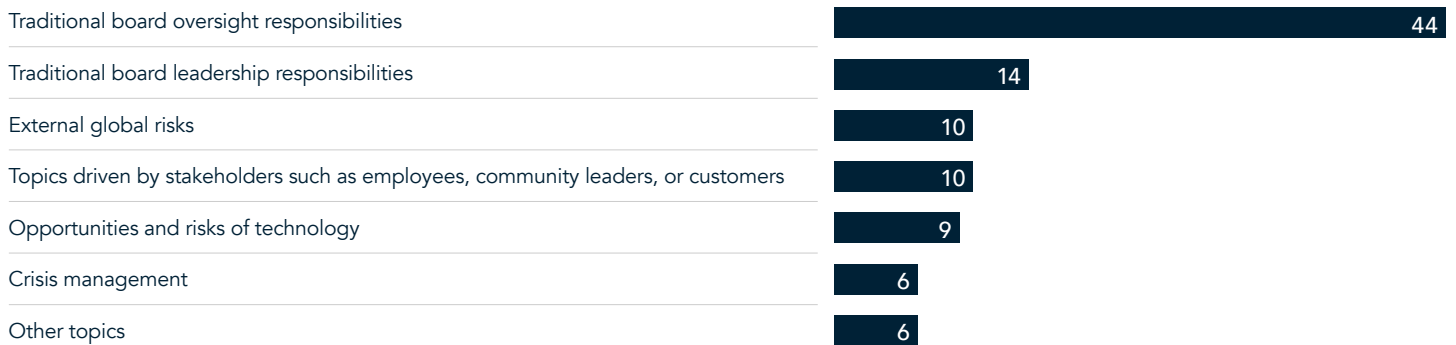
Where does the board spend its time—and are those the right places?

More and more companies are learning to thrive in this environment, adjusting to consider and address an expanding number of issues. As new influences come to the fore, boards are also shifting how they spend their time. We asked directors and CEOs both how they split their time in meetings and which topics are receiving more of their attention in the post-Covid environment.

Allocation of meeting time

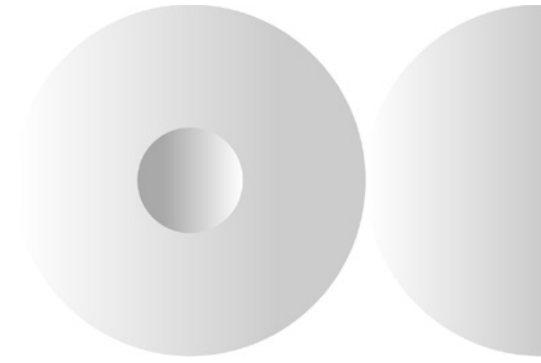
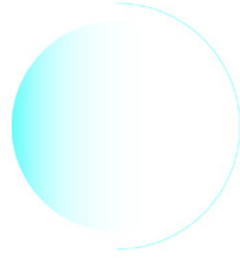
There is broad agreement globally, among both CEOs and directors, that the board meeting agenda remains primarily focused on “traditional board oversight responsibilities” (financial performance and risk, stockholder concerns, and strategy reviews, for example) and “traditional board leadership responsibilities” (CEO succession planning and leadership performance and compensation, for example). Together, these categories take up nearly 60% of boards’ time. External global risks, the opportunities and risks associated with technology (AI and cybersecurity) and other stakeholder issues capture about 10% each in the balance of the meeting schedule. Crisis management and other topics round out the balance.

Global: Average share of meeting time spent on... (%)



Source: Heidrick & Struggles’ survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,715

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.

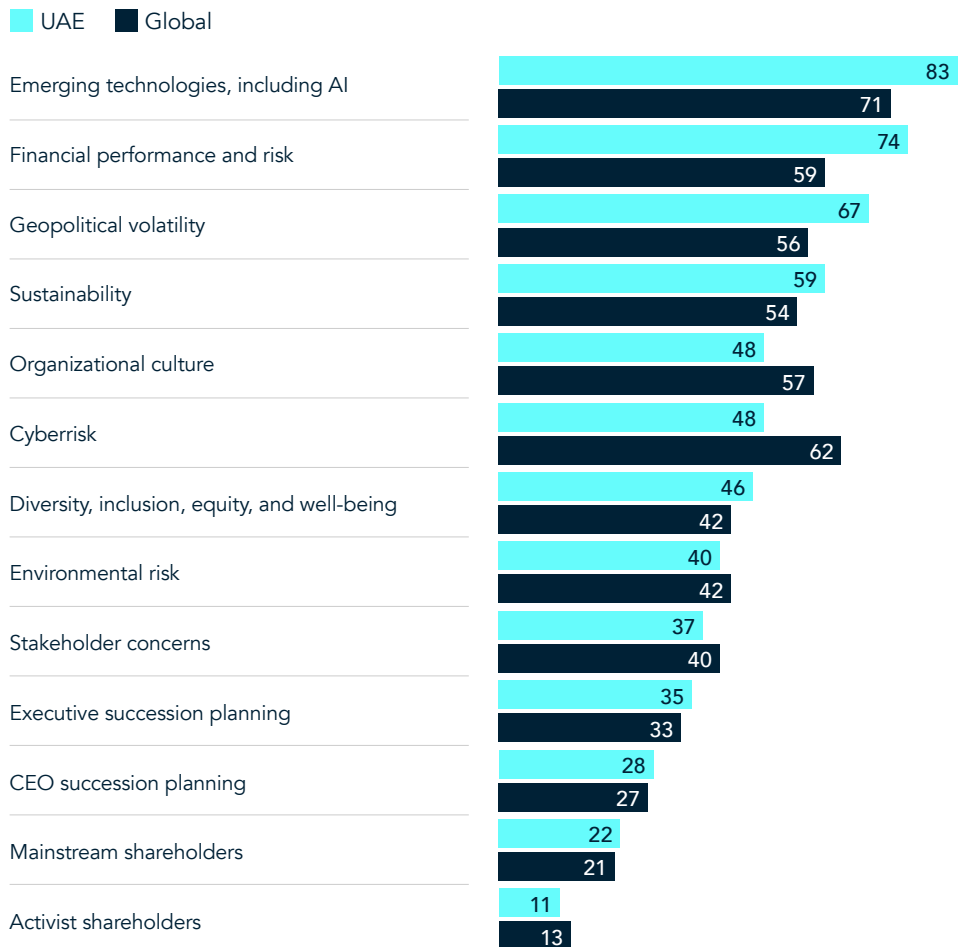


Most pressing topics now versus pre-Covid

Globally, more respondents report spending more time on emerging technologies/AI and cybersecurity compared to pre-Covid than any other category. This is even more pronounced in the UAE, with 83% of respondents saying that they are spending more time on emerging technologies, compared to 71% globally. This finding reflects the overall focus and investment in the space of advanced technologies and AI in the UAE, with several government and private sector investments to drive growth in this space.

UAE and global: Topics on which the board has most increased the amount of time spent (%)

(Somewhat more and significantly more)



Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,687

More satisfaction with where the board spends time includes more time spent on CEO succession planning

CEO succession planning falls near the bottom of the list of areas where directors around the world say they've spent more time post-Covid, at 11th out of 13 options. However, 40% of directors who say their time is spent in the right places say they've increased time spent there, compared with only 28% of those who aren't satisfied. This suggests that at least some directors are concerned that succession planning is not receiving the attention it deserves—a reasonable concern given the findings of other recent research we've conducted showing that 57% of CEOs and directors had little or no confidence that their company's CEO succession planning was positioning the organization well for the future.¹

¹ "CEO and board confidence monitor: A worried start to 2024," Heidrick & Struggles, January 17, 2024, heidrick.com.

We also see that significantly more respondents in the UAE report spending time on financial performance and risk, geopolitical stability, and sustainability compared to global peers.

On the whole, respondents at larger companies, those with more than \$1 billion USD in annual revenue, report spending more time in every area, except financial performance and risk, while their counterparts at smaller companies are more often spending more time specifically in that area. Respondents at public companies are also more often saying they are leaning into emerging issues compared with their private company counterparts.

Boards in the UAE and globally can expect to continue to operate in an environment where more is at stake (with geopolitical uncertainty and climate change) and more is uncertain (with constant technological advancements). Boards need to be ready on an ongoing basis for change and build the ability to pivot to relevant focus areas with an emphasis on building the right capabilities withing the board and organizational leadership.



In the UAE, where the government has placed a strong emphasis on innovation and digital transformation, boards are dedicating more time to emerging technologies such as AI. Understanding AI and advanced technologies is important not only to remain competitive in the region's fast-evolving business landscape but also to ensure that businesses can harness them for strategic advantage. Advanced technologies are today also becoming a critical governance issue, crucial for mitigating risks, unlocking new growth opportunities, and navigating the future responsibly. Boards play a pivotal role in ensuring that organizations leverage AI and advanced technologies responsibly while unlocking their potential for growth and strategic advantage."

Richard Guest

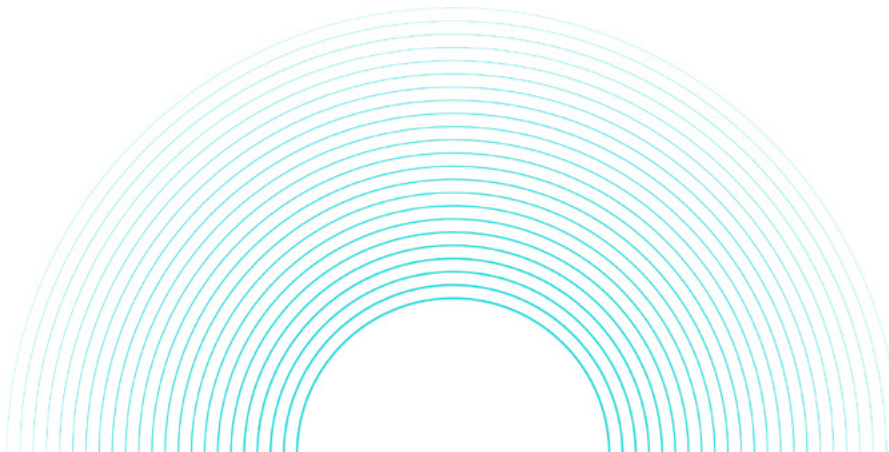
Partner in charge, Middle East and North Africa; Managing Partner, Asia Pacific and Middle East, Technology & Services Practice; Heidrick & Struggles



How are boards addressing the widening risk environment?

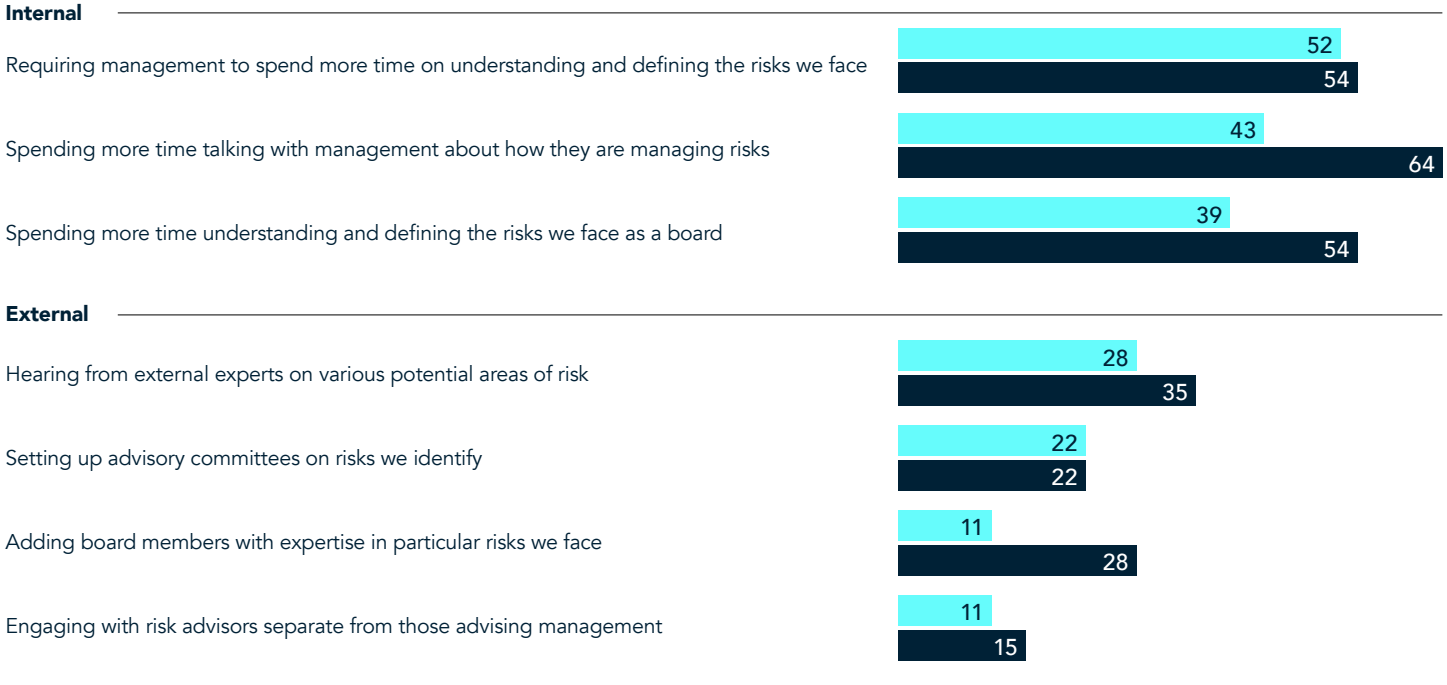
Most directors accept that the complexity, intensity, and accelerating rate of change in the boardroom require a new approach to governance. Ironically, perhaps, in an environment where there is a call for leaders to have more expertise on every topic, what really helps them succeed are wisdom, business judgment, and learning. These capabilities have never been more important. Governing in this environment requires new and practical approaches to ensuring expertise and managing risk.

To better understand how boards are adjusting to this new reality, we asked what steps they have taken since Covid began to better manage uncertainty and risk. Respondents remain anchored primarily in risk management practices that are “internal” in nature; that is, derived from interactions among the board itself and between the board and management, and from a push by the board for more investment in risk from the management team. However, we also see growing willingness to draw in the contributions of “external” experts.



UAE and global: Steps your board has taken to better manage uncertainty and risk since Covid began (%)

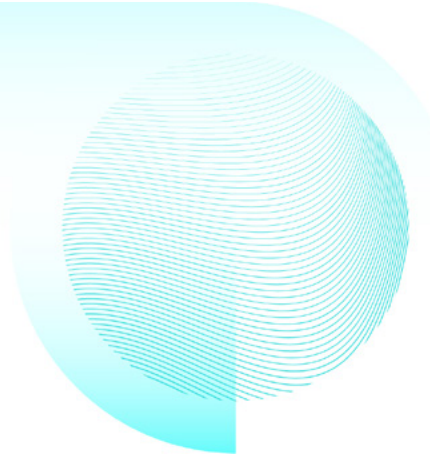
■ UAE ■ Global



Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,552

The UAE in context

Respondents in the UAE, similar to the global view, are requiring management to spend more time on understanding and defining risks. However, we see less emphasis on boards spending more time talking with management about risks and understanding and defining the risks for the board. Boards in the UAE are fully aligned with the global view when it comes to a focus on setting up advisory committees on identified risks. The increased focus on advisory committees globally may reflect a trend toward evolving board governance mechanisms, with focus on problem solving through relevant expertise going hand in hand with board decision making.

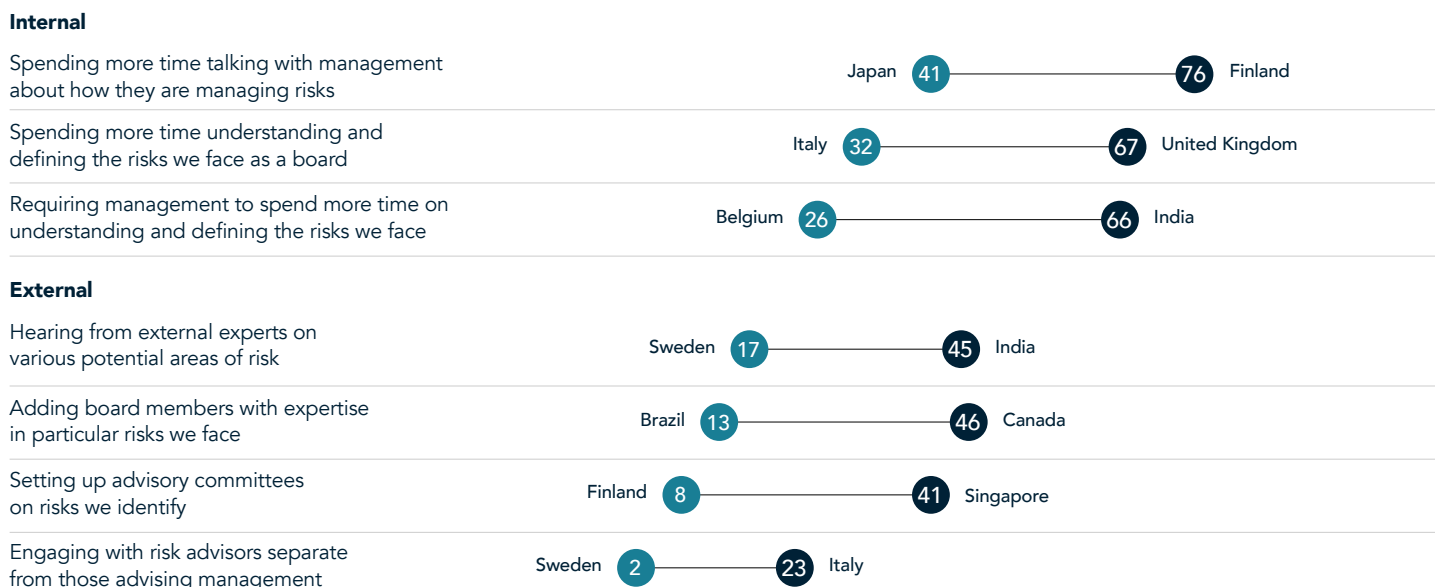


Perspectives across sectors and company types

- Across markets, there are notable outliers in use of various tactics.

Global: Ways in which the board is managing risk and uncertainty post-Covid (%)

● Lowest country average ● Highest country average



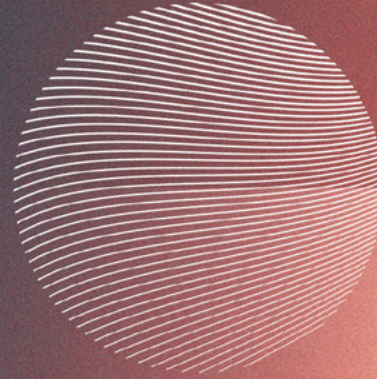
Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,552

- **Globally, respondents at financial services companies, more than those at companies in any other sector, have most often taken active "external" steps to address risk and uncertainty.** 41% have added board members (versus 28% overall); 44% use outside experts (versus 35% overall); and 24% use advisory boards (versus 22% overall).
- **Consumer company respondents say they have least often added external risk management resources:** 23% have added board members (versus 28% overall); 31% use outside experts (versus 35% overall); and 21% use advisory boards (versus 22% overall).
- **Public companies, respondents say, have accelerated their risk management efforts more aggressively than private companies in every tactic we asked about.**
- **Respondents at larger companies more often than those at smaller companies report they are adding outside board members or hiring external experts.**

Post-Covid, the risk landscape has widened for businesses. While companies remain anchored in financial and operational risk management practices, the spectrum is growing and now includes significant emerging cybersecurity, AI, and geopolitical risks on top of growing environmental and social concerns and regulations. According to the *BDI Board Effectiveness Review 2023*, boards in the UAE and GCC more broadly now expect to incorporate a broader set of risks into scenario planning. Further, boards also need to maintain a more flexible approach to agenda setting to adequately address new risks as they arise.¹

¹ *Board Effectiveness Review 2023: Determining board effectiveness across the GCC*, GCC Board Directors Institute and Heidrick & Struggles, 2023, gccbdi.org.

Are boards more operationally involved?



Few dispute that more is at stake, and more is expected of directors now.² As the role of business in society expands, directors have been grappling with the boundaries of their respective roles.

To better understand this complicated issue, we asked directors and CEOs the following question: “There is an impression that many board members are more operationally involved than ever before, some crossing the traditional line between oversight and management. Have you seen this on your board?”

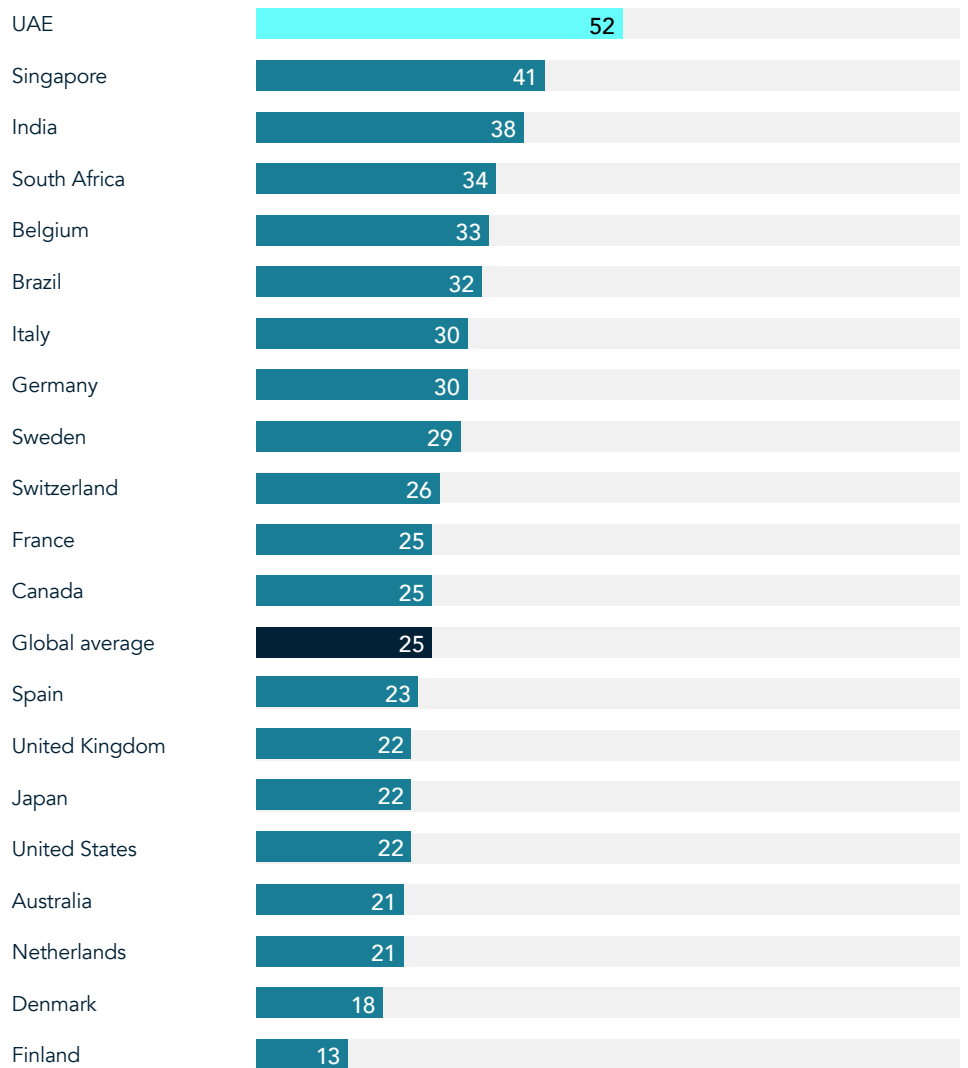
Globally, a majority of respondents report that they are more operationally involved; 25% say it happens frequently; 45% occasionally; 4% that it has happened once. Only a quarter report that they have not crossed that line. Notably, CEOs more often than directors report operational involvement from the board.

When we look at a country-level view, we see that 52% of the respondents in the UAE say that this happens frequently—the highest figure across all countries. Board involvement in day-to-day management has long been more common in the UAE and the GCC region more broadly, than in other regions, and continues to be so.

² For more, see Jeremy Hanson and Tim Gallagher, “CEO and board succession in the age of impact,” Heidrick & Struggles, heidrick.com.

Global: Boards' increasing operational involvement, by country (%)

Share of respondents that have reported seeing on their board increased operational involvement, with some crossing the traditional line between oversight and management (share who said yes, frequently)

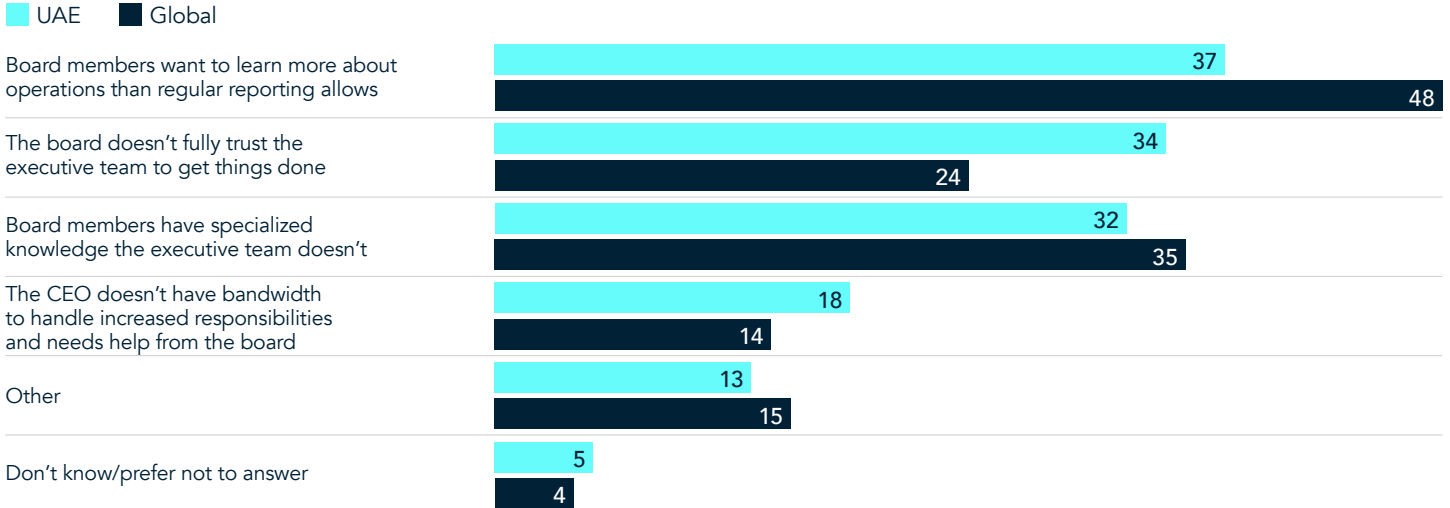


Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,569

What reasons do those who have gotten more operationally involved cite?

- In the UAE, the top two reasons cited for more operational involvement from the board include board members wanting to learn more about operations than regular reporting allows (similar to the global view), and the board not fully trusting the executive team to get things done (higher than the global share.)

UAE and global: Reasons why boards are more operationally involved (%)

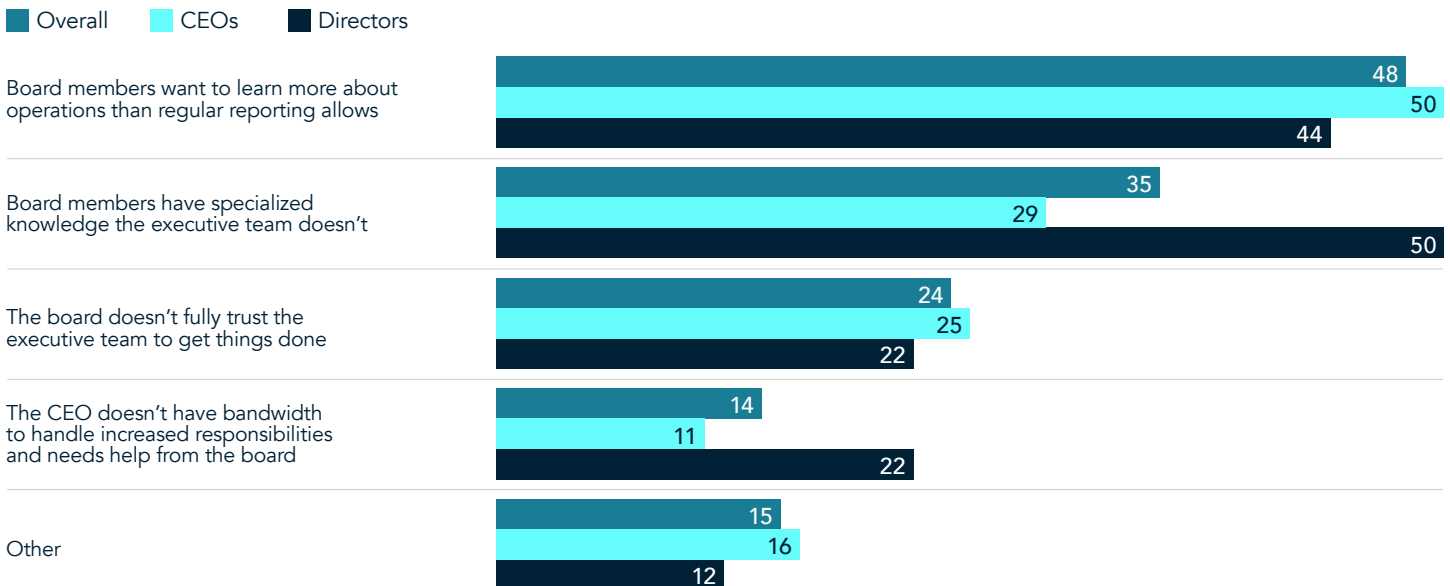


Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=1,858

Globally, we see a distinction in the responses to increased involvement provided by CEOs versus directors:

- CEOs most often say it's because board members want to learn more about operations than regular reporting allows
- Directors most often say it's because they have specialized knowledge the executive team doesn't.

Global: Reasons why boards are more operationally involved (%)



Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=1,858

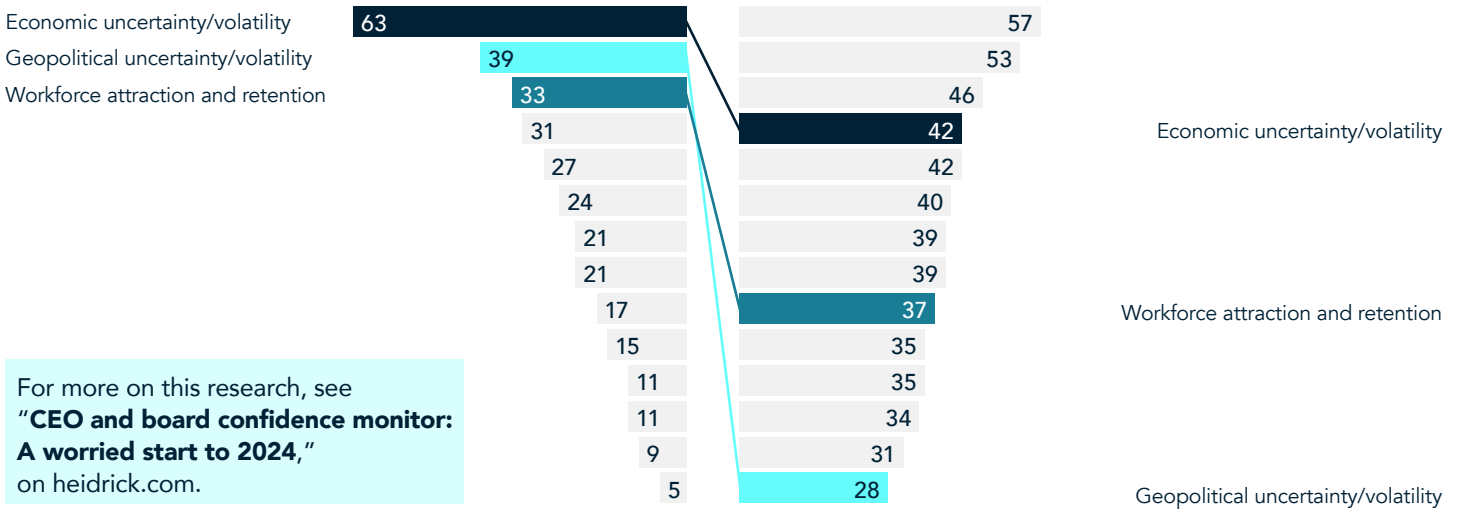
How are boards engaging with the workforce?

Recent research with CEOs and directors around the world has found that workforce attraction and retention was the third-highest concern of directors globally and in the GCC, behind geopolitical risk and economic uncertainty—but it ranked in the bottom half of issues the board feels the company is equipped to address.³

Global: Most significant issues and confidence in company's ability to manage them (%)

Most significant issues

Confidence in company's ability to manage the issues directors consider most significant



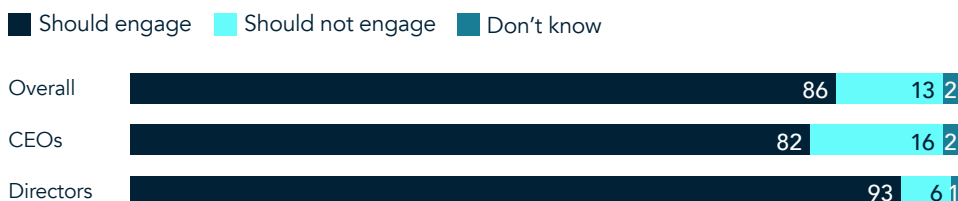
For more on this research, see **"CEO and board confidence monitor: A worried start to 2024,"** on heidrick.com.

Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, November 2023, n=3,156

³ "CEO and board confidence monitor: A worried start to 2024," Heidrick & Struggles, January 17, 2024, heidrick.com.

To better understand the impact of this on how the board does its work, we asked respondents how they think they should engage with employees other than the most senior executives. **A significant majority (86%) believe directors should engage with employees deeper in the company; only 13% believe they should not** (the rest said they didn't know). But there is a notable difference between the responses of CEOs and directors: 93% of directors believe they should engage; 82% of CEOs say the same.

Global: Board members' engagement with employees deeper in the firm (%)



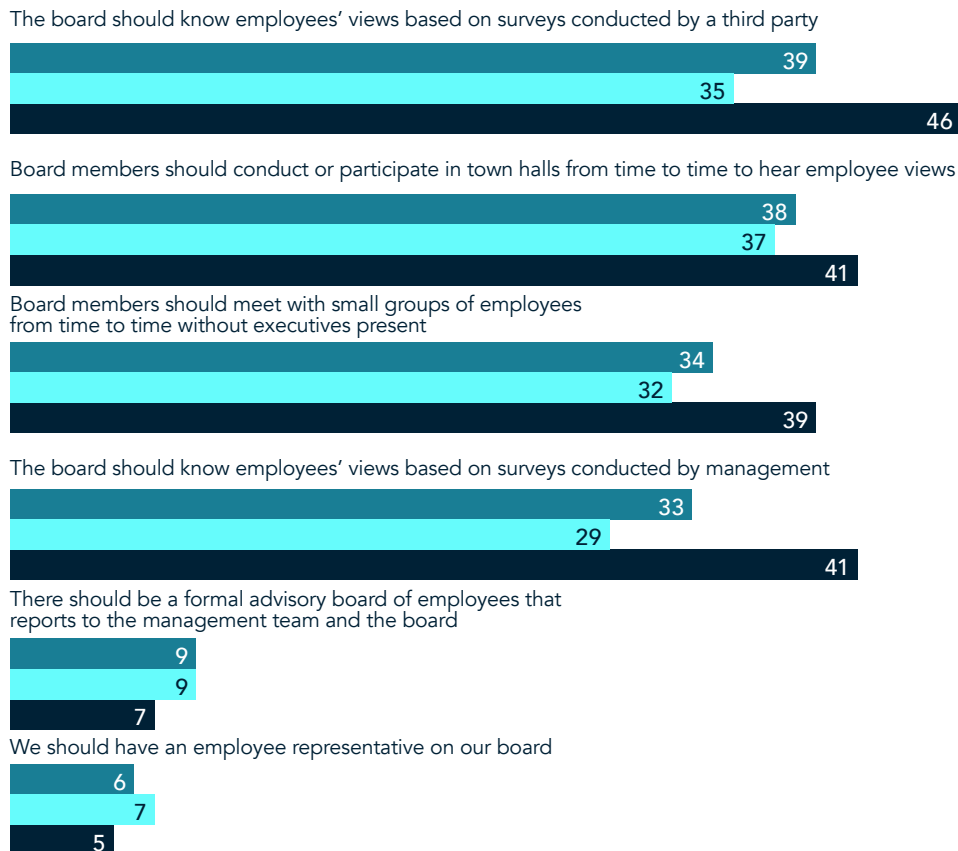
Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,547

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.

On a global basis, respondents most often preferred to engage with the workforce through the use of surveys, town halls, and direct engagement with small groups of employees without management present. Here, too, there are some differences between how directors and CEOs think boards should seek engagement.

Global: Ways boards should engage (%)

Legend: Overall (Dark Blue), CEOs (Light Blue), Directors (Black)



Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,547

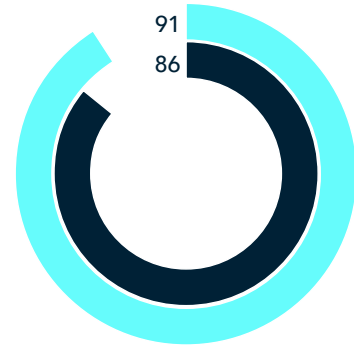
The UAE in context

Perhaps not surprisingly, given their deeper operational engagement than directors in many other regions, leaders in the UAE are even more keen on direct engagement with the workforce in a number of ways, with 91% of respondents in the UAE saying that they should engage more with the firm overall.

UAE and global: Board members' engagement with employees deeper in the firm (%)

Share that say they should engage with firm overall

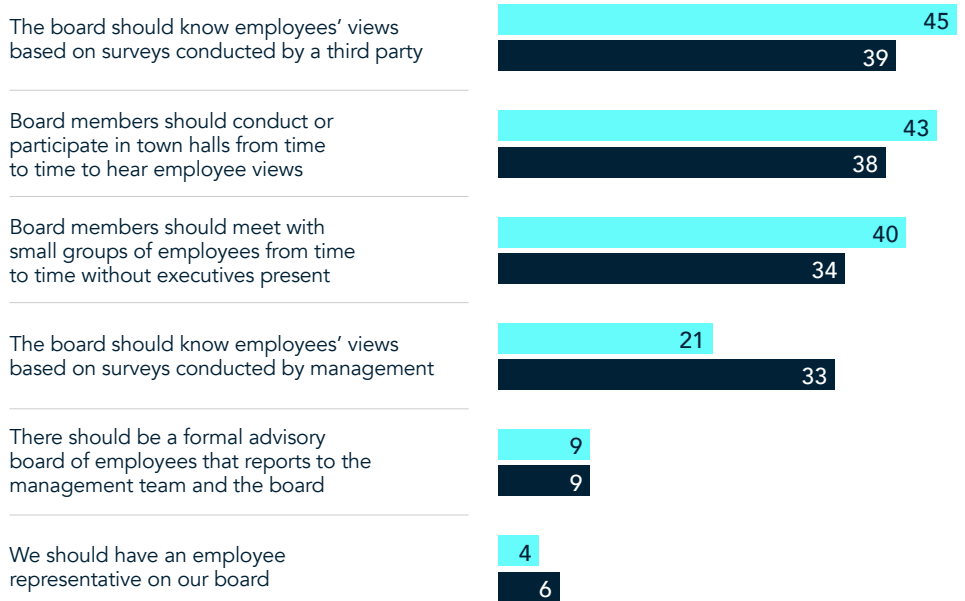
■ UAE ■ Global



Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,547

UAE and global: Ways boards should engage (%)

■ UAE ■ Global



Source: Heidrick & Struggles' survey of CEOs and board members, February 2024, n=2,547

Given the growing influence the workforce has on business globally, it is not surprising that directors are engaging more and exploring novel approaches to understanding the needs of this increasingly important stakeholder.

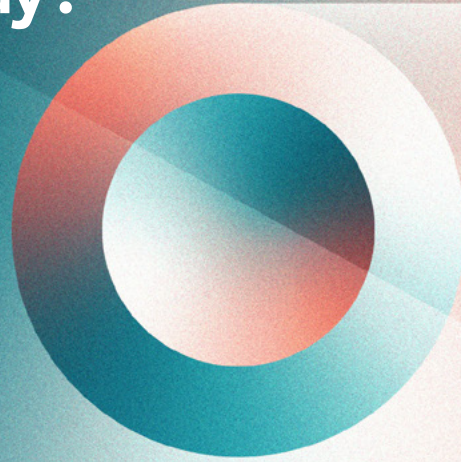


As organizations navigate increasingly complex challenges, boards are recognizing the importance of engaging with employees beyond the senior executive level. By connecting with the broader workforce, boards can gain deeper insights into company culture, operational realities, and emerging trends that impact long-term strategy. This inclusive approach not only strengthens trust and transparency but also ensures that decision-making is informed by diverse perspectives across all levels of the organization."

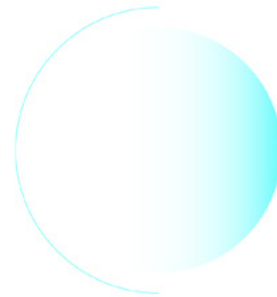
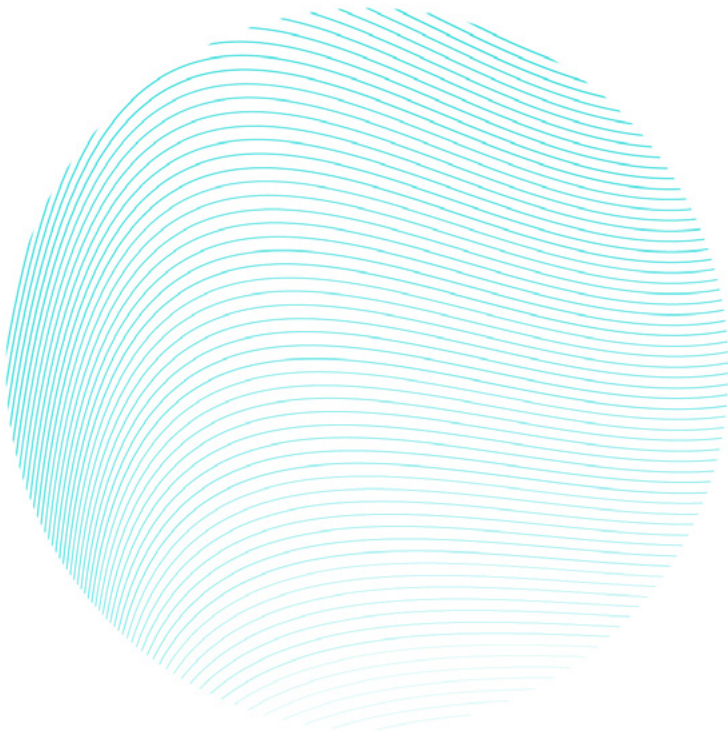
Shaloo Kulkarni

Partner, Heidrick & Struggles, Dubai

How are boards thinking about diversity today?



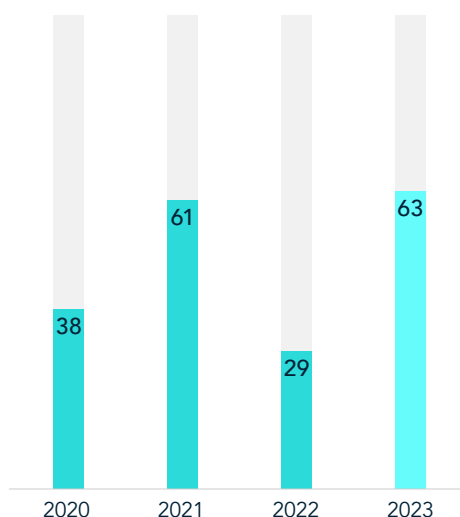
In light of some of the themes shaping global and UAE boards today—including more being at stake and uncertain, increasing involvement from diverse set of stakeholders, and growing expectations for the board—ensuring board diversity with the right balance of expertise, demographics, and widening of perspectives is even more important today than it has been in the past.



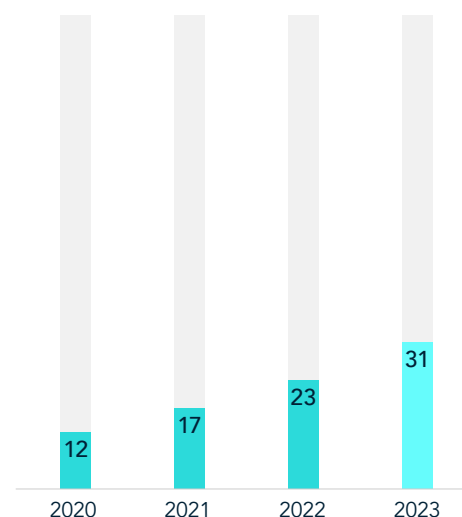
Diversity among the newest directors in the UAE

When looking at 2023 board appointments in the UAE, we see positive trends, including an increased share of first-time board members, a growing share of women on boards, a balance of nationals and non-nationals on boards, and cross-industry experience on boards.

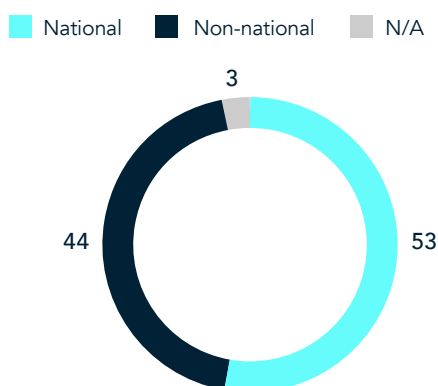
Share of first-time director appointments, 2020–2023 (%)



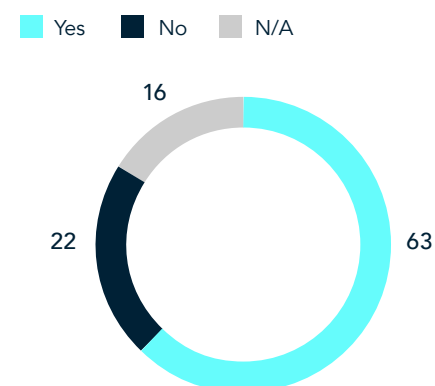
Share of female director appointments, 2020–2023 (%)



Nationality of appointments, 2023 (%)



Cross-industry experience of director appointments, 2023 (%)



Source: Heidrick & Struggles' analysis of DFM/ADX boards. In 2023, there were 32 seats filled.

We see a continuous focus on improving board diversity within boards in the UAE, with positive trends this year on increasing the share of first-time board members, adding women on boards, a good balance of nationals versus expats, and nearly two-thirds having cross-industry experience. Regulation, such as the requirement to have at least one woman director on boards of publicly listed companies in the UAE, and the very recently passed regulation of having at least one women director on boards of private joint-stock firms (to come into effect January 2025), has also supported the trend toward increasing board diversity. We are also seeing an emerging trend of more young leaders being included on boards or given relevant training to take on future board positions. Boards in the UAE should maintain this momentum and continue to strengthen board composition through demographic diversity as well as diversity of experience.



Board diversity significantly enhances board decision-making and success by bringing together a range of perspectives, experiences, and expertise. A diverse board is essential for a robust succession plan, drawing from years of experience across various sectors, including private, public, and global industries. This diversity allows the board to represent the voice of the private sector while also being attuned to challenges and creating global benchmarks for fellow board members, turning challenges into opportunities.

Diversity should be looked at holistically, including demographic diversity and diversity of experiences. Gender diversity on boards helps bring a balanced approach to decision-making. This diversity contributes to innovative and effective outcomes. The diversity of experience among board members allows for a broad understanding of different industries and sectors. This wide-ranging expertise enables the board to anticipate challenges and devise strategies that are innovative and effective.”

Marwa Al Mansoori

Board member, Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Recommendations

Boards globally and also within the UAE are looking at a range of options and actions to improve board diversity, as well as governance.

Following are a set of recommendations that reflect adjustments effective boards are making:

- 1 Expand sources of expertise**
Use mechanisms such as advisory committees, independent advisors, external advisors, and on-demand talent platforms to surround the board with the broad and rapidly changing skills needed to govern in this expanding environment. We are seeing a growing trend in the appointment of independent advisors in the UAE and in the GCC region.
- 2 Avoid over-boarding**
Boards in the UAE have seen the challenge of over-boarding, with members sitting on multiple boards and committees leading to scenarios in which directors may not have the bandwidth to commit the required time and focus to each board. This challenge is further exacerbated when there is a scarcity of required experience, meaning that potential directors with relevant experience are sought out for multiple boards. Boards should actively focus on addressing this challenge with relevant investments in diversifying the director pool complemented by a focus on board development and succession planning.
- 3 Increase your investment in board succession**
The most effective boards have moved to an ongoing approach to succession planning—their own and that of the CEO—and are investing more time in such planning, to stay ahead of their growing mandate. Directors should be evaluated no less frequently than the frequency of performance review of the CEO.

- 4 Invest in bringing younger talent onto the board**
 Directors in the UAE (and the GCC overall) have highlighted a focus on bringing more young talent onto boards to increase diversity and bring in different perspectives, as well as strengthen succession planning and proactively address the concerns around over-boarding. Boards can also consider options such as apprentice boards and shadow boards to develop relevant skills for young leaders to become effective on boards.
- 5 Cultivate a learning culture on the board**
 At precisely the point in their careers where they are expected to be experts, board members are now being asked to govern in an environment of uncertainty. Learning to learn and business judgment have never been more important for board members than it is now, and boards should invest in both individual development and move toward innovative development mechanisms such as board simulations.
- 6 Take peer and self-evaluation, and board refreshment, seriously**
 Most boards are increasing their investment in director evaluation and encouraging responsible turnover. Boards should install term limits or average tenure policies for board service that match their business model and actively examine director alignment with the evolving needs of the business.
- 7 Leverage others**
 As the scope of board member responsibility expands, directors should lean on the board secretary for help and challenge service providers to take on more, collaborate with each other, and rethink their business models (standards, pricing, conflicts).

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Methodology

In November 2023, Heidrick & Struggles fielded an online survey that garnered responses from 3,156 respondents. Of those, 2,320 respondents were CEOs and 836 were non-executive directors. Forty-one percent were in Europe; 38% in North America; 10% in Asia Pacific; 4% in both Latin America and the Middle East; and 2% in Africa. Respondents represented companies of all sizes; 23% reported annual revenue of US \$1 billion or more. Companies ranged across all industries.

In February 2024, Heidrick & Struggles fielded an online survey that received responses from 2,653 respondents. Of those, 1,927 respondents were CEOs and 726 non-executive directors. Thirty-seven percent were in Europe; 37% in North America; 9% in Asia Pacific; 4% in the Middle East; 3% in Latin America; and 1% in Africa (and 9% N/A). Respondents represented companies of all sizes; 26% reported annual revenue of US \$1 billion or more. Companies ranged across all industries.

This analysis is part of Heidrick & Struggles' long-standing study of trends in board composition in countries around the world. Produced by our global CEO & Board Practice, these reports track and analyze trends in non-executive director appointments to the boards of the largest publicly listed companies in Australia (ASX 200), Belgium (BEL 20), Brazil (B3), Canada (TSX 60), Colombia (COLCAP), Denmark (OMX Copenhagen 25), Finland (OMX Helsinki 25), France (CAC 40), Germany (DAX and MDAX), Hong Kong (Hang Seng), Ireland (ISEQ), India (Nifty Top 200), Italy (FTSE MIB), Mexico (BMV IPC), the Netherlands (AEX), New Zealand (NZX 10), Norway (OBX), Poland (WIG20), Portugal (PSI 20), Saudi Arabia (Tadawul), Singapore (STI 30), South Africa (JSE Top 40), Spain (IBEX 35), Sweden (OMX Stockholm 30), Switzerland (SMI Expanded), the United Arab Emirates (ADX and DFM), the United Kingdom (FTSE 350), and the United States (Fortune 500). Information about executives is gathered from publicly available sources, BoardEx, and a Heidrick & Struggles proprietary database.

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Heidrick & Struggles' CEO & Board of Directors Practice has been built on our ability to execute top-level assignments and counsel CEOs and board members on the complex issues directly affecting their businesses.

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