

Keeping Board Assessment Fresh

Board assessment is now so broadly accepted and used both in the private sector, and increasingly in the not-for-profit and public sectors, that there are seldom questions about “why” to do it. The challenge organizations face now is ensuring their process adds value to the quality of governance rather than being a process simply to comply with governance guidelines.

Organizations that wish to keep their board-evaluation process fresh, need to look closely at and continually refine both the content (what you are measuring) and the process (how you are conducting the assessment).

Focus on content

The first thing you can do is critically review what you are measuring. Asking the same questions annually permits comparison over time, but this does not mean you have to get locked into a single set of questions. Take licence on an annual basis to delete questions that no longer add value and to add new questions to probe issues in greater depth or to reflect on emerging issues for the board.

Look at the process

The second thing you can do is look at the process - how you are conducting the assessment. While quantitative measures help you to track progress, a great deal of the value of board assessment comes from the qualitative side (the written or interview comments directors make). To add to the qualitative side, there are three things you can do: emphasize the importance of making written and/or verbal comments; add or enhance the personal interview component of the evaluation; and plan a full board discussion about specific issues that have arisen from the evaluation.

Another way that some boards are keeping the assessment process innovative is by alternating between a comprehensive and a more targeted assessment. For example, the board would conduct a full board survey and third-party interviews one year, and just interviews the next year.

Keep the annual assessment rhythm

Business has an annual cycle. Boards and their committees have annual work plans. Therefore, organizations that wish to keep their board assessment fresh should make it an annual time to step back, look in the mirror and assess their effectiveness.

To arrange a confidential meeting to discuss your organization's needs, call Meridien's President, Dr. Peter Stephenson at 416-972-0782.

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