

# Deloitte.



## The Deloitte Africa Chair of the Future Forum

How Chairs can be impactful  
against the backdrop of the  
pandemic era

Summary report | April 2022



# ESG now at the centre of board conversations

Board members, and particularly board chairs, that will be effective in the post pandemic environment are those that bring depth and contextual understanding to the businesses they govern. This can be gained through interaction with staff members, customers and suppliers to the business. They must also bring business credibility through their own expertise and networks and be forward looking. Lastly, they must possess authenticity, compassion and emotional intelligence in order to be effective as individual board members and as a collective.

The Chair of the Future Forum, recently hosted by Deloitte Africa Board Chair Delia Ndlovu, explored what will make Board Chairs effective in the post pandemic era. The Forum brought together board chairs, Non-Executive Directors and other board members in an event that was addressed by Dr Jay Bevington, who is the Deloitte UK Board Advisory Practice Leader. Bevington, who has worked with over 500 boards over the past 18 years, started by noting that boards are pre-occupied with a range of important issues including companies' response to the pandemic, climate change and for many companies now the Russia Ukraine conflict as the most immediate and pressing,

"The role of the chair is paramount particularly through their engagement, motivation and energy," Bevington told the audience. He said effective chairs lead effective boards, which then set the tone for the organisation and define its culture, an issue that most boards are still grappling with. What emerged from the Forum is that the Environment, Social and Governance matters are now top of minds for boards, reflected also by the discussion and questions and answer session that

followed Bevington's address. "Boards have a role in creating healthy societies by creating healthy organisations and a trusted ecosystem," says Bevington.

Apart from ESG and culture related issues, other challenges facing boards include diversity and inclusion as well as executive remuneration and remuneration through the rest of the organisation. Bevington says boards are also seized with stakeholder centric governance, individual accountability and the new reality of hybrid meetings. Economic reforms as well as increased regulation as well as corporate and social impact, an issue that resonates with Deloitte, are also key agenda items for boards.

---

**"Boards have a role in creating healthy societies by creating healthy organisations and a trusted ecosystem."**

---

Bevington describes the role of the board, which he says is still misunderstood, as encompassing stewardship, oversight and accountability. Stewardship entails providing strategic leadership to help ensure that the purpose, vision and mission of the organisation are clear and owned. It also involves defining the values of the organisation and proactively develops its culture and improves sustainability. Stewardship also helps build highly effective management teams.

Oversight is the process through which boards hold management accountable. It also monitors compliance with obligations at various levels of the company and

## Panel of speakers

Delia Ndlovu, Deloitte Africa Chair

Dr Jay Bevington, Board Advisory Senior Partner, Deloitte Middle East

Neo Dongwana, Independent Non-Executive Director at Nedbank Group Limited and former Chair of Barloworld Limited

Susan du Toit, Independent Non-Executive Director at Italtile Limited

Prof Bonang Mohale, Chair of Bidvest Group Limited and SBV Services. Also serves on the board of Swiss Re Africa Limited and RMB

Yemi Saka, Deloitte Africa Deputy Chair

Dr Ajouritshedere Awosika, Chairperson Access Bank Plc, Independent Non-Executive Director Access Bank Plc

## Supporting materials

Presentation by Dr Jay Bevington



oversees the risk framework to identify major risks and their probability as well as impact on the company. Oversight also helps to ensure governance procedures are effective and adhered to.

Accountability requires that the board engages proactively and meaningfully with owners and various stakeholders of the business. The board must openly and clearly explain the direction, performance and conduct of the company or organisation and openly and clearly explains the impact that the board has had and the effectiveness of its governance framework.

Bevington describes four levels of boarding of board effectiveness starting at the lowest scale of -1. This is that a board that consumes a lot of time and energy, distracting management from doing valuable work by request for additional information that add no value, unjustified interference in operational and a combative board member style that makes executive defensive.

A board that operates at Level 0 is one that simply ratifies what is put before it and does not add value. A board that operates at Level 1 is effective in its oversight and accountability role and, as Bevington puts it, “stops bad things from happening” leaving management with a sense that they are constructively held accountable.

A high performing board is rated as level 2 and over and above being good at accountability and oversight, also masters the role of stewardship and “enable great things to happen.” This is a board that has clear instances of executive proposals being improved, sets its own agenda with support from management and works

well with executives offering advice and connections even outside of formal meetings.

Bevington left his audience with much to ponder when he spoke of “managing polarities”. He notes that as you become senior, you do not just solve problems but manage polarities, which involves “balancing trust with challenges”.

One participant told the gathering that the best way to understand a business is “to walk the corridors and speak to stakeholders. She notes that boards tend to default to an oversight role and believe that “executives report to the board” which is not entirely correct.

---

“To not have diversity is criminal, but to not have inclusion is a sin.”

---

Another board chair, a senior board member and an experienced chair, emphasised the importance of context and culture, with the former referring to the conditions under which your employees operate. He used the current state emerging from the pandemic and returning to offices as an example arguing that companies have to create a welcoming culture, especially for employees who joined during the pandemic and may have never really met their supervisors’ teams or colleagues. “Rather than look for management reports, find out how they are doing,” he says.

A question that emerged was how boards can prepare for future crises, be they health, economic or both. A board chair for a West African Deloitte banking client said boards need a robust risk management tool as companies do not prepare for the risks but their outcomes. For example, their board prepared for an extreme movement of their currency against the dollar and prepared to respond to that.

The Forum heard that boards around the world are improving diversity not just gender diversity, but also ethnic, age and skills diversity, with digital and cyber skills now becoming critical. Boards now must improve on inclusion. “To not have diversity is criminal, but to not have inclusion is a sin,” said another South African board member participant who argued that it is not enough to have a black or female board member serve on the board, but they should be listened to and engaged.

Board members were urged to elevate their companies’ purpose by looking at it through an ESG lens, with one participant noting that investors care about ESG issues to a point where they are now part of the long-term incentive of executive remuneration. Another speaker noted that ESG had to be looked at holistically and strike a balance, noting that there is no dichotomy between ESG and profit.

Board members were reminded that companies can do good by doing well simple by focusing on their broader role in society and that required effective board members and board chairs.

The next Chair of the Future Forum takes place in August.



Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (“DTTL”), its global network of member firms, and their related entities (collectively, the “Deloitte organization”). DTTL (also referred to as “Deloitte Global”) and each of its member firms and related entities are legally separate and independent entities, which cannot obligate or bind each other in respect of third parties. DTTL and each DTTL member firm and related entity is liable only for its own acts and omissions, and not those of each other. DTTL does not provide services to clients. Please see [www.deloitte.com/about](http://www.deloitte.com/about) to learn more.

Deloitte is a leading global provider of audit and assurance, consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory, tax and related services. Our global network of member firms and related entities in more than 150 countries and territories (collectively, the “Deloitte organization”) serves four out of five Fortune Global 500® companies. Learn how Deloitte’s approximately 334,800 people make an impact that matters at [www.deloitte.com](http://www.deloitte.com).

This communication contains general information only, and none of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (“DTTL”), its global network of member firms or their related entities (collectively, the “Deloitte organization”) is, by means of this communication, rendering professional advice or services. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your finances or your business, you should consult a qualified professional adviser.

No representations, warranties or undertakings (express or implied) are given as to the accuracy or completeness of the information in this communication, and none of DTTL, its member firms, related entities, employees or agents shall be liable or responsible for any loss or damage whatsoever arising directly or indirectly in connection with any person relying on this communication. DTTL and each of its member firms, and their related entities, are legally separate and independent entities.