**Executive Summary**

Virtual board meetings are here to stay and will soon consign the in-person board gatherings to history’s dustbin.

Now is our opportunity to do away with monolithic agendas and marathon board meetings that go hand-in-hand with the old traditions of doing everything in-person. Board meetings have been around for so long they have become part of the DNA of large organisations. In fact, one of the earliest ‘modern’ board meetings took place at the Company of Merchant Adventurers in London in 1505!

Today, it is time to embrace a new kind of board meeting. The kind of meeting that leverages the technological advances of the past 20 years to allow directors to make faster, more informed decisions.

For instance, why can’t specific items on a multi-page board meeting agenda be replaced with a dedicated meeting for each one?

Why can’t agile meetings be called at short notice? Each of them can have their own micro-agenda and sub-committee. Such meetings can be peopled by virtual directors who are fresh, focused, and ready to tackle the issues they care about, in minutes rather than hours.

**The Straightjacket of the Annual Board Meeting Calendar**

Most boards run on an annual calendar, with meeting dates pre-booked and carved in stone. With all the effort required of changing the date of a single meeting, it is hardly surprising that rescheduling seldom happens.

**Think about it.**

**A company’s board meeting schedule dictates the exact timing when strategic decisions and financial changes can occur.**

How can a corporation on this kind of schedule hope to survive, let alone keep pace and prosper in today’s world? How can it react and profit from fluid situations that can change overnight, when it takes up to a month for an issue to percolate onto an agenda and circulate to board members?

Nowadays, information and news cross the globe at the speed of light. Global challenges arise overnight. And the spoils of such disruptions go to those companies that react quickly to change. Company management needs to be able to recognise and react to changing conditions and opportunities in their trading environment. Once a need to meet is recognised, the ability to turn on a dime and call a meeting to discuss and make any necessary decisions become more important than ever.

The last thing modern boards need is to purposely slow their response to urgent issues, sticking to the stone-carved dates in the board meeting schedule. Then, unmoved by the technology already at their disposal, they simply carry out old-world practices in Zoom meetings.

**The Ancient Agenda Dance**

The monolithic meeting agenda gets birthed early and forms slowly as items are added. This often happens as far as a month preceding the actual meeting. New items settle into their place on the agenda based on a pattern that follows a long line of previous meetings.

**Slow In, Fast Out**

It’s a stone-cast business rule - Items at the top half of the agenda receive more time and attention than items towards the bottom. The closer to the end of the meeting it gets, the faster the remaining items get rushed through. All too often, items are postponed and carried over to the next meeting, which can be as long as a quarter away. This delay can result in lost business opportunities, unforeseen disasters, and unnecessary costs due to delayed decisions.

Years ago, I had the privilege of serving as technology director on the board of a public company. To my frustration, the technology section of the meeting was routinely scheduled after the lunch break. Leaving me to explain weighty IT problems to a board of zombies, anaesthetised by a morning of passive listening, on top of an insulin semi-coma induced by a huge lunch. To make matters worse, morning agenda items often flowed into the afternoon, pressing my urgent items off the agenda and onto the next meeting.

There is no easy way to solve this problem using the current rule book.

**It is time for a change.**

**The Agile Board Meeting Process**

I don’t for a moment imagine that any call for agile board meetings will succeed without accommodating the old system of day-long board meetings in some way. Thus, I propose the agile board retains their traditional board meetings in a shortened form. The agenda having been reduced by a series of agile sub-meetings occurring between scheduled board meetings.

**Operational and Report Back Sessions**

These meetings of the board would be regular, prescheduled events that are arranged in advance over the financial year. The timing of these would be at the behest of each organisation. However, doing so quarterly is a good starting point.

Even with these traditional meetings, speed of execution must be increased. Reports and documents pertaining to agenda items must be pre-released to board members at least a week before they are scheduled to take place. Board members should be required to have read and digested the reports ahead of the meeting. This kind of diligent preparation will replace the rote-reading of reports, so common in some board meetings. The now informed audience can then ask insightful questions instead of sleeping with their eyes open.

Also, with the advent of virtual meetings, every company should have meetings guided by a strict code of discipline, agreed to by all directors.

**Agile Ad-Hoc Meetings for Sub-Committees**

Agile meetings are, by their nature, quick to convene and close. They should adhere to a clearly-defined timeframe. This will ensure that attendees have certainly of the time required for their meeting and hopefully the pressure of a meeting close deadline will help keep them focussed.

Modern agenda builder tools allow for real-time collaboration when setting up a meeting agenda. Directors can add or move agenda items, and add supporting documents or comments to the agenda before it is finalised.

These agile meetings may increase risks of bad decisions but as the adage goes ‘Better a bad decision than no decision’.