



# How to Ace IT Governance Without Tech Expertise

50 POWERFUL QUESTIONS READY TO ASK  
AT YOUR NEXT BOARD MEETING

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# OVERVIEW

## 50 POWERFUL I.T. QUESTIONS READY TO ASK AT YOUR NEXT BOARD MEETING

As boards place increasing value on IT governance, those with technology expertise play a leading role. The rest of us can also raise our IT game, by exploring the integration of strategy, technology and risk. It all begins with curiosity and a forum for questions.

I first encouraged every director to lean into IT discussions in my blog post entitled, "[How to Ace Board IT Governance Without Tech Expertise.](#)" The piece provided a sample of questions directors can ask about technology.

This document contains that list of more than 50 IT-related questions. I hope you find them useful as you engage with technology topics at your next board meeting. For simplicity, the questions have been grouped into four sections:

- i. Director orientation and background context
- ii. Alignment of IT with the enterprise and its strategy
- iii. Responsible use of IT resources and capital investments
- iv. Risk management

This by no means a complete list. I welcome your suggestions of other questions about technology, strategy and risk. Please send your thoughts to:

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and I will update this document with your contributions. Thank you!

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# i. DIRECTOR ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND CONTEXT

1. How critical is IT to sustaining the organization today? And growing our organization tomorrow?

- Is the enterprise clear on its position relative to technology: pioneer, early adopter, follower or laggard? Is it clear on risk: risk-avoidance or risk-taking?
- Can you share a recent context in which an IT initiative or asset allowed us to exploit an opportunity?
- Does IT appear as a regular board agenda item? Is it addressed in a structured manner?

2. How critical is IT to sustaining the organization today? And growing our organization tomorrow?

- Who manages our enterprise architecture? How long is their planning horizon?
- How old are our key systems? To what extent are we reliant on external vendors for support?
- To what extent are our strategically critical processes managed on spreadsheets?
- How do we audit the ongoing accuracy of our models and systems? What compliance activities do we have in place?
- How is our enterprise architecture likely to change in the next three to five years?

# i. DIRECTOR ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND CONTEXT (continued)

3. How do we approach IT project management?

- What resources do we have allocated to IT project management?
- How are new IT project teams structured?
- How do we balance representation of business sponsors and IT leaders?
- How do we balance the vision of senior leaders with the technical perspective of those who use the system each day?

4. How do we assess quality in our IT operations? How is value delivered by IT being measured?

- How would you describe the past performance record of our IT function?
- How often do IT projects fail to deliver what they promised?
- Are end users satisfied with the quality of the IT service
- What has been the average overrun of IT operational budgets?
- How much of the IT effort goes to firefighting rather than enabling business improvements?

## ii. ALIGNMENT OF I.T. WITH THE ENTERPRISE AND ITS STRATEGY

5. How will IT enable the organization in five years? Are we investing enough to support the organization's strategy?
6. How are emerging technologies and their potential impact on the organization monitored?
  - How does management ensure that its IT resources, systems and technologies are keeping pace with changing business needs?
7. Do we have the right organization structure in IT? Is it sufficiently resilient to support our growth aspirations?
  - Do we have the right skills in house? How do we work with external IT advisors ?
  - Is the reporting level of the most senior IT manager commensurate with the importance of IT?
  - Do we have succession plans in place for key IT personnel?
  - Do we have the right level of IT knowledge on the board itself?

# iii. RESPONSIBLE USE OF I.T. RESOURCES AND CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

8. Is our IT function performing well?

- Are we achieving our projected milestones and ROI on key projects?

9. For each new IT project, what is the business case?

- What is the projected ROI and payback period?
- How were timelines for this project developed?
- Who will represent various stakeholders throughout the project?

10. Based on past systems implementations, what are the 3 sources of risk that worry us the most about a new IT project?

- What plans have we put in place to mitigate key risks?

11. For each new IT project, what did our reference checks on the hardware, software and systems integration partner reveal?

- How many checks were done?
- Are their projects of comparable size and scope to ours?
- Were their project teams staffed/structured in a way that is similar to our plan?
- Is there any kind of employment history between the two organizations? (e.g., Did the person giving the reference once work at the client?)

## iv. RISK MANAGEMENT

12. Are there adequate plans and resources in place to withstand a significant disruption in IT assets?
- At a high level, what are our business recover plans?
13. How do we manage cyber risk?
- What cyber security measures do we have in place?
  - How do we protect our data? Should we consider cyber insurance?
  - Do we employ benign hackers to test the strength of our security?
  - How many external cyber attacks did we experience in the past quarter? How did we remediate?
  - What is our approach to internal security threats (e.g., from employees)?
  - What lessons did we learn from a recent security threat?
  - How credible are our cyber security solution providers?
14. How do we manage IT execution risk?
- For ongoing projects, what feedback mechanisms will provide an early warning to potential problems?
  - How are legal, regulatory and contractual obligations related to IT monitored for compliance?
15. When did management last simulate an IT disaster? What were the learnings?



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With gratitude to the clients, colleagues and readers  
who continue to shape my work.

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