

HOW TO TALK ABOUT HR'S WORK AT A BOARD-LEVEL

To contribute meaningfully in the boardroom, it's useful to reframe HR's work **through a different lens**. This resource offers top-line examples.

**4 LANGUAGE SHIFTS WHEN
PRESENTING TO THE BOARD**



2. PRESENT RECOMMENDATIONS, BUT ALSO INVITE INPUT

This demonstrates respect for the board as a decision-making body and reframes the discussion as a shared, solutions-focused forum. Ensure the options and implications are well-tested internally before the discussion

FOR EXAMPLE:

Instead of saying:

“We recommend proceeding with this workforce restructure to address capability gaps and cost pressures.”

Frame it as:

“We see two viable options to address capability gaps and cost pressure. One prioritises speed but carries execution risk; the other builds longer-term resilience. We’d value the board’s perspective on risk appetite and strategic fit before refining our recommendation and moving forward.”

1. PROVIDE A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

Be upfront about risks and opportunities. This helps build your credibility with the board. When culture and engagement trends are overly positive, this raises more questions from the board; when you only surface problems, the tone can shift to feel defensive.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Instead of saying:

“Our engagement scores are strong and culture remains positive across the organisation.”

Frame it as:

“Engagement is tracking above benchmark, but we’re seeing early fatigue in two critical functions. This presents a retention risk if left unaddressed — and an opportunity to intervene now through targeted leader capability and workload redesign to protect performance in FY26.”

3. FRAME HR STRATEGIES IN COMMERCIAL TERMS

Board members don't need to know about the functional work of HR – they want to know how it connects upwards.

Become familiar with key business drivers such as profit & loss statement management, capital allocation, innovation and risk assessment. This helps connect people strategies to the organisation's long-term resilience.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Instead of saying:

“HR is rolling out a new performance framework and refreshed capability model to improve consistency and engagement.”

Frame it as:

“We're reshaping performance management to sharpen accountability and lift productivity in revenue-critical roles. This change is designed to reduce margin leakage, strengthen succession for key growth bets and lower execution risk as we invest capital in new products and markets.”

See [AHRI's business terms glossary here](#).

4. BE SUCCINCT AND FOREGROUND THE RELEVANT CONTENT

Board members value relevance. If you are presenting additional materials, ensure these are distributed ahead of time and clearly label the information as ‘background’, so the attention during the meeting is focused on the pertinent decisions.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Instead of saying:

“I’ve included some additional HR data and context in today’s board pack to support the discussion.”

Frame it as:

“You’ll find a short background pack circulated ahead of the meeting for context. Today, I’d like to focus the discussion on two decisions required from the board — both directly linked to cost control, delivery risk and our capacity to execute the strategy over the next 12–18 months.”

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE

1

Scenario: The board is discussing the potential roll out of a new AI-enabled productivity tool across the organisation that could drastically redistribute work and change roles.

How HR might approach this: Frame the AI rollout as a structural shift — not a technology upgrade — by outlining its implications for future capability, role design and the operating model. This shows how workforce strategy underpins productivity, risk and long-term resilience. Avoid speaking in ‘HR jargon’ to ensure your message lands with a director who has previous HR exposure.

Ask questions such as:

- “Which roles and workflows will be most disrupted by this tool?”
- “What new capabilities will leaders and teams need to absorb the change?”
- “What risks emerge if adoption outpaces our workforce readiness?”

This positions HR as a strategic partner shaping sustainable transformation.

Scenario: A spike in executive and critical-role turnover within a short period of time raises board concern around continuity and succession risk.

2

How HR might approach this: Acknowledge the impact on organisational confidence and external perception, then link turnover patterns to their root causes – such as leadership load, operating model strain or role design – supported by clear evidence.

Ask questions such as:

- “Which roles deliver equal or higher productivity under flexible models?”
- “What risks emerge if we don’t adapt for this cohort?”
- “How will we measure performance, accountability and business impact post-implementation?”

This positions HR as proactively managing enterprise risk.

3

Scenario: The organisation is considering expanding remote or flexible work for a specific employee cohort, prompting board questions around productivity, equity, risk and performance impact.

How HR might approach this: Position flexibility as a targeted business lever, not a cultural concession. Link the proposal to talent retention, cost efficiency, capability access and risk mitigation, supported by evidence from performance data, attrition trends and role suitability analysis.

Ask questions such as:

- “Which roles deliver equal or higher productivity under flexible models?”
- “What risks emerge if we don’t adapt for this cohort?”
- “How will we measure performance, accountability and business impact post-implementation?”

This reframes flexibility as a disciplined, outcomes-driven strategy.

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