Board Decision Review Checklist for Directors

When to use

Use this short preparation pass after reading a decision paper. It does not replace full reading. Prioritise your questions; allow the meeting time the decision requires. It is not a scoring system or a shortcut to an approval.

Your output

A focused challenge: the most important unresolved issue, why it matters and what the board needs to establish before deciding. Test management's judgement without taking over its proposal.

Name the actual choice

Ask: "What, precisely, are we being asked to authorise today?"

Check scope, boundaries, timing and what is excluded. Confirm the relevant decision-making arrangements rather than assuming this forum has authority.

Follow-up: "What happens if we do not decide today? What makes that consequence credible?"

Find the assumption that matters most

Ask: "Which assumption, if wrong, would most change your recommendation?"

Distinguish observed results from estimates, interpretation and aspiration. Check the source, relevance and limitations of evidence.

Follow-up: "What evidence would make you change your view, and have we looked for it?"

A confident answer is not evidence. An uncertain answer may be sound if its limits are understood.

Test a credible alternative

Ask: "What is the strongest practical alternative, and why is this better?"

Consider a smaller step, delay or continuing current arrangements where viable. Compare options on consistent assumptions; include the cost of waiting and the preferred option's disadvantages.

Follow-up: "What would have to be different for the alternative to become preferable?"

Do not require artificial options simply to fill a comparison table.

Explore the downside and the exit

Ask: "If this underperforms, what are we exposed to, and what can we still reverse?"

Explore more than expenditure: operational disruption, people, customers, obligations and dependencies may matter. Ask who bears the downside and whether capacity is available alongside existing commitments.

Follow-up: "What would we see early, and what action would that trigger?"

A pilot can still create ongoing commitments. "We can stop" needs an explanation of the practical cost and consequences.

Close the decision loop

Ask: "Who owns delivery, how will we know whether the intended outcome happened, and when does this return to us?"

If approval depends on a condition, make its meaning, evidence, owner and timing clear through the organisation's normal process. Distinguish a condition to satisfy before action from a matter to monitor afterwards.

Follow-up: "What change would require a fresh decision rather than routine management action?"

Your decision readiness note

The proposed decision, in my words: _____

The issue most likely to change my judgement: _____

Evidence or explanation still needed: _____

Why it matters now: _____

Question I will put to the board/management: _____

Resulting position and reason: _____

Choose the next move

If the answer resolves the issue, update your view. If it exposes a material gap, explain its effect on the decision. Discuss whether further evidence, a changed scope, a clear condition, deferral or rejection is warranted. Approval may still be reasonable with uncertainty; an unexplained gap should not silently become an accepted risk.

Fictional example

A proposed service launch depends on a supplier completing integration before launch. Management's forecast assumes success but provides no confirmation.

Ask: "What supports that date, and what is the customer impact if integration slips?" The answer may support launch, changed scope or a later decision. Asking only "Are you confident?" is unlikely to establish what the board needs.

Use with care

These are practical educational prompts, not legal advice, a complete governance procedure or assurance that duties have been met. Apply your organisation's arrangements and seek appropriate advice where needed. Use alongside the "Board paper and director review pack"; this guide tests a recommendation rather than replacing the paper template or management's analysis.

Help improve this tool

Did this help you test a recommendation? If you have not used the tool, say so.

Which question helped, which did not, and what one change would improve the tool?

Please use a general description only. Do not submit board papers, names, commercial details or other confidential information.

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