

AI, BOARDS & STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY

FIDELIO OVERTURE



THE PACE OF CHANGE, THE PACE OF OPPORTUNITY

The pace of change has picked up for Boards in 2025, including with regard to AI. The technology which threatened to subvert or disrupt so many sectors found itself disrupted with [news of a new player](#) on the block.

Against this backdrop, how do Boards keep pace? How do Boards provide oversight?

Fidelio has been addressing this question in our Board Performance Reviews and Board Searches. We were delighted therefore to welcome [Bola Adegbulu](#), an early AI entrepreneur, and highly experienced AI VC investor and advisor, to explore the role of the Board and the strategic opportunity of AI.

With a roundtable of Chairs from a range of sectors, Bola stressed the biggest risk for Boards was missing the AI opportunity. AI is undoubtedly a disruptor, but Bola stressed that Boards need to be focusing on the same issues and addressing the same questions that apply in other aspects of Board oversight.

We set out in this Overture 10 key findings from the first in Fidelio's series of Chair Roundtables focusing on AI:

10 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1.** **THE GREATEST RISK IS MISSING THE AI BOAT**

The biggest risk of not engaging with AI is competitors gaining a massive advantage, a gap that cannot be closed. It's game on and incumbent on Boards to be alert to the scale of the opportunity and the potentially existential risk of missing that opportunity.
- 2.** **BOARD RELEVANCE**

AI expertise seldom sits in the Boardroom. Boards should upskill but their core function with AI is the critical thinking and challenge that they would apply to other aspects of their Board work. Ensuring the right leadership team, resource allocation and risk appetite is key.
- 3.** **MANDATE FROM THE TOP**

AI strategy will be developed by the Executive but needs a clear mandate, oversight and guidance from the Board. AI should be subject to the same rigour that effective Boards bring to other strategic priorities.
- 4.** **'AI FLUENCY'**

Bola challenged Boards to develop AI fluency - sufficient collective understanding of AI to ask the right questions and ensure the optimum conditions for an AI strategy to flourish. In our Search and Board composition assignments Fidelio is seeing different profiles being introduced to the Boardroom to address this need.
- 5.** **TALENT BOTTLENECK**

Chairs in the Roundtable saw access to talent as a major obstacle to developing successful AI strategies. Clearly this bottleneck needs to be factored into talent strategies by building an understanding of what is required in-house and fostering a culture of curiosity and development to supplement external hiring.
- 6.** **CULTURE IS KEY**

Bola stressed a key role for the Board in addressing AI is fostering a culture that supports innovation and accepts that some AI strategies will take time to bite. A fear of AI and job loss may inhibit a company's progress, and a healthy culture needs to acknowledge both the fear and excitement related to AI.

WHO OWNS THE DATA?

- 7.** Boards, quite rightly, are concerned about the guardrails around commercially sensitive data in the context of AI. Bola was pragmatic about development that was impractical to do in-house versus highly sensitive data or areas of such competitive advantage that needed to be ring-fenced.

THE DATA CHALLENGE

- 8.** A key concern at the Roundtable was that American competitors, in particular in the Financial Services and Technology sectors, had created massive competitive advantage by building vast amounts of data – so-called data lakes. Acknowledging the challenge, Bola also flagged that quality as well quantity of data will be a critical differentiator.

BENCHMARKING AND DISRUPTION

- 9.** If the biggest risk of AI is being left behind, then benchmarking and horizon scanning become all the more important for Boards. Bola stressed the need to maintain a keen awareness of competitors beyond your operating region.

WHERE IT'S AT

- 10.** Undoubtedly the US is the dominant driver in AI recently challenged by China, but for our London-based Roundtable, Bola underscored the strengths of the UK, typically ranked third globally and with a marked shift in Government openness.

THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

Boards have a significant role to play in ensuring that their organisations stay on the competitive playing field with regard to AI and are set to flourish.

The overarching conclusion from Fidelio's first AI Chair Roundtable is that Boards need to:

- Upskill and continue learning about AI
- Deploy the governance tools at their disposal to provide oversight and direction

What's new is the pace and scale of change.

For further information on how Fidelio can support your Board to build its AI competence and oversight, please get in touch.

ABOUT FIDELIO

[Fidelio Partners](#) advises and supports Chairs to build and develop high performing Boards. We have an international track record in advising Chairs, building Boards, creating value for shareholders and stakeholders and effecting change through:

- **Chair Advisory**
- **Board & Executive Search**
- **Board Review**
- **Development & Succession**

For further information about how Fidelio can support your Board to increase its effectiveness and performance through Search, Evaluation or Development, please contact gkarrancumberlege@fideliopartners.com.

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BUILDING BETTER BOARDS

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