

Preparing the Future-Ready Board: Actions for the GC

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Today's business landscape no longer follows traditional crisis-and-recovery cycles. Instead, organizations face a persistent "polycrisis" where geopolitical, technological and macroeconomic disruptions intersect, creating ongoing uncertainty and complexity.

As a result, 56% of nonexecutive directors believe organizations should increase their risk appetite over the next 12 months to drive shareholder value.

Discover how general counsel (GC) can help boards navigate this new reality with insights from the Gartner Preparing the Future-Ready Board report, including three critical actions:



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Evolution of future-ready boards

	Current state	Actions	Future state
Executive accountability	"Deferential" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine information Seek clarity in presentation and proposal quality Annual review of the CEO based on financial performance success 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Implement strategic foresight mechanisms Transition to real-time information practices Facilitate provocative oversight and constructive conflict 	"Provocative" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Probe information Check narratives with AI and strategic intelligence for presentation and proposal quality Use continuous feedback tied to financial and nonfinancial metrics
	"Compliance-driven" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressure-test assumption using a defined set of risks Improve strategic proposals with business-oriented contributions Improve risk management plans with reactive, compliance-focused contributions 		"Agile" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressure-test assumption using scenario planning outcomes Improve strategic proposal with stakeholder-centric suggestions Improve risk management plans with proactive anticipation and preparation

Source: Gartner

Implement strategic foresight mechanisms

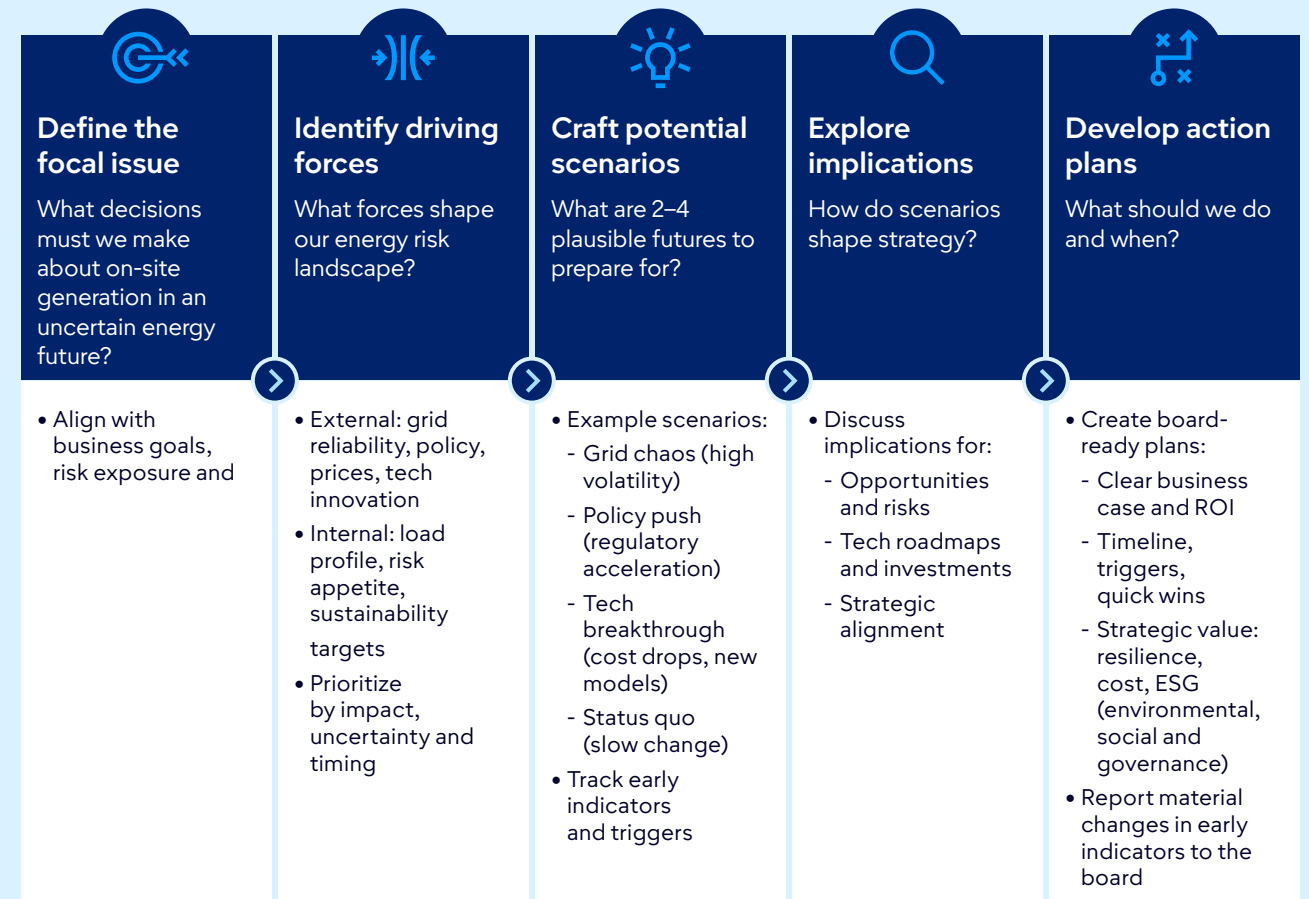
Strategic foresight is a systematic approach to anticipating and preparing for future disruptions, transforming strategic planning from a reactive review process into a proactive exercise that drives strategic resilience.

Organizations that rely solely on historical performance data risk reacting to disruption after strategic damage has already occurred. Strategic foresight helps boards and management move upstream of disruption and prepare for alternative futures before they materialize.

Recommendations:

- **Update agenda priorities.** Shift board discussions from historical reporting toward future-focused planning and enterprise value creation.
- **Incorporate horizon scanning.** Monitor weak signals, emerging trends and risk convergence to better anticipate strategic disruption.
- **Use premortem workshops.** Challenge assumptions, identify blind spots and pressure-test strategy before risks materialize.

Example scenario planning process



Source: Gartner

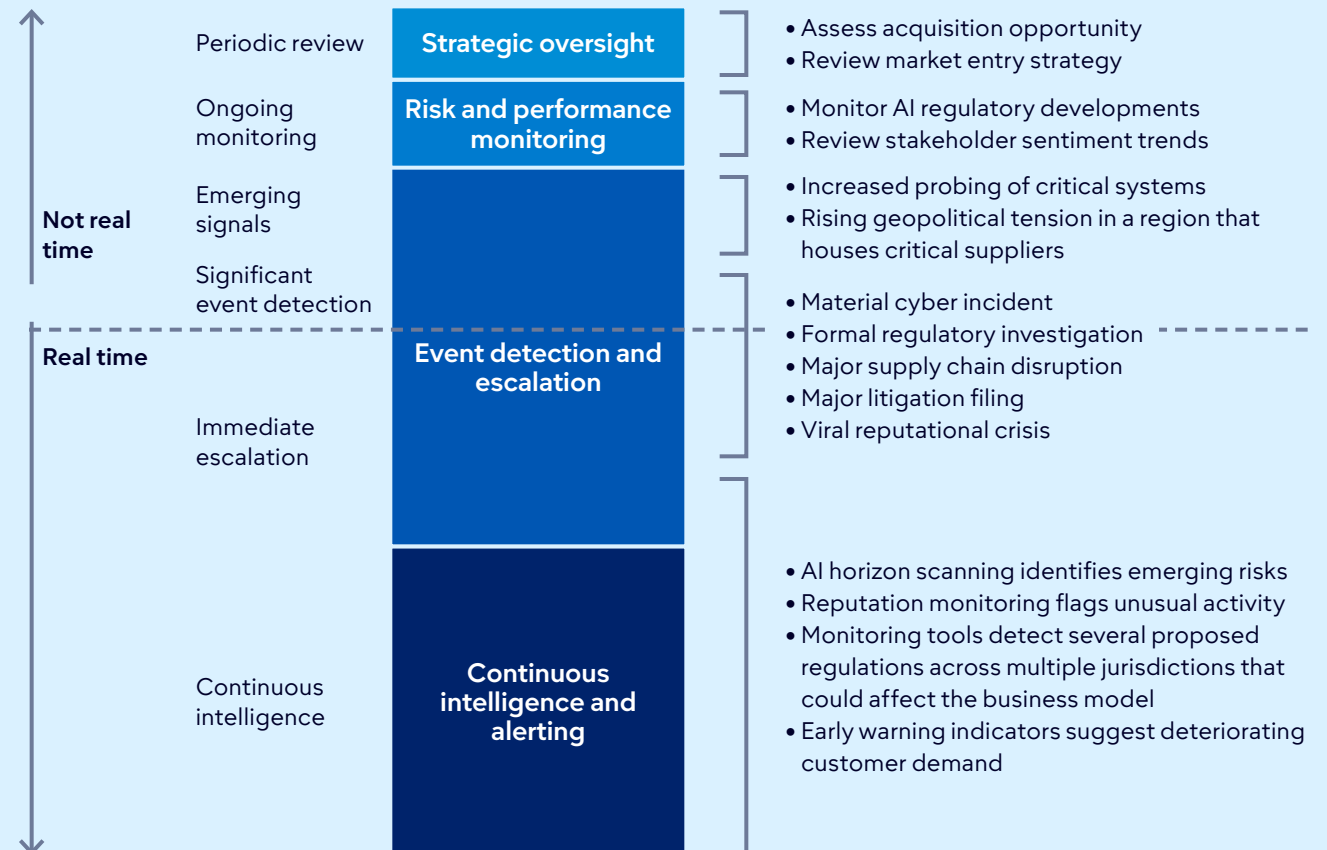
Transition to real-time information practices

Future-ready boards require access to leading indicators and real-time intelligence, not just quarterly reports and historical performance reviews. Directors must be able to understand emerging issues while they are still manageable.

Recommendations:

- **Leverage AI-enabled insights.** Explore AI capabilities, such as horizon scanning, predictive modeling and anomaly detection, to enhance board visibility and decision making.
- **Modernize dashboard practices.** Increase the use of leading indicators and connected metrics to better anticipate and assess cross-functional impacts.
- **Implement flash reporting.** Establish predefined thresholds that trigger immediate board updates when significant risks or disruptions emerge.

Which concept of “real time” is relevant to your business problem?



Source: Gartner

Facilitate provocative oversight and constructive conflict

Provocative oversight shifts board culture from polite consensus to constructive challenge. Rather than simply validating management decisions, directors actively pressure-test assumptions, identify blind spots and explore strategic vulnerabilities.

Recommendations:

- **Document must-achieve and must-avoid outcomes.**
Align on strategic priorities and define critical outcomes and risks.
- **Adopt a “red teaming” mindset.** Challenge assumptions behind major strategic decisions to uncover blind spots and strengthen resilience.
- **Frame difficult questions as strategic stress tests.**
Help bridge the gap between directors and management by positioning challenging questions as efforts to strengthen long-term growth and resilience, rather than as criticism of management’s decisions.

Illustrative provocative oversight

Current board question	Provocative oversight question	GC’s framing
Is the project on budget?	What would kill this project and how would we know it’s starting before it gets too bad?	The board is testing for resilience, not performance.
Does the engagement survey data show employees are happy?	Is our talent model built for impacts from agentic AI workflows and can our culture withstand a material workforce contraction?	The board is testing for the viability of the workforce in the future.
Is our data secure?	Are we digitally sovereign or dependent on a single AI and data infrastructure provider?	The board is testing for IT infrastructure resilience.

Source: Gartner

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