

Five Questions with Gavin Adda



- Board director at:
 - Lindström (since 2023)
 - Maxeon Solar Technologies (2022-Nov 2023)
- European Chamber of Commerce, Singapore, Co-Chairman of Sustainability Committee (2021-Present)
- Peak Energy, CEO (since 2023), a subsidiary of Stonepeak Infrastructure Partners
- TotalEnergies, CEO Renewables Utility Scale Asia (2022-2023), CEO Renewables Distributed Generation Asia (2017-2023), Chairman ENEOS JV (2022-23)
- Cleantech Solar, Founder & CEO (2015-17)
- [Gavin Adda | LinkedIn](#)

1. What are your general observations from having served on multiple boards and what drive the biggest differences (country, industry, diversity)?

I did see differences arising from the nature of the industry, the history behind the company, and the composition of the board. It's clear that a company with a long history, family-ownership and strong operations is better-placed, and has the luxury, to spend time on long-term strategic matters.

Across all the boards that I have worked, there is a real risk of being complacent and stuck in one's echo chamber. This is especially challenging if all board members come from the same country and/or have been on the board for a long time. With ambiguous board topics, you often see board members abstain from constructive open discussions.


It was impressive to me that a board of a European company decided to conduct a search to locate a potential board member in Asia as part of their growth strategy. This is a great way to support access to new markets. A younger company with different stakeholders in a joint venture situation involving fast-paced technologies might instead end up focusing on making tactical decisions and often in a hurry. I think boards are less effective in the latter case, especially if board members do not come from the appropriate industry.

In some situations, board members might be appointed by stakeholders to drive a particular result – rather than recruited based on requirements. Ultimately, the Chairperson and the board members play a big role in shaping the dynamics and explaining the differences.

2. What are your views on the robustness of debate at board meetings and how can we continue to improve decision-making? Are decisions data-driven? Are decisions timely?

Good decision-making is not always a given – especially when access to data or market insights might be somewhat limited. Diversity at the board level can lead to the need to use translators, which only decreases meaningful engagement.

There is an interesting difference in perspective between Shareholder Designee Director and Independent Directors. Theoretically, Shareholder Designee Directors are open to conflicts of interest or not having a “pure focus” on the company’s best interests. In practice, I have seen Designee Directors that are sometimes more invested in the long-term success of the company and have stronger market insights. It is important that Directors respect each other’s perspective as there is a clear benefit to having a mixed representation.



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Clearly, the chairperson is a critical influence in the social dynamic and board structure. They need to facilitate discussion – moving the board to make decisions and focusing on the critical topics. In one board, the chairperson regularly organized one-on-one meetings with each member. That was very useful as we all got to know where each one was coming from. The chairperson would go around asking board members for their feedback randomly so everyone had to be well prepared. Another chairperson would require one hour at the end of the board sessions to do a post-mortem.

At another board, training on fast-moving technologies was provided at each board meeting. So, there are things that can be done to ensure board members are well-informed and well-prepared.

In addition to board preparedness, there is also the topic of board agenda. I feel sometimes there are issues that should not be brought to the board level. The board needs to be clear about pushing those decisions back to the management team. Often there are too many topics for the board to manage effectively. In most board meetings, I would suggest that there are only two-to-three key topics that need extensive discussion.


3. What are the ways for Boards to truly understand the talent and capabilities of the Management Team and what more can be done?

It takes time and interaction over multiple activities to develop the relationships with the management team members and to assess key individuals. These activities can be dinners and site visits, among others. Individuals can be asked to present to the board. In some cases, it might be useful to have third-party firms to conduct tailored assessments of specific individuals within the management team.

4. What are the new areas that Boards should pay more attention to, and how can Boards address these new issues effectively?

Sustainability is definitely one topic that boards have to pay more attention to. Unlike maybe CSR which is more of a cost, Sustainability can be a net positive. Boards have to ensure that organizations take the right path and adopt the right targets. There is the reporting side but there is also the practical and operational dimensions.

5. What are your perspectives on the depth of knowledge regarding Sustainability, Energy Transition or Climate Change within boards? What is more important: consistency of understanding or diversity of views?



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Quite frankly, I think that most boards are struggling to grapple with sustainability. Companies need to identify the baseline Scope 1-2-3 emissions created by the business, the main drivers of emissions and then the multitude of solutions to reduce emissions. Instead, we see many companies committing to emission reduction targets without a clear view on the actions required to hit those targets.

At this stage, I think most boards and management teams need to focus on having a strong base of shared understanding (of the above issues) before we can discuss solutions and include diverse views. There are some no-brainer solutions which will reduce emissions and improve profitability immediately. The issue is too much of a global emergency for us to delay implementation.

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