BOARDFORUM PEER TALK • MEMBERS-ONLY SUMMARY

AI at the Board Table

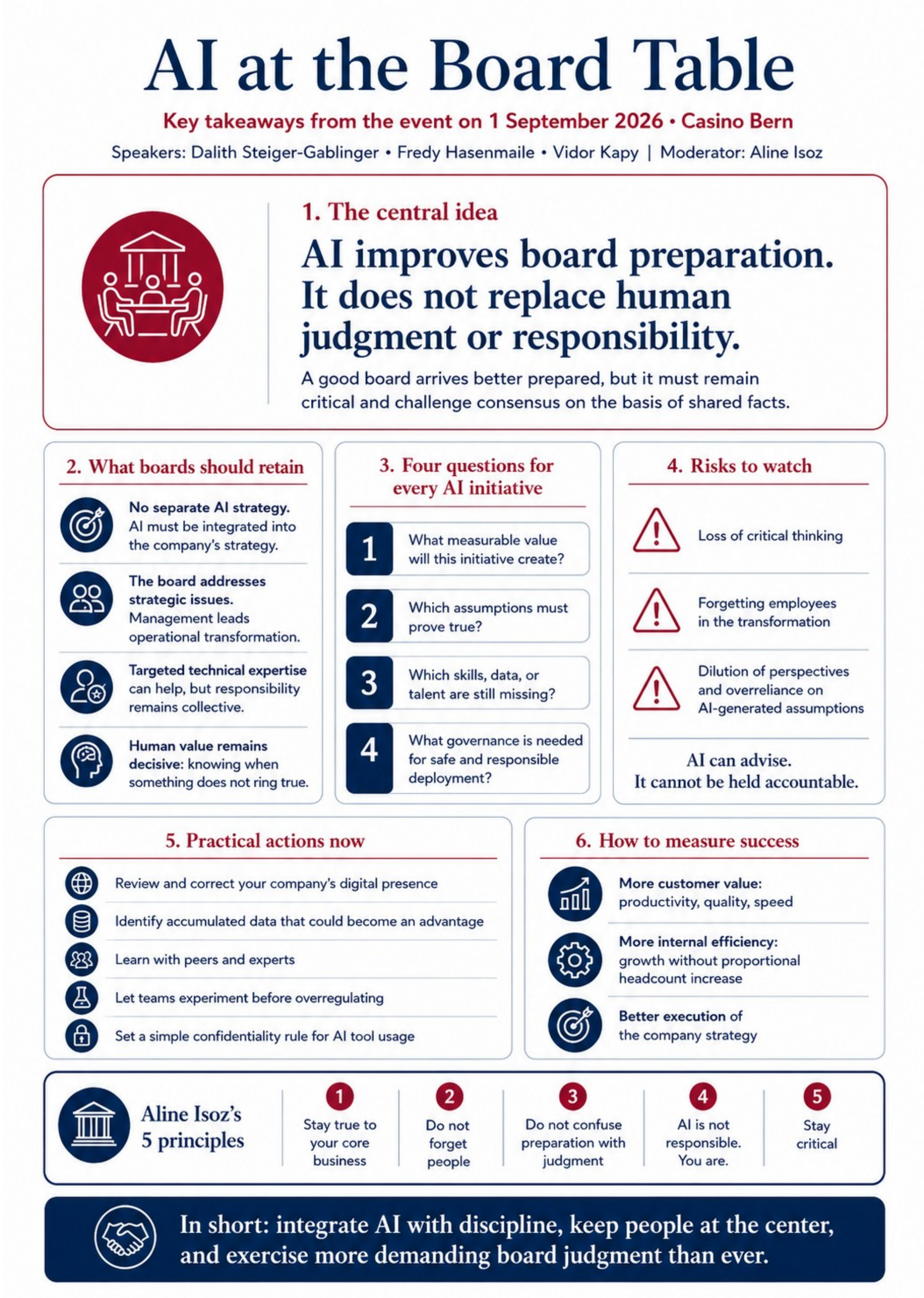
Rethinking communication, collaboration and leadership in the age of artificial intelligence

Tuesday, 1 September 2026, Casino Bern, Bern

With Dalith Steiger-Gablinger (SwissCognitive), Fredy Hasenmaile (Chief Economist, Raiffeisen Switzerland) and Vidor Kapy (CIO, Bühler AG). Moderated by Aline Isoz, SwissBoardForum committee member.

This document summarises the key points of the BoardForum Peer Talk held on 1 September 2026, dedicated to the role of artificial intelligence in the work of boards of directors. It is intended for SwissBoardForum members, whether or not they attended the evening, and also includes the closing round and the questions raised by members in the room.

AT A GLANCE


AI at the Board Table
Key takeaways from the event on 1 September 2026 • Casino Bern
Speakers: Dalith Steiger-Gablinger • Fredy Hasenmaile • Vidor Kapy | Moderator: Aline Isoz
1. The central idea
AI improves board preparation. It does not replace human judgment or responsibility.
A good board arrives better prepared, but it must remain critical and challenge consensus on the basis of shared facts.
2. What boards should retain
No separate AI strategy. AI must be integrated into the company's strategy.
The board addresses strategic issues. Management leads operational transformation.
Targeted technical expertise can help, but responsibility remains collective.
Human value remains decisive: knowing when something does not ring true.
3. Four questions for every AI initiative
1 What measurable value will this initiative create?
2 Which assumptions must prove true?
3 Which skills, data, or talent are still missing?
4 What governance is needed for safe and responsible deployment?
4. Risks to watch
Loss of critical thinking
Forgetting employees in the transformation
Dilution of perspectives and overreliance on AI-generated assumptions
AI can advise. It cannot be held accountable.
5. Practical actions now
Review and correct your company's digital presence
Identify accumulated data that could become an advantage
Learn with peers and experts
Let teams experiment before overregulating
Set a simple confidentiality rule for AI tool usage
6. How to measure success
More customer value: productivity, quality, speed
More internal efficiency: growth without proportional headcount increase
Better execution of the company strategy
Aline Isoz's 5 principles
1 Stay true to your core business
2 Do not forget people
3 Do not confuse preparation with judgment
4 AI is not responsible. You are.
5 Stay critical
In short: integrate AI with discipline, keep people at the center, and exercise more demanding board judgment than ever.

A better prepared board, a judgement that remains human

The panellists agreed on one first point: thanks to AI, board members arrive at meetings better prepared. The tools make it easier to work through large amounts of documentation and allow for more precise questions. But this gain in preparation should not turn into a comparison of the results each member's AI produced. The purpose of a board discussion remains to challenge how a consensus was reached, based on facts shared by everyone, provided by executive management and available to all members.

One point was particularly emphasised: human judgement, especially the ability to sense that something “doesn't sound right” or falls outside the usual pattern, cannot be delegated to a machine. It is precisely this kind of anomaly, difficult to formalise, that makes up each board member's added value.

Retiring the term “AI strategy”

The panellists proposed a shift in vocabulary: the goal is not to build a separate AI strategy, but to embed AI into the company's overall strategy, with the same rigour as any other strategic question. Talking about an “AI strategy” risks creating a framing bias, pushing the organisation to view every decision solely through the lens of AI, even when that is not always the right tool.

The distinction of roles remains central: the board should focus on strategic questions, such as how the business model, the competitive landscape and new risks are evolving, while the operational transformation linked to AI is the responsibility of executive management. Blurring this boundary was identified as a recurring source of confusion within organisations.

Does the board need an AI expert?

Opinions differ slightly on this point. Some recommend that at least one board member develop deeper AI expertise, one that connects the technology to its economic implications, its consequences for the business model and its governance, given how quickly certain business models are being rewritten today (the audit sector was cited as an example). Others prefer to bring in external advisors, without transferring decision-making to them.

A point of convergence nonetheless emerges: technical expertise can be concentrated in one person or an external advisor, but judgement and accountability remain the responsibility of the board as a whole. What is expected of every board member is not technical mastery, but genuine literacy on the issues and consequences of AI for the company.

Risks to watch

Three risks were identified over the course of the evening. First, the loss of critical thinking: accepting a model's output rather than challenging it. Second, forgetting about staff, a point raised repeatedly: transformation only succeeds if employees are brought along, not just the governance bodies, since it is the teams who, day to day, deliver the service or the product. Third, the dilution of perspectives: the risk, for time-pressed board members, of relying more on AI-generated assumptions than on their own experience and the board's diversity of views.

> ***“AI can advise. It cannot be held accountable. That responsibility remains, and will remain, with the board of directors.”***

Practical takeaways

Beyond the broad themes of the discussion, the evening produced a series of very concrete recommendations, drawn from the closing round and the exchanges with the room.

Steering an AI initiative: four questions to ask

A simple framework, usable by any board without prior technical expertise, whenever an AI initiative is put in front of it:

- What measurable value will this initiative create for the company?
- What assumptions need to hold true for that value to materialise?
- What capabilities, data or talent are still missing to get there?
- What governance mechanisms need to be in place to ensure safe and responsible deployment?

Three pieces of advice from the closing round

Check your digital presence. Dalith Steiger-Gablinger shared a very concrete observation: when an AI tool gets something wrong or “makes up” information about a company, the cause can be trivial, incorrect or outdated web pages (opening hours, offering, contact details), which the tool relies on to formulate its answer. Correcting this information requires no AI expertise at all, but directly improves how your company is represented by these tools.

Get support from your peers. Vidor Kapy stressed the value of peer exchange, particularly for smaller organisations that cannot afford a dedicated AI role: inviting experts or other leaders to discussion sessions helps trigger thinking that is hard to do alone.

Look at what your company has accumulated over the years. Fredy Hasenmaile illustrated this with the example of a German company specialised in colour products: by applying AI to thirty to fifty years of data on the colour blends requested by its clients, it cut its raw material consumption by a third while increasing its margin by two thirds. The message: every company probably holds a data asset, without realising it, that could become an advantage with AI.

Answers to questions from the room

How can a shared understanding of AI be built, beyond the technical side?

One member highlighted the difficulty, in a multicultural board, of sharing a common understanding of the dependency and governance issues linked to AI. The panellists' answer: talk less about “sovereignty”, a difficult goal to reach given how dependent Europe currently is on American and Chinese technology, and more about “resilience”: learning to use these tools while building the mechanisms that help limit the risks involved.

How can SMEs with no time, budget or expertise be supported?

Several SME board members asked how to bring their company up to speed on the topic without dedicated resources. The panellists' advice: avoid overregulating too early, while putting a few minimum guardrails in place from the outset, around confidentiality, data and approved tools, and then evolve the governance framework as use cases and business value become clearer. A simple rule to pass on to teams: anything you could say out loud on public transport can be shared with a tool like ChatGPT, everything else should not be. SMEs were also encouraged to pool efforts with other boards facing the same challenge, rather than each trying to understand the technology alone.

How can a business model be rethought with AI, not just optimised?

The question concerned how to move beyond optimising existing processes towards genuinely rethinking a business model. Answer: current processes often reflect the human limitations for which they were designed, in particular the need for experts to work through each step. With agentic AI, that constraint fades, making it possible to reorganise work around value creation rather than around inherited processes. One reminder was added: the real skill required is not technical but strategic, the ability to picture a future that does not yet exist.

How can critical thinking be preserved if AI prepares part of the board's work?

One member raised concern about confusing a “better prepared” board with a board that thinks more critically. The panellists' answer was direct: expertise can be concentrated, judgement cannot be outsourced, and that remains the responsibility of every board member individually. The image used to illustrate it: you can own a dishwasher and still never put your crystal glasses in it, even though you technically could. Some tasks should stay done by hand, by choice, not by necessity.

How has AI changed the work of investment committees?

A member active on several investment committees asked whether assessing a company's future soundness had become harder. Answer: market composition has changed considerably over the past ten to twenty years, and it is now harder to predict where the next winner will come from. The recommendation remains a classic one, but reinforced by this observation: diversification, and viewing periods of major transformation as periods that favour value creation for those willing to think it through carefully.

How should the success of AI in a company be measured?

The evening's final question concerned which indicators to track. The panellists advised against measuring success through tool-level indicators, such as the number of active licences or how often the tool is used. Two dimensions were proposed instead: on the customer side, the value created in terms of productivity, quality and speed, which should translate into revenue; internally, the efficiency gains that allow the company to grow without having to grow headcount at the same pace, with a direct effect on margin. One final point was added: AI should ultimately be judged by the business value it creates and its contribution to the company's strategy, whether by improving execution or by revealing where the strategy and business model themselves may need to evolve.

A word from the moderator

To close her first session as moderator as a SwissBoardForum committee member, Aline Isoz shared five principles she personally takes away from the evening:

- Stick to your business.
- Don't forget people.
- Don't confuse preparation with judgement.
- AI is not accountable, you are.
- Be critical.

Further reading

Dalith Steiger-Gablinger shares her white paper “AI is Changing the Economics of Expertise” (SwissCognitive, June 2026) with members. It extends one of the evening's central threads: as artificial intelligence makes knowledge abundant and nearly free, value no longer comes from access to information, but from judgement, accountability and trust. In the author's view, tomorrow's competitive advantage will rest on the combination of human expertise, AI and trust, rather than on any one of these dimensions alone.

Full paper: https://swisscognitive.com/white-papers/ai-is-changing-the-economics-of-expertise

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Many thanks to Dalith Steiger-Gablinger, Fredy Hasenmaile and Vidor Kapy for the quality of their preparation and the richness of the discussion, and to Aline Isoz for her first session as moderator as a SwissBoardForum committee member. Thanks also to all the members who took part in the closing round and asked such relevant questions in the room. Finally, thank you to everyone who took part in this first English-language evening, an experience that allowed us to bring our German-speaking and French-speaking members together around the same topic.