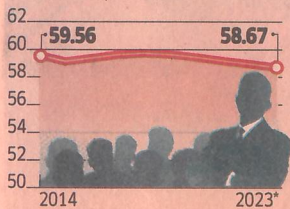


# Grey Remains the New Black for Co Boards

## NEEDLE BARELY MOVES

Average age (in years) of NSE-listed co boards in India (as on March 31)



2014 2023\*  
\* September 20 Source: primeinfobase.com

Number of younger directors increasing but slowly

Search firms say seeing a rise in mandates for younger directors

This is especially at cos that target a young demographic



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**Bengaluru:** Gen Z may be taking workplaces by storm but on the boards of India Inc, it is still age and experience that rules the roost. The average age of boards is 58.67 years — falling marginally from 59.56 years over the last decade — at NSE-listed companies. This indicates that while there has been some infusion of younger blood, boards are still largely grey.

Data compiled for ET by primeinfobase.com showed, however, that the number of younger directors has been rising steadily. As of the start of September, 13.89% directors were below the age of 45 (2,340 of total 16,837) across 2,107 NSE-listed companies. This compares to 10.72% (or 1,249 of 11,643 directors) across 1,481 companies as of March 31, 2014.

Currently there are 956 independent directors below 45.

## Slow Change Underway

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This number is over three times that of March 31, 2014, when there were 312 independent directors. Both these numbers have been seeing a steady rise over the last 10 years.

Similarly, directors below the age of 40 have risen to 1,368 (590 independent) as of early-September, compared to 631 (118 independent) as of March 31, 2014. There are now 210 directors under 30 (of them 86 independent), compared to 95 (18 independent) a little over a decade ago.

Experts say that even with the Great Board Refresh of 2024 — when 1,551 independent directors in 825 NSE-listed companies complete a 10-year tenure by April 1 — Indian boards are unlikely to get much younger anytime soon. Most companies still prefer traditional profiles to fit these

roles, valuing maturity and experience.

Amit Tandon, managing director of proxy-advisory firm Institutional Investor Advisory Service India (IIAS), says that people who join a board need to have sufficient experience and maturity. “Boards cannot be seen to be a training ground. We have seen Rajiv Bajaj and Rishad Premji working in their companies for many years before being given a seat on the board.”

Pranav Haldea, managing director of Prime Database Group, said: “Despite the imminent board refresh, it is unlikely that many companies will actively scout for younger directors.” “While a few companies will use this opportunity to get younger fresh faces in the boardroom, most others shall just replace the incumbents with those who are known to them or who come with a strong referen-

ce, as earlier, to comply with the letter of the law.”

However, there is a slow change underway.

Boards are now starting to reflect a company’s employee base and customer segment, says Monica Agrawal, managing director-financial services, Asia-Pacific at executive search firm Korn Ferry. About 10-15% of board searches the firm handles are for younger board members currently, she says, compared to practically none a couple of years ago.

“Companies which are catering to the younger segment, like those in consumer tech, fintech, healthtech, etc., are specifically asking for one young member, but not all. Otherwise, there is a lot of value for grey hair; people who have seen different business, economic, political cycles,” she says.

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