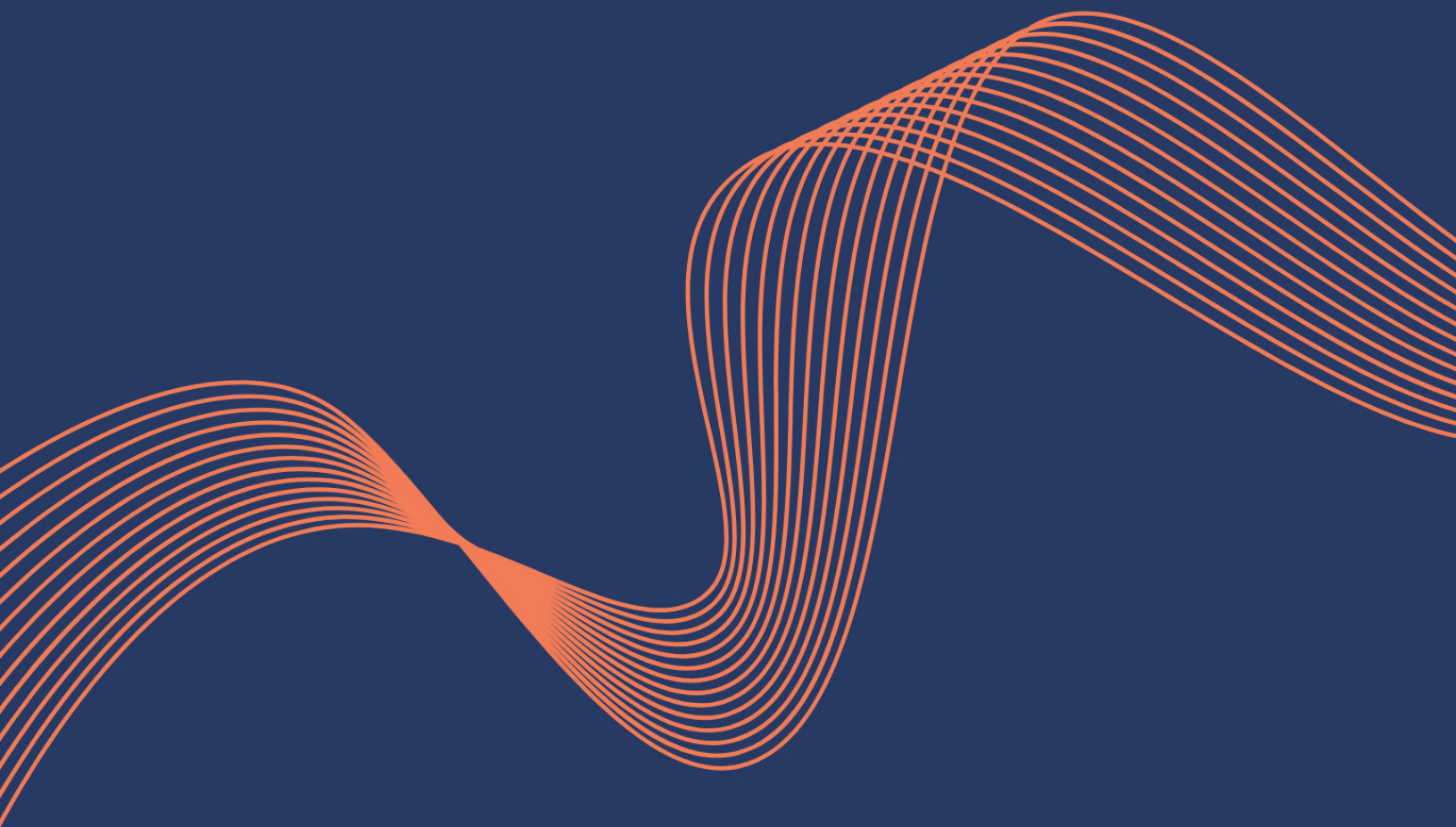


APRIL 2025

# INNOVATION AND GOVERNANCE

SIX ESSENTIAL MOVES FOR BOARDS



boardspan

# Innovation and Governance

## Takeaways From Chris Young

Following our recent conversation with Chris Young (Microsoft, McAfee, Intel, and American Express) about how boards can drive strategic growth through innovation, we've highlighted below six of the many pearls of insight and wisdom that Chris shared with us. We hope this serves as a practical guide on how boards can actively engage in the innovation dialog at the organizations they serve.

### 1. Innovation Starts at Home (Base)

Innovation should be the lifeblood of any organization: it's not just a means to lean into the future and drive growth, but a way to stay current and competitive. Nonetheless, innovation as a topic can get sidelined in the boardroom because it comes with the sense of "high risk-high reward". Interestingly, some of the most innovative initiatives start with existing people, processes, products, and strategies, building on past successes to create better processes or outcomes. Rather than feeling pressure to invent something entirely new, organizations can leverage existing strengths as an effective way to innovate. Whether building on prior knowledge or creating something entirely new, innovation is a "must have" competency for any business to survive in these dynamic times.

### 2. Curiosity as a Governance Skill

Curiosity is a critical part of board contribution. It not only keeps directors intellectually engaged; it sets the bar high for others. Asking how innovation is driving change within the company—across all functions—opens up meaningful dialogue and helps boards uncover both hidden risks and untapped opportunities. A curious board challenges assumptions and brings fresh perspectives that spark new ways of thinking.

### 3. Making Innovation a Boardroom Priority

Innovation belongs at the center of almost every boardroom discussion—woven into conversations about strategy, growth, risk, compliance, and culture. When boards embrace innovation as a way to solve problems as well as create opportunities, they open up many paths for advancement. Siloing innovation as a standalone agenda item runs the risks of (i) not using it pragmatically, (ii) not reinforcing it culturally, and (iii) kicking the can down the road and not getting to it. When boards and management embraced innovation as a mindset to advance their work, they become partners in asking thoughtful questions, sharing bold ideas, solving problems, and calculated risk-taking, all of which leads to long-term value creation.

### 4. AI: A Strategic Imperative

AI is reshaping every industry and organization, including those that, on the surface, seem less affected by this technology. And for those organizations not embracing it, expect them to be behind by almost every measure. AI is not just another tool—it's a new layer of capability that touches every function from market knowledge to product ideation to customer experience. Boards are wise to approach AI as a strategic priority, not a technical detail. Implemented strategically, AI can unlock new business models, boost productivity, and strengthen decision-making across the enterprise.

## 5. Governing AI with Intention

Because AI is a transformational technology, albeit still in early days, and with the potential to influence how business is conducted, it's governance demands proactive consideration. Like cybersecurity or financial controls, having a clear framework on how it will be implemented, tested, and evolved is in everyone's interest. Ensuring ethical use, managing risk, and maintaining competitive awareness are necessary which means employing standards around privacy, bias, transparency, safety and a host of other matters. It also means having a team in place who understand and can report back how AI is tested, deployed, and monitored. Effective AI governance is foundational to building trust with all stakeholders including employees, customers, and regulators.

## 6. Augmenting Human Potential to Be Better Innovators

Innovation very much remains a human talent. That doesn't mean we can't be better at it using tools like AI. The invention of fire, the wheel, the internet...well, you get the point. Using AI and other creative solutions allows us to automate repetitive work, advance workforce development, and enhance decision-making. As humans, our opportunity is to focus on higher-value work and find undeniable pathways to countless advances while employing thoughtful risk mitigation. The power of technology will continue to be with the humans who use it and how they choose to further innovation.

*We welcome your perspective, questions, and any thoughts on your mind.  
Please contact us at [info@boardspan.com](mailto:info@boardspan.com).*

## About Boardspan

We help boards raise the bar on their governance initiatives by combining cutting-edge digital capabilities with high-touch consulting services. Boardspan is a leader in board assessments, individual director & CEO evaluations, board succession planning & search, skills & composition analyses, and bespoke advisory work.

Our focus is entirely on boards, delivering deep experience, objectivity, an analytical orientation, and insight-driven recommendations. We work with public, private and non-profit organizations across all industries. Clients include Autodesk, Blue Shield (CA), Colgate-Palmolive, e.l.f. Beauty, HubSpot, Roblox, KKR, the PGA,