

# THE LEADERSHIP GAP IN EMERGING TECH

LESSONS FROM GLOBAL BOARDROOMS



WRITTEN BY: FUMBI CHIMA


## A QUIET MISMATCH BETWEEN

# TECHNOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP

After spending a lot of time in different boardrooms as a part of companies' board and as an independent director, one pattern becomes evident in almost every situation: when you look at the discussions taking place surrounding

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE 

DATA PLATFORMS 

DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS 

they sound confident and even visionary. However, once you dig down below the surface of the discussions, there is another unmistakable element – hesitation. Not in terms of what is being said, but in terms of how confident someone feels they have the ability to execute the desires expressed in the discussions.

It is not that Board members lack intelligence or experience; in fact, they have been successful at leading complex organizations through tremendous change over the last several decades. Therefore, the difficulty that boards are having understanding how emerging technologies operate, compared to the manner in which they typically manage transformation, occurs because the nature of emerging technologies is not predictable, complicated, or manageably ambiguous.

During one of the global retail board discussions I participated in recently, one of the most compelling items discussed among board members was how to determine when to invest in AI.

Should they focus on:

Revenue growth?

01

Cost savings?

02

Brand differentiation?

03

There was consensus among board members that those were all plausible reasons to invest in AI; however, none of the board members had arrived at the point of full agreement about which one of those items to use as the basis for making a decision to invest in AI. So this is where the leadership gap begins.





As I have interacted with different board members, I have discovered that there are other characteristics shared by organizations that are managing emerging technologies much more effectively than others.

An example of that is that the boards that are managing emerging technologies more effectively have enhanced questioning techniques, which is not being used (i.e., they ask better questions instead of simply asking more questions).

A board that is more proficient at managing the complexities associated with emerging technologies tends to ask more high-level and strategic inquiries, such as "where should we be making intelligent risks" instead of asking questions like "what is our AI strategy."

Additionally, organizations that are managing emerging technologies much more effectively invest in enhanced educational activities. In most cases, this does not have to be performative; instead, boards have been known to schedule what they refer to as "deep dives" into subjects such as machine learning bias or platform economics for the benefit of enhancing its ability to make sounder decisions.

Lastly, there appears to be a noticeable distinction in the way that boards that manage emerging technologies more effectively perceive and address the talent that is necessary for managing it. Organizations that are managing emerging technologies much more effectively have established that digital capabilities should not be restricted to the IT departments, but they should be treated as being classified as an organization-wide common language among all leaders of their various divisions, including Technology, Risk Management, and Product Development.

Companies must evolve in terms of their collective management of the digital capabilities of the organization by utilizing effective collaboration among executives of various divisions throughout the decision-making processes.

# THE RISK OF MOVING TOO FAST OR TOO SLOWLY



Many people are tempted to cast the leadership gap as being solely the result of delays in action.

WE MUST WORK QUICKLY  
TO ADOPT NEW TECHNOLOGIES,

INNOVATE AGGRESSIVELY

MOVE FASTER

is one side of the argument.

Conversely, relatively little is said about the other side of the argument that describes the risk associated with making rapid moves without conducting sufficient research. For example, I have observed organizations implementing sophisticated analytics solutions that appeared great on paper, but the implementation had no relevant business value whatsoever to the organization. In these instances, the problem stemmed from a "lack of alignment" among people making strategic decisions.

Ultimately, the truth will be somewhere in between these two extremes. Boards must act with intent while simultaneously exercising a significant level of humility because emerging technologies are not merely another box to check off, but rather, they redefine how organizations think, operate, and compete.

## CLOSING THE GAP, GRADUALLY



Closing this leadership gap caused by traditional governance and emerging technologies will not happen as a result of attending a single leadership intervention or a nice strategic planning document. Instead, in reality, it is the gradual evolution of an organization's collective mindset.

Boards need to create a comfort level for their members to obtain a certain level of comfort with their lack of complete knowledge. Executives must be able to articulate complex issues clearly without providing a simplistic explanation for them. Last, but certainly not least, organizations must develop a collaborative decision-making process that allows for discussions that do not lead to an immediate decision or development of an implementation plan.

Although this may sound inefficient, in all likelihood in the short term it will likely feel less efficient but will create much more value for a board and its members. Ultimately, the most valuable way is to establish a commonly understood value proposition. Almost more than anything else, a common understanding will likely represent the only sustainable competitive advantage related to managing emerging technologies.

# About the Author

Dr. Fumbi Chima is a global technology executive who has led digital and operational transformation initiatives at industry-leading brands including adidas, Burberry, Walmart, Boeing Credit Union, and Fox Networks. Her experience spans P&L ownership, M&A, operations, and enterprise technology leadership across retail, CPG, digital, and financial services.

She is widely recognized as an AI thought leader with a strong reputation for aligning innovation with business goals to deliver sustainable value and competitive advantage. At adidas AG, she spearheaded large-scale infrastructure and process transformations, achieving cost savings, accelerating speed to market, and enabling cross-market scalability.

Known for bridging the gap between technology and business, she fosters high-performance cultures rooted in innovation, accountability, and transparency. Her leadership has consistently increased employee engagement and organizational impact.

Throughout her career, she has championed innovative solutions in data strategy, digital marketing, and cybersecurity, always with a relentless focus on driving growth and enhancing customer experience.



**Fumbi Chima**

Check her [LinkedIn Profile](#)

