

# GETTING YOUR BOARD ON BOARD

2026

## THE NEXT IMPERATIVE

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# GETTING YOUR BOARD ON BOARD – THE NEXT IMPERATIVE

***The world your board was built for no longer exists. Is your board ready to lead in the one taking its place?***

We are in 2026. The geopolitical order has fractured; social polarization is restructuring markets. Questions of sovereignty are reshaping the landscape while artificial intelligence is accelerating shifts in competitive advantage in ways few boardrooms anticipated. Still, most boards are structured, composed, and operating much as they were a decade ago. Same instinct to recruit for the familiar, same frameworks built for a world that is already passing.

**We are not in a difficult cycle but in a regime shift, and the gap between the complexity boards now face, and the practices they rely on to govern is a measurable reality.** The board's role is shifting from supervising performance to navigating strategy in an environment where uncertainty has become part of the equation itself.

The boards that will shape the next ten years are not those that manage disruption most gracefully. **They are those that choose, early and deliberately, to govern for the world as it is, and get ready for what comes next.**

*"In every great challenge lies a great opportunity. Today, that opportunity is clear: for boards to become stewards of transformation and make business a true force for good."*  
**ISABELLE GROSMAITRE, Founder & CEO, Goodness & Co — Co-Founder, Board for Change Program at ChangeNOW 2026**

## ***Rethinking the room***

*Governance begins with a fundamental question: who belongs in the room?*

Most boards are still recruiting for the competencies that defined good governance a decade ago: financial acumen, operational experience, industry knowledge... These matter, but they are no longer the full picture. As of 2025, 55% of directors believe at least one of their peers should be replaced - the highest level ever recorded in this annual survey of corporate directors<sup>1</sup>. That number is less a verdict on individuals than a signal

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<sup>1</sup> PwC Annual Corporate Directors Survey, 2025

that boards collectively sense the mismatch between who sits at the table and what governing well now requires.

The cost of that mismatch is increasingly measurable, and it runs across every dimension of governance. On technology, sustainability or societal complexity, the majority of board members do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable or confident to lead - with only 36% feel prepared to leverage the disruptive potential of AI.<sup>2</sup>

Changing the composition is the hardest part, because the pressure to retreat to the familiar is constant. Shareholder architecture pulls one-way, political headwinds pull another, and in boardrooms where the same profiles have governed for decades, inertia is gravity. And yet the instinct to fill gaps with specialists often misses the point. In a world of compounding complexity, what boards need most are strong generalists, people with broad exposure to how businesses actually work, capable of engaging as genuine peers with management rather than as external validators.

The boards already responding to this have understood that composition alone is not enough. **What changes the output is a shift in mindset : a willingness to think beyond the familiar, to hold uncertainty, and to build collective curiosity as a governance capability.**

*"The changes required are starting with mindset. There are three shifts to implement:*

- 1. Renewal: boards must embrace change and drive flexibility, not resist it.*
- 2. Readiness: having the right competencies is non-negotiable.*
- 3. Relatedness: in times of uncertainty, you need to be out there, constantly connected to your key stakeholders, driving things in the right direction."*

**FRANCISCO VELOSO, Dean of INSEAD — ChangeNOW 2026**

## ***The double mandate of the Board***

*What does it take to perform and transform at the same time?*

Boards have always known how to commission transformation. What has changed is that transformation no longer arrives as a mandate with a beginning and an end. It has become the permanent condition of governing well, and that demands a different kind of board.

**The boards creating lasting value have internalized something their peers are still debating: performing and transforming happen together.** That means thinking systemically - understanding how environmental performance connects to financial resilience, how talent strategy connects to innovation capacity, and how purpose

connects to stakeholder trust. It also means planning for multiple possible futures and building organizations capable of adapting across scenarios as the world shifts around them. At its core, this is deeply human work. The boards that transform well are those where alignment between board and executive leadership becomes a practice, built on candid dialogue, shared purpose, and the collective courage to measure success not only in quarterly results, but in the value being created for all stakeholders.

**This is where purpose becomes an operational compass for decision-making,** embedded in capital allocation decisions, executive incentives, and the metrics boards use to evaluate long-term success. A growing number of boards are going further still, questioning whether traditional governance models are fully equipped to protect long-term purpose in volatile contexts, and exploring structures that anchor mission across leadership transitions and market pressures. In that context, the boards that will endure are those building organizations worth inheriting.

*“The board has a twofold role to play. First, as an engine of transformation, actively helping management and teams drive the business forward. Second, as a compass: keeping the big picture in sight, holding the long-term vision, and ensuring the plan stays on course. You cannot have one without the other.”*

**JEAN-PAUL AGON, Chairman L'Oréal, HEC — ChangeNOW 2026**

## ***Leading beyond the Boardroom***

*What if the room was never meant to be closed?*

The emerging challenges boards are being asked to govern were not created by any single organization, and they will not be solved by any single boardroom. Yet for decades, governance has been defined by boundaries: what belongs inside the company, what belongs outside, who has a seat at the table and who does not. Today, those boundaries are becoming liabilities.

**The most forward-looking boards are rethinking how they govern collaboratively. Inside,** they are creating space for genuine debate and formalizing new mechanisms to do so: advisory boards, next-generation committees, external expert circles. These structures are designed to bring the constructive tension and fresh perspective that boards cannot generate from within alone.

**Beyond their walls,** they are building the alliances, the cross-sector partnerships, and the stakeholder dialogues that bring the outside world into their decision-making before it arrives uninvited. **The organizations that will shape the next decade are those**

**willing to work together on shared challenges, to build trust across competitive boundaries, and to treat collaboration as a strategic capability.**

*"Most boards are still guardians of the past rather than stewards of the future. But the room needs to make space for the voices that are never in it: the planet, the people, the generations that will inherit our decisions. In twenty years, no one will ask whether boards had the right incentives. They will ask whether they had the courage to do what needed to be done."*

**PAUL POLMAN, Business leader, investor, philanthropist — ChangeNOW 2026**

## ***Join us in building the boardrooms the world needs.***

For four years, Board for Change at ChangeNOW has brought together the board members who believe governance can be a force for good - those willing to ask who is missing from the room, to govern beyond the next quarter, and to build the bridges between today's decisions and tomorrow's consequences.

Business is today the world's most trusted institution, ahead of governments, media, and NGOs<sup>2</sup>. That trust is both an opportunity and a mandate, but it comes with a responsibility: to collaborate with public institutions, civil society, and the democratic processes that shape the world businesses operate in. The most consequential decisions are always made in relation to others.

*"Cultivate your relevance with intention and cultivate your independence of mind. Strong convictions matter, as long as they contribute to the consensus rather than undermine it."*

**ANGELES GARCIA-POVEDA, Chair — ChangeNOW 2026**

The conversations held in Paris this year were a starting point, **join us in building what comes next.**

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<sup>2</sup> (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2026)