Event Report:

Navigating Digital Disruption – How Can Boards in Financial Institutions Enhance Strategic Digital Governance

Date: Thursday, 17 July 2025

Time: 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Venue: Asia School of Business (ASB

Speakers:

- Dr. Sebastien Picard, Founder & CEO, xCube

- Ms Julia Chin, Chief Regulatory Affairs Officer, xCube

- Ms Sharesz T. Wilkinson, CEO & Founder, Resilient Power

- **Moderated by:** Ms Eelee Lua, Chief of Staff, xCube

Executive Summary

FIDE FORUM's masterclass on "Navigating Digital Disruption" convened board directors to address the evolving role of board leadership in the age of rapid technological change.

The session highlighted the critical importance of embedding digital governance into the boardroom, not as a technical function but as a strategic imperative.

Through a dynamic mix of simulation, expert-led presentations, and panel dialogue, participants explored how emerging technologies—particularly AI—are reshaping the financial services landscape. Key themes included digital execution, regulatory expectations, risk management, ethical oversight, and the psychological attributes necessary for board leaders to steer change.

The session emphasized that digital fluency, decision agility, and cultural leadership are no longer optional—they are now core competencies for today's boards.

Welcome Remarks

Mr. Tay Kay Luan, CEO of FIDE FORUM, opened the session by emphasizing the growing relevance of digital governance in the boardroom. He reiterated the importance of execution in digital strategies and the necessity for boards to engage beyond IT oversight, advocating for a more proactive and integrated governance role. He also touched on themes such as cybersecurity, AI, customer expectations, regulatory requirements, and the importance of asking the right questions at the board level.

Key questions posed by Mr. Tay included:

1. How do boards embed digital learnings into strategic conversations?

2. How do boards ensure intelligent questioning and accountability beyond IT delegation?

3. What is the board's role in catalysing transformation—not just observing it?

He concluded by stating that today's board directors must lead digital disruption, not navigate around it.

Interactive Lecture & Simulation

Led by: Dr. Sebastien Picard

Dr. Sebastien Picard opened with a provocative assertion: artificial intelligence is no longer a future concept—it is an existential reality. He compared AI's rise to the invention of electricity, arguing that it is no longer a vertical function or a tool, but rather a foundational infrastructure driving a new economic model. Citing tech leaders such as Jensen Huang, he warned that AI development is growing at exponential speed, compressing innovation cycles to mere months.

Sebastien encouraged boards to abandon the idea of AI as an isolated project. Instead, they must understand it as a capability—an integrated function that touches value creation, customer experience, compliance, and risk management. He outlined the dual dimensions of digital governance: 'governance of digital' (how technology drives business strategy and value) and 'governance for digital' (oversight of risk, security, and ethics). He challenged participants to evaluate their board's readiness: 'Where is your board on the AI adoption curve?'

Board Simulation Exercise

Participants were assigned to simulation groups and tasked with evaluating a hypothetical acquisition of an AI-based fintech company. As board members, they were asked to review due diligence material and identify any red flags. The simulation revealed a number of concerns including the absence of a model risk management framework, unlicensed open-source software (OSS) components, monthly rather than real-time vulnerability scanning, and non-compliance with the EU AI Act despite having users in the European Union.

Each group deliberated on whether to proceed with the acquisition and proposed mitigation strategies. The exercise emphasized real-world boardroom dynamics, requiring directors to exercise both technical inquiry and risk judgment under pressure. The facilitators later debriefed on how each group's approach reflected different digital maturity levels and leadership mindsets.

Expert Lecture

Delivered by: Julia Chin

Julia Chin provided a regulatory and compliance perspective on AI and digital transformation. She began by referencing Malaysia's anti-scam initiatives and regional developments, such as Singapore's centralized fraud reporting platform. She noted the urgent need for a coordinated national response to scams and misuse of digital infrastructure.

Julia explained the implications of emerging regulations, including the upcoming BNM Responsibility Mapping policy. She emphasized that digital oversight is no longer confined to the IT or compliance departments—it must be embedded in boardroom discussions. She further highlighted the significance of system thinking, third-party risk, and culture as core compliance elements.

She encouraged directors to increase their technology fluency, stating, 'The board needs to understand enough to ask the right questions, not necessarily to have the answers.' Her session reinforced the idea that digital literacy, organizational culture, and collaborative compliance are essential for future-ready boards.

Panel Discussion

Moderated by: Eelee Yau

Panellists: Dr. Sebastien Picard and Sharesz T. Wilkinson

The panel discussion featured Dr. Sebastien Picard and Sharesz Wilkinson, who explored how boards can exercise governance over AI while remaining agile and relevant in the digital era.
Sebastien emphasized that in environments of rapid disruption, boards must 'go with the flow' rather than relying on rigid forecasts. He introduced the concept of 'dynamic managerial capabilities'—the ability to sense, seize, and transform based on emerging opportunities. He explained that sensing involves recognizing patterns and trusting both data and intuition, while acknowledging the role of cognitive and psychological biases. Seizing requires critical problem-solving, team collaboration, and emotional commitment. Transforming, he stressed, calls for high emotional stamina and the ability to lead through ambiguity.

Sebastien encouraged boards to turn the boardroom into a 'sandbox of ideas'—a place where experimentation with emerging technologies like AI, Web3, and quantum computing can occur safely and strategically.

Sharesz echoed these sentiments and added that many boardroom decisions suffer from 'decision latency'—the fear of getting things wrong leads to paralysis. She emphasized the need to recognize two types of decisions: those with irreversible impact and those that are reversible and iterative. The latter, she argued, should be acted on quickly and with greater confidence.

She also highlighted the importance of psychological safety, intercultural communication, and continuous self-awareness. In her words, 'We have to become students again—of AI, of technology, of leadership. What worked 20 years ago doesn't work now.'

Q&A

The Q&A session featured a final, candid exchange between the facilitators and participants. A standout moment came when a participant asked Dr. Sebastien Picard to share one 'do or die' lesson boards must adopt to govern AI and digital transformation in the next two years.

Sebastien responded by reiterating the impossibility of predicting the future but stressed the importance of understanding how systems work and adapting quickly. He emphasized the value of 'going with the flow'—a lesson he drew from his experience living in China—and the need for what he termed 'dynamic managerial capabilities' at the board level.

These capabilities include:

- Sensing opportunities through pattern recognition, supported by both cognitive interpretation and intuition.
- Seizing those opportunities through collaborative problem-solving and emotional commitment.
- Leading transformation with strong communication, cross-cultural awareness, and emotional resilience.

Sebastien concluded that boardrooms should become 'sandboxes'—safe environments where directors can test new ideas around AI, Web3, and quantum technologies without fear of failure.

Sharesz Wilkinson expanded on the conversation, noting that one of the greatest weaknesses in

boardrooms today is decision latency. She explained that many decisions are reversible and do not warrant prolonged delays.

To overcome fear and resistance to change, she emphasized the importance of trained communication skills, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. She also underlined the vital role of organizational culture, which, she argued, often determines whether strategic decisions get executed.

Her closing message was clear: *'We must become learners again—students of technology and leadership—because what worked in the past will not work today.'*

Conclusion & Closing Remarks

In conclusion, the session successfully empowered participants to rethink the board's role in navigating digital disruption—not as bystanders or gatekeepers, but as proactive leaders in shaping strategy, managing risk, and building digitally resilient institutions.

Attendees were also reminded about upcoming FIDE FORUM events, including:

- **Crisis Simulation Masterclass** on July 29
- **My Fintech Week 2025**

Thank you.

Jessy Bharm
Manager, Corporate Communications