Regulatory expectations are accelerating faster than most boards realize

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Canada's regulatory environment is evolving — rapidly. Boards that do not stay ahead risk exposing their organizations to non-compliance, reputational damage, and enforcement action. In privacy, cybersecurity, and AI, the pace of change is significant and uneven across jurisdictions, creating complexity for management and governance teams alike.

Why it matters

Privacy laws are advancing province by province. Québec's Law 25 imposes robust obligations that have shifted the standard for privacy compliance nationally. Other provinces are following suit, and with the April 2025 election now behind us, federal legislation is likely to be updated under the new government.

Meanwhile, regulators expect boards to provide direct oversight. A growing body of guidance — both in Canada and internationally — targets the boardroom, reinforcing that data governance and cyber risk are no longer just operational concerns, but core governance responsibilities.

What management and boards must prioritize

1. **Regular board engagement on cyber, privacy, and AI**
   Governance in these areas must be built into the board agenda, not pushed to the margins. Directors must stay current on emerging risks and regulatory trends.
2. **National strategy for privacy compliance**
   With differing timelines and requirements across Canada, compliance cannot be tackled piecemeal. Organizations need a coordinated approach that addresses Québec, federal, and other provincial obligations.

3. **Third-party oversight**
   Vendors, suppliers, and technology partners introduce material risk. Boards must understand how these relationships are assessed and monitored, particularly where sensitive data or AI technologies are involved.
4. **Internal accountability structures**
   Boards must ensure that internal roles and responsibilities — between legal, IT, privacy, and compliance — are clearly defined and resourced. Regulators are increasingly asking who is accountable, and how.

Final thoughts

Compliance is no longer a matter of box-checking. It requires active, informed leadership from both management and boards to ensure the organization is not just meeting today's expectations, but anticipating tomorrow's.

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