MARK MORRIS.

FRACTIONAL CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER

Corporate innovation, run AI-native.



Corporate innovation and venture portfolios, run on evidence rather than sponsorship.

25+ years building brands, technology teams and ventures. Outside of running an AI-native product development factory and an AI-native venture factory, Mark takes on a small number of fractional engagements with corporates, funds and accelerators: **helping leaders decide what to build, what to stop, and what their data has to be ready for first.**

25+	50%+	3	22	7 weeks
ventures built and governed	closed, not quietly parked	exited by sale or merger	validated through the platform	signed NDA to shipped MVP

Twenty-five years of ventures, built and governed, including the ones that were stopped. The seven weeks is the founders' own count, from the date on the NDA.

WHAT AI-NATIVE ACTUALLY MEANS HERE

He has already done it to his own business. Twice. Both ran the traditional way, and he rebuilt them AI-native himself, as a business user rather than a sponsor, for roughly a third of what a conventional team was quoted. Both platforms are live and processing founders now.

The system he sells is the system he runs. One triage engine classifies, scores and routes the inbound for three businesses in production. None of them is a demo.

And he knows where the power stops. AI made the inference cheap. It did not make judgment, foundations, or expertise free. That is the part a fractional seat brings into the room.

Data first. Then strategy. Then the systems.

Most organisations do it in reverse: a strategy deck first, then a product, then a hunt for data to justify both. Mark builds forward. It is slower for the first month and faster for every month after. His fractional work sits at board and executive level, with South African mid-market and enterprise companies that have a real mandate to act on innovation and AI, and with the funds and accelerators governing portfolios of early-stage ventures. He has designed innovation for companies like **FiberLean, Altron, Mr Price and KPMG**.

ENGAGEMENT MODELS

Six ways to work together.

Sized to how deep the problem needs to go, from standing advisory to a fixed-scope diagnostic.

ENGAGEMENT	WHAT IT ANSWERS
Fractional Chief Innovation Officer 1–2 DAYS A WEEK · RETAINER	"How do you build a data- and AI-driven innovation portfolio?" Owns the innovation agenda at exec level: an honest portfolio classification, an assumption registry per initiative, the AI and data-readiness agenda, build-vs-buy calls, an honest kill rate, and board reporting on commercial outcomes rather than activity.
Advisory A FEW HOURS A MONTH · LIGHT RETAINER	An operator on call for a CEO, CIO or founder: a sounding board on AI decisions, product direction and venture calls. Quiet, honest, no deck required.
AI & Data Readiness Diagnostic 2–4 WEEKS · FIXED SCOPE	An evidence-graded answer to "is our data ready for what we want AI to do?", with a sequenced plan: foundation gaps, governance, quick wins, and what not to build yet.
Innovation-Ready Data Foundation 3–6 WEEKS · FIXED SCOPE	Most innovation portfolios fail on context, not ideas. This installs a provenance map, a governed context layer over raw sources, lifecycle rules, and decision records that make every kill-or-cultivate call auditable.
Venture / Product Evidence Review FIXED SCOPE	An operator's read on a venture, product or portfolio before money moves: what the evidence supports, what it does not, and the honest kill-or-cultivate call.
Custom Playbooks SCOPED ON REQUEST	Corporate innovation or AI-assimilation work, built to the specific shape of the problem rather than a standard package.

THE METHOD

Most innovation portfolios are a list, not a system.

A list gets reviewed. A system makes decisions. This is the discipline Mark runs his own venture portfolio on, in the same order every time, and it is why more than half of the ventures on that list were closed.

01	**Classify the portfolio honestly**	Core improvement, adjacent bet, or genuine new venture. They carry different kinds of risk, and the same gate cannot serve all three.
02	**Write down what has to be true**	An assumption registry per initiative, owned by a named person and dated, so a gate review checks against something written down before anyone knew the answer.
03	**Grade the evidence, then gate on it**	Pass, hold or stop, against a bar set in advance. The same bar for the sponsored project and the unsponsored one.
04	**Make the stop decisions hold**	The test is whether initiatives with a sponsor ever get stopped, and whether the call sticks a month later when the sponsor comes back.
05	**Report outcomes, not activity**	What was decided, what it cost, what was learned and what stopped. The output of governance is decisions, so that is what gets reported.

> **"I'd rather tell you the truth than send an invoice for optimism."**

TRACK RECORD

Innovation theatre is easy. Evidencing success is what matters.

Fifteen years inside one enterprise FIBERLEAN TECHNOLOGIES	A UK nanotechnology business spun out of a joint venture between Imerys and Omya. The relationship started in 2009 and is still running: a full digital transformation on Microsoft Business Central, cloud-only when that was still an unusual call for a manufacturer. Its CFO put on record, in a 2018 letter of reference, that it was "the only one of nine ERP implementations they'd been involved in that finished on time and within budget."
Signed NDA to shipped MVP in seven weeks and one day KHAYA CREW	An escrow-based marketplace for home improvement work in South Africa. The founders did that arithmetic themselves, counting from the date on the NDA. It launched on 13 August 2026 and is trading.
25+ ventures, and more than half were closed THE PORTFOLIO	Three exited by sale or merger. The rest sit at known stages: scaling, product-market fit, launch, validation, seed. Every closed venture on that list was a decision someone had to make and defend.
Twenty-two ventures through one machine FIFTYKNOTS · AI ACUMEN	Twenty-two ventures have been validated and supported through the FiftyKnots platform, and the kill decisions in that portfolio were made with it. Both studios are Mark's own companies, so read them as working demonstrations rather than independent references. The independent ones are above and below.

In their words

"We find Acumen's approach incredibly refreshing and completely transparent. It's been such a pleasure working with them and they have added so much value to what we do, that we find ourselves actively looking for ways to work with them more and they are now core to our strategy moving forward."

WILLIAM DUK · CEO, UTOPIAN BRANDS

"I have learned so much from this process and you and your team, about strategy and more importantly strategy implementation, even about life. Looking forward to the wild adventure of making dreams come true and helping create a better earth!"

MICHAEL GRAY · CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, CFO MENTOR

Start a conversation.

Send an outline of the problem you are looking at, and Mark will come back with next steps directly.
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Mark Morris, in a personal capacity. A fractional engagement buys Mark's time and judgment; if it later turns into something that needs building, that is a separate decision and a separate conversation. Cape Town · South Africa, UK & USA.