



Uncertainty and Opportunity

The CEO Playbook for 2026

Uncertainty and Opportunity: The CEO Playbook for 2026

GLOBAL SUMMARY

Introduction



In 2026, CEOs must manage a convergence of forces: intensifying geopolitical tensions, regulatory fragmentation, rapid advances in AI, shifting labor markets, and structural changes in supply chains and consumer behaviors.

The purpose of this report is to aggregate the wisdom of CEOs and other C-Suite executives globally concerning chief external and internal challenges, and what they plan to prioritize in 2026 to maintain a focus on growth and profitability amid choppy waters. These priorities are then coalesced into three categories—where to play, how to win, and how to operate—to provide business leaders with insights into how their peers are ensuring strategic clarity.

Grounded in cross-regional data and diverse industry viewpoints, this essential survey equips leaders with the intelligence they need to make confident decisions in an increasingly uncertain world. Leaders who understand these dynamics are well positioned to safeguard reputation and capture growth.



Trusted Insights for What's Ahead®

- Uncertainty was seen as the defining challenge for 2026, with CEOs most worried about a fragile economy (recession risk, tariffs, inflation), geopolitical and security instability, and regionally uneven anxiety about the overall macro environment.
- Regulation, protectionism, and divergent policies were expected to reshape industry dynamics, as CEOs brace for heavier compliance burdens, conflicting standards, and tighter foreign investment rules, especially in Asia.
- Cyberattacks, geopolitical risk, and civil unrest sat at the top of CEOs' geopolitical threat matrix, with business leaders in Europe particularly alert to armed conflict and those in North America most concerned about social and civil unrest driven by polarization and cost-of-living pressures.
- AI-driven disruption, political polarization, and shifting consumer behavior were the most salient societal/technological headwinds, while Japan stood out for its acute demographic concerns and Europe and the US for higher distrust in government.
- Governance worries centered on political uncertainty, rapid public policy shifts, and evolving AI regulation, with US CEOs also focusing on erosion of the rule of law and governance and sustainability leaders elevating AI rules as their top concern.
- Global trade and operations remain vulnerable, as CEOs cited supply chain disruptions, tariff-driven price increases, and energy shortages as key risks—yet most have little appetite for costly nearshoring and continue to view China as indispensable for sourcing.
- Talent and skills mismatches were seen as critical internal constraints, with CEOs struggling to find qualified workers, secure in-demand skills, manage rising pay expectations, and support technology/AI adoption; chief human resources officers (CHROs) echoed concerns about worker shortages and automation.
- To drive growth and profitability, CEOs reported leaning hard into business model change, pricing power, and marketing, while expansion strategies prioritized domestic markets plus the US/Canada, with Western Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East as important secondary regions and customer segments in the primary “where to play” lens.

- Winning in 2026 was framed around AI, innovation, and disciplined governance/finance: CEOs reported investing in AI and product/service innovation; focusing AI strategies on data and measuring return on investment (ROI); elevating strategic planning and revenue growth in governance; and prioritizing financial planning, liquidity, risk management, and AI-enabled supply chains over large-scale production relocation.
 - When considering how to operate in the new year, CEOs emphasized productivity, leadership and skills development, and selective sustainability and social commitments—with contested views on environmental priorities (especially in North America) and rising attention to mental health.
 - Regarding marketing, CEOs were focused on revenue, brand, and customer experience, with growing use of AI in marketing. When it comes to communications, CEOs were centered on corporate strategy, internal engagement, and cautious adoption of AI in messaging.
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What CEOs Need to Know and Prioritize in 2026

UNCERTAINTY WAS AMONG THE TOP CHALLENGES FOR GLOBAL CEOs IN 2026

Uncertainty—economic, geopolitical, security, political—was the overarching theme keeping global CEOs up at night.

Figure 1
High-impact challenges for CEOs in 2026

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT	INDUSTRY AND MARKET DYNAMICS	GEOPOLITICAL AND SECURITY RISKS	SOCIETAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, AND TECHNOLOGICAL SHIFTS	GOVERNANCE FACTORS	INTERNATIONAL TRADE WARS/ BARRIERS	HUMAN CAPITAL CHALLENGES
Economic downturn/recession	Regulation in your primary markets	Cyberattacks	AI	Political uncertainty in the regions you operate in	Supply chain disruptions	Finding qualified workers
Uncertainty	Protectionism	Uncertainty	Political polarization in the regions you operate in	Public policy shifts in the regions you operate in	Having to raise prices due to tariffs	Expectations of higher compensation
Tariffs	Industrial policy in your region	Social/civil unrest	Shifting consumer buying behaviors	Evolving AI regulation and governance requirements	Energy shortages	Adoption of new technologies
Inflation	Regulatory divergence across jurisdictions you operate in	Armed conflict in Middle East	Trust in government	Potential erosion of the rule of law	Export controls	Lack of in-demand skills
Financial market disruptions	Reduced reliance on the US dollar	Armed conflict in Asia-Pacific	Climate events and disruptions	Evolving supply chain due diligence requirements	Having to stop selling products to certain regions	Impact of automation, including AI

Note: Answers ranked from most important to least important.

Source: *The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity*

Economic downturn/recession topped list of external economic challenges for CEOs globally

The economic environment for 2026 remains fragile, with global CEOs primarily fearing an “economic downturn/recession” (35.6%), followed closely by “uncertainty” (29.3%) and “tariffs” (23.2%).

Notably, Europe (32.5%) and Asia (36.9%) ranked “economic downturn/recession” first, while North America (35.4%) ranked it second. Unease about “uncertainty” among CEOs was uneven across regions: it was most acute in North America (42.5%), followed by Europe (24.9%) and Asia (15.1%). However, CEOs in Other Asia reported it as far less relevant (11.2%). “Tariffs” (23.2%) and “inflation” (18.7%) also ranked highly as top concerns globally and regionally.

Figure 2

CEOs expected to be vexed by slower economies, uncertainty, and tariffs

Q: Which external factors do you expect to have the greatest negative impact on your business in 2026?

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL CFO	GLOBAL G&S
Economic downturn/recession	35.6%	35.4%	32.5%	36.9%	31.0%	34.7%	55.1%	35.2%	26.7%	35.7%
Uncertainty	29.3%	42.5%	24.9%	15.1%	11.2%	42.9%	27.0%	31.9%	31.7%	47.6%
Tariffs	23.2%	28.2%	25.7%	23.3%	26.5%	29.8%	13.5%	27.0%	21.4%	35.3%
Inflation	18.7%	15.5%	24.3%	17.2%	15.5%	13.9%	22.5%	19.2%	25.0%	9.4%
Financial market disruptions	13.9%	14.0%	15.1%	15.7%	18.6%	15.5%	6.7%	13.8%	8.9%	22.8%
Energy prices	12.9%	5.2%	14.4%	21.3%	22.0%	4.5%	19.1%	11.2%	16.2%	6.3%
Interest rates	12.3%	12.0%	9.9%	9.5%	10.7%	13.1%	5.6%	8.9%	17.8%	10.5%
Exchange rates	10.9%	5.9%	5.9%	18.8%	17.2%	6.1%	23.6%	8.7%	7.9%	3.4%
Corporate tax rates/policy	9.0%	5.5%	12.5%	9.2%	10.0%	4.1%	6.7%	7.9%	5.8%	4.3%
Fiscal policy	8.8%	8.3%	7.6%	8.3%	9.5%	6.9%	4.5%	10.1%	11.7%	2.1%
Monetary policy	6.1%	4.3%	3.1%	9.3%	11.9%	4.9%	1.1%	8.4%	12.9%	2.7%
National debt/deficits	5.6%	7.9%	8.0%	4.3%	4.9%	8.2%	2.2%	3.3%	3.9%	4.8%
Food prices	3.8%	3.4%	7.5%	2.8%	3.4%	4.1%	1.1%	4.5%	6.2%	2.4%

Note: Globally, 768 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

CEOs across the globe fretted over protectionism and regulations as key external challenges

Worries about protectionism and regulation reflect how CEOs globally view industry and market dynamics in 2026. "Regulation in primary markets of operation" (34.0%) and "protectionism" (32.0%) were the two main industry and market factors global CEOs expect to hamper their business this year. Together, these factors signal a more complex operating environment, where compliance burdens and increasing international trade barriers may raise costs and slow decision-making. While "regulation in your primary markets" ranked number one globally, it ranked second in North America (37.0%), first in Europe (35.0%), and third in Asia (27.7%).

“Industrial policy in your region” and “regulatory divergence across jurisdictions you operate in” followed closely behind globally (25.6% and 24.4%, respectively), further fragmenting conditions across markets and increasing the risk of conflicting standards. For firms operating across borders, this combination heightens uncertainty around market access, licensing, data handling, and ownership structures, particularly where foreign investment limits are being tightened or politically contested. Other Asia economies appeared to fear “foreign investment restrictions” more than others (24.5%). North America (12.7%) and Europe (19.9%) had some trepidation but not as acute.

Figure 3

CEOs said regulation in primary markets, protectionism, and industrial policies will be challenging

Q: Which external factors do you expect to have the greatest negative impact on your business in 2026?

INDUSTRY AND MARKET DYNAMICS

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite
Regulation in your primary markets	34.0%	37.0%	35.0%	27.7%	21.1%	37.5%	48.3%	34.7%
Protectionism	32.0%	38.0%	34.0%	28.3%	24.8%	35.8%	39.3%	30.9%
Industrial policy in your region	25.6%	16.6%	26.0%	29.6%	23.2%	17.5%	49.4%	27.0%
Regulatory divergence across jurisdictions you operate in	24.4%	26.7%	25.2%	24.5%	23.3%	27.1%	28.1%	29.4%
Reduced reliance on the US dollar	18.2%	20.0%	18.2%	15.5%	19.0%	19.6%	4.5%	14.0%
Foreign investment restrictions	17.4%	12.7%	19.9%	19.3%	24.5%	12.9%	3.4%	14.0%
Financial sanctions	16.1%	14.4%	15.8%	17.2%	19.2%	15.8%	11.2%	17.2%
Implementation of global minimum tax	11.8%	9.5%	9.2%	18.4%	22.8%	11.3%	4.5%	9.5%
BRICS+ expansion	8.9%	6.4%	5.2%	12.8%	15.8%	5.0%	3.4%	8.6%

Note: Globally, 758 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

CEOs reported cyberattacks, uncertainty, and civil unrest as chief geopolitical threats

Geopolitical and security uncertainty, as well as cyberattacks, worry CEOs across the globe.

“Cyberattacks” (46.5%) and broader “uncertainty” (45.8%) were their two primary concerns, affecting sectors and organizations of all sizes. The pattern was remarkably consistent across all regions, underlining that few leaders feel insulated from cascading security shocks or state-based tensions.

In Europe, one in three CEOs (33.1%) specifically highlighted the risk of “armed conflict in Europe,” likely reflecting the ongoing war in Ukraine and concerns about spillover into neighboring countries, critical supply chains, and energy markets.

Nearly one-third of CEOs globally (28.8%) were also concerned about “social and civil unrest,” with North America (35.6%) citing it the most. For these CEOs, societal concerns about polarization, cost-of-living pressures, and disinformation may fuel civil unrest that potentially disrupts operations and business continuity, and creates reputational risks linked to corporate response and communications.

Figure 4

CEOs anticipated cyberattacks, uncertainty, unrest, and armed conflict to challenge firms

Q: Which external factors do you expect to have the greatest negative impact on your business in 2026?

GEOPOLITICAL AND SECURITY RISKS

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL COO & CSO
Cyberattacks	46.5%	54.3%	52.3%	38.7%	37.4%	53.9%	42.7%	48.3%	43.3%
Uncertainty	45.8%	50.2%	37.5%	40.1%	38.6%	49.0%	44.9%	48.3%	54.2%
Social/civil unrest	28.8%	35.6%	20.0%	25.8%	23.6%	36.2%	32.6%	27.4%	35.3%
Armed conflict in Middle East	15.9%	7.7%	14.6%	24.2%	29.5%	8.6%	7.9%	15.6%	12.1%
Armed conflict in Asia-Pacific	14.2%	7.9%	11.3%	25.1%	18.3%	8.6%	46.1%	10.9%	11.7%
Terrorism	13.8%	11.5%	10.3%	18.3%	22.4%	10.7%	5.6%	8.9%	9.1%
Armed conflict in Europe	13.6%	11.6%	33.1%	7.8%	8.1%	12.3%	6.7%	16.1%	13.9%
Armed conflict in North America	6.5%	6.7%	3.3%	8.7%	8.6%	7.0%	9.0%	4.6%	6.2%
Armed conflict in Africa	3.6%	2.8%	5.9%	3.4%	4.5%	3.3%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%
Armed conflict in Central and South America	2.7%	2.4%	4.4%	1.8%	2.4%	2.9%	0.0%	4.0%	3.7%

Note: Globally, 761 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

AI-driven shifts were top of mind for CEOs as the external factor impacting businesses

Among societal, demographic, and technological shifts, “AI” (30.3%) was the most significant source of downside risk for CEOs globally, followed by “political polarization” (26.1%).

The expectation that AI-driven technological shifts will negatively impact their business likely reflects concern not about AI’s potential but about the execution, governance, and organizational disruption **risks of rapid adoption**—including uneven ROI; skills shortages; evolving AI regulations; data governance demands; and the challenge of scaling AI without undermining trust, accountability, and operational stability. This concern was expressed across every region: North America (35.8%), Europe (34.5%), and Asia (23.4%).

“Political polarization in the regions you operate in” ranked second among CEOs’ concerns, at 26.1% globally, signaling the risk of fragmented markets, unstable policy environments, and reputational exposure. The issue ranked second in every region—North America (30.2%), Europe (21.3%), and Asia (24.9%). Relatedly, 21.0% of CEOs cited concerns about “trust in the government.” Concerns about distrust were higher in the US (25.0%) and Europe (20.2%) than in Asia (13.9%).

“Shifting consumer buying behaviors” (25.2%) ranked third, further complicating business planning, as household preferences and values evolve quickly. Asia (30.7%) ranked it as the top concern, while Europe (20.2%) ranked it second and North America third (21.0%).

Within Asia (18.8%), Japan stood out for its concern about “demographic change” (35.6%). Interestingly, demographic changes ranked low among other regions despite rapidly aging populations (Europe 17.9%, and North America 11.4%).

Figure 5
CEO cited AI, polarization, and shifting customer preferences as potential disruptors

Q: Which external factors do you expect to have the greatest negative impact on your business in 2026?

SOCIETAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, AND TECHNOLOGICAL SHIFTS

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL G&S
AI	30.3%	35.8%	34.5%	23.4%	19.9%	37.7%	34.5%	37.8%	38.2%
Political polarization in the regions you operate in	26.1%	30.2%	21.3%	24.9%	25.5%	30.7%	23.0%	24.5%	31.6%
Shifting consumer buying behaviors	25.2%	21.0%	20.2%	30.7%	30.2%	21.3%	32.2%	27.1%	23.9%
Trust in government	21.0%	26.9%	20.2%	13.9%	16.2%	25.0%	6.9%	17.3%	14.6%
Climate events and disruptions	17.4%	11.4%	19.3%	23.8%	22.2%	11.1%	28.7%	17.7%	26.5%
Trust in domestic institutions	15.3%	15.4%	15.2%	13.0%	14.9%	15.2%	6.9%	10.9%	10.2%
Demographic changes	14.7%	11.4%	17.9%	18.8%	13.5%	11.9%	35.6%	17.7%	18.2%
Trust in media	11.7%	14.6%	11.3%	11.7%	14.7%	13.9%	2.3%	6.8%	2.5%
Immigration/migration	11.2%	16.3%	13.4%	5.0%	6.2%	16.0%	1.1%	13.7%	11.5%
Trust in international institutions	10.8%	4.2%	9.8%	17.5%	22.3%	4.1%	2.3%	9.3%	5.9%
Global health pandemic	10.6%	5.6%	10.6%	15.2%	12.8%	5.7%	23.0%	8.7%	4.9%

Note: Globally, 763 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

Externally, AI, political uncertainty, and public policy shifts dominated governance concerns

Political uncertainty and public policy shifts in the regions companies operate in were the defining governance concerns for CEOs in 2026. Political uncertainty was the governance factor most expected to have a negative impact on businesses in 2026 (35.9%). This consideration was heightened in North America (36.3%) and Europe (37.5%) but less so in Asia as a whole (27.2%). However, it was felt particularly acutely in Japan (42.0%), suggesting elevated volatility in the policy environment.

“Public policy shifts in the regions you operate in” was the second-most-cited governance concern for CEOs globally (27.9%), signaling that rapid changes in policy direction, priorities, and enforcement were essential concerns for executives. This was more pronounced in North America (34.9%) and Asia (27.1%) than in Europe (19.3%).

“Evolving AI regulation and governance requirements” (25.6%) ranked third among CEOs globally, introducing an additional layer of complexity as organizations face new and diverging obligations across jurisdictions regarding transparency, accountability, data governance, and the use of AI in operational and customer-facing decisions. This sentiment was nearly even across regions: Asia (28.3%), Europe (25.3%), and North America (24.9%).

CEOs in the US were most concerned about the “potential erosion of the rule of law” (33.5%), which could weaken predictability in regulatory and judicial outcomes in the economy. However, CEOs globally (22.1%) ranked concerns about the rule of law fourth, with those in Europe (19.2%) ranking it fifth and Asia CEOs (14.7%) ranking it eighth.

Governance and sustainability executives broadly agreed with CEOs on the top three governance factors but they ranked “evolving AI regulations and governance requirements” (32.6%) as their top concern, reflecting their closer proximity to implementation, oversight, and compliance.

Figure 6

Political uncertainty and AI regulation in markets firms operate in top CEO governance concerns

Q: Which external factors do you expect to have the greatest negative impact on your business in 2026?

GOVERNANCE FACTORS

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL G&S
Political uncertainty in the regions you operate in	35.9%	36.3%	37.5%	27.2%	22.5%	37.2%	42.0%	33.8%	29.0%
Public policy shifts in the regions you operate in	27.9%	34.9%	19.3%	27.1%	26.7%	33.1%	28.4%	27.5%	23.3%
Evolving AI regulation and governance requirements	25.6%	24.9%	25.3%	28.3%	28.6%	25.9%	27.3%	28.6%	32.6%
Potential erosion of the rule of law	22.1%	32.2%	19.2%	14.7%	14.3%	33.5%	15.9%	15.9%	14.4%
Evolving supply chain due diligence requirements	18.0%	16.3%	20.7%	18.9%	19.1%	16.3%	18.2%	20.6%	22.6%
ESG regulations and disclosure mandates	16.7%	11.7%	17.6%	20.4%	20.4%	13.0%	20.5%	17.0%	16.3%
Shareholder activism and investor pressure	14.2%	10.1%	17.4%	19.5%	21.0%	10.5%	14.8%	14.5%	14.7%
Anti-ESG sentiment	10.9%	9.2%	11.8%	13.5%	14.2%	10.0%	11.4%	12.6%	14.4%
Greenwashing and reputational risk	10.1%	7.9%	11.6%	12.6%	11.9%	6.7%	14.8%	8.0%	7.6%
ESG litigation and legal exposure	9.9%	5.7%	6.8%	14.9%	18.9%	6.3%	2.3%	12.1%	14.6%

Note: Globally, 758 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

Shortages, disruptions, and price increases drove CEOs' international trade woes

Globally, 41.6% of CEOs were most concerned about "supply chain disruptions," reflecting lingering vulnerabilities exposed in recent years. These challenges resonate among the three regions: North America (46.8%), Europe (30.1%), and Asia (38.5%).

Global CEOs were also worried about "having to raise prices due to tariffs" (31.4%), an issue of significant concern across regions: North America (34.6%), Europe (31.9%), and Asia (30.9%). Indeed, higher prices and/or faster inflation associated with tariffs may reduce competitiveness and weaken demand.

In Europe, concerns about "supply chain disruptions" were eclipsed by "having to raise prices due to tariffs" (31.9%), which was the top concern among CEOs in the region.

Across all regions, "energy shortages" (19.8%) remained a key concern among CEOs. This was most pronounced in Japan (27.0%), Europe (23.4%), and the US (20.2%). Notably, shortages of rare earths, semiconductors, or other critical inputs were ranked lower, underlining the central role of reliable and affordable energy as first principles for supporting operations and faster growth.

Figure 7

CEOs view supply chain disruptions and price hikes due to tariffs as elevated risks

Q: Which external factors do you expect to have the greatest negative impact on your business in 2026?

INTERNATIONAL TRADE WARS/BARRIERS

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite
Supply chain disruptions	41.6%	46.8%	30.1%	38.5%	34.6%	46.6%	50.6%	45.4%
Having to raise prices due to tariffs	31.4%	34.6%	31.9%	30.9%	29.6%	34.4%	34.8%	38.6%
Energy shortages	19.8%	18.7%	23.4%	23.1%	21.9%	20.2%	27.0%	16.2%
Export controls	17.3%	9.7%	14.7%	23.2%	25.9%	10.5%	14.6%	12.0%
Having to stop selling products to certain regions	15.3%	12.8%	20.1%	14.8%	16.7%	12.1%	9.0%	13.7%
Foreign investment restrictions	14.5%	13.6%	19.5%	10.2%	12.8%	12.1%	2.2%	14.0%
Shortages of other critical inputs (excluding energy, rare earths, microchips)	12.9%	16.9%	12.6%	11.1%	10.3%	18.6%	13.5%	12.1%
Closure of key ocean shipping choke points (e.g., Panama Canal)	12.0%	7.8%	12.0%	16.3%	17.6%	7.3%	12.4%	10.6%
Semiconductor shortages	12.0%	10.0%	13.7%	13.8%	13.1%	10.1%	15.7%	9.1%
Rare earths shortages	10.5%	9.9%	12.1%	13.9%	13.4%	10.5%	15.7%	9.9%

Note: Globally, 771 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

For internal talent matters, CEOs globally were most vexed by skills mismatches

Globally, CEOs ranked “finding qualified workers” (37.2%), “expectations of higher compensation” (23.7%), “adoption of new technologies” (23.4%), and “lack of in-demand skills” (22.0%) among the top human capital challenges.

Concerns surrounding “finding qualified workers” were more pronounced in Europe (42.8%) than Asia (34.1%) and North America (32.7%). However, within Asia, 55.4% of CEOs in Japan were highly concerned about finding top talent. “Lack of in-demand skills” was ranked highly in Europe (22.7%) and Asia (27.8%). Concerns about “expectations of higher salaries,” which ranked second globally, was largely driven by North America (29.0%) and the US in particular (26.8%), compared to Asia (18.9%) and Europe (14.8%).

For CEOs globally, the human capital challenge that followed was “adoption of new technologies” (23.4%), which was cited by 25.4% of CEOs in North America, 22.9% in Europe, and 22.1% in Asia.

For CHROs globally, the biggest challenge in 2026 was expected to be the “impact of automation, including AI” (30.2%), followed closely by “finding qualified workers” (29.3%). Other areas of concern were “low employee engagement” (21.7%) and “adoption of new technologies” (20.1%).

Figure 8

Qualified and skilled workers will remain in demand, as will higher compensation

Q: Which external factors do you expect to have the greatest negative impact on your business in 2026?

HUMAN CAPITAL CHALLENGES

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL CHRO
Finding qualified workers	37.2%	32.7%	42.8%	34.1%	27.7%	32.2%	55.4%	32.7%	29.3%
Expectations of higher compensation	23.7%	29.0%	14.8%	18.9%	20.2%	26.8%	14.5%	17.3%	15.3%
Adoption of new technologies	23.4%	25.4%	22.9%	22.1%	26.2%	27.2%	8.4%	24.8%	20.1%
Lack of in-demand skills	22.0%	18.8%	22.7%	27.8%	29.7%	19.7%	21.7%	22.5%	16.5%
Impact of automation, including AI	21.5%	24.0%	18.7%	21.5%	26.2%	26.8%	6.0%	25.2%	30.2%
Worker shortages	20.4%	18.1%	22.6%	25.6%	18.1%	19.2%	50.6%	17.1%	16.9%
Low employee engagement	13.7%	12.1%	15.4%	13.6%	10.4%	12.1%	24.1%	18.3%	21.7%
Managing different generations	13.2%	11.7%	11.1%	13.8%	15.4%	10.5%	8.4%	15.7%	20.4%
Visa/work permit regulations	10.9%	9.8%	9.2%	15.6%	20.2%	8.4%	0.0%	7.1%	5.0%
Quits and retirements	9.2%	11.9%	12.2%	6.0%	4.6%	12.1%	10.8%	10.0%	10.4%

Note: Globally, 749 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

CEOs Lean In to Altering Business Models to Supercharge Growth

Against a challenging external and internal backdrop, CEOs globally understand that achieving growth in 2026 will include a variety of tactics against three critical questions:

1. Where to play;
2. How to win; and
3. How to operate.

Figure 9

CEOs agreed that changing business models is the first step toward boosting profitability

GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA	EUROPE	ASIA
Business model changes	Business model changes	Business model changes	Business model changes
Price increases	Price increases	Price increases	Marketing spending
Marketing spending	Marketing spending	Marketing spending	Price increases
Head count	Head count	M&A	M&A
M&A	M&A	Labor costs	Head count
Labor costs	Labor costs	Head count	Promotional spending
Promotional spending	Promotional spending	Promotional spending	Labor costs
Divestitures	Divestitures	Price decreases	Divestitures
Price decreases	Price decreases	Divestitures	Price decreases

Note: Globally, 744 CEOs responded. Answers ranked from most important to least important.
 Source: *The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity*

MODIFYING BUSINESS MODELS WAS SEEN AS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD GREATER PROFITABILITY FOR CEOS

The top three priorities among CEOs globally for boosting profitability were “business model changes” (51.5%), “price increases” (28.2%), and “marketing spending” (26.0%).

In terms of business model changes, CEOs in North America (58.7%) prioritized it the most, followed by Asia (45.5%) and Europe (44.4%). Across regions and large economies, Japan stood out as strongly preferring both business model changes (61.4%) and price increases (66.3%).

By industry, the push for business model change globally was especially pronounced in government and nonprofit administration, where 75.0% of leaders were focused on redesigning how services are delivered and funded. Strong momentum was also visible in business and professional services (62.2%) and communications and media (62.0%), where leaders in these sectors are targeting business model innovation as a key driver of future growth and resilience.

Figure 10
CEOs reported they plan to deploy business model changes, price increases, and marketing spending

Q: How will you improve profitability in 2026?

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite
Business model changes	51.5%	58.7%	44.4%	45.5%	40.8%	60.3%	61.4%	44.0%
Price increases	28.2%	29.9%	30.3%	26.9%	15.0%	29.1%	66.3%	26.5%
Marketing spending	26.0%	21.5%	23.9%	34.1%	38.6%	24.1%	19.3%	17.4%
Head count	19.8%	18.9%	18.7%	19.3%	24.4%	16.5%	2.4%	27.8%
M&A	19.1%	17.3%	20.0%	22.3%	22.5%	17.7%	21.7%	19.2%
Labor costs	16.0%	14.6%	19.8%	16.1%	20.3%	15.2%	2.4%	24.7%
Promotional spending	15.7%	13.5%	17.1%	16.2%	16.8%	13.1%	14.5%	9.9%
Divestitures	8.0%	7.2%	8.6%	8.0%	10.3%	7.6%	0.0%	9.7%
Price decreases	6.3%	3.6%	10.7%	6.8%	8.5%	3.8%	1.2%	4.7%

Note: Globally, 744 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

PRIORITIES: WHERE TO PLAY

CEOs globally reported robust ambitions for growth in 2026. Executives are mapping expansion by geography and market arenas: prioritizing domestic investment, continued engagement in the US, and customer segments.

Figure 11

CEOs reported seeing home and US/Canada markets as vital to operate in

GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA	EUROPE	ASIA
The US and Canada	The US and Canada	Western Europe	South Asia
Western Europe	Western Europe	The US and Canada	The US and Canada
South Asia	Latin America	Eastern Europe	Middle East
Middle East	South Asia	Middle East	North Asia
Eastern Europe	Eastern Europe	South Asia	Eastern Europe
Latin America	None	Latin America	Western Europe
North Asia	Middle East	North Asia	Africa
Africa	North Asia	Africa	None
None	Africa	Oceania	Latin America
Oceania	Caribbean	None	Oceania
Caribbean	Oceania	Caribbean	Caribbean

Note: Answers ranked from most important to least important.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

Domestic markets and the US/Canada region were cited as the top geographies for expansion

Expansion priorities among CEOs globally were highly focused on the US/Canada. More than half (52.9%) of CEOs globally ranked the region as the number-one region for expansion, underlining its continued position as the world's primary growth and investment destination. Western Europe (28.4%) and South Asia (28.3%) emerged as the next tier of target regions, signaling that CEOs are looking to balance mature markets with high-growth economies. CEOs in North America (29.7%) and Europe (42.8%) were the most likely to invest in each other's regions despite ongoing geopolitical concerns.

A notable finding was the rising appeal of the Middle East: one in four CEOs see it as a region for expansion, reflecting expectations of ongoing growth, diversification agendas, and major investment programs. This desire was most notable in Asia (37.0%) and Europe (28.2%).

The data also point to a strong home bias. Across all geographies, each region consistently ranked itself as the top area for investment, indicating that local familiarity, networks, and proximity still shape expansion strategies.

At a sector level, the US/Canada region was the top choice across every industry for expansion. For manufacturing, Europe (industrial 27.6%, consumer 34.6%, technology/computer 38.7%) and South Asia (industrial 36.9%, consumer 33.1%, technology/computer 38.7%) were top regions for expansion after the US/Canada region. For software, Europe (40.3%) and South Asia (41.8%) were the top regions for expansion after the US/Canada region. This may suggest that companies in these sectors are actively pursuing a multiregion footprint that combines advanced industrial bases with rapidly developing tech and talent ecosystems.

Figure 12

Domestic and US/Canada markets topped the list of "where to play"

Q: In which regions do you plan to expand?

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite
The US and Canada	52.9%	78.0%	42.8%	45.2%	51.3%	79.0%	25.0%	46.5%
Western Europe	28.4%	29.7%	56.0%	19.6%	22.7%	31.1%	9.5%	26.4%
South Asia	28.3%	13.1%	21.2%	52.4%	57.5%	12.6%	35.7%	32.9%
Middle East	25.1%	9.8%	28.2%	37.0%	47.6%	10.9%	2.4%	17.4%
Eastern Europe	20.5%	11.4%	35.9%	23.5%	30.3%	12.6%	1.2%	21.1%
Latin America	19.2%	22.7%	18.9%	9.0%	11.4%	23.1%	1.2%	17.4%
North Asia	15.8%	7.7%	16.7%	26.6%	27.5%	8.0%	23.8%	16.8%
Africa	11.5%	7.5%	9.5%	13.3%	16.3%	8.4%	3.6%	10.6%
None	11.2%	10.7%	7.1%	10.7%	1.3%	8.8%	41.7%	13.9%
Oceania	5.3%	2.9%	7.2%	6.7%	6.9%	2.9%	6.0%	8.1%
Caribbean	2.9%	5.2%	1.5%	1.1%	1.5%	4.6%	0.0%	4.1%

Note: Globally, 747 CEOs responded.
 Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

CEOs globally listed customer segments as the top expansion arena

Globally, growth strategies in 2026 were expected to start with customer segments, ensuring investments are anchored in the most attractive and profitable customer groups. CEOs across markets were clear about how they want to organize their growth priorities. “Customer segments” ranked first (35.9%), especially in North America (43.3%), followed by “product categories” (22.7%) and “distribution channels” (22.0%). In other words, leaders start by identifying who they serve, refine what they offer accordingly, and only then optimize *how* those products and services reach the market.

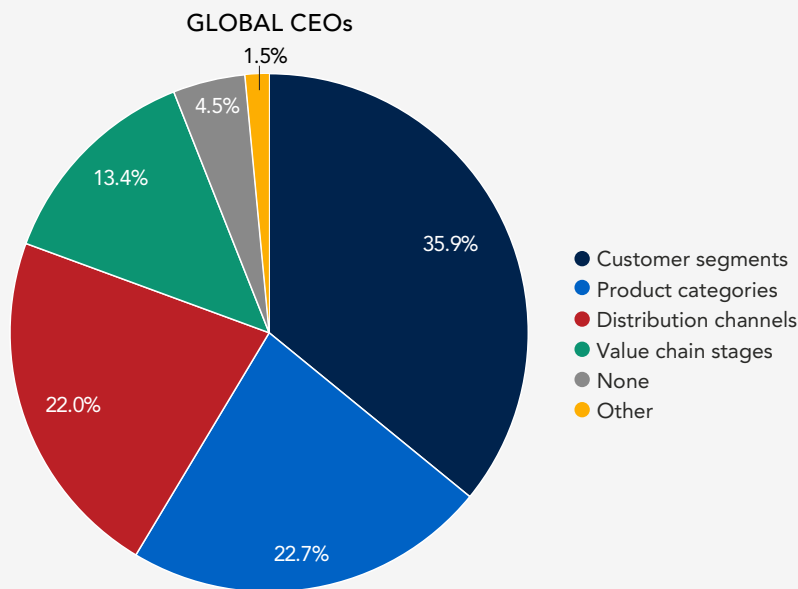
However, this global pattern is not uniform. Europe stands out with “distribution channels” as the top consideration (34.7%). CEOs in the continent prioritized the *route to customer* strategy above all else as the primary growth lever for 2026. “Customer segments” (29.5%) was the second preference in their expansion strategies.

By contrast, CEOs in Other Asia follow a more balanced approach in terms of the various options for expansion. Rather than a single dominant dimension, Other Asia leaders reported simultaneously tuning “customer segments” (28.8%), “distribution channels” (27.9%), “value chain stages” (22.0%), and “product categories” (20.6%), aiming for flexibility and diversification across options available.

Figures 13A—G

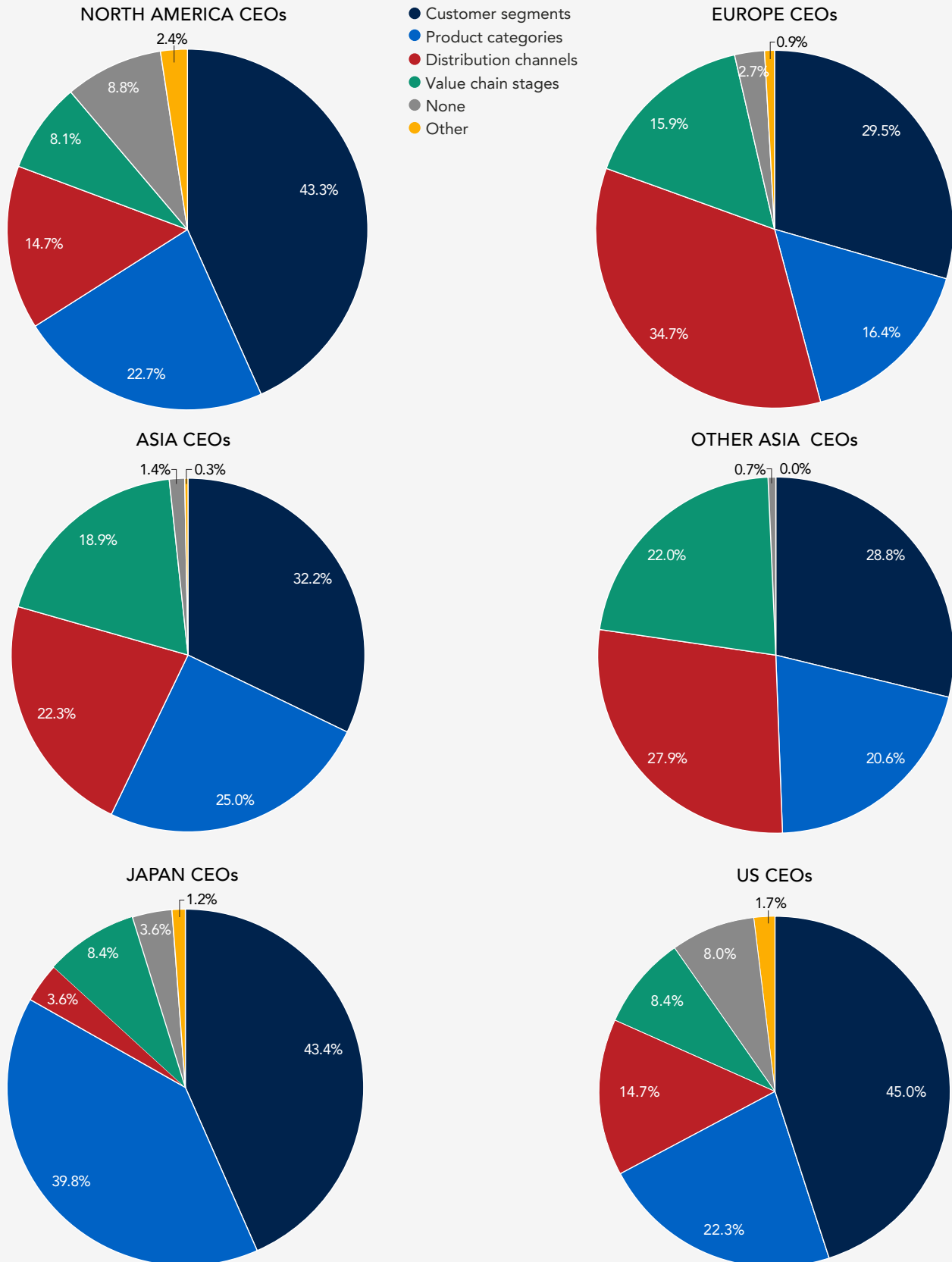
CEOs globally anticipated expansion in customer segments to grow profits

Q: Which of the following expansion arenas is your top priority in 2026?



With the exception of Europe, CEOs ranked expansion of customer segments first

Q: Which of the following expansion arenas is your top priority in 2026?



Note: Globally, 605 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

PRIORITIES: HOW TO WIN

“To win,” CEOs globally are devoting resources toward investments in AI, product and service innovation, talent, strategic and financial planning, and optimizing supply chains using technology.

Figure 14

AI was seen as a central focus for growing business, as well as strategic and financial planning

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES	AI PRIORITIES	GOVERNANCE PRIORITIES	FINANCE PRIORITIES	SUPPLY CHAIN PRIORITIES
AI/technology	Enhance data quality and quantity to measure the return on investment of AI	Strategic planning	Improve financial planning	Expand AI and digital technology use
Product and service innovation	Enhance AI expertise	Revenue growth	Increase liquidity	Improve service
Talent	Improve the culture of the workforce to adopt AI	Enterprise risk management	Increase risk management and oversight	Supplier diversification
Enhanced customer experience	Integrate data across existing systems	Succession planning	Refinance debt	Improve distribution/delivery
Global supply chain	Leverage the most effective AI tools via build or buy	Shareholder value	Issue equity	Expand capacity

Note: Answers ranked from most important to least important.
 Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

AI, product and service innovation, and talent were CEOs’ primary areas for investment

Across markets, CEOs reported aligning their 2026 investment opportunities around “AI/technology” and “product and service innovation” (41.6% and 41.0%, respectively). “Talent” ranked third globally (25.6%). Boards anchored growth strategies on “product and service innovation” (47.9%) and “AI/technology” (42.8%), while investing deliberately in “talent” (34.5%) as the critical enabler for 2026. This indicates that leaders view technology and innovation as the primary drivers of value creation, supported, but not led, by people investment at the global level.

However, regional patterns differ. In Japan, “talent” came first (65.4%), followed by “product and service innovation” (47.4%) and “AI/technology” (24.4%). CEOs in Japan signaled that without the right skills and capabilities, technology and innovation will not deliver. In Europe, “global supply chain” emerged as a relevant priority (23.4%), reflecting the region’s exposure to global markets—rendering it vulnerable to disruption.

Functional leaders bring another layer of nuance. For chief marketing officers (CMOs), “enhanced customer experience” was the top priority (43.9%), highlighting the need to translate technology and innovation into tangible improvements for end users. For chief operating officers (COOs) and chief strategy officers (CSOs), “AI/technology” was the top priority (59.0%), underlining its central role in operations, efficiency, risk, and security.

Figure 15

AI/tech, product and service innovation, and talent were the top investment priorities

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL Board Member
AI/technology	41.6%	40.0%	48.7%	36.0%	39.3%	38.7%	24.4%	43.6%	42.8%
Product and service innovation	41.0%	42.4%	32.8%	39.8%	37.6%	41.0%	47.4%	39.7%	47.9%
Talent	25.6%	26.7%	18.8%	29.4%	19.0%	27.9%	65.4%	18.3%	34.5%
Enhanced customer experience	24.7%	36.2%	21.1%	17.6%	18.6%	38.7%	14.1%	30.4%	24.3%
Global supply chain	13.1%	6.5%	23.4%	14.4%	16.3%	7.2%	7.7%	15.0%	10.7%
Machinery and equipment	11.7%	6.2%	11.3%	16.1%	16.3%	6.3%	15.4%	7.9%	5.7%
Domestic supply chain	11.1%	4.4%	9.5%	17.6%	19.4%	4.5%	11.5%	8.5%	3.7%
External start-ups	7.2%	4.2%	7.8%	10.3%	12.6%	4.5%	2.6%	5.4%	2.4%
US supply chain capacity	6.4%	7.2%	8.0%	6.9%	8.5%	8.1%	1.3%	8.2%	2.7%
Land and building acquisitions	5.4%	7.2%	7.7%	3.0%	3.5%	5.9%	1.3%	4.9%	4.3%
Internal incubators	4.4%	4.8%	5.1%	4.5%	4.7%	5.4%	3.8%	4.5%	3.6%
Not a priority	1.2%	3.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	2.3%	1.3%	2.1%	1.6%

Note: Globally, 715 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

AI priorities centered around enhancing data quality and quantity to measure ROI

CEOs across most regions want to see ROI on AI and are willing to enhance data quality and quantity to measure them. Global CEOs demand clear, demonstrable returns on their AI investments. To achieve this, they reported that their priority was to “enhance data quality and quantity to measure the ROI of AI” (32.5%). Without an abundance of reliable data, even the most advanced AI systems cannot deliver meaningful business impact or be credibly evaluated. CEOs in North America (47.9%) were the most passionate about AI ROI compared to Europe (25.3%) and Asia (25.0%).

The second priority for CEOs was to “enhance AI expertise” (31.3%) of customers, employees, and partners so that AI tools are adopted and embedded in daily work. The third AI priority for CEOs globally was to “improve the culture of the workforce to adopt AI” (26.8%), with CEOs in Asia (31.3%) most likely to prioritize it, followed by North America (25.6%) and Europe (22.1%).

In Europe, the first AI priority for growing businesses in 2026 was to “enhance AI expertise” (32.1%), followed by “leverage the most effective AI tools via build or buy” (27.2%) and “enhance quality and quantity to measure the ROI of AI” (25.3%). In Japan, a full 100% of CEOs were looking to “enhance data quality and quantity to measure the ROI of AI” and 43.6% of CEOs expected to “improve the culture of the workforce to adopt AI” as their second priority.

Chief technology officers globally agreed “enhance data quality and quantity to measure the ROI of AI” should be a priority (45.1%), reinforcing that the technical leadership sees data foundations and measurable ROI as crucial. CHROs agreed with this point even more strongly than other functions (87.8%), recognizing that better data and clearer ROI are essential to securing buy in, reskilling the workforce, and scaling AI responsibly. CMOs ranked “improve the culture of the workforce to adopt AI” first (37.0%).

Figure 16

Regarding AI, CEOs will measure ROI via data quality and quantity enhancements

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

	AI PRIORITIES						
		#1	#2	#3			
	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs
Enhance data quality and quantity to measure the return on investment of AI	32.5%	47.9%	25.3%	25.0%	23.2%	45.7%	100.0%
Enhance AI expertise	31.3%	37.0%	32.1%	25.9%	25.6%	36.8%	26.9%
Improve the culture of the workforce to adopt AI	26.8%	25.6%	22.1%	31.3%	27.7%	25.1%	43.6%
Integrate data across existing systems	24.6%	17.7%	20.7%	32.7%	35.4%	17.9%	23.1%
Leverage the most effective AI tools via build or buy	24.6%	23.3%	27.2%	21.7%	20.2%	23.3%	26.9%
Improve quality of AI output and human oversight	21.6%	19.1%	20.6%	25.2%	27.3%	18.8%	17.9%
Identify and promote proven, quantified use cases	15.9%	22.2%	15.1%	11.5%	10.4%	22.9%	15.4%
Address data privacy and security concerns	14.6%	15.1%	11.3%	18.0%	18.1%	14.8%	17.9%
Improve data center performance	11.4%	6.5%	20.5%	10.9%	13.3%	7.2%	2.6%
Not a priority	4.3%	6.6%	2.2%	2.0%	0.0%	6.3%	9.0%

	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL CHRO	GLOBAL CMO	GLOBAL TECH
Enhance data quality and quantity to measure the return on investment of AI	45.6%	87.8%	33.4%	45.1%
Enhance AI expertise	31.4%	31.3%	30.4%	32.0%
Improve the culture of the workforce to adopt AI	27.3%	36.0%	37.0%	21.2%
Integrate data across existing systems	21.2%	17.1%	14.3%	17.6%
Leverage the most effective AI tools via build or buy	25.6%	23.5%	33.9%	30.7%
Improve quality of AI output and human oversight	16.2%	9.9%	12.1%	25.0%
Identify and promote proven, quantified use cases	21.1%	27.6%	16.0%	14.1%
Address data privacy and security concerns	15.7%	14.7%	8.2%	14.5%
Improve data center performance	7.0%	3.2%	7.8%	6.3%
Not a priority	3.9%	4.3%	4.7%	0.8%

Note: Globally, 716 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

Strategic planning, growing revenue, and risk management were CEOs' governance priorities

CEOs' governance agenda globally prioritizes strategic planning and revenue growth in 2026. "Strategic planning" was the top priority for growing the business, with 50.5% of CEOs globally ranking it as such; 48.0% of global governance and sustainability executives agree.

"Revenue growth" was second overall (48%) and for Asia (40.8%) but was the first governance priority for CEOs in North America (54.1%) and Europe (45.5%). The strong sentiments in North America and Asia were led by the US (56.3%) and Japan (61.0%), respectively. It is no surprise that "revenue growth" was the top priority for chief financial officers (CFOs) (54.8%). Across all industries globally, these two objectives—"strategic planning" and "revenue growth"—consistently emerged as the top priorities for governance.

Figure 17

Strategic planning, revenue, and risk management are top governance priorities

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

GOVERNANCE PRIORITIES

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL G&S
Strategic planning	50.5%	45.6%	44.1%	54.5%	54.8%	43.2%	53.2%	47.6%	48.0%
Revenue growth	48.0%	54.1%	45.5%	40.8%	35.1%	56.3%	61.0%	45.5%	42.5%
Enterprise risk management	28.6%	15.8%	27.1%	44.1%	44.8%	15.8%	41.6%	27.4%	27.9%
Succession planning	22.7%	30.9%	17.3%	18.8%	19.0%	29.7%	18.2%	21.0%	29.8%
Shareholder value	20.0%	24.0%	26.0%	12.6%	13.6%	24.3%	9.1%	25.6%	28.8%
Board diversity	11.1%	7.4%	18.0%	11.8%	13.4%	8.6%	6.5%	8.8%	4.7%
Board refreshment	10.2%	12.4%	6.9%	12.3%	13.6%	13.5%	7.8%	7.9%	5.5%
Not a priority	2.1%	2.3%	2.2%	2.1%	2.3%	2.3%	1.3%	4.1%	3.4%

Note: Globally, 713 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

CEOs globally were squarely focused on financial planning, liquidity, and risk management and oversight

Financial preparedness—improved financial planning, risk management, and sufficient liquidity buffers—is at the top of CEOs’ financial priorities. CEOs globally aligned around a common financial agenda. Nearly half (48.4%) reported “improve financial planning” as their top priority, followed by “increase liquidity” (41.5%).

Once those foundations are in place, 37.1% highlighted “increase risk management and oversight” as the next focus area. This hierarchy was consistent: all major corporate functions and industries agreed that better financial planning comes first. CFOs agreed with CEOs and put more emphasis on “improve financial planning” (54.5% vs 48.4% of CEOs). Across the regions there was broad agreement on the first three financing priorities but in Europe, CEOs also point to the need to “refinance debt” (21.6%) and “issue equity” (21.2%) more than any other region.

Figure 18

CEOs reported prioritizing financial planning, and increasing liquidity and risk management and oversight

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

FINANCE PRIORITIES

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL CFO
Improve financial planning	48.4%	47.7%	42.0%	49.4%	48.5%	46.6%	52.6%	54.4%	54.5%
Increase liquidity	41.5%	35.5%	40.2%	43.0%	45.4%	37.6%	34.6%	33.6%	40.9%
Increase risk management and oversight	37.1%	40.3%	31.1%	39.3%	39.6%	39.4%	38.5%	39.0%	33.0%
Refinance debt	15.5%	14.6%	21.6%	15.1%	16.5%	14.5%	10.3%	15.9%	22.7%
Issue equity	13.5%	10.0%	21.2%	13.6%	16.1%	9.5%	5.1%	9.3%	16.0%
Repurchase shares	8.9%	7.3%	11.4%	9.6%	8.3%	8.1%	14.1%	13.1%	10.0%
Sale-leaseback	8.8%	5.5%	11.3%	12.2%	15.0%	6.3%	2.6%	3.6%	4.9%
Not a priority	7.3%	9.0%	5.1%	6.3%	3.3%	8.6%	16.7%	7.6%	3.8%

Note: Globally, 711 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

Expanding AI and digital technology use remains critical for optimizing supply chains

In a business environment defined by geopolitical tensions, evolving trade policies, and periodic supply chain disruptions, CEOs are prioritizing digital transformation to strengthen operational resilience. “Expand AI and digital technology use” (33.7%) ranked as the top priority for CEOs globally for improving supply chain performance. “Enhance service levels” (26.5%) and expanding “supplier diversification” (25.2%) followed as key focus areas, reflecting a dual emphasis on agility and risk mitigation.

The importance given to “supplier diversification” had regional differences. It was a significantly lower priority for CEOs in North America (19.9%) compared with Japan (38.5%), Europe (26.8%), and Other Asia (26.3%). This suggests varying levels of exposure to supply chain vulnerabilities and differing expectations about future geopolitical risk.

Although supply chain disruptions remain a key concern for global CEOs, there are limits to how far companies are willing to take costly supply chain reconfigurations to mitigate future risks. Despite policy efforts to strengthen manufacturing in (i.e., onshoring) or near home markets (i.e., nearshoring), these actions were low priorities across all titles. CEOs and COO/CSOs were largely aligned in assigning limited importance to relocating production, with COO/CSOs ranking it even lower (3.9%) than CEOs (9.5%). CEOs across regions also ranked “nearshoring or onshoring manufacturing” as a low priority, including in the US, potentially due to the high costs of doing so.

Despite escalating trade tensions and rising economic security policies worldwide, most executives have no plans to shift supply chain or manufacturing operations out of China. Regional responses show minimal variation, underscoring a broad consensus: China remains indispensable for sourcing due to its scale, efficiency, and deeply embedded supplier ecosystems even as companies prepare for a more volatile global environment.

Figure 19
Expanding AI and digital technology use topped supply chain priorities for a third year

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

SUPPLY CHAIN PRIORITIES
 ● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL COO & CSO
Expand AI and digital technology use	33.7%	29.3%	38.3%	29.2%	28.0%	29.1%	33.3%	30.0%	33.7%
Improve service	26.5%	25.4%	26.6%	26.7%	29.2%	23.3%	17.9%	20.3%	18.0%
Supplier diversification	25.2%	19.9%	26.8%	29.0%	26.3%	20.6%	38.5%	24.4%	28.3%
Improve distribution/delivery	22.2%	19.6%	17.8%	24.9%	26.2%	18.8%	20.5%	21.5%	17.3%
Expand capacity	19.0%	18.4%	23.0%	21.5%	22.1%	19.3%	19.2%	15.5%	22.7%
Inventory management	18.0%	17.4%	16.2%	20.3%	18.8%	17.9%	25.6%	26.4%	18.9%
Harden against natural disasters/climate events	12.3%	3.8%	12.3%	20.6%	21.3%	4.0%	17.9%	9.8%	9.7%
Nearshore or onshore manufacturing	9.5%	9.9%	9.2%	10.4%	10.4%	10.8%	10.3%	8.1%	3.9%
Move supply and/or manufacturing from greater China	9.4%	10.3%	10.7%	10.3%	12.2%	9.9%	3.8%	8.3%	11.0%
Not a priority	8.0%	17.7%	4.3%	0.9%	0.0%	17.9%	3.8%	9.7%	8.7%
Reduce capacity	3.5%	2.7%	8.0%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.6%	5.7%	8.1%

Note: Globally, 716 CEOs responded.
 Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

PRIORITIES: HOW TO OPERATE

Worker productivity, the green transition, expanding economic opportunity, education, and mental health are top priorities among CEOs globally to bolster human capital, burnish corporate citizenship initiatives, and meet governance and sustainability goals. CEOs globally ranked revenue, brand building, and enhancing customer experience as the top three marketing priorities. In communications, a focus on corporate strategy, internal communications, and using AI for messaging was noted to be critical.

Figure 20

CEOs have a multipronged strategy for growing their businesses

HUMAN CAPITAL PRIORITIES	ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY PRIORITIES	SOCIAL PRIORITIES	MARKETING PRIORITIES	COMMUNICATIONS PRIORITIES
Productivity	Sustainable use of key inputs (i.e., water, energy)	Economic opportunity	Increase revenue	Corporate strategy
Leadership development	Investing in clean and green technology and energy	Education	Brand building	Internal communications
Skill development	Not a priority	Mental health	Customer experience	AI in communications
Digital or AI implementation	Circular economy/waste reduction	Digital inclusion	Customer service	Performance measurement
Company culture	Transition to renewable energy sources	Working conditions and workers' rights	AI for marketing	Issue, crisis, and risk management

Note: Answers ranked from most important to least important.
 Source: *The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity*

CEOs reported valuing productivity, leadership and skills development, and digital or AI implementation

Workforce transformation has become a critical enabler of corporate strategy execution. This is reflected in a growing focus on skill development and productivity improvements as companies navigate significant changes in their operating environment.

Globally, CEOs identified “productivity” (27.3%), “leadership development” (26.2%), and “skills development” (24.9%) as their top human capital priorities for 2026. However, the urgency of these priorities varied by region. “Leadership development” ranked highest for CEOs in both North America (30.3%) and Japan (35.1%), while “worker flexibility,” “compensation,” and “employee well-being” remained at the bottom of their agendas.

Following the pandemic-driven shift toward more flexible work arrangements, CEOs across all major regions placed less emphasis on “worker flexibility” as a lever for business growth (6.7%). Indeed, globally, this tactic ranked last among priorities. Two potential reasons include: 1) flexible work arrangements are the standard for many firms; or 2) CEOs are shifting back toward in-person work to help bolster company culture, employee engagement, and productivity.

“Employee well-being” (13.5%) ranked low among human capital priorities, potentially as it is a universally known issue that companies address in a variety of ways. It is possible that well-being, while lower as an explicit human resources priority, remains structurally important as a productivity enabler rather than a standalone human capital program. For example, focusing on leadership and skills development and digital or AI implementation can enhance well-being. However, executives cited mental health as a high priority, as CEOs may be more focused on the specificity of mental health as a subset of well-being.

Notably, CEO and CHRO priorities were not fully aligned in terms of human capital. The most significant gap appeared in “organizational transformation,” which CHROs (23.7%) viewed as a more urgent priority than CEOs (17.9%).

Figure 21
CEOs elevated productivity, leadership, and skill development for human capital priorities

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

HUMAN CAPITAL PRIORITIES

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL CHRO
Productivity	27.3%	21.8%	23.7%	33.1%	34.0%	20.4%	29.9%	23.6%	23.2%
Leadership development	26.2%	30.7%	21.7%	23.4%	20.1%	30.3%	35.1%	20.2%	24.9%
Skill development	24.9%	24.8%	22.0%	24.8%	26.4%	25.3%	19.5%	24.7%	19.8%
Digital or AI implementation	18.9%	19.2%	26.7%	13.2%	15.2%	19.9%	6.5%	25.8%	22.0%
Company culture	18.8%	25.1%	18.4%	14.0%	14.0%	24.4%	14.3%	18.7%	16.5%
Organization transformation	17.9%	17.7%	14.3%	20.7%	18.9%	17.6%	27.3%	24.0%	23.7%
Employee retention	15.6%	15.8%	24.6%	12.2%	10.5%	16.7%	18.2%	15.6%	18.3%
Compensation and benefits	14.2%	9.8%	12.2%	18.2%	19.0%	10.9%	15.6%	9.8%	17.6%
Employee well-being	13.5%	8.9%	12.5%	19.1%	20.4%	9.5%	14.3%	12.0%	5.7%
Succession planning	11.5%	15.0%	8.9%	11.2%	11.0%	14.5%	11.7%	11.5%	17.7%
Worker flexibility (e.g., hybrid)	6.7%	5.6%	7.1%	7.3%	7.1%	5.9%	7.8%	7.6%	2.3%
Not a priority	0.9%	1.0%	2.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.0%	1.0%	0.4%

Note: Globally, 711 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

CEOs prioritized reducing, reusing, and recycling or they don't

Globally, CEOs' environmental and sustainability priorities in 2026 centered on operational efficiency and resource use rather than transformational commitments. The most common priorities were "sustainable use of key inputs (i.e., water, energy)" (21.1%), "investing in clean and green technology and energy" (20.4%), and "circular economy/waste reduction" (19.9%). The "transition to renewable energy sources," which ranked fifth globally (16.6%), remained strategically significant.

At the same time, environmental sustainability is increasingly contested rather than consensus driven among global executives. One in five CEOs globally (20.2%) did not view environmental and sustainability issues as a business priority in 2026, signaling a more polarized executive landscape than in prior years.

This divide was most pronounced in the US (38.4%), as CEOs gave environmental and sustainability issues significantly lower priority than their global peers. This was nearly double the share in Japan (18.4%) and far above Europe (13.8%) and Other Asia (4.7%). This divergence likely reflects a shift in business calculus shaped by the domestic political and regulatory environment rather than a lack of awareness of environmental risk.

In North America, political polarization; legal scrutiny of environmental, social, and governance claims; and a more adversarial public discourse raise the perceived downside risk of visible sustainability commitments, leading many CEOs to scale back how prominently—and publicly—environmental priorities feature in corporate strategy, particularly where regulatory expectations are less prescriptive than in Europe or parts of Asia.

Figure 22
By region, CEOs differed on whether to prioritize the environment and sustainability

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY PRIORITIES

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite
Sustainable use of key inputs (i.e., water, energy)	21.1%	16.1%	23.7%	22.2%	27.3%	16.0%	3.9%	20.0%
Investing in clean and green technology and energy	20.4%	17.3%	22.8%	23.4%	25.6%	14.6%	15.8%	19.7%
Not a priority	20.2%	38.0%	13.8%	7.7%	4.7%	38.4%	18.4%	16.2%
Circular economy/waste reduction	19.9%	16.5%	28.1%	19.9%	17.3%	17.4%	28.9%	20.5%
Transition to renewable energy sources	16.6%	13.1%	17.6%	17.7%	19.7%	15.1%	10.5%	18.3%
Climate resilience/adaptation	16.1%	10.2%	19.4%	20.3%	19.4%	10.0%	23.7%	13.2%
Green product and service innovation	14.1%	10.4%	11.3%	18.3%	16.8%	9.1%	23.7%	19.4%
Greening the supply chain	13.5%	9.1%	14.4%	15.8%	13.6%	9.6%	23.7%	16.4%
Green capital/finance	11.1%	5.2%	12.2%	13.3%	16.7%	5.9%	1.3%	6.8%
Responsible land use	11.0%	10.1%	7.8%	15.0%	17.8%	9.1%	5.3%	9.7%
Greenhouse gas emissions	10.6%	7.2%	10.1%	16.0%	13.5%	7.8%	25.0%	13.4%

Note: Globally, 709 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

Mental health was added to a broadening list of social priorities for CEOs globally

Globally, CEOs continued to prioritize social issues most directly linked to economic growth and workforce development, with expanding “economic opportunity” (28.9%) and “education” (28.7%) ranking as the top social priorities for 2026. This is likely due to their role in strengthening labor force participation, skills pipelines, and long-term competitiveness. In North America, “economic opportunity” rose sharply to the top (38.9%), potentially reflecting heightened concern about workforce access and affordability pressures.

Regional differences underscore how social priorities track local conditions: Europe-based CEOs placed the greatest emphasis on “digital inclusion” (27.6%) amid ongoing digital and regulatory transitions, while CEOs in Other Asia prioritized “natural resource management” (31.0%), potentially in response to more immediate environmental and development pressures. “Education” ranked lower in Europe and Other Asia. There could be a number of reasons, including education being a longer term or institutional challenge, or the populous is already well educated in those regions and, hence, not a corporate priority.

In an environment shaped by geopolitical tensions and rapid technological change, “mental health” is gaining prominence. It was a priority for 24.2% of global CEOs for 2026, making it the third-highest concern. This trend was consistent across most regions, except Other Asia, where 19.7% of CEOs consider it a priority. Within the C-Suite, “mental health” was an especially important issue for CHROs, with 43.2% reporting it being a priority—potentially reflecting their closer exposure to burnout, engagement, and retention risks.

Figure 23
CEOs championed economic opportunity, education, and mental health as social priorities

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

SOCIAL PRIORITIES

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite
Economic opportunity	28.9%	38.9%	26.1%	22.3%	22.1%	40.1%	23.1%	21.7%
Education	28.7%	33.7%	23.8%	21.5%	12.9%	30.6%	51.3%	24.9%
Mental health	24.2%	24.7%	24.5%	21.3%	19.7%	23.9%	26.9%	27.7%
Digital inclusion	21.9%	14.4%	27.6%	26.1%	28.5%	14.0%	17.9%	20.6%
Working conditions and workers' rights	18.7%	11.9%	24.5%	21.3%	23.0%	11.7%	15.4%	22.4%
Gender equality	16.9%	11.7%	20.0%	20.6%	22.5%	12.6%	14.1%	18.2%
Natural resource management	15.7%	10.2%	12.6%	25.0%	31.0%	12.2%	3.8%	11.4%
Human rights	11.1%	7.2%	12.7%	16.4%	16.3%	8.1%	16.7%	12.1%
Disaster/humanitarian response	10.0%	5.7%	9.4%	16.1%	14.8%	6.3%	20.5%	7.6%
Not a priority	8.4%	14.3%	5.8%	3.5%	3.8%	14.0%	2.6%	10.6%

Note: Globally, 711 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

Revenue, brand building, and enhancing customer experience were marketing priorities for CEOs

To drive business growth in 2026, CEOs globally prioritized marketing strategies that “increase revenue” (36.1%), strengthen “brand building” (29.4%), and enhance “customer experience” (27.6%). Overall, CEO priorities aligned closely with those of CMOs, who gave these priorities even greater importance.

However, CMOs globally placed significantly greater emphasis on the use of “AI for marketing” (28.4% for CMOs vs. 21.4% for CEOs) and “brand building” (40.3% vs. 29.4%), while assigning lower priority to “social media” (9.0% vs. 17.2%). In Europe, using “AI for marketing” was strongly prioritized among CEOs (37.9%) compared to North America (16.9%), Japan (10.3%), and Other Asia (18.7%).

Figure 24

CEOs expected marketing to increase revenue, build the brand, and improve customer experience

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

MARKETING PRIORITIES

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite	GLOBAL CMO
Increase revenue	36.1%	36.8%	29.2%	37.1%	37.4%	37.8%	35.9%	28.3%	39.2%
Brand building	29.4%	33.5%	27.3%	25.6%	19.7%	34.2%	46.2%	30.1%	40.3%
Customer experience	27.6%	33.6%	32.1%	20.1%	21.1%	33.8%	16.7%	35.4%	33.9%
Customer service	22.8%	19.8%	17.2%	30.1%	32.9%	20.7%	20.5%	17.8%	14.0%
AI for marketing	21.4%	16.9%	37.9%	16.8%	18.7%	17.6%	10.3%	22.0%	28.4%
Social media	17.2%	11.9%	26.6%	14.1%	16.7%	12.6%	5.1%	13.8%	9.0%
Sustainability of products and services	15.3%	10.0%	9.2%	23.9%	20.0%	9.5%	37.2%	16.1%	8.9%
Website, packaging, and visual identity	12.2%	18.0%	9.2%	8.8%	7.7%	16.7%	12.8%	11.0%	7.7%
Measurement and attribution	12.1%	10.3%	4.1%	20.9%	23.9%	9.0%	10.3%	10.7%	9.7%
Not a priority	1.4%	2.5%	2.2%	0.3%	0.0%	2.3%	1.3%	4.1%	0.4%

Note: Globally, 713 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

CEOs prioritized corporate strategy, internal communications, and using AI for messaging

When it comes to communications, a focus on “corporate strategy” (41.2%) remained the dominant priority for global CEOs as they look to drive business growth in 2026. It ranked first across all regions except Japan, where 75.6% of CEOs placed greatest emphasis on “internal communications”—well above the global average of 27.9%.

Europe-based CEOs assigned higher importance to the use of “AI in communications” (31.0%), putting it as their second-highest priority. In Asia, CEOs placed stronger emphasis on “issue, crisis, and risk management” (23.2%), with 26.9% in Japan and 32.3% in Other Asia citing it as a priority in an increasingly uncertain operating environment. Notably, North America-based CEOs ranked the use of “AI in communications” fifth (20.6%).

“Sustainability communications” ranked low overall, with 16.9% of global CEOs viewing it as a priority. This was especially the case in the US (7.7%), while prioritization was higher in Other Asia (25.5%) and Europe (20.6%).

Figure 25

CEOs will utilize communications to convey corporate strategy and align workers; AI in communications was also ranked highly

Q: What are your priorities for growing your business in 2026?

COMMUNICATIONS PRIORITIES

● #1 ● #2 ● #3

	GLOBAL CEOs	NORTH AMERICA CEOs	EUROPE CEOs	ASIA CEOs	OTHER ASIA CEOs	US CEOs	JAPAN CEOs	GLOBAL Other C-Suite
Corporate strategy	41.2%	39.7%	43.7%	37.6%	35.8%	40.5%	43.6%	41.9%
Internal communications	27.9%	29.0%	23.0%	29.4%	16.1%	30.9%	75.6%	30.4%
AI in communications	24.5%	20.6%	31.0%	23.2%	27.0%	20.0%	10.3%	19.6%
Performance measurement	23.3%	28.0%	21.4%	22.0%	26.5%	27.3%	6.4%	22.8%
Issue, crisis, and risk management	22.2%	13.6%	21.1%	31.1%	32.3%	12.7%	26.9%	19.8%
Corporate website	22.1%	28.0%	15.3%	20.6%	20.3%	28.2%	21.8%	14.4%
Sustainability communications	16.9%	8.5%	20.6%	21.8%	25.5%	7.7%	9.0%	20.2%
Earned media	12.7%	16.4%	13.2%	11.6%	14.2%	16.4%	2.6%	10.6%
Not a priority	2.3%	4.1%	2.8%	0.4%	0.2%	4.1%	1.3%	4.4%

Note: Globally, 711 CEOs responded.

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity

Additional Resources

For additional data and insights please visit TCB.org/c-suite-outlook

APPENDIX 1: ABOUT THE SURVEY

About The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook

The anonymous survey was carried out from October 10, 2025 to November 24, 2025, with 1,732 C-Suite executives responding, including 771 CEOs from around the world. This is the 27th annual survey conducted by The Conference Board®. The survey findings are described in the past tense to reflect the specific context in which responses were collected.

The survey would not have been possible without the support of Ipsos, one of the world’s leading market research companies and the sole sponsor for the C-Suite Outlook Survey 2026. We are also grateful for the participation of the seven other organizations—Conference Board of Canada, Directors & Boards, El Instituto para el Desarrollo Empresarial de la Argentina (IDEA), Global Finance, Industrie-Club Hannover e.V, Instituto Chileno de Administración Racional de Empresas (ICARE), and Japan Productivity Center—who helped secure responses across the globe. We also greatly appreciate the C-Suite executives and board directors who responded to the survey.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

EXECUTIVE TITLE								
% of CEOs and Other C-Suite & Board Directors	CEO				Other C-Suite & Board Directors			
	44.5%				55.5%			
% of CEOs, Other C-Suite, Board Directors	CEO			Other C-Suite			Board Directors	
	44.5%			44.0%			11.5%	
% of Other C-Suite	CFO	COO	CMO	CHRO	G&S	Board Directors	Tech	CSO
	9.0%	3.5%	4.6%	6.2%	5.7%	11.5%	7.5%	1.9%

COMPANY HEADQUARTERS BY REGION								
% of CEOs and Other C-Suite	North America *	Europe **	Asia ***	US	Canada	Japan	Other Asia ****	Southern Cone*****
	9.0%	3.5%	4.6%	6.2%	5.7%	11.5%	7.5%	1.9%

* North America is defined as Canada, the US, and a small number of respondents from other economies, including Mexico

** Europe is defined as France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and a small number of respondents from other economies

*** Asia is defined by Japan and Other Asia

**** Other Asia is defined as Australia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and a small number of respondents from other economies

***** Southern Cone is defined as Chile and Argentina

		COMPANY AVERAGE ANNUAL REVENUE		
% of CEOs and Other C-Suite		\$1 billion and above	\$100 million-under \$1 billion	Less than \$100 million
		46.7%	23.2%	30.1%

		RESPONDENTS BY INDUSTRY						
% of CEOs and Other C-Suite	Business and professional services	Communications and media	Construction	Energy	Financial services (including insurance)	Government/nonprofit/administration	Health care	
	10.5%	3.3%	4.3%	4.8%	12.7%	3.3%	6.0%	
	Manufacturing (industrial)	Manufacturing (consumer)	Manufacturing (technology/computer)	Natural resources and utilities	Software	Transportation, warehousing, and logistics	Trade and consumer services	
	14.0%	8.7%	4.8%	3.9%	4.3%	3.1%	8.4%	

METHODOLOGY

To provide a more representative view of respondents from around the world, responses in aggregates are weighted (such as global and major regions) by the square root of the respondent’s economy share in global output (GDP) divided by the respondent’s share in the total number of responses from their economy.

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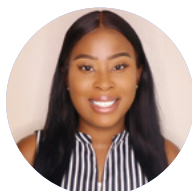
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The survey would not have been possible without the support of Ipsos, one of the world's leading market research companies, the sole Sponsor for the C-Suite Outlook Survey 2026.



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	MANUFACTURING (INDUSTRIAL)	MANUFACTURING (CONSUMER)	MANUFACTURING (TECHNOLOGY/ COMPUTER)	NATURAL RESOURCES AND UTILITIES	SOFTWARE	TRADE AND CONSUMER SERVICES	TRANSPORTATION, WAREHOUSING, AND LOGISTICS
CHALLENGES IN 2026							
The economic environment	Economic downturn/ recession	Economic downturn/ recession	Tariffs	Tariffs	Economic downturn/ recession	Economic downturn/ recession	Economic downturn/ recession
Industry and market dynamics	Protectionism	Regulation in your primary markets	Industrial policy in your region	Regulation in your primary markets	Regulation in your primary markets	Protectionism	Protectionism
Geopolitical and security risks	Cyberattacks	Cyberattacks	Armed conflict in Asia-Pacific	Uncertainty	Cyberattacks	Cyberattacks	Cyberattacks
Societal, demographic, and technological shifts	AI	Shifting consumer buying behaviors	AI	Climate events and disruptions	AI	Shifting consumer buying behaviors	AI
Governance factors	Political uncertainty in the regions you operate in	Political uncertainty in the regions you operate in	Political uncertainty in the regions you operate in	Public policy shifts in the regions you operate in	Political uncertainty in the regions you operate in	Evolving supply chain due diligence requirements	ESG regulations and disclosure mandates
International trade wars/barriers	Supply chain disruptions	Supply chain disruptions	Having to raise prices due to tariffs	Supply chain disruptions	Supply chain disruptions	Supply chain disruptions	Supply chain disruptions
Human capital challenges	Finding qualified workers	Finding qualified workers	Finding qualified workers	Finding qualified workers	Finding qualified workers	Finding qualified workers	Finding qualified workers
WHERE TO PLAY IN 2026							
Improving profitability	Business model changes	Business model changes	Business model changes	Business model changes	Business model changes	Business model changes	Price increases
Expansion regions	The US and Canada	The US and Canada	The US and Canada	The US and Canada	The US and Canada	The US and Canada	The US and Canada
Expansion arenas	Product categories	Product categories	Customer segments	Customer segments	Customer segments	Distribution channels	Customer segments
HOW TO WIN IN 2026							
Investment priorities	Product and service innovation	Product and service innovation	Product and service innovation	AI/technology	AI/technology	Enhanced customer experience	AI/technology
AI priorities	Enhance data quality and quantity to measure the return on investment of AI	Enhance data quality and quantity to measure the return on investment of AI	Enhance data quality and quantity to measure the return on investment of AI	Enhance data quality and quantity to measure the return on investment of AI	Enhance data quality and quantity to measure the return on investment of AI	Enhance AI expertise	Enhance AI expertise
Governance priorities	Revenue growth	Revenue growth	Strategic planning	Strategic planning	Revenue growth	Revenue growth	Revenue growth
Finance priorities	Improve financial planning	Improve financial planning	Improve financial planning	Improve financial planning	Improve financial planning	Improve financial planning	Improve financial planning
Supply chain priorities	Supplier diversification	Inventory management	Supplier diversification	Inventory management	Expand AI and digital technology use	Inventory management	Expand AI and digital technology use
HOW TO OPERATE IN 2026							
Human capital priorities	Productivity	Skill development	Productivity	Leadership development	Productivity	Leadership development	Leadership development
Environmental and sustainability priorities	Circular economy/ waste reduction	Circular economy/ waste reduction	Investing in clean and green technology and energy	Investing in clean and green technology and energy	Not a priority	Circular economy/ waste reduction	Greenhouse gas emissions
Social priorities	Education	Mental health	Economic opportunity	Economic opportunity	Economic opportunity	Economic opportunity	Education
Marketing priorities	Increase revenue	Customer experience	Customer experience	Increase revenue	Increase revenue	Increase revenue	Customer experience
Communications priorities	Corporate strategy	Corporate strategy	Corporate strategy	Corporate strategy	Corporate strategy	Corporate strategy	Corporate strategy

Source: The Conference Board® C-Suite Outlook 2026: Uncertainty and Opportunity