



Building global ambition

C-suite barometer: outlook 2024

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Foreword

At the end of 2023, we gathered the views of leading executives from all over the world for our annual C-suite barometer. With insights from around 800 executives across over 30 countries, we uncovered a significant increase in optimism, suggesting 2024 is set to be a bounce forward year: a year of increasing investments, transformations and strong growth ambitions.

It's terrific to see such high levels of optimism and renewed confidence among our C-suite respondents this year. It's a good indication of what's to come. In the face of volatility, the C-suite has demonstrated resilience and agility and is now set for growth.

Many businesses have retained investment potential, particularly a lot of larger businesses. Government support for business continued when many countries emerged from pandemic conditions. This has made companies relatively cash secure and ensured they have reserves to draw on and use to invest in their next stage of growth.

New geopolitical and economic factors influenced initial uncertainty in Q1 of the last financial year and the likelihood of organisations achieving growth targets was in constant question. The C-suite is now approaching a bounce forward year, more resilient and equipped with the learnings from the pandemic (and arguably from previous recessions).

Our C-suite barometer shows a clear focus on four areas this year: transforming technology, international expansion, sustainability and talent strategies. Confidence in managing some of the key trends, including new technology and regulatory requirements, is high, but new regulation (and a need for more guidance on it) is considered a potential inhibitor of growth. This applies to not only sustainability but also new technologies like AI, where we find a greater demand for regulation by those already using it. It's clear the business voice wants to see more control in this space.

C-suite executives are expected to be bullish when it comes to growth, but there is some volatility reflected in the areas they are investing. While there's consistency in the numbers of respondents optimistic about growth, how they achieve this and their approach vary.

International expansion is high on the agenda, with some countries like Germany, France, China and the US expected to fare better than others in attracting new businesses to enter their markets.

It's important for leaders to fully understand the markets in which they operate and be more aware of the latest changes in those they are entering. I get a sense of some hedging of bets among the key drivers of activity and people must consider the impact on sustainable growth if not fully prepared.

Having the right people, with dedicated expertise and focusing specifically on key areas of the business is a clear way of mastering this, as well as delivering on increasing expectations that come through in sustainability reporting and understanding regulation.

The competition for this talent (and more generally) is accepted as a real challenge. Encouragingly, C-suite executives continue to tackle this head on with new or revised talent strategies maintaining position at the top of priorities. Again, it's more interesting to note the variation in how leaders plan to achieve this and where they focus their efforts. Investment in people takes time, yet opportunities for learning, training and development emerges as the most important factor to attracting top talent this year, alongside the usual salary and benefits package.

We now have a generation of tough, robust leaders with experience of dealing with very challenging environments and a level of change. While some industries need to be careful of over-confidence, overall, you can see the realism and positivity projected in the priorities clearly being planned.

Foreword

What we're seeing from our clients supports these findings, with more focus on cost management, with an assessment of human costs compared with more controllable costs. Right sizing is expected to clear a path for deployment of transformative technologies, commitments to more sustainable business models and increasing expectations on reporting requirements.

There are tough decisions ahead but, like the C-suite, I am optimistic – in this bounce forward, in the leaders making these tough decisions, and in their plans to secure a sustainable future.



Mark Kennedy
Partner & Group Executive Board
Member, Mazars



Executive summary

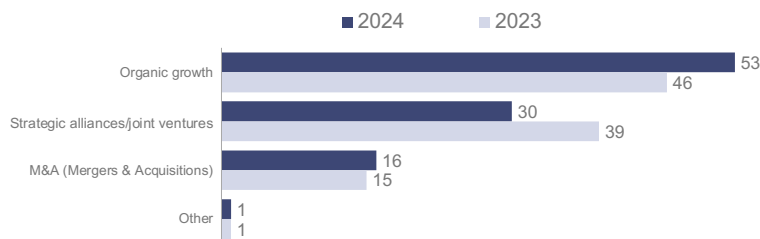
Key findings

Optimism and confidence are on the up in 2024

94% have a positive growth outlook for their company.

Most important sources of growth

Percent of respondents expecting 2024 growth



Mazars Investment Index

Average % increasing investment across all fields

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Average % increasing investment	47%	72%	63%	66%

Mazars Confidence Index

Average percent “very confident” their organisation is prepared across all relevant trends

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Average percent “very confident”	32%	44%	37%	44%

Tackling the biggest trends

Key trends having the biggest impact on growth

Percent of respondents



Topping the C-suite agenda

Top five strategic priorities in the next 3-5 years

Percent of respondents



Chapter one

Confidence and optimism on the up

This year's global C-suite barometer indicates a business world optimistic for the future, confident about growth and ready to take on the challenges ahead.



Confidence and optimism on the up

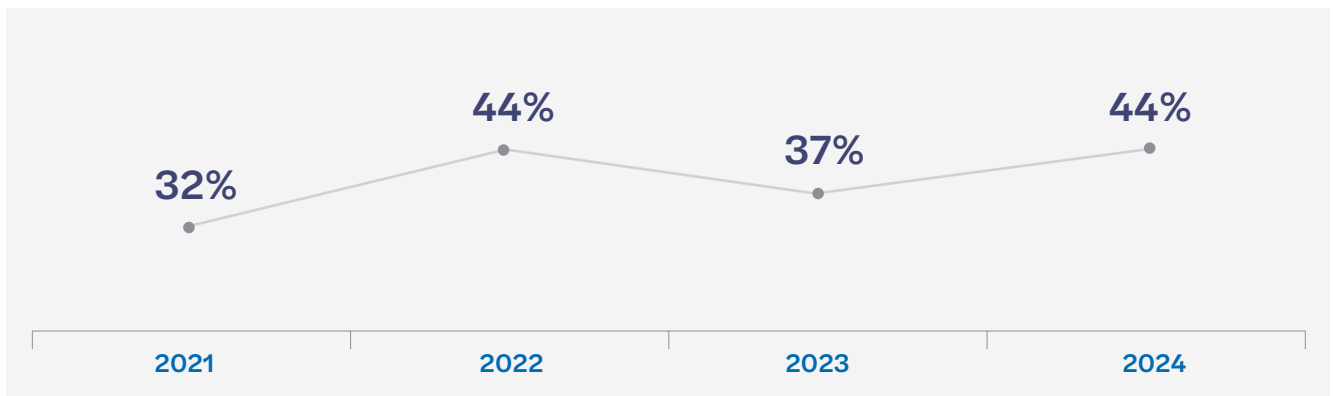
Confidence in tackling key trends

While leaders seek to shape a positive future for their businesses, they can't take their eye off the big external trends all organisations will need to navigate. The trends expected to have the biggest impact on business in the coming year are economic (including inflation and the cost of living), selected

by 37% of C-suite leaders, and energy prices/shortages and the emergence of new technologies (each, 33%).

Businesses feel they are ready to manage these trends and our Confidence Index shows an average of 44% are "very confident".

Confidence index*



*Average % "very confident" across all relevant trends

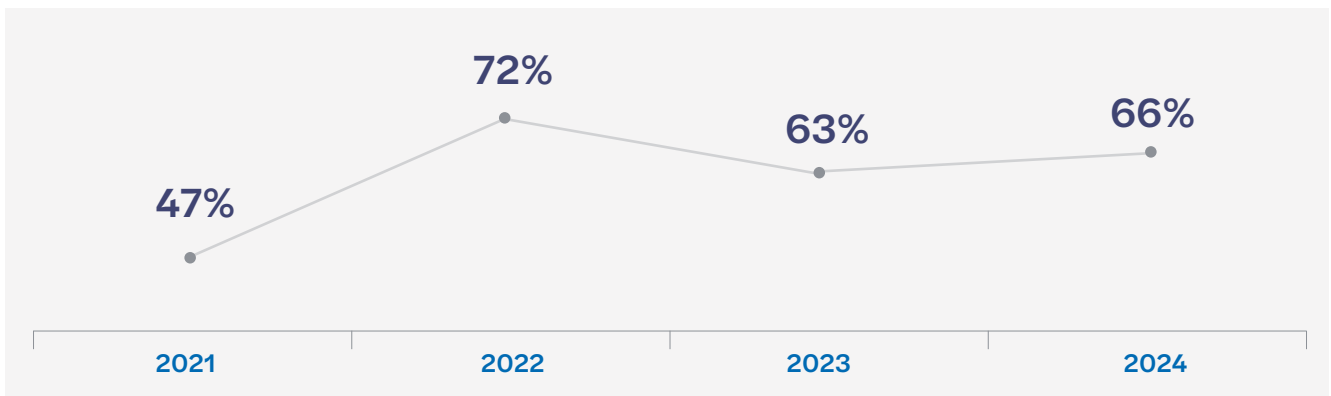


Confidence and optimism on the up

Investing for growth

Along with revenues, optimism and confidence, planned investment is also expected to rebound this year, with our Investment Index (percentage of businesses planning to increase investment averaged across 24 activities) moving up to 66%.

Investment index*



*Average % increasing investment across all fields

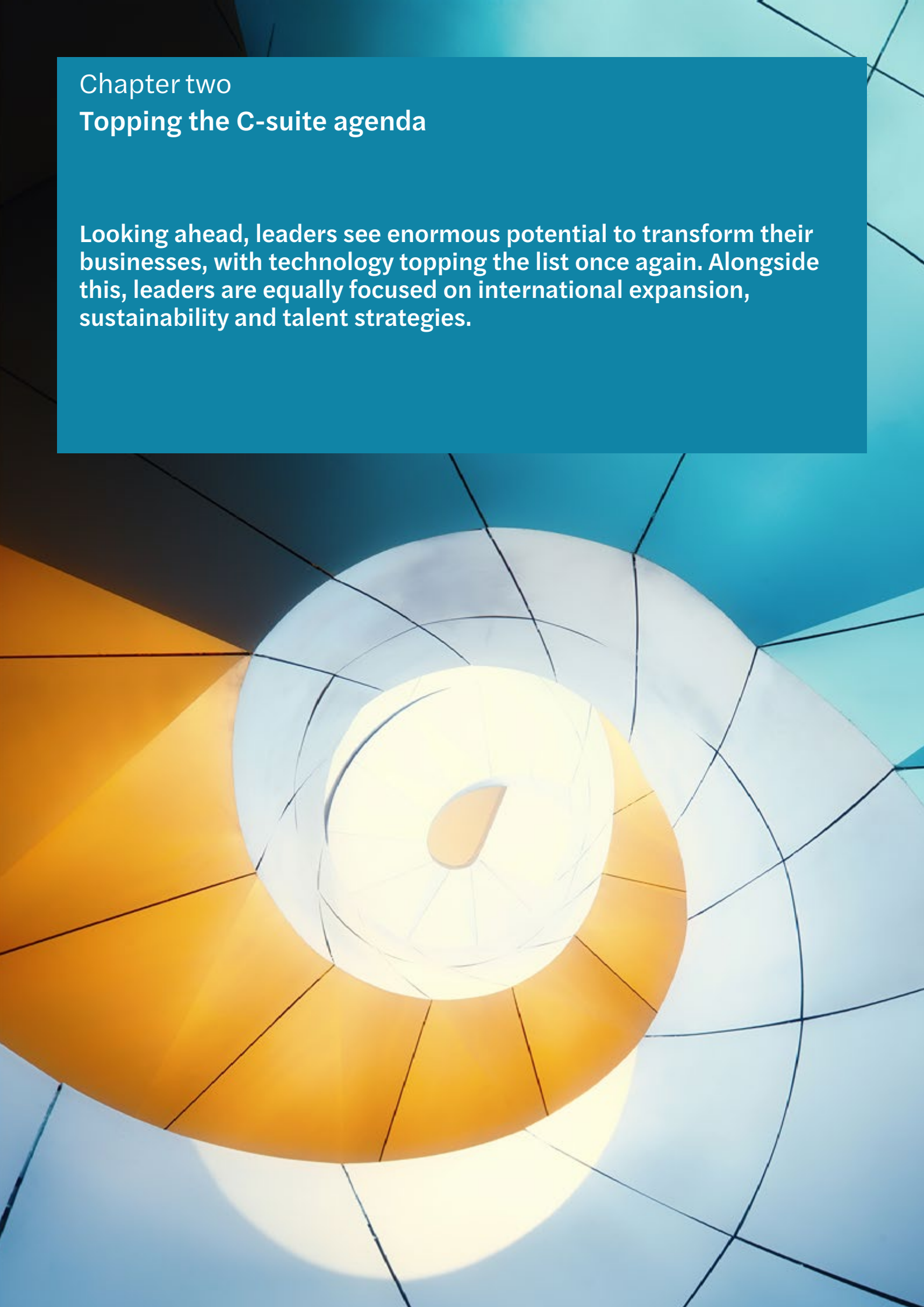
Top ten areas of investment

Area of investment	2024	2023	Change in investment from previous year
	Percent of respondents investing		
Acquiring new customers	74%	72%	Up 2 points
External growth opportunities	70%	64%	Up 6 points
Sustainability initiatives	70%	68%	Up 2 points
Maintaining and evolving IT systems	70%	69%	Up 1 points
Brand strategy and positioning	69%	60%	Up 9 points
Investment strategy	69%	66%	Up 3 points
Improving efficiency	69%	68%	Up 1 points
New product/service/markets	69%	70%	Down 1 point
Sourcing new talent	68%	65%	Up 3 points
Updating corporate strategy	68%	66%	Up 2 points

Chapter two

Topping the C-suite agenda

Looking ahead, leaders see enormous potential to transform their businesses, with technology topping the list once again. Alongside this, leaders are equally focused on international expansion, sustainability and talent strategies.



Topping the C-suite agenda

The biggest strategic priority remains technology transformation, with nearly a third (32%) selecting this as a focus for the coming three to five years.

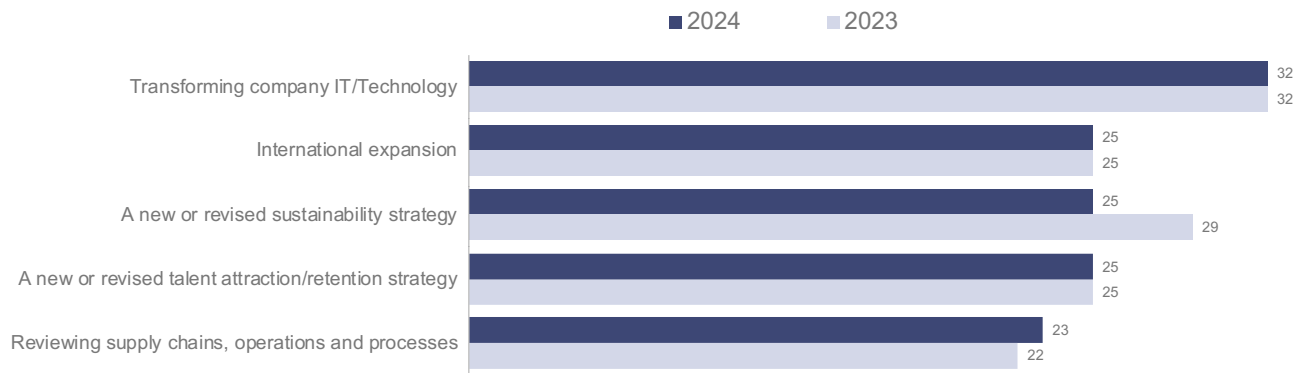
International expansion is now high on the C-suite priority list, jumping from joint fifth to the joint second highest priority, alongside sustainability and talent strategies. With most leaders predicting growth and over half of these (53%) saying it will be organic, it's clear the C-suite has its sights set on overseas markets for future growth opportunities.

This is a business world still motivated by the need for digital transformation, focused on the pursuit of cross-border growth opportunities, committed to doing business with purpose and responsibility, and looking for the best people to do it.

In this report we take a closer look at these key areas: technology, international expansion, talent and sustainability.

Top strategic priorities in next 3-5 years

Percent of respondents



“C-suite executives are expected to be bullish when it comes to growth, but there is some volatility reflected in the areas they are investing. While there’s consistency in the numbers of respondents optimistic about growth, how they achieve this and their approach vary.”



Mark Kennedy
Partner & Group Executive Board
Member, Mazars

Chapter three

Transformation in a digital world

C-suite executives remain invested in the technological advances that will transform business opportunities and establish more robust operations. As with all innovations, there are considerations around the level of investment needed and the warning labels that come with new technologies, but leaders are confident in preparing for the trends that will deliver long-term solutions.



Transformation in a digital world

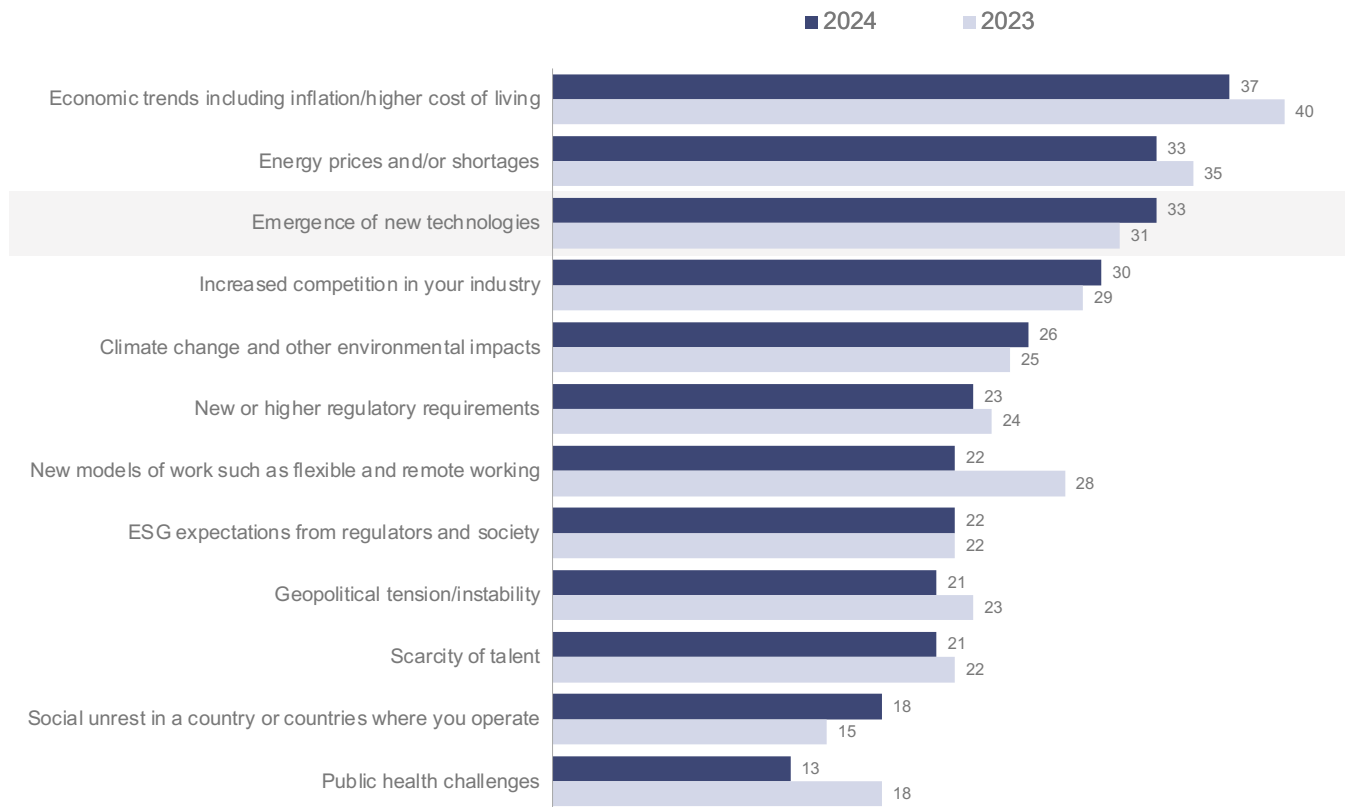
Transforming company IT remains top of the agenda for business leaders with one third (32%) naming it a top strategic priority. This is particularly true for respondents from North America, where 47% cite it as a top priority.

Alongside this focus on transforming their own technology, the emergence of new technologies

is identified as one of the key trends expected to have a big impact on businesses, second only to economic factors and equal with energy prices. C-suite executives know they need to be ready for new technologies – and they think they are. Some 87% say they are confident their business is prepared for what’s coming in terms of new technologies.

Biggest external trends over next 12 months

Percent of respondents



"With a history of more than 75 years as a family led company, we have recently initiated a thorough assessment of how digitalization, sustainability and corresponding regulation will impact our business – something we do regularly. Those massive, possibly disruptive, changes are likely to shape not only our customers' demands but also the overall business model to its' core.

With a strong commitment to future generations we have decided to proactively explore and invest in the opportunities rather than avoiding the risks that might come along with those transformations. We clearly see data-driven services, combined with hardware - in our case waste bins and sensor technology - as one major way of offering new value to our customers by helping them deal with challenges in labor shortage, environmental care and with ESG-reporting demands."

Christoph Erbach
CEO Hailo Digital
Hub GmbH & Co. KG



Transformation in a digital world

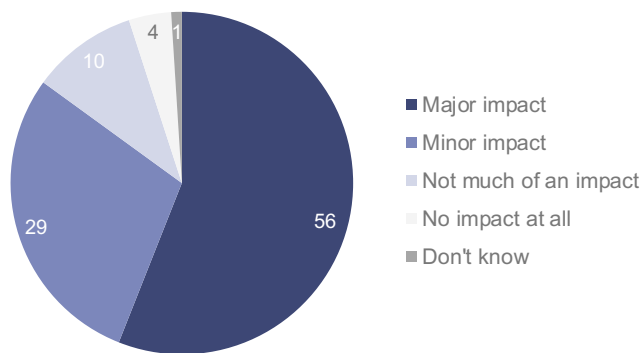
The rapid advance of generative AI

With technology transformation still top of the agenda, it's no surprise there is significant interest in, debate surrounding and uptake of generative AI.

Generative AI is already having a huge influence on businesses. According to our research, 85% of C-suite executives believe that generative AI will have an impact on their organisation, including 56% saying it will have a "major impact".

Impact of generative AI on organisations

Percent of respondents



For many leaders, AI is already part of their business. Three-quarters say their company is currently making use of generative AI for internal processes and commercial products and services. Almost half of C-suite leaders (49%) expect AI to replace some jobs in their organisation, with 57% among those responses saying it's already happening or will within the year. It's a trend that's growing more across certain sectors, specifically in financial services and automotive and manufacturing.



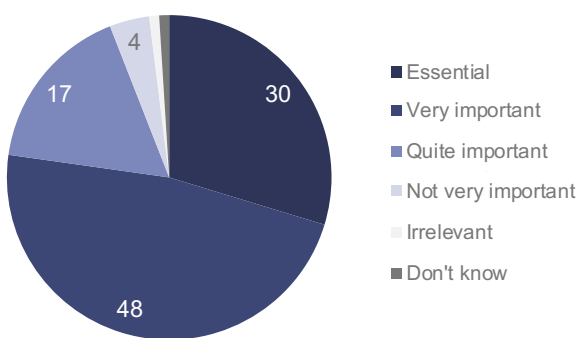
Transformation in a digital world

Ethical questions and regulatory implications

This is also a time to be conscious of regulatory requirements and upcoming changes. Expectations are high with 95% of C-suite leaders agreeing it's important to have more regulation, either nationally or internationally, in controlling generative AI.

Importance of more generative AI regulation

Percent of respondents



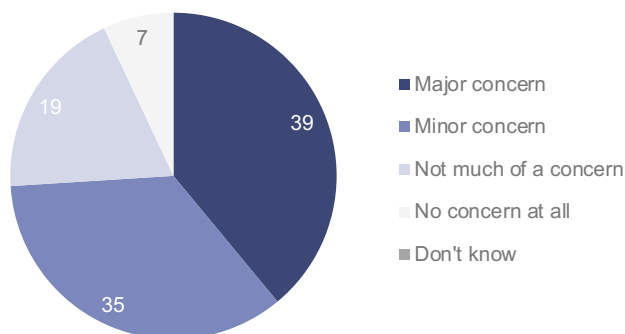
Despite clear demand for more regulation and guidance globally, this has not challenged the appetite for many transformative technologies and efficiencies.

The staggering ethical concerns expressed by three quarters of C-suite executives already using AI across their business also doesn't seem to have slowed down interest.

In fact, 39% of those executives say they have major ethical concerns about using AI.

Ethical concerns about using generative AI

Percent of respondents whose organisation uses generative AI



“The number of applications AI can have across business is enormous. While the technology has been around for a while, some organisations are just getting started and the challenge is two-fold: to scale up capacity to learn and implement AI responsibly, but also to know where to best focus efforts and resources at this early stage when there are so many opportunities to get the most value from this technology.”



Karine Phillipon
Partner & Global Practice Leader Technology, Media and Telecommunications, Mazars

Transformation in a digital world

Robust security

As businesses move ahead into an AI-powered world, they need to make sure their IT infrastructure is solid and secure. There are already indications that issues may be piling up. As more new technologies are implemented across businesses, the expectation of threats has risen: 40% of C-suite executives now expect a data breach in their organisation in the next 12 months – up from 32% one year ago.

Likelihood of a data breach in coming year

Percent of respondents

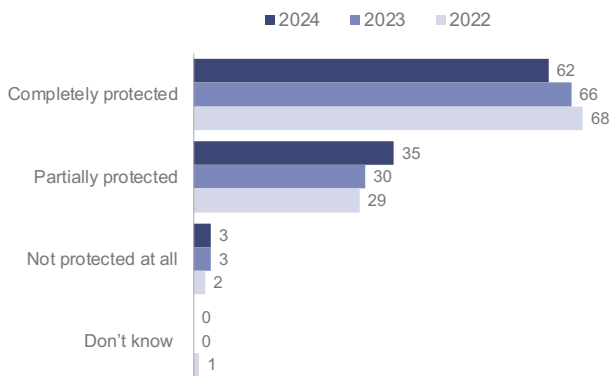
	2024	2023	2022
Will happen	40%	32%	36%
Will not happen	57%	65%	61%

There's been a steady decline in leaders' overall confidence that their data is fully protected – 62% compared with 66% in 2023 and 68% in 2022. We can see why transforming IT is a top strategic priority for leaders in North America, with a noticeable drop in those who feel their organisation's data is fully protected, from 77% to 44% this year. In the US alone, data breaches were at an all-time high, increasing by 20% in the first nine months of 2023. [source [Apple newsroom](#)]

Cyber threats grow in sophistication and complexity every day, and it is no longer acceptable to simply manage cyber risk; companies must take a proactive approach towards cyber security. Our study shows that three quarters of organisations spend less than 20% of their IT budgets on security measures. Businesses could do more to protect their data – for example, a stronger focus on continuity plans, as only 40% of organisations surveyed perform regular disaster response and recovery testing procedures and 46% have regular cyber security awareness training for their people.

Level of data protection

Percent of respondents





Chapter four

The rise of international growth as a strategic priority

Businesses are approaching 2024 with international expansion front of mind. Leaders are seriously assessing opportunities to expand internationally and the regions of the world most attractive to the deliver their plans.

The rise of international growth as a strategic priority

Topping the charts for the first time

With a quarter of our C-suite executives surveyed naming international expansion as one of their strategic priorities, this is the first year it's featured in the top three globally, with smaller companies (US\$1m – US\$100m) placing a slightly higher priority on international growth (28%) than their larger counterparts.

Top destinations for expansion

The top destinations named for international expansion are China, Germany and the US, with France and the UK still emerging strong. Canada also features in the top destinations businesses plan to expand into in 2024, alongside Brazil.

Sample size: 199 of 798 respondents confirming international expansion a strategic priority.

10%

China, Germany, USA (equally)

8%

France

6%

United Kingdom

4%

Canada & Brazil (equally)

3%

Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Japan, Italy, Belgium and Australia (equally)



The rise of international growth as a strategic priority

Emerging markets and top destinations for growth

Countries where expansion is planned

There are common threads among locations of current business operations and destinations planned for expansion. Companies within Europe are more likely to select other European destinations to expand into. Germany retains its position in this category too with 15% selecting it as the top choice, followed by 11% confirming France as the country they plan to expand into. The US is still a clear ally in the current climate as the only non-European country in the top four (on 10%), followed by the UK (7%).

When reviewing industry expansion plans, we start to see wider global ambition, with China a top destination for automotive and manufacturing and TMT. Whereas the financial services sector has its sights firmly fixed on Germany, the US, France and in Canada, which features strongly again here.

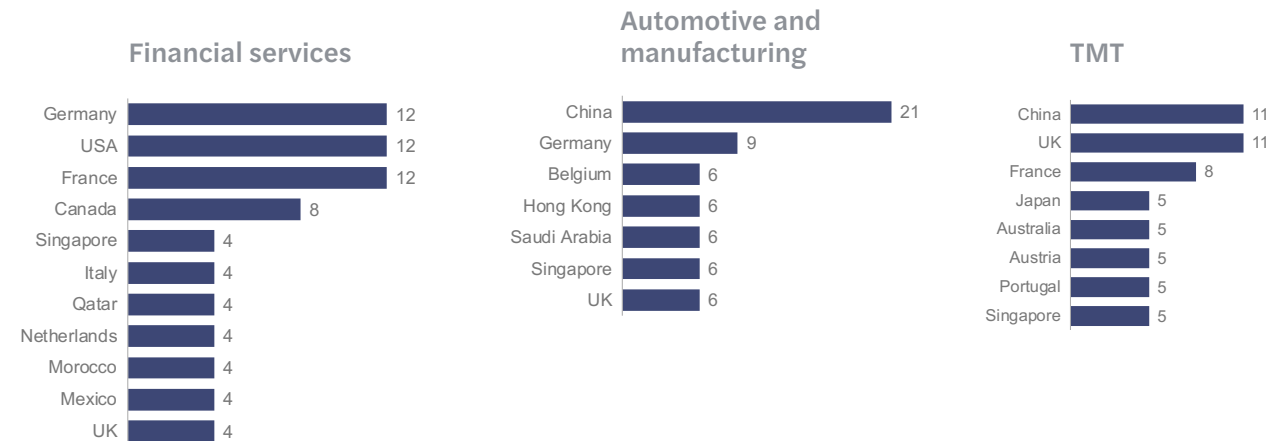
“With international expansion high on the agenda, it’s important for leaders to fully understand the markets in which they operate and be more aware of the latest changes in those they are entering.”



Mark Kennedy
Partner & Group Executive Board Member, Mazars

A view of expansion plans by sector

Percent of respondents (displaying countries with 3%+)



Sample size: 199 of 798 respondents confirming international expansion a strategic priority

Chapter five

Recognising greater sustainability commitments

Sustainability responsibilities are rising as the business community continues to expand around the globe and regulation becomes increasingly complex. C-suite executives are committed to meeting this challenge, less prioritised areas of reporting are now gaining attention, and budgets are increasing to support the need for greater expertise.



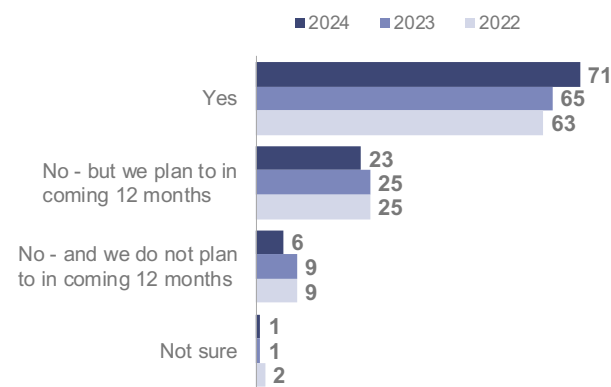
Recognising greater sustainability commitments

Riding the ESG wave

The wave of sustainability expectations continues across the business world. More organisations are producing a sustainability report than in previous years (71%) and more are factoring this into budget planning (72%) – the highest we have recorded to date for both.

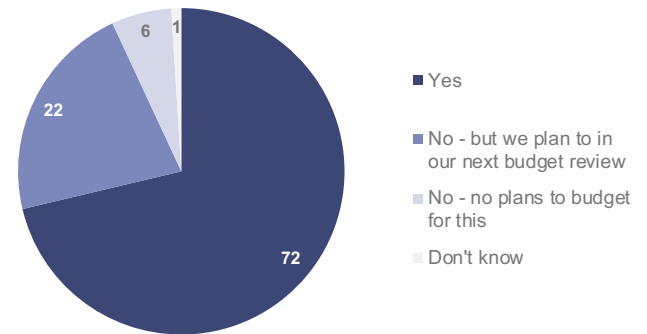
Producing a sustainability report

Percent of respondents



Budgeted costs for ESG reporting

Percent of respondents



Reporting is more common among the largest businesses: 82% of US\$1bn+ organisations say they produce a sustainability report vs 60% in the US\$1m – \$100m bracket. There are also significant differences across regions, with 86% of respondents in Africa producing a report vs 54% in CEE.

“The scale of sustainability reporting, generally, has been demystified and there’s a regulatory drive increasing the number of organisations reporting. A variation of standards across regions however, is contributing to the complexity when it comes to regulation and data capture. As a result, no one market has really cracked it which could account for the increased lack of understanding we’re seeing in the barometer this year from leaders and the boost in budgets for reporting expertise.”



Chris Fuggle
Partner & Global Head of Sustainability Services, Mazars

Recognising greater sustainability commitments

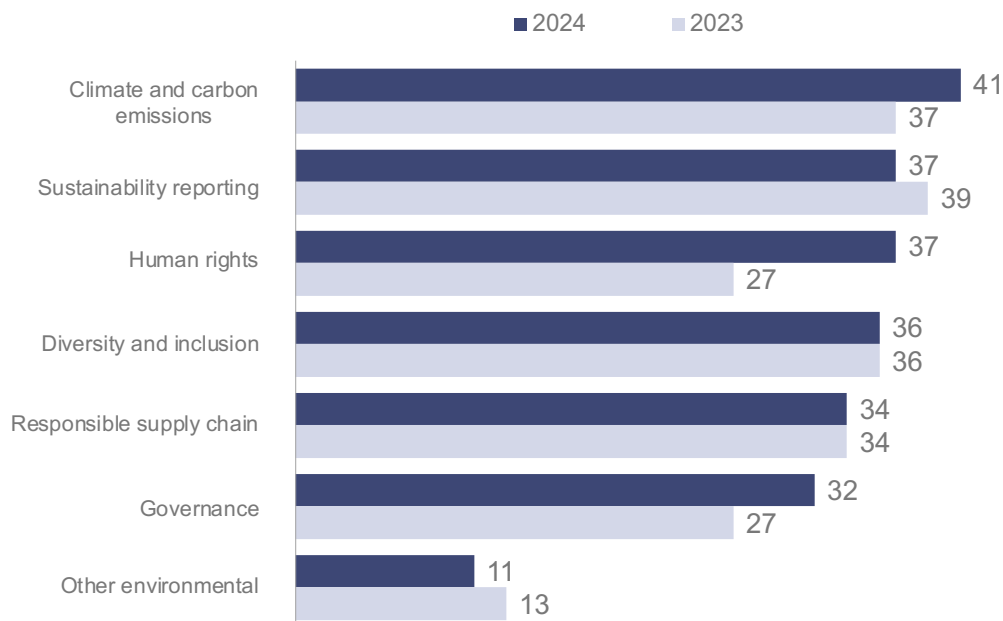
Reporting challenges

Data capture and quality is still the top challenge when preparing a sustainability report. Understanding regulation comes next on the list of challenges, having leapt from 21% last year to 31% this year. The arrival of new regulations, such as the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, also appear to be having an impact here, as the challenge of understanding regulation is felt most in Europe (35%).

Sustainability reporting is still an area in which businesses feel they lack in-house expertise, after climate and carbon emissions. It's a better picture overall. We can assume organisations have invested in more expertise in some areas over the last year, but the big change is in human rights where we see a distinct increase – 37% say they lack expertise vs 27% last year. This area is becoming even more complex. Leaders are clearly feeling it as we see a growing lack of expertise in governance too.

ESG areas lacking in-house expertise

Percent of respondents



Recognising greater sustainability commitments

Expert view: Chris Fuggle

There's a regulatory drive increasing the number of organisations reporting. The scale of sustainability reporting, generally, has been demystified and there has been increasing recognition among companies that they're expected to cover more than just charitable contributions and volunteering efforts. Previously overlooked areas of reporting are now gaining more attention, which is extremely positive – particularly for the growing number of C-suite executives planning to expand their business in the next year and who need to understand the sheer scale of expectations.

Sustainability reporting across borders

Some regions of the world are taking stronger action. Regulation is still unfolding, particularly in Europe where there's been no reporting yet under the EU's new Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive. The IFRS has also just released new disclosure standards as a base line to meet capital markets' needs, but individual countries are still considering whether to adopt these.

No one market has really cracked it yet and this variation of standards is contributing to the complexity when it comes to regulation and data capture. As a result, this could account for the increased lack of understanding we're seeing in the barometer this year from leaders and the boost in budgets for reporting expertise.

This is essential to support expansion plans. Organisations entering unknown reporting territories with higher regulation requirements are more likely to get bitten, especially without the support of responsible supply chains to keep them right. Industry-led multistakeholder initiatives are still in the early stages, but these are making a significant difference to creating slick and efficient processes and more consistent, clear standards that organisations can buy into, regardless of where they're based.

Human rights rise up the agenda to meet supply chain requirements

Organisations are expected to capture more data and an area of reporting that's often been overlooked is human rights. Most money, time and energy are still going into understanding, measuring and reporting on climate and carbon impacts, but we can see leaders are trying and taking human rights more seriously. It's the area that shows the biggest jump in the number of respondents confirming challenges with data capture. It's also clear that acceptance is growing in the number of leaders recognising human rights as an area they lack in-house expertise: up from 27% to 37% this year.

Understanding the extent of human rights when it comes to reporting should be a key focus for leaders looking to progress their sustainability goals. Most will already be reporting on the human rights of their own workforce and those of the end consumer. In our experience, many fail to fully consider the human rights of the workers in the organisation's supply chain, as well as the communities impacted by the organisation and its supply chain. We're now seeing a knock-on effect with human rights rising up the agenda to meet supply chain as one of the priority areas of sustainability where C-suite executives are allocating budget.

Expectations are everywhere and businesses are now more conscious of their ESG data needs. So many more stakeholders are asking companies for their position and their progress on sustainability. From regulators and investors to future talent and supply chain, it impacts every area of business and I'd expect these priorities on human rights to continue to increase alongside the general levels of reporting.



Chris Fuggle
Partner & Global Head of
Sustainability Services, Mazars

Chapter six

The new 'laws' of talent attraction

Investing in people means more now than a benefits package and generous salary. Our research shows that competition in the market for talent is set to continue. In response, the C-suite is taking a holistic approach with new or revised strategies that offer more learning and development opportunities to retain and attract the best people which will, in turn, contribute to the long-term growth of their business.



The new 'laws' of talent attraction

The talent shortage is impacting business. This has even bigger ramifications for C-suite executives looking to grow their business internationally. It's likely to take longer and require more investment than it would have in previous years.

Almost half of C-suite executives accept that it's difficult to get people through the door in the first place with 44% saying they struggle to hire talent into their organisation and 39% confirming this as the biggest recruitment challenge overall.

Biggest recruitment challenges

Percentage of respondents

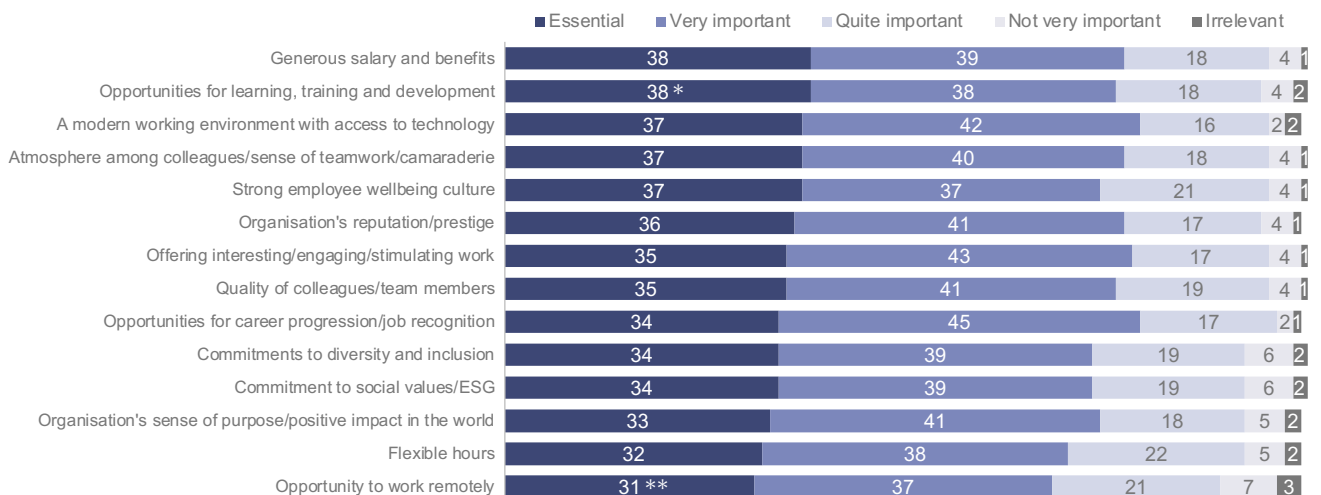


The C-suite is responding, with a new or revised talent attraction/retention strategy in their top five strategic priorities. Opportunities for learning, training and development are considered the most essential factor in attracting talented employees,

alongside generous salaries and benefits, rising significantly in importance from last year. Culture still plays a role with factors including a modern working environment, a sense of teamwork and camaraderie, and wellbeing and culture ranking second equally.

Attracting talented employees

Percentage of respondents



* Last year: 33% ** Last year: 25%

Methodology

Mazars, in partnership with Peter McLeod AS and GQR, surveyed 798 C-suite executives around the world for its 2024 C-suite barometer. The fieldwork was conducted via online panels between 5 September and 21 October 2023. This independent research captures the views of C-suite leaders at for-profit organisations with annual revenues of over US \$1million across over 30 countries.

Respondents were based in Australia, Austria, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Singapore, Switzerland, the UAE, the UK, and the US.

Seniority	Sample
CEO, Chair, Board	554
Other C-suite	242

Revenue band	Sample
\$1m - \$100m	299
\$100m - \$1bn	190
\$1bn+	309

Industry sector (largest shown)	Sample
Financial Services	202
Technology & Telecoms	132
Automotive & Manufacturing	130
Retail & Consumer	92

Global region	Sample
Africa	90
Asia-Pacific	144
Central & Eastern Europe	56
Europe	335
Latin America	61
Middle East	50
North America	62

Global region	Country	Sample	
Africa (n=90)	Botswana	6	
	Côte d'Ivoire	3	
	Mozambique	1	
	Morocco	30	
	Nigeria	20	
	South Africa	30	
Asia-Pacific (n=144)	Australia	20	
	China	63	
	Hong Kong	20	
	Japan	20	
	Singapore	21	
Central & Eastern Europe (n=56)	Austria	10	
	Poland	20	
	Romania	18	
	Slovakia	8	
Europe (n=335)	France	53	
	Germany	52	
	Ireland	12	
	Italy	51	
	Netherlands	52	
	Spain	51	
	Switzerland	10	
	United Kingdom	54	
	Latin America (n=61)	Brazil	20
		Chile	20
Mexico		21	
Middle East (n=50)	Egypt	20	
	Qatar	10	
	United Arab Emirates	20	
North America (n=62)	Canada	12	
	United States of America	50	
Total		798	

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Mazars is an internationally integrated partnership, specialising in audit, accountancy, advisory, tax and legal services*. Operating in over 100 countries and territories around the world, we draw on the expertise of more than 50,000 professionals – 33,000+ in Mazars' integrated partnership and 17,000+ via the Mazars North America Alliance – to assist clients of all sizes at every stage in their development.

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