

Time for action

C-suite barometer 2021



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Foreword

At the end of 2021, we surveyed over 1,000 executives around the world for our annual C-suite barometer. We uncovered a sense of confidence and resilience: with the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the deeply concerning events in Ukraine, these are qualities that are likely to be tested once again this year.

I believe we can only succeed as a business if we listen to our clients. And not only listen, but also understand.

Our C-suite barometer helps us to do this. It enables us to hear the concerns facing our clients, gain first-hand insights into their markets and understand the opportunities and challenges they see ahead. It is only by hearing – and responding effectively – that we demonstrate our ability and our determination to support our clients in responding to these challenges and achieving their objectives.

One of the most notable findings of the 2021 study is the high level of confidence we encountered among businesses towards the end of 2021. I believe there are two main drivers for this. First is the natural sense of relief that the worst impacts of the pandemic seemed to be receding. Second is the resilience that businesses have shown through a uniquely testing time. They have suffered the shock and come through it stronger. With the pandemic's resurgence in some regions and the dramatic and shocking events following the invasion of Ukraine by Russian state troops, which have led to a serious war situation in Europe, this resilience needs to be maintained.

Another interesting finding is around technology and cyber risks. The risk of cyber-crime is growing. Regulations around data security and privacy are also increasing, so it's no surprise to see business leaders are focusing on this area. They must guard against complacency, however. No system is invulnerable. No safeguards unbreachable. The tools available to criminals are ever more sophisticated and, given the crucial role that technology plays in the operations of most business, the potential damage is enormous.

The study shows that environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors are playing an increasingly central role in C-suite decision-making. Nevertheless, there still appears to be a gap between

the intent of businesses to take ESG seriously, and their ability to act on those good intentions today. This is a journey that we, as a firm, are also on. It is one whose destination is still some way off. But we are as committed to meeting our own ESG responsibilities as we are to helping our clients achieve theirs.

Looking ahead, there are some key lessons we can take from this year's survey.

The sense of confidence and resilience that comes through is undoubtedly positive. It's built on the factors outlined earlier, as well as on the financial environment at the end of 2021, such as relatively cheap investment funding. As we look ahead into 2022, the resilience businesses have shown over the past two years is likely to be needed once more.

Competition for talent has intensified as normality returns, particularly with the rise of ESG and people's expectations of how businesses should behave. There is an opportunity to build competitive advantage for businesses that can demonstrate their values and their vision, and who can develop, recruit and empower their people with the right skills.

Finally, there will inevitably be challenges for many businesses over the next 12 months. But challenge brings opportunity. And that's where we can help. At Mazars, we help businesses grow for the long-term. Whether that's through audit services, advisory services, or corporate transactions, we help our clients build businesses that are more resilient, more sustainable and, ultimately, more successful. We look forward to continuing to do this over the months and years ahead.



Mark Kennedy
Partner &
Group Executive Board Member,
Mazars



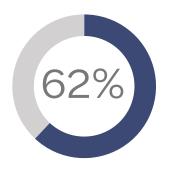
Chapter 1: Transformations ahead

Technology and sustainability top the list

Our research, conducted at the end of 2021, shows leaders expect to transform their business, with technology and sustainability-related transformations being the most likely: nearly two thirds (62%) expect to transform their sustainability strategy in the coming years, second only to technology transformation (68%). Both have increased sharply (+18 percentage points vs 2020) making them clear areas of focus moving forward.



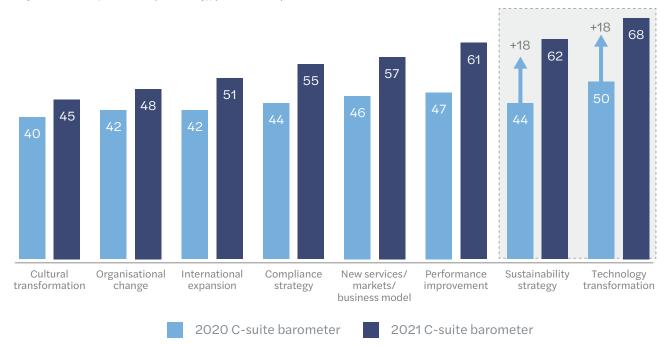
Two thirds expect their business to go through a technology transformation in the next three to five years.



Businesses consider a transformation in their sustainability strategy in the coming three to five years likely.

Transformations in sustainability and technology most likely

Likely to transform (above 50% probability), percent of respondents



Q: How likely is it that your organisation will go through a transformation in each of the following areas during the next 3-5 years? 2021 total, n=1,130; 2020 total, n=540

Chapter 1: Transformations ahead Confidence to respond

At the end of 2021, business leaders reported a high level of confidence in responding to the trends and transformations identified.

Businesses have had to dig deep and show resilience over the past two years: with the impact of the pandemic ongoing and the shocking events in Europe, this resilience will be needed again. Our research suggests those that survived are feeling stronger for it. Some 88% say they are confident they have the resilience to weather a crisis.



An average of 87% of leaders are confident their business can tackle the trends affecting them – an increase of 8 percentage points over last year.



Companies are confident they have the resilience to weather a crisis.



Chapter 1: Transformations ahead Cyber risk

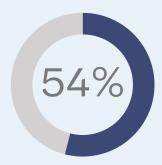
C-suite pulse on cyber risks

Most leaders believe cyber risks have increased over the past year and over a third (35%) expect a significant breach within the next year. Yet, the majority of businesses (68%) remain confident their data is completely protected.

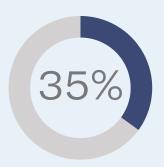
The perceived increase in cyber security risks is highest amongst executives in North America and Europe: 66% and 64% respectively say the risk level has increased in the past year vs 40% in Latin America and 44% in CEE.

Whilst leaders in North America consider the risks to be increasing, they are very confident their data is fully protected (80%).

In the face of increasing cyber risks...



Over half of respondents believe the cyber security risk to their organisation has increased over the past 12 months.



More than a third think a significant data breach in the next 12 months is likely.

...confidence remains high



Over two-thirds are confident their data is completely protected. A further 29% say their data is partially protected.

Cyber risk: resilience as important as protection

Business leaders recognise that data will have a big impact on their business in the coming years and are ramping up their investment, which is a good sign. It also aligns with our recent report on data maturity, which found that businesses see big data as their most important source of growth for the next 10 years.

As our reliance on tech and data increases, however, so too do the risks around cyber security. Most businesses are confident in their ability to manage cyber risks, but cyber security is about more than having the right policies and processes. No policy can protect you if your technology is not up to standard. So, challenge number one is to close the gap between your cyber security policy and processes, and the practical realities of your technology.

Another key challenge is our relationships with third party tech suppliers, like Software as a Service (SaaS) software providers or Cloud hosting platforms. It can be hard to verify their cyber security, which can make businesses more vulnerable to infection or attack, so you need to work closely with your technology partners on security and monitor their systems as well as your own. The importance of monitoring applies to the external context, too, so you are aware of new vulnerabilities that emerge and can update your protection accordingly.

No matter how well protected you are, it's highly likely a cyber attack will affect you eventually. When that happens, you need to have a recovery plan to minimise the disruption and impact on your business. This should include regular data backup, preferably offline, network infrastructure recovery and regular testing of all your IT systems and assets.

Getting all this right will take time and it can be expensive. But only a fraction as expensive as a cyber incident could be to your business.

Jan Matto

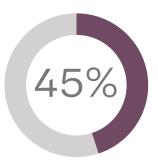
Partner, Mazars

Chapter 2 Harnessing the power of technology

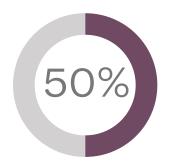


Chapter 2: Harnessing the power of technology

The pandemic showed the world a new way of working, as businesses harnessed technology and adapted to remote working. This will be a major business legacy of the pandemic.

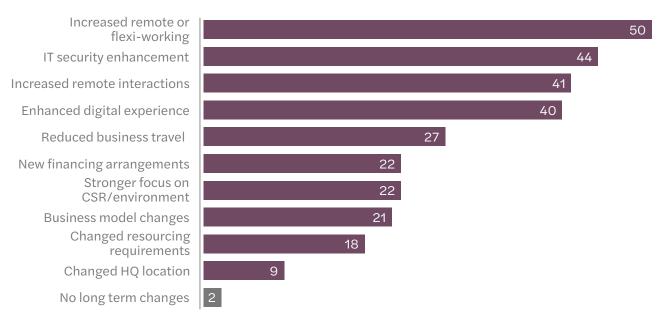


'Adapting to remote working' was the most significant challenge caused by Covid-19: almost half named it in their top three disruptions.



Remote working is here to stay: half expect increased remote or flexi-working to be a long-term change for their business.

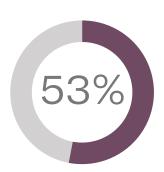
Long-term changes made due to the Covid-19 pandemic Percent of respondents



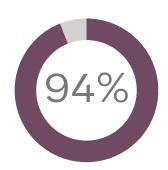
Q: Select the three most important changes (from list) that your organisation has made, which will remain in place in your business over the long-term. Total, n=1,130

Chapter 2: Harnessing the power of technology

Leaders expect trends in technology/innovation to have the biggest impact on their business in the coming years: they are confident they can respond and are planning to increase investment in IT systems.



Technology trends are firmly on executives' radars: over half expect technology/innovation trends to have a major impact on their business in the next three to five years.



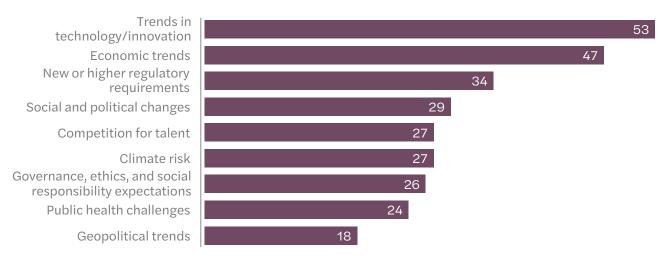
Trends in technology/ innovation are expected to impact businesses the most, but nearly every leader is confident their business can respond.



Leaders are prioritising IT: 82% plan to increase investment in maintaining and evolving IT systems.

Trends that will have biggest impacts

Percent of respondents



Q: Which of the following trends do you expect to have the biggest impact on your business in the next 3-5 years? Please select up to three trends that you expect to have the biggest impact. Total, n=1,130.

Chapter 2: Harnessing the power of technology

Tech is at the core of business growth

Tech has been a priority focus for businesses for many years, and it's likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. That's partly because we are living in a digital revolution, and the revolution is far from over. It also reflects the fact that the majority of clients and consumers expect to be able to interact with all organisations in a digital way. This means that for most businesses, if you don't exist in the digital ecosystem, you don't exist, period. So, organisations need to keep focusing on tech if they don't want to get left behind.

What does this mean for our clients? I see three key issues that need to be addressed:

- There is a war for tech talent. There is only a finite pool of people that truly understand what digital transformation is and how to successfully achieve this in a particular industry. The demand for those people is much greater than the supply and will remain so for the foreseeable future.
- Get tech into the boardroom. If you look at the makeup of many boards, including nonexecutive directors, there tend to be very few

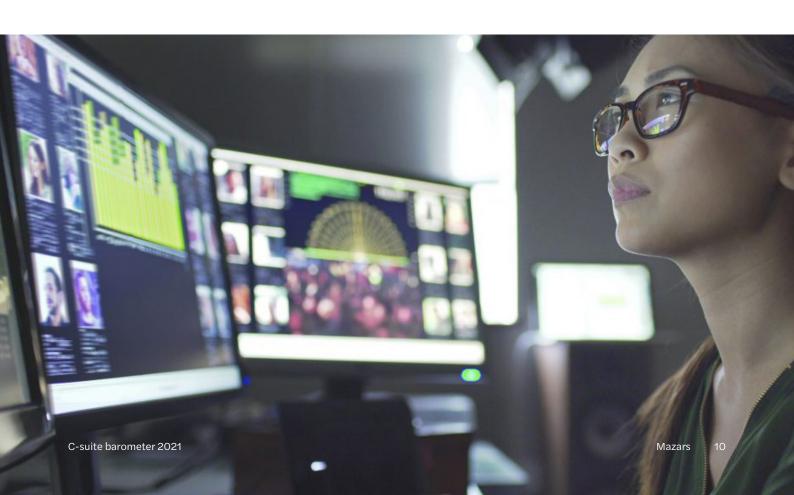
technologists. But without this skillset at the highest level, how do you know what you are looking for and steer the organisation in the right direction? How can you challenge those leading your tech delivery to ensure your investment is well spent?

 Recognise digital opportunities and risks and develop strategies for them. You need a digital strategy that sets out how you address the opportunities around digital transformation.
 But with transformation comes risk, specifically in this case, cyber risks. So, as well as a digital strategy, you need a cyber security strategy to address the risks around going digital.

If you compare the list of the world's largest companies 20 years ago to today, it's clear how important tech has become as a driver of business growth. There are huge opportunities for those companies that get it right and those that get it wrong, risk becoming obsolete.

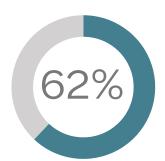
Asam Malik

Partner, Technology & Digital Consulting, Mazars

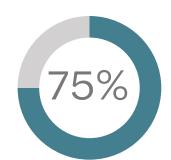




ESG (environmental, social and governance) is now a clear priority for the C-suite: they expect to transform their sustainability strategy. Most – particularly large businesses – say Covid-19 sharpened their focus on ESG; three-quarters plan to increase investment in sustainability initiatives and most have made public commitments on a range of ESG issues.



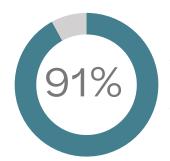
Businesses consider a transformation in their sustainability strategy in the coming three to five years likely – an 18-point increase vs 2020.



Three quarters plan to increase investment in sustainability initiatives over the next 12 months – a 27-point increase.



Most (58%) say Covid-19 has sharpened their focus on ESG: in large companies (\$1bn+revenue) 70% say this has increased.



Businesses are confident tackling trends: 91% are confident they can respond to expectations for governance, ethics and social responsibility.

ESG at the heart of the boardroom

It's no surprise to see such a big increase in the proportion of businesses planning to transform their sustainability strategy in the next three-to-five years.

Sustainability has shot up the agenda over the past year or so. This is partly due to the impact of Covid-19 on business strategies and operating models, but it also reflects the explosion of awareness, concern and expectation across society as a whole. ESG is not just a marketing initiative, or even a regulatory compliance issue, it has become a core boardroom issue that needs to be embedded into every aspect of the business.

The big challenge is to turn the intentions and commitments reflected in our C-suite barometer into achievable strategies. We work with clients in all sectors to place sustainability at the centre of their business. Starting with our ESG 'health check', we work with them to identify the ESG risks and opportunities across their business and, crucially,

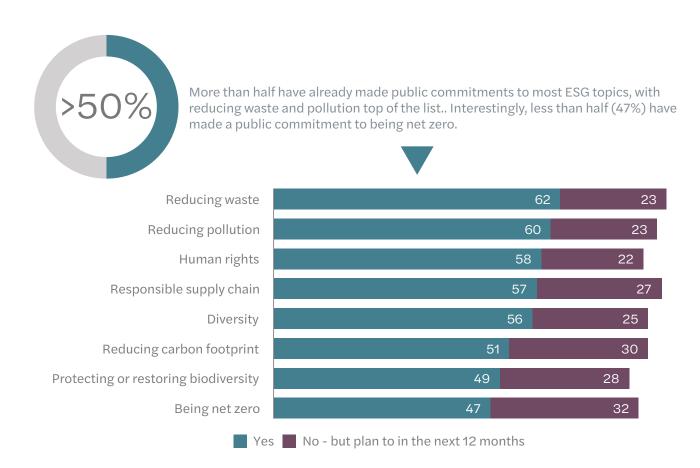
throughout the value chain. From there, they can narrow them down to focus on the three or four areas with the greatest potential business impact.

Data collection is often an issue – and is another area we often help with – but with priorities set and the baseline data in place, improving the ESG metrics becomes a regular business change project, with the same kinds of processes, like governance, organisation, training and engagement, resourcing, monitoring and review.

The critical element is building that understanding in the C-suite, embedding it in the core business strategy, and having a plan that you follow through on a daily basis. You also need to recognise that this isn't a quick fix. It's going to be a five- to tenyear journey for everyone. The important thing is to get started.

Chris Fuggle

Partner, Global Co-Head of Sustainability, Mazars



Q: Have you made public commitments related to the following ESG topics? Total, n=1,130

Commitments reflect the long-term realities of ESG

The fact that reducing waste and pollution are the top two areas of existing commitments made, ahead of things like being net zero or reducing the carbon footprint, is on the surface a little surprising. Particularly given the wall-to-wall media coverage of net zero and climate change leading up to the COP26 summit in Glasgow last autumn.

However, I think this can be explained by the fact that waste and pollution could be seen as 'easier' challenges to commit to and to act on. Committing to, never mind achieving, net zero and meaningful carbon reduction requires a lot of effort, a lot of planning and a lot of investment. It's good to see that businesses understand this complexity and are not making commitments lightly. This is also borne out by the fact that, when asked about their future ESG commitments, net zero and carbon reduction were

the top two choices. This suggests that businesses not only recognise their importance, but also the scale of the preparatory work they need to undertake before making commitments in these areas.

In terms of the most important reasons for ESG investment, it's encouraging that almost half of respondents see it as critical to long-term growth, the second highest choice. It's unlikely this figure would have been so high even just a couple of years ago. Again, I think this illustrates that business leaders recognise the scale of the transition they need to go through. But they don't need to do it alone. We advise clients to work hand in hand, not only across their own organisation, but with peers and competitors, too, to share ideas, experience and best practices. It's a journey we are all on together.

Maud Gaudry

Partner, Global Co-Head of Sustainability, Mazars

Why do businesses invest in ESG?

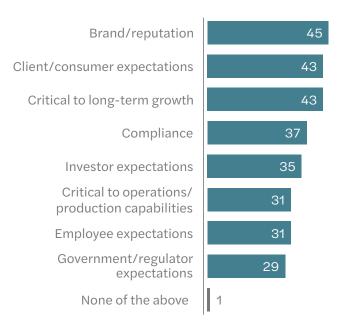
Brand/reputation tops the list of reasons for companies to invest in ESG, closely followed by client/customer expectations and ESG being critical to long-term growth.

Nearly half (46%) of large companies (\$1bn+revenue) and 43% overall see ESG as essential to their long-term growth. It is the top or joint-top reason to invest in ESG in Europe, CEE and Asia-Pacific.

Funding and complexity are considered the most significant barriers to ESG investment. This is particularly true for smaller companies (\$1m - \$100m): 58% are held back by funding and 54% by complexity vs 45% and 46% respectively for large businesses (\$1bn+).

Most important reasons for ESG investment

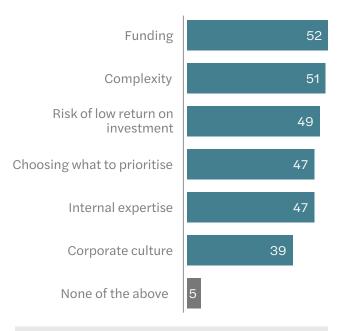
Percent of respondents



Q: Which three of the following are the most important reasons to invest in responses to ESG issues? Total, n=1,130

Most significant barriers to ESG investment

Percent of respondents



Q: What are the most significant barriers to your organisation investing in responses to ESG issues? Total, n=1,130 $\,$

Sustainability reporting

The majority of businesses produce a sustainability report, and a further 25% say they plan to in the coming 12 months.

Sustainability reporting

Whether company produces a report, percent of respondents

Yes

No - but we plan to within the coming 12 months

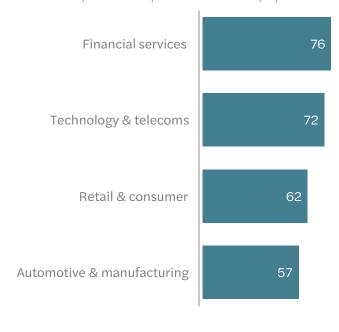
No - and we do not plan to in the coming 12 months

Don't know

Large companies are more likely to report on sustainability than small companies, and financial services leads the way with over three quarters producing a sustainability report.

Sustainability reporting by industry sector

Percent of respondents that produce a sustainability report

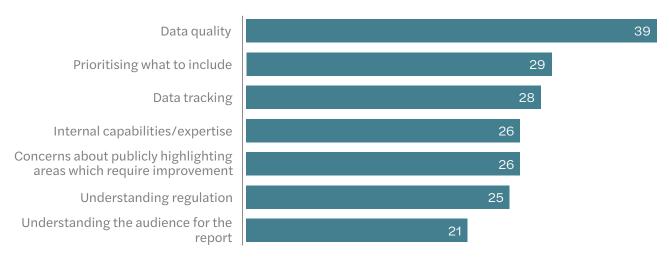


Does your company produce a sustainability report?

Total, n=1,130. Financial services, n=219; Technology & telecoms, n=178; Retail & consumer, n=149; Automotive & manufacturing, n=166

Challenges in producing sustainability reports

Percent of respondents, companies who produce a report



What challenges does your organisation face when producing its sustainability report? Please choose the two biggest challenges. Organisation produces sustainability report, n=717.



Businesses are moving into a post-pandemic future with a greater sense of confidence and resilience. Our research shows steps are being taken and momentum is building. With around three quarters either currently focusing on a range of ESG topics, or planning to within the coming year, we uncover the topics getting the most attention.

ESG areas of focus, now and in the coming year:

Environmental

Energy efficiency tops the list (81%)

Regional insight

Energy efficiency is a relatively higher focus in Latin America; Europe and Asia-Pacific place the most emphasis on reducing their carbon footprint.

Social

Health and safety (84%), employee wellbeing and worklife balance (84%) and labour conditions (82%)

Regional insight

Equal opportunities is a relatively higher focus in Latin America. Europe places a relatively high priority on work-life balance.

Governance

Compliance (83%), transparency (83%), responsible tax behaviour (82%)

Regional insight

Businesses in Africa and the Middle East have the strongest focus on anti-corruption, making it the highest governance priority there (88% focus now or within 12 months).

Considering the transformations expected, investments planned, and public commitments made on ESG, businesses must shift from planning to implementation if they want to live up to promises. Now is the time for action.

Businesses expect to transform their sustainability strategy and boost investment in sustainability initiatives, but is this enough? Executives are planning to increase investment in many areas: sustainability initiatives are just one of many and may not receive the focus needed.

Where environmental issues are concerned, businesses have committed to reducing waste (62%) and pollution (60%) while only 49% and 47% respectively have made those topics a strong current focus.

Businesses appear to be more advanced in terms of action on social issues: 55% say human rights are a strong current focus, and 51% are focused on D&I.

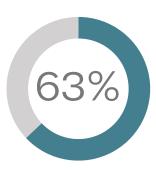
It seems that businesses have begun their ESG journey, but to turn strategy into action, there are important steps that most still need to take, to accelerate their transformation.

Do organisations have the leadership skills they need to achieve their aspirations?

Our study shows that the C-suite believe they have the skills they will need: some 88% say they have either all (40%) or most (48%) of the skills they need to weather the next three to five years.



Most leaders believe their leadership team has the skills their organisation needs for the next three to five years.



Nearly two thirds (63%) of executives say Covid-19 has changed the future leadership styles their organisation needs.

Regional insight

Although all regions display high confidence, the region with most businesses seeking to add skills to their leadership team is Asia Pacific, where 17% indicate they lack at least some key skills.

Different regions of the world vary somewhat in the skills they value most in leaders. In particular, the top skills by region include:

- Asia Pacific: Analytical thinking and problem solving
- CEE/CIS: Analytical thinking and problem solving and ability to make tough decisions.
- Latin America: Analytical thinking and problem solving and ability to make tough decisions.
- Europe: Innovation and creativity.

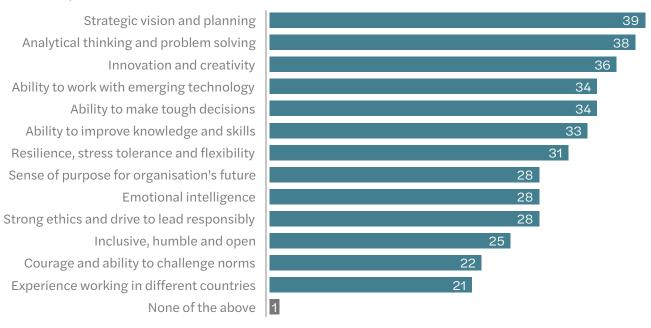


Our study reveals the most important leadership skills and qualities the C-suite believe they need for the coming three to five years are:

- 1. Strategic vision and planning;
- 2. Analytical thinking and problem solving;
- 3. Innovation and creativity.

Just as leaders expect to undergo a sustainability transformation and recognise they need to nurture new leadership styles, it's interesting to note that many still appear to value traditional leadership qualities over more progressive ones: qualities such as a sense of purpose, emotional intelligence, strong ethics and drive to lead responsibly and inclusively, as well as humility and open-mindedness, appear lower down the list.

Most important leadership skills to meet the challenges ahead Percent of respondents



Q: Which of the following skills and qualities are the most important for a leader in your organisation to have, in order to meet the challenges you expect to face over the coming 3-5 years? Select the four you consider the most important. Total, n=1,130

Zoom: Leadership skills

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of executives say the pandemic changed the types of leadership styles their organisation needs for the next three to five years.

With technology identified as the biggest external trend and the main driver of transformations in business, it makes sense to see this reflected in the leadership skills businesses feel they need in the years ahead: working with emerging technologies is considered one of the top five leadership skills particularly in large organisations.

However, softer skills don't appear to be so highly valued – perhaps surprising considering the focus on ESG.

- Despite the relevance of sustainability, a "sense of purpose for the organisation's future" and "strong ethics and drive to lead responsibility" are in the bottom half of the table.
- Although employee wellbeing is important for many businesses, "emotional intelligence" and being "inclusive, humble and open" were considered less important skills for leaders to have.

Zoom: Time to focus on employees

Executives plan to increase investment – of time, money and other resources – in sourcing new talent. It is one of the top three areas of increase.

Attracting and retaining top talent can be challenging and businesses need to understand what employees value today. Considering the social areas of focus within ESG, it seems businesses are prioritising people, focusing their attention on health and safety and employee wellbeing and work-life balance.

When asked about diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives, leaders are putting employees front and centre. Of the list of D&I initiatives that are current focus areas, employee mental health and wellbeing, work-life balance, and gender diversity top the bill.

Regionally, D&I focus varies. In Latin America, there is a much stronger focus on disabilities (65% have a dedicated programme vs 43% globally). Sexual orientation and gender identity also comes into sharper focus in Latin America with 47% claiming to have a programme dedicated to this issue vs 34% globally. And in North America, half (50%) have dedicated gender and sexism programmes, vs the global average of 41%.

"As businesses prepare for the changes ahead, they mustn't overlook the importance of people. Businesses that can demonstrate their values through their actions and their programmes, and in doing so, attract, retain and develop the best people, will be at a considerable advantage."

Mark Kennedy

Partner & Group Executive Board Member, Mazars



Five key takeaways

Our C-suite barometer showed leaders were confident at the end of 2021. And that's a good thing. Confidence means expansion, development, investment. But it also brings with it some key challenges and opportunities that businesses need to consider in achieving their objectives over the next few years, particularly in light of the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the dramatic events in Europe.

1. Invest in leadership and skills

Making the most of new opportunities and successfully executing your growth plans is dependent on having the right people with the right skills to lead these changes. Businesses need to invest in the next generation of leaders and ensure they have the necessary competencies to deliver in a continually evolving environment. Not just technical management skills, but also the softer skills that mark out truly effective leaders. This is especially true in privately-owned businesses, where resources are scarcer and the existing talent pool is perhaps not as deep as in larger and listed businesses.

2. Embed ESG in the boardroom

ESG needs to be front and centre in the boardroom. It's not only about making the current business ESG-compliant, but thinking long-term about how the entire business might need to adapt to ESG factors, particularly in privately-owned businesses that have historically not had to consider ESG factors to the same extent as larger PLCs.

3. Define your ESG data collection and reporting priorities

For both regulated and non-regulated businesses, there is an emerging global ESG framework against which you'll be assessed. It's therefore essential to ensure all your professional advisors – accountants, actuaries, auditors and so on – are on the same page in terms of developing the data collection and reporting streams to enable that, because that's how the world will assess your business in future.

4. Focus on cyber security

Cyber security is getting ever more complex and the risks ever greater. For most businesses, it's not a question of if you will suffer a cyberattack but when. It can cause huge damage, not just reputationally, but also commercially and financially. Businesses need to ensure they are as robust and resilient as possible to withstand cyber threats. Again, without the resources or depth of expertise as listed businesses, privately-owned businesses need to pay particular attention to protecting themselves from cyber security risks.

5. Don't be caught out by regulatory changes

The role of businesses in society and people's expectations of how businesses should behave has changed enormously in the past few years. ESG is part of that, but also other issues such as corporate failures, taxation, privacy and more. The regulatory environment is continually developing to reflect these changes. Companies that do best in the longrun will be those that can negotiate and manage this fast-changing regulatory landscape.

Ultimately, the message of the 2021 C-suite barometer is one of positivity. After two years of uncertainty, C-suite leaders have shown the confidence and resilience to survive and to thrive: qualities that are likely to be tested once again in 2022. Those that win out in the marketplace, will be those who are best able to maintain that positivity and turn it into action over the next 12 months.

Methodology

The Mazars C-suite barometer was designed and conducted by GQR Research, in collaboration with Mazars. The data was gathered via an online survey between 24 September 2021 and 25 October 2021. The total sample is N=1,130, with 1096 sourced from online panels and 34 invited via email directly from Mazars.

Ukraine

Job role		Industry	Annual revenue (USD)		
CEO, Chairman, Board	706	Financial Services	219	\$1m-\$100m	432
Other C-suite executive	423	Technology & Telecoms	178	\$100m - \$1bn	350
		Retail & Consumer Products	149	\$1bn+	348
		Automotive & Manufacturing	166		

Region	Country	Samp	le	Region	Country	Sampl	le
	Egypt	20	135	North America	Canada	53	108
	Kenya	20			United States of America	55	
Africa &	Morocco	20		Latin America	Argentina	10	171
Middle East	Nigeria	20			Brazil	25	
	South Africa	35			Chile	29	
	United Arab Emirates	20			Colombia	30	
	Australia	23	198		Mexico	72	
	China	20			Uruguay	5	
	Hong Kong	20			France	50	354
	Indonesia	20		Europe	Germany	60	
Asia-Pacific	Japan	20			Ireland	15	
	Malaysia	15			Italy	53	
	Philippines	20			Netherlands	51	
	Singapore	20			Spain	50	
	South Korea	20			Switzerland	22	
	Vietnam	20			United Kingdom	50	
	Austria	9	164		Turkey	3	
	Poland	36		Total	39 countries	1,130	
Central & Eastern	Romania	48					
Europe	Russia	43					
	Slovakia	12					

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