PwC's 29th Global CEO Survey: Africa perspective

Navigating disruption through reinvention

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From the desk of the Territory Senior Partner

Navigating disruption through reinvention

Business leaders in Africa have proven adept at navigating volatility. However, future-focused transformation needs to be prioritised alongside immediate operational demands.

CEOs are being asked to lead through more uncertainty than ever. They need a microscope to manage immediate threats—and a telescope to spot the opportunities ahead. But are CEOs striking that balance?

Our latest CEO Survey, capturing insights from over 4,400 CEOs globally including more than 150 in Africa, reveals an interesting pattern. While global confidence wavers, CEOs in Africa continue to demonstrate remarkable optimism that is grounded in their operational resilience—through years of navigating currency fluctuations, political uncertainty, infrastructure challenges, and supply chain disruptions—they often focus on strengthening existing positions while opportunities to reshape their businesses future is recognised but can be outweighed by short-term priorities.

Global megatrends are accelerating the need for businesses in Africa to shift from reactive operational management to proactive strategic transformation. Technology and AI are reshaping competitive landscapes, geopolitical uncertainty is creating new risks and opportunities, and climate change is fundamentally altering business models—creating **new domains of growth** and shifting industries.

Reinvention isn't an option—it's an imperative.

Dion Shango

Territory Senior Partner for PwC Africa

The central paradox: Optimism without transformation

Africa's CEOs are optimistic. Most expect economic conditions to improve, both globally (65%) and in their own markets (81%). Nearly half (47%) are confident about their revenue growth over the next year—a figure that holds steady over the next three. They also trust their ability to see disruption coming (39%) and respond effectively when it does (45%), outpacing the global average on both counts.

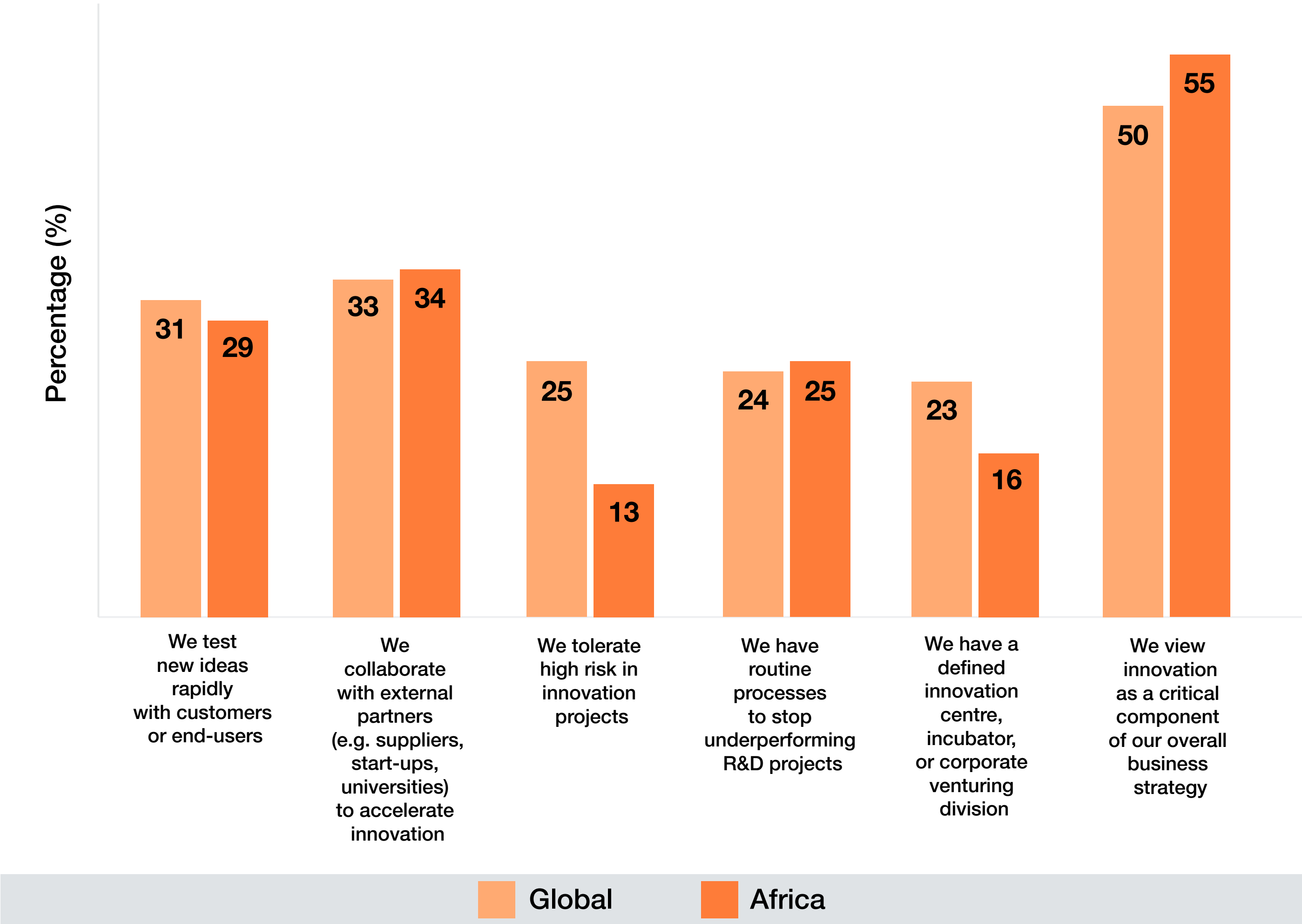
However, when it comes to strategic decision making, most CEOs are prioritising stability over transformation.

Operational mastery with an opportunity cost

This caution shows up clearly in how CEOs approach innovation. 55% say innovation is critical to their overall business strategy—yet the data suggest otherwise:

- 13% are willing to tolerate high risk in innovation projects.
- 16% have a dedicated innovation centre or incubator.
- 25% have processes to stop underperforming research and development projects.
- 29% test new ideas rapidly with customers or end-users.

To what extent do each of the following statements characterise your company's approach to innovation?



Without dedicated structures, risk appetite, rapid feedback loops, and the discipline to stop what isn't working, innovation remains reactive rather than embedded.

To move from ambition to action, leaders should focus on a few key shifts:

1. Reposition innovation as a growth engine, not an efficiency tool.
2. Create dedicated spaces and resources for transformative ideas.
3. Define two to three future growth themes and concentrate innovation efforts around them.

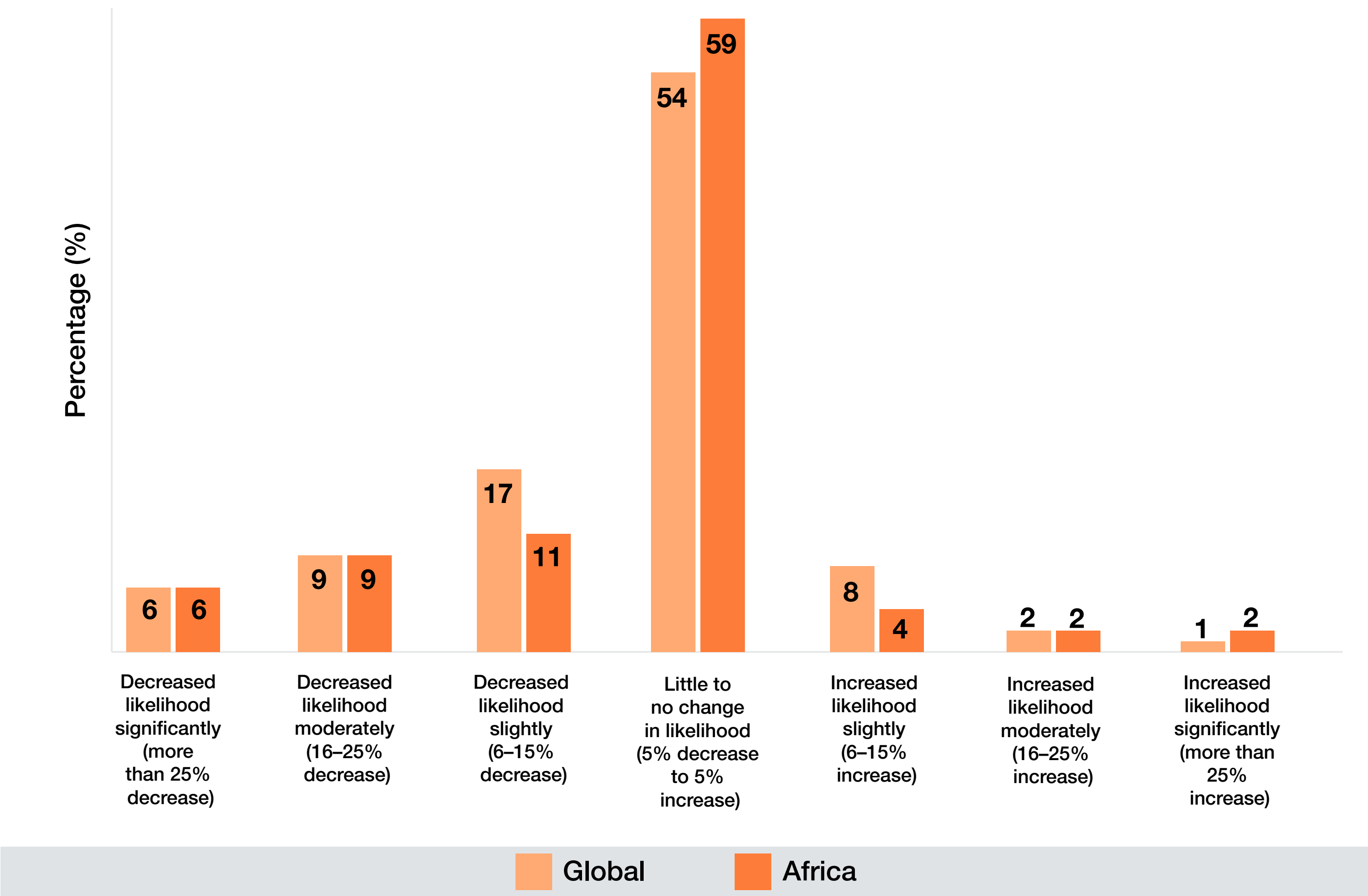
"Innovation is a powerful engine for sustainable success. Leaders who recognise the importance of building the right foundation and creating conditions where transformative ideas can flourish are the ones who move from vision to results."

Olusegun Zaccheaus, West Africa Strategy& Leader, PwC Nigeria

The defensive investment dilemma

The same pattern plays out in investment decisions. 59% of CEOs indicated little to no change in investment likelihood, while 26% actually decreased their likelihood to invest, leaving only 8% willing to increase large investments despite geopolitical uncertainty. While protecting and safeguarding existing operations is important, businesses cannot pause reinvention waiting for uncertainty to subside. Leaders need to continue creating opportunities through decisive investment decisions that position their businesses for future growth.

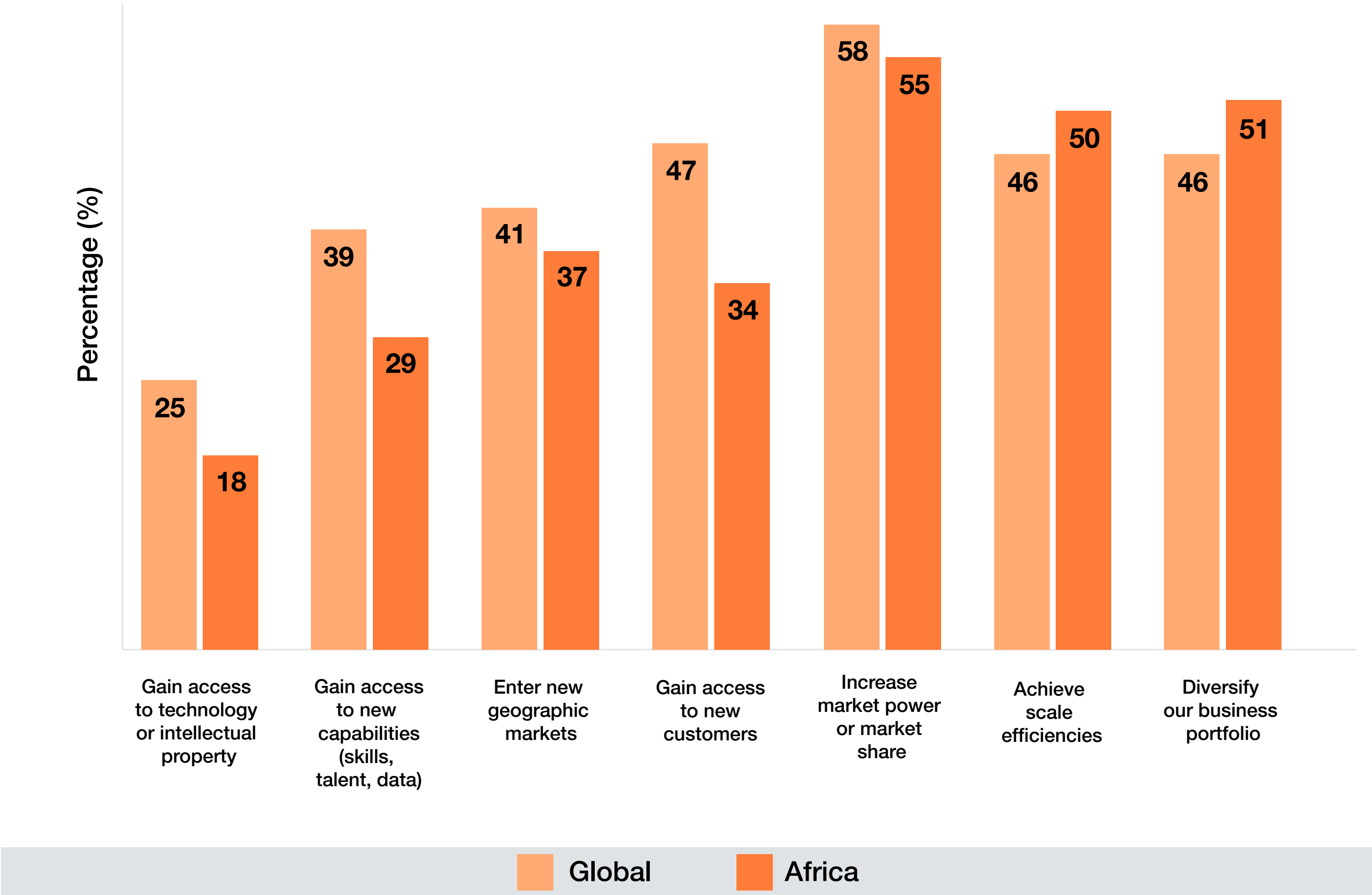
Compared to last year (2024), how has geopolitical uncertainty (including tariffs) impacted your company's likelihood of making new, large investments?



This pattern extends to acquisition strategies as well. Only 40% are actively planning to pursue growth through acquisition within the next three years, compared to 46% globally. When acquisitions do occur, they target sensible objectives: increasing market share (55%), achieving scale efficiencies (50%), and diversifying portfolios (51%). These are positive indicators of strategic intent, yet because investment likelihood remains static or declining, these acquisition rates will likely remain muted.

Despite the fact that CEOs recognise valuable strategic opportunities, if their investment appetite remains unchanged, these numbers won't translate into the transformational growth that Africa's businesses need. Strategic acquisitions offer pathways to accelerate innovation through cutting-edge technology, intellectual property, and specialised capabilities—growth trajectories that would otherwise take years to develop organically.

Which of the following statements describe your company's motivations for undertaking these acquisitions?



When asked about time allocation, 51% of CEOs stated that they spend their time on activities with horizons of less than one year, while 15% direct their time toward planning five years out. This can pose a risk, as leaderships' attention is focused on operational execution rather than the strategic work that reinvention requires.

Rebalancing requires structural change:

- Long-term strategy should be institutionalised through regular, structured forums rather than one-off annual retreats.
- Second-line leaders should be empowered with clearer decision rights and greater autonomy, freeing senior capacity from day-to-day firefighting.
- Future-focused metrics need to sit alongside operational KPIs, ensuring that transformation receives sustained attention and not just stated intent.

Without these structural changes, operational excellence will continue to dominate. Organisations will remain well run for today—efficient, resilient, and responsive to immediate challenges. But they will be underprepared for tomorrow.

"The leaders who build enduring businesses are those who find a way to both protect their core business while creating its future. That balance is not optional—it is the defining leadership challenge of this era."

Lullu Krugel, Chief Economist and Sustainability Leader, PwC South Africa

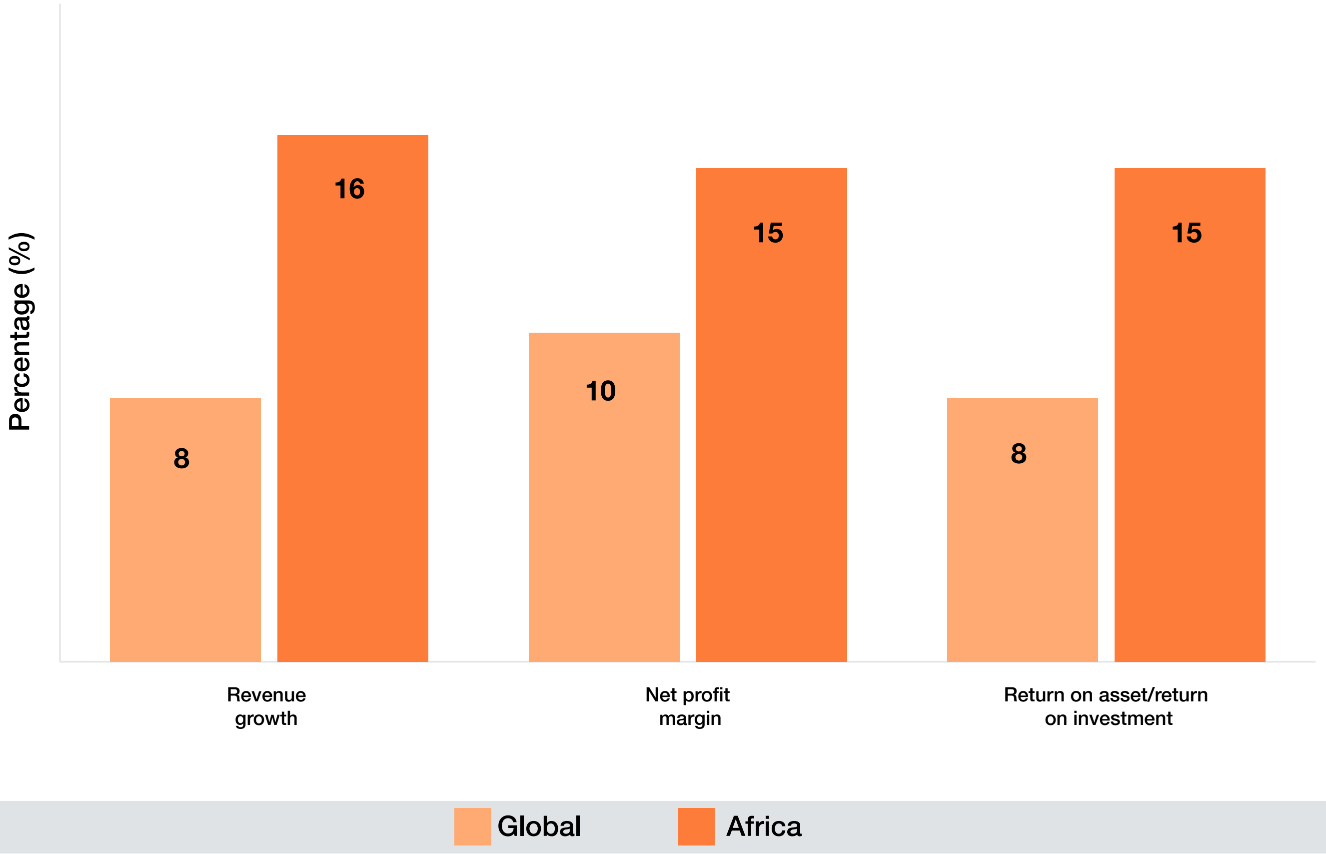
Measured diversification, untapped potential

Although the data reveals that CEOs focus on near-term pressure and less on long term opportunities, over the past five years, 34% of CEOs have been competing in new sectors, with 24% of their revenue now derived from these newer ventures. Growth sectors targeted by CEOs reflect strong demographic and digital trends—with technology leading at 17% of planned expansion efforts, followed by real estate (13%), retail (13%), and transport and logistics (12%).

This diversification success raises a compelling question: if CEOs in Africa can achieve above-target diversification while maintaining strong core performance—higher revenue growth (16% vs 8% globally), better net profit margins (15% vs 10% globally), and stronger returns on assets (15% vs 8% globally)—then CEOs can leverage off this proven capability to achieve long term reinvention goals.

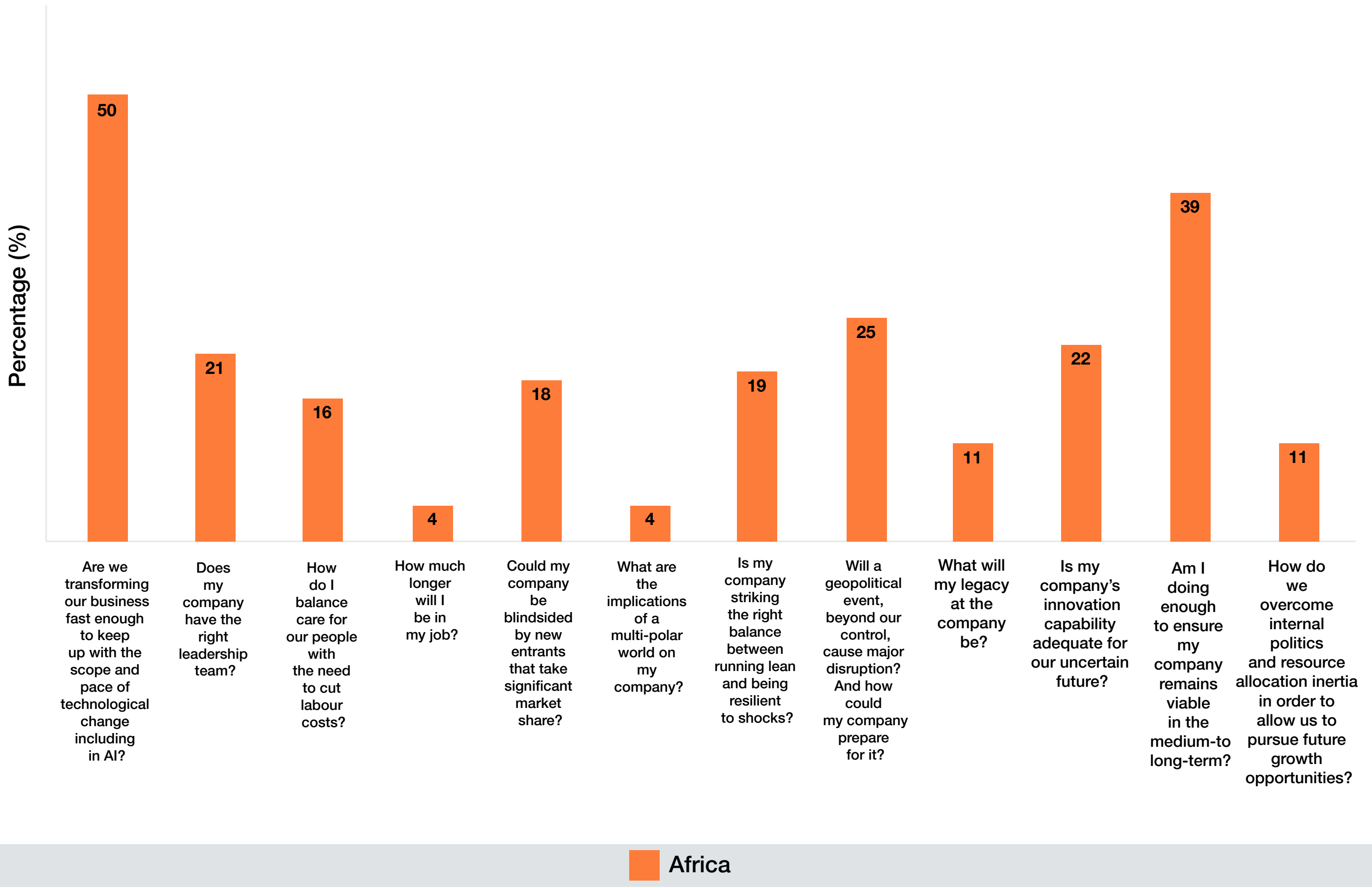
Leaders need to understand that their responsibility extends beyond their own term—ensuring their businesses are positioned for success decades into the future.

What was your company's revenue growth, net profit, and return on investment/ equity for the most recently completed fiscal year?



When asked about what concerns them the most, 50% of CEOs indicated that transforming fast enough to keep up with technological change was top of mind. This was followed by 39% questioning whether they're doing enough to ensure the medium- to long-term viability of their organisations. This opens the opportunity to translate concern into action.

What is the question that concerns you most these days?



On the African continent, markets are accustomed to volatility. This creates the opportunity for organisations to build resilience by pivoting quickly from one issue to the next. This could, unintentionally result in the de-prioritisation of long-term strategies. Additionally, frequent shifts can dilute clarity, making it harder for leaders to drive the transformational changes that are genuinely needed. Reinvention requires that risk management becomes a lever for strategic advantage—not a parallel, compliance-driven activity.

"The central tension becomes clear: Africa's CEOs have developed remarkable resilience and operational excellence, yet their current cautious investment approach and risk-averse innovation stance can limit their ability to capitalise on transformative opportunities. The evidence is consistent: companies that continuously reinvent outperform those that don't. Operational strength alone is not enough—it must translate into bolder transformation."

Olufemi Osinubi, Consulting and Risk Services Leader, PwC Nigeria

AI adoption reveals the reinvention challenge

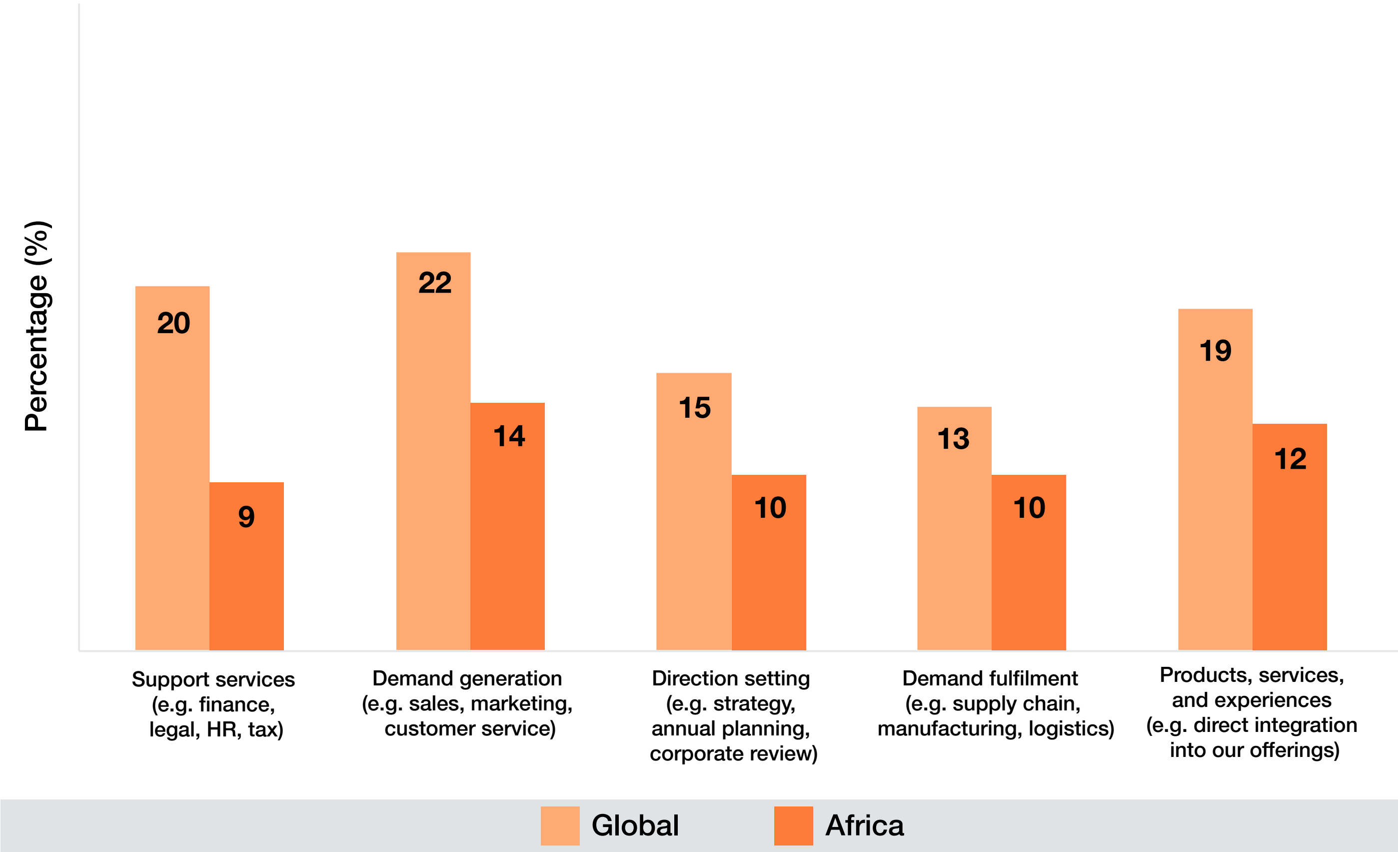
The implementation gap

AI dominates boardroom discussions across Africa. While leaders recognise its strategic importance, complex market dynamics make transformative implementation a significant challenge.

Despite cloud adoption rates that match the broader EMEA region, businesses in Africa have been slow to modernise their underlying infrastructure. Many organisations have executed basic "lift and shift" migrations but stopped short of meaningful re-platforming—the critical step of optimising applications for cloud-native capabilities. Without re-platforming legacy systems to take advantage of modern database engines, containerisation, and cloud-native services, businesses lack the scalable foundation essential for AI deployment.

Africa's CEOs are lagging their global peers in actual AI deployment across all business functions, signalling a pace of digital transformation that threatens to widen competitive gaps rather than close them. The pressure is increasingly top line.

To what extent has AI been applied in the following areas of your business?



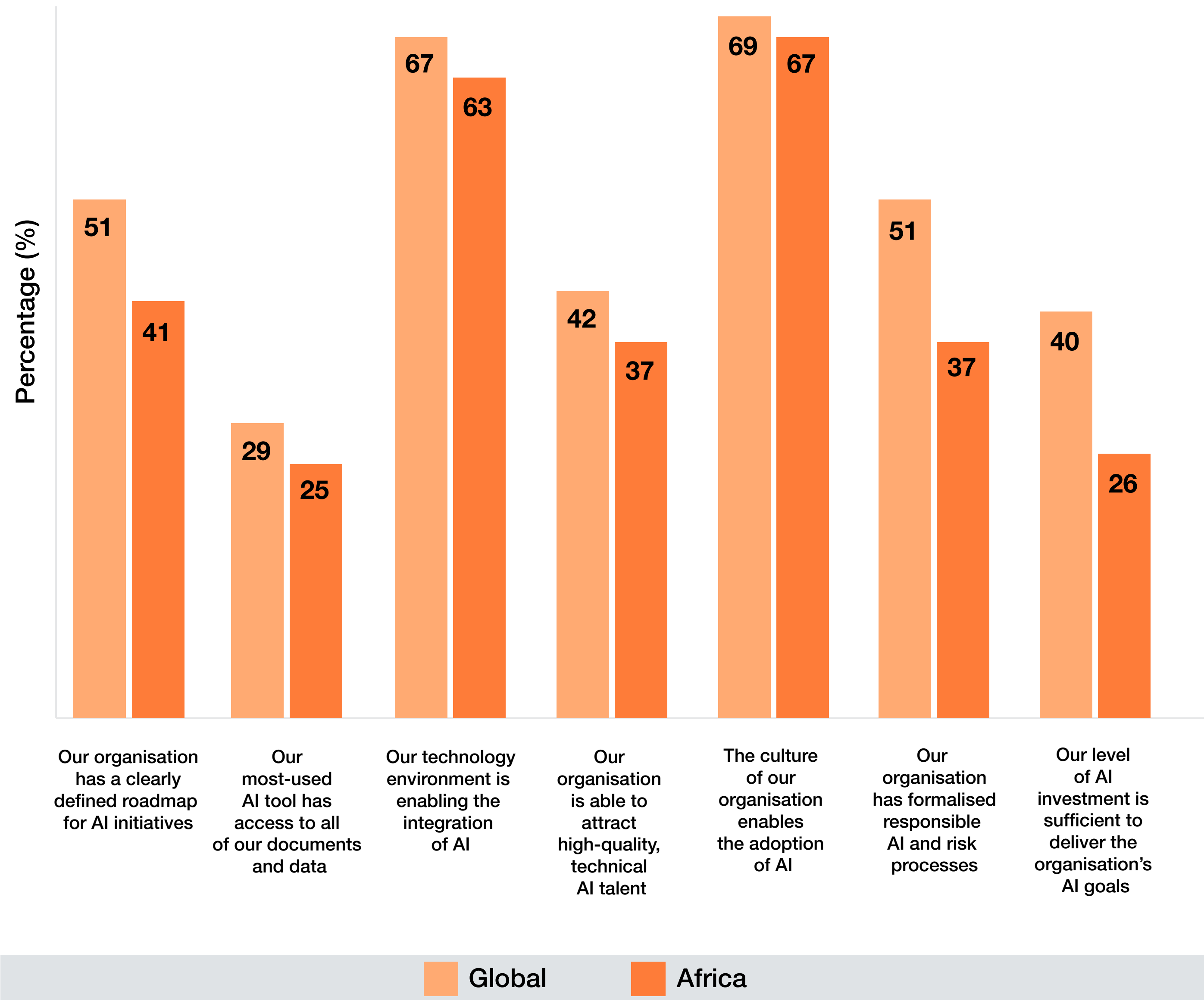
This implementation gap reflects deeper structural constraints. Skills availability remains a persistent barrier, with only 37% of CEOs citing that they are able to find and retain the talent needed to drive AI initiatives. The talent pipeline exists, but competition for skilled professionals is intensifying globally, making local retention harder.

Cost compounds the difficulty. Foreign exchange pressures make capital-intensive technology investments harder to sustain.
Cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity, and AI are deeply interconnected: without robust, scalable cloud environments, deploying AI securely and at scale becomes significantly more difficult. Unlike regions such as Europe and the Middle East—where localised data centres and sovereign cloud infrastructure are increasingly the norm—Africa's cloud ecosystem remains largely dependent on global hyperscalers, adding cost, latency, and data sovereignty concerns to an already complex investment equation.

The AI execution challenge

While CEOs indicate that their technology environment enables AI integration and that their business culture supports AI adoption, the planning gap reveals multiple dimensions of the challenge. Only 41% have developed clearly defined roadmaps for AI initiatives, only 37% have formalised responsible AI and risk processes, and just 26% state that their level of investment is sufficient to deliver their businesses AI goals.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to AI use at your company?



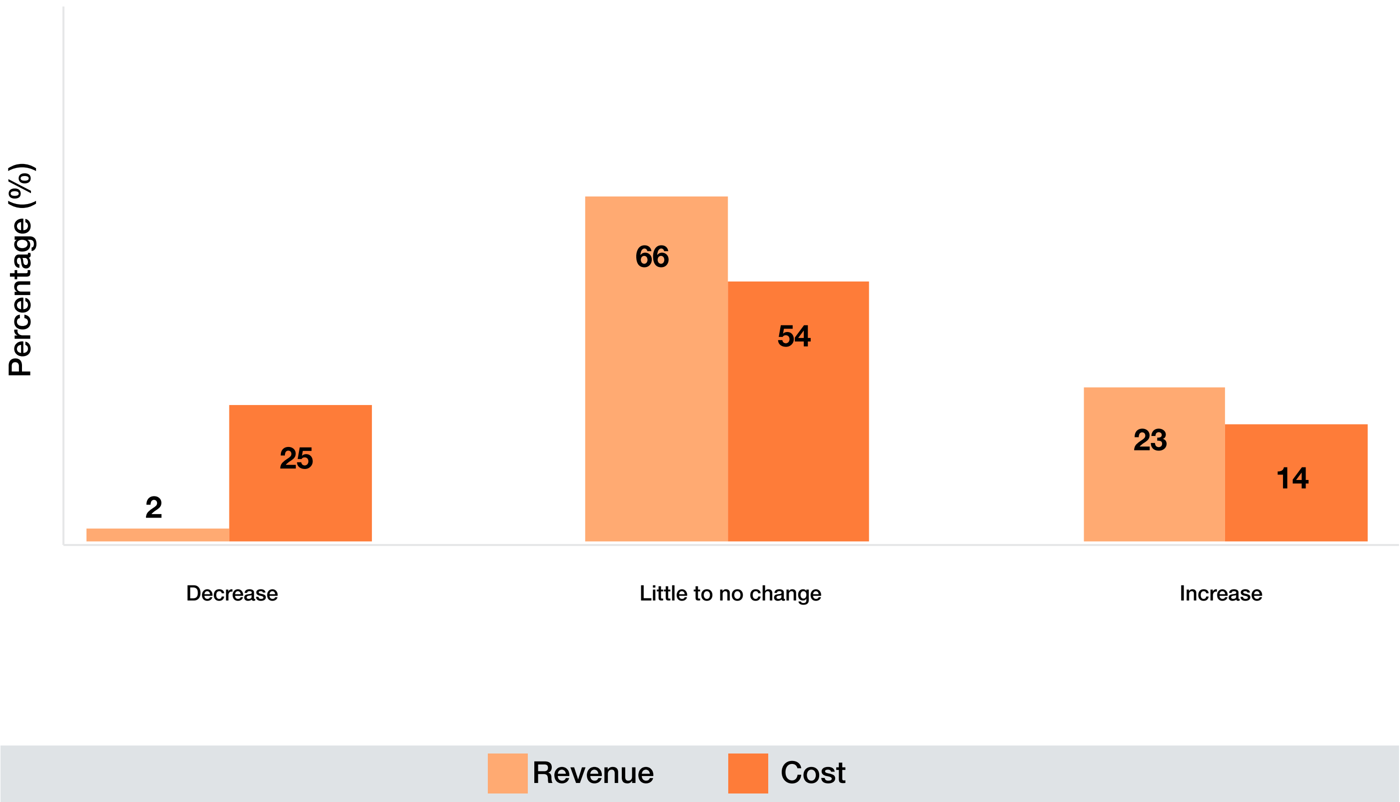
"The challenge is fundamentally a governance deficit rather than a lack of ambition. When cloud environments remain fragmented, data governance unclear, and cybersecurity frameworks still developing, building a coherent AI roadmap becomes exponentially harder. AI depends on trusted data, secure infrastructure, and clear accountability. Without these foundations, strategic planning defaults to tactical experimentation rather than enterprise-wide transformation."

Vikas Sharma, Africa Cyber Leader, PwC Mauritius

The competitive positioning question

The results validate AI's immediate utility: 23% of Africa's CEOs who have invested in AI report revenue increases and 25% achieved cost reductions over the past year. These outcomes demonstrate that AI investments are delivering measurable value.

In the last 12 months what impact did AI have on your company's cost and revenue?



The critical question is not whether AI works, but whether the current pace and scope of adoption positions businesses in Africa for long-term competitiveness. Last year's survey results indicated that 75% of CEOs in Africa were adopting AI—signalling strong intent. Yet this year, only 26% believe their investment levels are sufficient to deliver organisational AI goals.

This investment gap becomes even more concerning when considering the rapid evolution of AI technology, including agentic AI. Unlike current AI applications that support human decision-making, agentic systems operate autonomously executing complex tasks, adapting to new information, and making decisions with minimal oversight. Deploying these capabilities requires a level of data maturity, infrastructure readiness, and governance rigour that many of Africa's CEOs are still building. The risk is that as global competitors move toward agentic deployment, the gap becomes harder to close.

"We're seeing CEOs approach AI with the same cautious investment mindset that's helped them navigate uncertainty for years. Organisations making modest AI investments today may find themselves significantly behind competitors who are rapidly scaling through focused return-on-experiment initiatives. The question isn't whether to invest in AI, but whether you're investing enough in AI and the required infrastructure to remain competitive."

Christiaan Nel, AI Africa Leader, PwC South Africa

The path forward

Strategic leadership priorities for Africa's leaders driving reinvention

In environments where disruption is constant, excessive caution becomes its own risk. Leaders must reframe uncertainty not as a threat to be managed, but as a catalyst for bold reinvention that runs parallel to core business operations.

This transformation requires four fundamental shifts. First, leaders must deliberately carve out time for strategic planning and future thinking. This helps businesses anticipate market shifts and seize emerging opportunities ahead of competitors—even when day-to-day pressures are intense.

Second, robust scenario analysis must be embedded into strategy cycles, not treated as periodic exercises. This requires investment in analytics infrastructure, talent to interpret complexity, and governance structures that translate insight into action. When leaders can articulate how their organisation will respond across multiple possible futures, they're better positioned to secure stakeholder support and maintain momentum through uncertainty.

Third, developing adaptability intelligence becomes essential. Rather than fearing constant change, leaders must build the capability to see change as normal operations. This means creating clear frameworks that provide direction, offering a long-term vision supported by plans reviewed quarterly rather than static five-year plans.

Finally, leaders must establish operating models that protect current performance while creating space for new capabilities to develop.
This requires investing in change leadership—communication, sequencing, and organisational stamina to sustain momentum through setbacks.
The critical shift is from "we should reinvent" to "we know how to reinvent without destabilising the business."

Success means actively exploring emerging opportunities, testing new business models before markets demand them, and accepting that some strategic bets will fail. The organisations that emerge stronger are those willing to balance core business protection with future-focused investments—not those waiting for certainty to arrive.

"Africa's CEOs are not short on ambition or ability—and they face an extraordinary opportunity. With vast talent pools and a dynamic young population, the continent is uniquely positioned to leapfrog global counterparts by embracing the necessary tools for transformation. The leaders who will shape the next chapter of business in Africa are those who recognise that tomorrow's stability comes from today's innovation. What's needed now is decisive and inspirational leadership that matches intent with action to enable our continent's success."

Hannelie Gilmour, Consulting and Reinvention Leader, PwC South Africa

The imperative to act

The data is clear: awareness of the need for reinvention is high, yet caution continues to shape decisions. Closing the gap between intent and action requires not just strategy, but the confidence to execute at scale.

Leadership implication summary:

Dimension	Current state	Future considerations
Risk orientation	Cautious and defensive; stability is prioritised over transformation	Embrace risk as a strategic input; place bolder bets on emerging opportunities.
Strategic focus	Leadership attention absorbed by operational demands; limited time spent on long-term planning.	Institutionalise strategic foresight; protect capacity for future-focused work.
Innovation appetite	Innovation recognised as important but lacks systematic foundations.	Create dedicated structures, increase risk tolerance, and build rapid feedback loops.
Investment approach	Acquisitions focused on market share and efficiency; constrained by capital access.	Balance core protection with deliberate investment in transformation pathways.
Planning mindset	Reliance on static plans that cannot hold in volatile environments.	Adopt adaptability intelligence; combine long-term vision with short-cycle recalibration.
Execution confidence	Doubt about ability to transform at pace without destabilising the core.	Build transformation operating models that run the core and build the future in parallel.
AI adoption	Pragmatic and selective; infrastructure and governance foundations still developing.	Accelerate investment in infrastructure and tools; embed AI strategy across business with clear accountability.

The challenge facing CEOs at this critical moment is to decide, in conjunction with their top team and board, how the company's value-creation recipe needs to change for the decade of innovation and industry reconfiguration ahead.

"The uncertainty we all live with today needs to be accepted as the new norm. Every business must find a way to navigate this uncertainty, along with the risks and opportunities it brings.

This reality fundamentally challenges how we think about strategy. Strategies cannot be static—they need to be responsive to unforeseen changes, enabled to adapt quickly, and designed with the agility and flexibility to ensure business models aren't compromised when major disruptions occur.

This is exactly why CEOs are so focused on reinventing their businesses, and why many are saying that if they continue on their current path, their businesses won't be viable in ten years."

Dion Shango, Territory Senior Partner, PwC Africa

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Survey methodology

We surveyed 4,454 CEOs in 95 countries and territories from 30 September through 10 November 2025. The global and regional figures in this report are weighted proportionally to countries' nominal gross domestic product, ensuring CEOs' views are broadly representative across all major regions. The industry- and country-level figures are based on unweighted data from the full sample of 4,454 CEOs. Further details by region, country, and industry are available on request.

Among the CEOs who participated in the survey:

2% lead organisations with revenues of US$25 billion or more.

4% lead organisations with revenues between $10 billion and $25 billion.

22% lead organisations with revenues between $1 billion and $10 billion.

35% lead organisations with revenues between $100 million and $1 billion.

30% lead organisations with revenues of up to $100 million.

60% lead organisations that are privately owned.

Note the analysis and commentary of this report are derived from the perspectives of our leadership teams based in Mauritius, Nigeria, and South Africa.

Percentages in the charts above may not add up to 100% due to rounding; multi-selection answer options; and the decision in some cases to exclude certain responses, including "Other," "Not applicable," and "Don't know" answers.

The research was undertaken by PwC Research, our global centre of excellence for primary research and evidence-based consulting services.

Advanced statistical techniques

Some analyses used advanced statistical techniques to look for relationships between questionnaire responses. These analyses went beyond dividing CEOs into groups and comparing responses (such as average profit margin) within those groups. Rather, we employed Bayesian multilevel regression analyses within a causal inference framework to estimate counterfactual marginal effects.

Counterfactual marginal effects measure the difference in outcomes that would occur if a specific level of a variable was changed while keeping everything else the same. They help us understand “What would happen if?” scenarios, such as predicting how a business outcome might improve if a particular strategy were implemented differently. This approach allowed us to model the relationships between variables, while accounting for uncertainty, and identify the causal effect of one variable on another, assuming that the hypothesised causal model is correct (i.e. no other variables other than the ones adjusted for affect the two variables of interest).

For most of these analyses, we adjusted for the effects of industry (e.g. industry sector, market concentration), company characteristics (e.g. company size, geography), and CEO characteristics (e.g. tenure). Further, we modelled outcome variables based on the assumed data-generating process (e.g. linear regression, for normally distributed data, and logistic regression, for Bernoulli-distributed data); ordinal predictors were modelled as monotonic effects.

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