



SPECIAL REPORT

Executive Vision: Leadership Priorities Shaping Tomorrow's Business Success

The world has entered an era marked by constant change, growing societal division, and unprecedented technological acceleration. CEOs and C-suite leaders are under pressure to not only deliver financial performance but also to guide their organizations through complexity, disruption, and global scrutiny.

The Executive Leadership Council (ELC), which represents CEOs, C-suite executives, and other top leaders across corporate America, has released the findings from its 2025 Voice of the Member survey. The results reveal a transformative outlook for corporate strategy and leadership demands amid rapid technological, marketplace, and cultural shifts. Specifically, The ELC surveyed members to understand the evolving business priorities, leadership skills, and organizational practices needed to ensure future success. It aims to identify shifts in corporate strategy, assess the impact of external forces, and explore how companies are preparing the next generation of leaders.

As inclusive leadership becomes an increasingly critical asset, this report offers a timely snapshot of where today's senior leaders are focused—and what that means for tomorrow's business world.



"In today's rapidly transforming landscape, the future belongs to those who lead boldly.

These findings

make one thing clear: traditional leadership models are no longer enough. To thrive in an era defined by disruption, organizations must embrace AI-driven innovation, champion inclusive leadership, and build the agility to adapt at speed. Organizations that rise to meet this moment won't just endure—they'll define the future."

Michael C. Hyter

President and CEO of
The Executive Leadership Council

METHODOLOGY

An online survey was distributed to over 800 ELC members, fielded from March 6, 2025 – March 31, 2025:



204

ELC
members
responded

61%

identify as C-suite
executives

16%

identify as a member
of a Board

81%

have been at their companies
between 1-9 years

19%

have been at their companies
for 10+ years

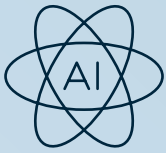


Approximately

61%

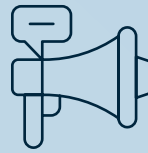
work at companies
with over 10,000
employees

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



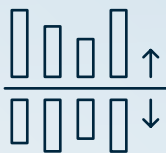
AI Takes the Lead – Executives now prioritize AI above even market volatility in their strategic planning

- 85% of The ELC executives say artificial intelligence will become a higher priority in the next 2-3 years; suggesting that even after years of discussion there is still a need for focus
- Respondents placed ‘other tech disruptors’ fourth (65%) after market instability (74%) and geopolitical instability (72%) as topics they will prioritize more highly in coming years



Sustainability and Social Activism Divide the C-suite

- Roughly 1-in-4 say sustainability (22%) and social issues / corporate activism (26%) will become lower priorities in the next 2-3 years
- Less than a third will pay very close attention to ESG-related policy areas like climate (26%) and labor laws (32%); however, more than half (54%) say they are closely watching workplace policies
- Employee demands (31%) and social issues (22%) are expected to have less influence on business strategy, relative to other internal and external pressures



Volatility Outweighs Regulation – Volatile markets and global events take strategic precedence over regulatory changes, cybersecurity, and even workforce management

- Economic / market instability and geopolitical instability will become higher priorities in the next 2-3 years (74%, 72% respectively)
- Regulatory changes (64%), cybersecurity (58%), workforce management (55%), and supply chain disruptions (46%) rated further down in expected focus in 2-3 years
- 68% of executives will be closely watching policy related to trade tariffs over the next 2-3 years



ESG Priority Divide – Larger companies are more likely to put ESG-related priorities on the back burner focusing on maintaining or ramping up priorities around new tech, cybersecurity, and responding to macro instability

- 31% of large companies will deprioritize sustainability, vs. just 16% of small companies over the next 2-3 years
- 36% of large companies will deprioritize social issues / corporate activism, while 33% of small companies say this will become a higher priority

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



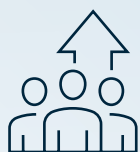
Hard Skills and Agility Rule – Executives overwhelmingly cite digital fluency, business acumen, and adaptability as the most critical capabilities for CEOs navigating the fast-evolving landscape

- Having tech skills, adaptive thinking, strategic agility, and business acumen will be more important to being a leader than people management, talent leadership, and communications skills as business priorities shift in response to the fast-changing macro landscape
- Sponsorship / advocacy from senior leaders and upskilling for new tech are most impactful in preparing future leaders (83%, 60% respectively)



Leadership Pipeline Challenges – Companies face difficulty balancing short-term demands with long-term leader development

- Executives cite three major challenges in developing future leaders: balancing proven business practices with the need for innovation amid constant disruption; navigating the diverse expectations of a multigenerational workforce; and making talent decisions today for evolving leadership needs. These issues are amplified by the ongoing pressure to perform in a volatile business environment
- Workforce management and upskilling (55%) were viewed as higher priority than talent acquisition (46%) in the coming years, indicating a focus on developing existing talent



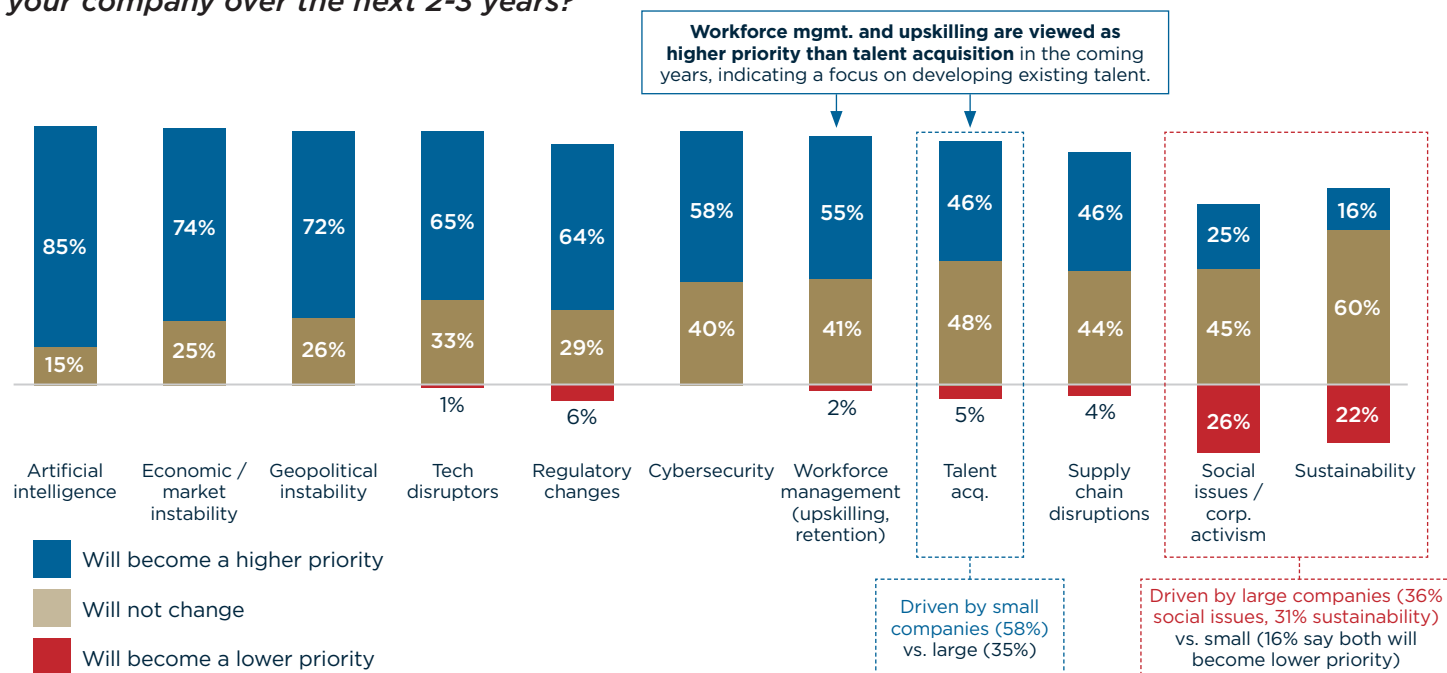
C-suite Sponsorship Matters – Senior leader sponsorship is seen as critical for developing future executives but is underused

- While personalized investment from senior leadership is viewed as most impactful in preparing future leaders (83%), it is less utilized than other efforts – only 68% of executives say their companies currently foster sponsorship / advocacy from senior leaders. Instead, companies are more likely to be implementing more formal coaching (73%) and training (76%)
- Technology upskilling is viewed as second-most impactful, with nearly the same percent who say their company currently invests in tech upskilling

AI, tech disruption, and market instability are driving C-suite priorities

AI will take strategic precedence over economic / market and geopolitical instability in the next 2-3 years. Social Issues and sustainability fall to the bottom of priorities, especially among large companies.

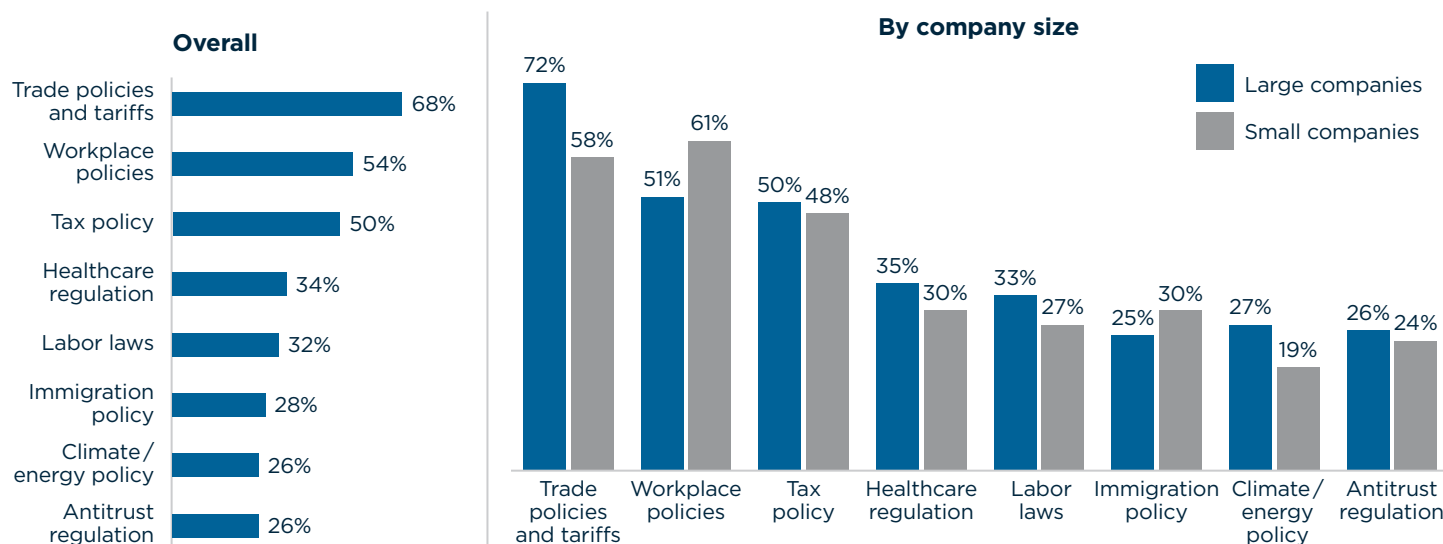
Looking at the list of topics below, which do you believe will become a higher or lower priority for your company over the next 2-3 years?



Smaller companies prioritize workplace and immigration policies compared to large companies

Executives overall plan to closely watch the trade, tariff, and tax policy over the next 2-3 years.

How closely will you be watching each of the below key policy areas over the next 2-3 years (as they relate to your company's performance)?



Hard skills and business agility lead in the race to successfully lead a company over the next 2-3 years

While hard skills such as business acumen and AI fluency are prioritized, leaders will still need to flex their soft skills – providing a clear vision for the company in an uncertain environment and managing their workforce toward achieving a common goal.

What skills will be most important for business leaders, such as yourself, to have in order to successfully lead a company over the next 2-3 years?

Strategic Thinking, Agility, Leadership Through Change / Uncertainty

- “Ability to craft and execute a clear strategy that can adapt to changing economic environments”
- “Agility to pivot and respond to business needs while maintaining long-term vision”
- “The ability to courageously lead the organization through a political climate in conflict with your organization values (specifically as it relates to inclusivity)”
- “Must have the ability to identify disruptors, adjust strategy, and pivot quickly to address client needs”

AI & Technology / Digital Fluency

- “Understanding emerging technology use cases, impact, and risk”
- “AI won’t replace humans, but those with AI skills will advance over those without”
- “Embrace new technologies and work in an agile way that embraces change”
- “Must understand the implications of technology, and particularly AI, on business model success”

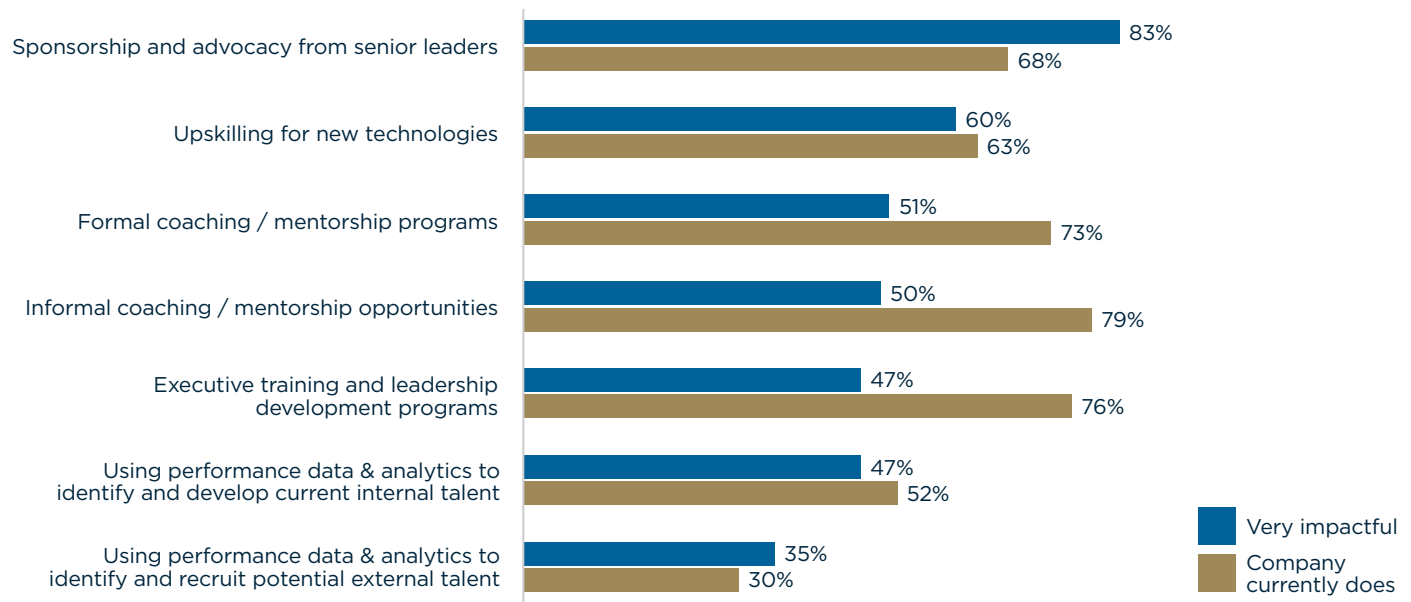
People Management, Talent Leadership, Communication

- “The ability to articulate a vision and rally an organization”
- “Strong people management to aid workforce retention”
- “Ability to motivate and inspire teams in the face of market challenges, turmoil and disruption”
- “Inclusive leadership; collaborative and influencing capabilities needed to ensure the successful integration of multiple businesses and geographies (cultural transformation)”

C-suite sponsorship and advocacy far outweighs the impact of more traditional training in preparing future leaders – though that is not where companies are currently focused

*How impactful do you believe each effort is in preparing future executive leaders?
(% very impactful)*

*Which of the below does your company currently do to help grow future leaders?
(Select all)*



The biggest challenges for developing future leaders are timing, a changing business landscape, and generational gaps

Executives identified three key challenges that companies must overcome to prepare the next generation of leaders:

What is the biggest challenge current executive leaders are facing when it comes to preparing talent for future leadership roles?

Matching High-Potential talent to opportunities in a volatile environment

- “Ensuring future leaders have the right breadth of experiences ahead of the need”
- “How to stretch into roles in an uncertain business climate”
- “Identifying high potential talent and retaining them long enough for the potential to be realized”
- “Balancing long-term and short-term needs: consider both the immediate needs of the business and the long-term development of future leaders”
- “Changing landscape at an accelerated rate. Balancing giving experience early for ‘ready enough’ talent vs. protecting the business for the short-term”

Shifting Marketplace Expectations

- “Balancing long-term and short-term needs: consider both the immediate needs of the business and the long-term development of future leaders”
- “Staying ahead of the geopolitical issues impacting society”
- “Failure to look ahead and recognize direct / adjacent shifts in operating environment, market conditions, and competitive dynamics”

Managing Generational Dynamics

- “Shifting workforce expectations. Future leaders, especially Millennials and Gen Z, prioritize purpose, flexibility, and development opportunities”
- “Generational differences will necessitate different engagement and alignment strategies”
- “Taking an individualized approach to manage the complex tapestry of leaders with different skills and experiences”



“These findings reinforce our commitment to future-proofing our members through collective insight, continuous learning, and intentional development. As the business landscape continues to evolve, our responsibility remains to equip leaders not just to navigate change, but to shape it. This survey sharpens our ability to deliver targeted, high-impact programming—empowering The ELC’s members to lead with resilience, inclusivity, and lasting influence, today and for the long term.”

Michael C. Hyter

President and CEO of The Executive Leadership Council



**THE EXECUTIVE
LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**