



# CEOs Are Taking Charge of AI

---

In 2026, the success of AI initiatives will be evaluated based on whether they achieve meaningful ROI. Three-plus years into the GenAI revolution, CEOs are expecting tangible results, not promises, and are rolling up their sleeves to achieve them.

This relentless focus on value is coming through in the day-to-day work we are doing with clients around the world. And it also comes out clearly in a recent [BCG AI Radar 2026](#) global survey of more than 2,300 business leaders, including 640 CEOs, in 16 markets.

**About 80% of CEOs** are more optimistic about AI's potential for ROI in 2026 than they were a year ago. About 90% believe AI agents will generate measurable ROI in 2026.

**Nearly three-quarters of CEOs** say that they are now their organization's main decision maker on AI, twice the share as last year—a remarkable increase.

**Half of CEOs** say that their job is on the line if AI does not pay off in 2026.

With CEOs assuming control and accountability, AI is entering a new stage. Corporations plan to double their spending on AI in 2026, projected to account for about 1.7% of revenues, up from 0.8% in 2025. And, not surprisingly, CEOs expect to see a return on that investment.

My personal experience with AI mirrors this transition as AI moves

from a useful tool to indispensable element of value creation. AI has proven helpful in preparing for and debriefing after meetings, for example. But my greatest satisfaction is seeing BCG teams work with AI and agents to help clients [transform their business](#) and also to transform our own, through efforts such as [improving talent acquisition and career management](#).

## **Trailblazers Lead the Way**

CEOs do not act with the same urgency and focus. The survey revealed divisions among CEOs in the investments they make in AI, the time they spend working with and learning about AI, and their commitment to upskilling their workforces.

**Follower CEOs**, about 15% of the sample, are playing it safe in part because they are not confident AI will pay off.

**Pragmatist CEOs**, about 70%, recognize AI's potential but are playing a more cautious hand by investing less and having lower ambitions.

**Trailblazer CEOs**, about 15%, oversee companies more fully committed to AI. They invest more on average and 64% are very confident these investments will pay off, more than three times higher than the share of followers. Trailblazers spend more than eight hours a week on AI, compared with five hours for followers. They have upskilled 69% of their employees in AI, compared with 35% for followers. By investing, prioritizing, and upskilling the organization in AI, they are creating a self-sustaining cycle of improvement.

At companies run by trailblazers, about 60% of their AI budgets are devoted to training and upskilling, the softer skills that help deliver results. Other companies devote only about 25% of their AI budgets to the human side of AI transformation.

In pursuing ROI, trailblazers put their people and themselves at the center of their AI transformation. That's a good lesson for all of us.

Until next time,



**Christoph Schweizer**  
Chief Executive Officer

---

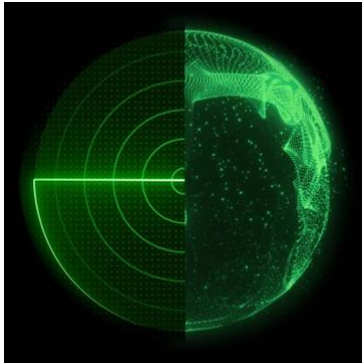
## Further Insights



### Inside Davos 2026 with BCG

Join BCG live from Davos on January 22 for an exclusive executive briefing on the forces shaping the CEO agenda in 2026.

[REGISTER NOW](#)



### As AI Investments Surge, CEOs Take the Lead

Nearly three-quarters of CEOs are their company's chief decision maker on AI. Most of them remain bullish on the technology.

[SET THE AI AGENDA](#)



### **Leading in the Age of AI Agents: Managing the Machines That Manage Themselves**

Agentic AI is both software and colleague—a form of artificial intelligence that acts. Organizations that swiftly adapt their management playbook to make full use of this transformative technology will gain the edge.

#### **MANAGE SELF-DIRECTING AI**



### **From Campaigns to Business Value: How AI Will Transform Marketing**

Artificial intelligence can automate and streamline many basic marketing functions, but the real opportunity lies in AI's ability to help CMOs reinvent their entire operating model.

#### **WHERE AI CREATES VALUE**