
Press release

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Business leaders face execution challenge in the new decade

LONDON – Global business leaders are potentially facing an execution challenge in order to ensure future success in the coming decade. That is one of the key findings from HLB’s *Inaugural Survey of Business Leaders: The Execution Challenge for the New Decade*, launched today. To gain insights in the concerns and priorities of business leaders in 2020, HLB surveyed 368 clients and relations in C-suite positions across 5 continents.

While business leaders are aware of the characteristics of business models most likely to be successful in the future, when asked what they are doing to grow in the next 12 months and what areas of the business they want to strengthen, business leaders seemed more concerned with the day-to-day.

Commenting on the findings, Marco Donzelli, HLB’s Global CEO, says: *“In times of profound continued uncertainty, it comes as no surprise that business leaders are cautious about what is ahead. This new decade will see further accelerated change in terms of technology, business models and growth markets. But it will be those leaders that innovate and adapt quickly that will reap the most rewards.”*

The economy is rocky, but we’ll be fine

It comes as no surprise is that economic uncertainty is a top concern for business leaders, with 46% predicting global economic growth to decline in 2020. In addition to being troubled by the state of the economy, half of respondents cite geopolitical uncertainty as a worry. However, when it comes to their own businesses, 87% of respondents have confidence (58% somewhat confident, 29% very confident) in their ability to grow revenue over the next twelve months. The confidence could be in response to the fact that while business leaders are concerned about geopolitical uncertainty, 48% believe that market upheaval will create new opportunities. Business leaders are relying on key countries to drive their growth forward with the USA, Germany and China ranked among the most important (41%, 23% and 17% respectively).

New business models for a new decade

There appears to be a degree of consensus of what winning business models look like - with progressive leaders setting their sights on more mobile, flexible and cloud-enabled business models better suited to today’s business environment. However, much of the activity business leaders are planning over the next twelve months is incremental, with 59% focused on boosting operational effectiveness. Our survey discovered that leaders

are primarily focused on improving existing processes and focusing inward than preparing for the challenges of the 2020's.

Readiness to adapt and thrive in turbulent times

Turbulence in the economic and global trade environment requires business leaders to adapt to new realities and be quicker to respond. Our respondents are strengthening different aspects of their business in order to boost agility. 42% of leaders are looking to strengthen their ability to innovate with 31% seeking to improve their digital capabilities. While these are priorities, the improvements they plan to implement will take place incrementally - no doubt in part due to the uncertainty of doing business in an ever changing and unpredictable global environment.

Harnessing technologies to succeed in the 2020s

Business leaders are now well aware of the role of new technology in transforming the way firms do business. Technologies once viewed as disruptive have become important drivers of success. Business leaders regard the Cloud (48%) and AI (49%) as the technologies most important to ensure future success. Technology will be a huge driver in overcoming cross-border business challenges, with 56% of leaders planning to deploy its use in the next 12 months.

The Execution Challenge

The results of our survey found that the ability to adapt will be key to future success in the coming decade. However, our experts' question whether business leaders are focusing on the right areas in order to secure a competitive advantage in the 2020s. Firms may be too focused on internal and incremental operational improvements and cost reduction, as opposed to strengthening consumer insights. There is a risk that businesses will be left behind by the pace of change, as technological progress accelerates. Continuous innovation, informed by finely-tuned customer insight, will be critical to ensure competitiveness and profitability in the 2020s.

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About our research

Between September and November 2019, HLB has collected 368 survey responses from business leaders across 55 countries and a range of industry backgrounds. Responses were collected via an online survey tool or telephone interview. The research sample was selected and controlled via HLB firms their CRM data.

A copy of the full report can be found on www.hlb.global/surveyofbusinessleaders Note that not all figures in this report sum up to 100% as a result of rounding percentages, excluding neutral responses or when respondents could choose more than one answer. The base for all figures is 368 (all respondents) unless otherwise indicated.

More data and information about this survey is available upon request. Please contact:
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