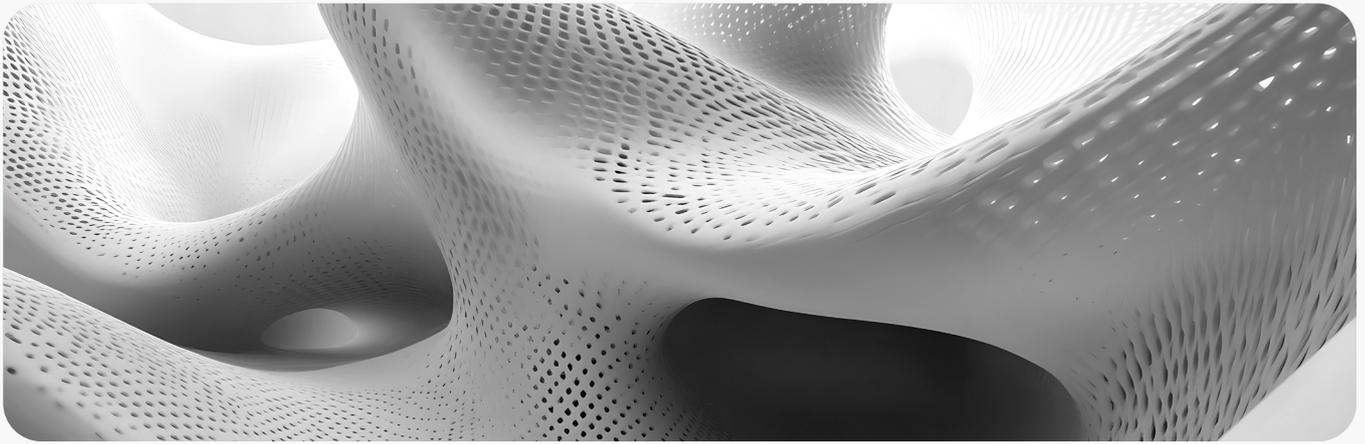


THE CEO INSOMNIA INDEX

What (and Who) Is Keeping CEOs Up at Night?

April 2026



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Executive Summary

Loneliness, sleepless nights, and pressure have always been part of a CEO's job. But today's leaders face something more acute and potentially threatening to their tenures: an unyielding pull toward the urgent.

More than 70% of CEOs report clinically high stress levels, while 57% say near-term issues often consume an outsized share of their time. Many describe the role as profoundly isolating, citing boards, employees, and senior leadership teams as their most stressful stakeholders. As one leader put it, the CEO is an “emotional shock absorber.”

Highly focused on the immediate and often experiencing those closest to them professionally as sources of strain as much as support, many CEOs face a compounding risk: issues that seem distant, manageable, or safely delegated gather momentum just beyond the edge of awareness—until they emerge as urgent tests of their leadership.

These insights are drawn from the inaugural BCG CEO Insomnia Index, a study grounded in two pillars of proprietary research: a survey of approximately 500 chief executives leading companies with revenues from \$100 million to more than \$5 billion, and our CEO Job Security Model, which is based on five years of turnover data across the S&P 1200. Together, these data sets illuminate how chief executives assess their stress levels and their sources of strain, and how those perceptions align with the factors closely associated with CEO turnover risk.

Among our findings:

- Hitting growth targets and managing costs top the list of CEO stressors. A majority of CEOs (60%) also predict operational conditions will be “challenging” or “very challenging” in the months ahead.
- One in three CEOs say they have more to prove to their boards now than they did only six months ago.
- CEOs of the largest companies in our study (\$5 billion or more in revenue) ranked their senior leadership team as the biggest source of stress among their many stakeholders.
- Of all members of their C-suite, CEOs see their chief financial officer (CFO) as the biggest threat to their job security, followed by the chief operating officer (COO).

But while CEOs focus on the daily pressures that come with the role, other threats may be lurking beyond their immediate awareness. For example:

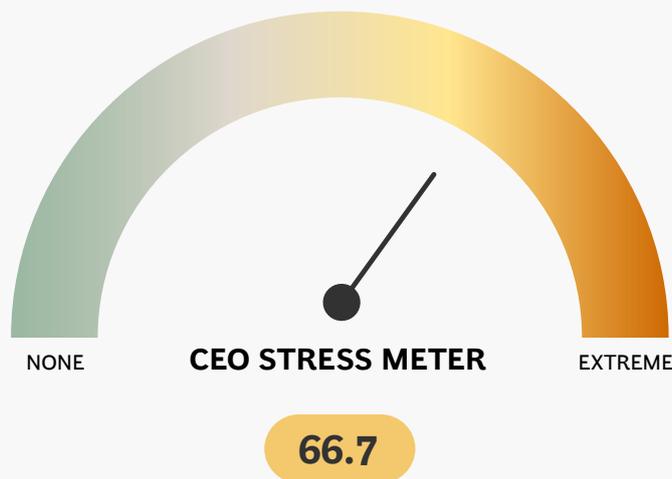
- AI does not rank among the top five stressors, suggesting that CEOs still view it primarily as an opportunity—one that has yet to translate into the near-term growth and cost outcomes that drive day-to-day leadership pressure. But every AI announcement a CEO makes raises market expectations and can narrow the window to deliver measurable, scaled results.
- Our CEO Job Security Model finds that when a company is targeted by shareholder activists, the likelihood of CEO turnover increases by 24%. Yet activists and activism rank far down the list of CEO stressors. That disconnect, and the relentless pressure to make quarterly numbers, raises an important question: Are CEOs doing enough to cultivate long-term shareholders who will support their strategy when volatility hits?
- When a company's employee net entry rate¹ drops by 10%, the likelihood of a CEO exit rises by 12%, according to our CEO Job Security Model. Yet fewer than half of the CEOs in our study are concerned about rising levels of employee disgruntlement—which, left unaddressed, can fuel attrition.

Together, these findings point to a broader challenge for CEOs. It's not enough to manage the obvious sources of stress; CEOs must also identify and mitigate the longer-term risks that may be hiding in plain sight. Indeed, more than a quarter of our respondents are unsure whether the moves they're making today will secure their long-term legacy.

The analysis that follows explores the patterns behind our findings, exposing how the persistent demands of being CEO can consume bandwidth and crowd out strategic focus. It also provides practical guidance for CEOs on managing their time and energy more effectively, along with simple gut checks to help them head off potential crises before they escalate.

1. Employee net entry rate is defined as the percentage difference between the number of new hires and the number of employees who leave, relative to the total workforce for a given time period. Our calculation is based on annual reported numbers.

Q: During the past quarter, how would you rate your overall level of job-related stress, with ‘0’ meaning no stress and ‘100’ meaning extreme stress?



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).

What CEOs Say Stresses Them Most

Stress Is the Great Equalizer

When asked to rate their overall job-related stress over the last quarter on a scale from 0 (no stress) to 100 (extreme stress), CEOs averaged a rating of 66.7 out of a possible 100—above the clinical threshold typically used to indicate high stress.² CEOs throughout the world report similarly high levels, making it a core aspect of the job that truly transcends geography. (See **Exhibit 1**.)

Our study also suggests that when CEOs perceive their workload as unsustainable, they reach a tipping point at which high stress levels become almost unavoidable, setting them on a path toward burnout that can have serious repercussions.

“When stress becomes a defining feature of the role, it can negatively impact quality decision making,” says Christine Barton, a BCG managing director and senior partner and the North America lead of the firm’s CEO Advisory. “Chronic stress can narrow a leader’s field of vision, reduce cognitive flexibility, and increase risk aversion or impulsivity, which at the CEO level can have outsized consequences for the organization.”



CEO PRESSURE VALVE

Treat decision making as a finite resource.

“Research shows that the quality of judgment declines over the course of a day and across a week, which is why regular check-ins on your energy and focus matter,” says Barton. “Schedule your most consequential decisions for the early hours of the day—before fatigue and distractions accumulate—and earlier in the week, rather than late afternoons or Fridays when cognitive bandwidth is thinner,” she advises.

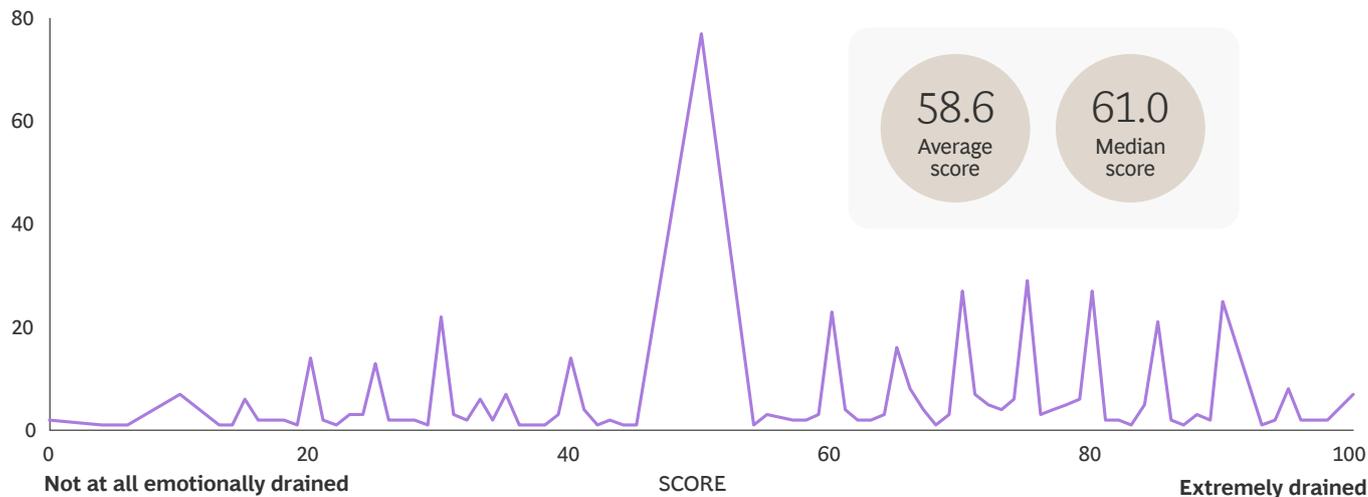
2. Stress scores were adapted from the Personal Stress Scale developed by Cohen et al. in “A Global Measure of Perceived Stress,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 1983; see Methodology for additional detail.

EXHIBIT 1

The Emotional Drain of Being the CEO

How emotionally drained have you felt from the demands of leading your company during the past quarter?

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).

Note: Participants were asked to rate how the emotional impact of the job made them feel, with '0' being not at all emotionally drained and '100' being extremely drained.



CEO PRESSURE VALVE

Make sure your calendar reflects your priorities.

A CEO's time is their most valuable asset, and they must manage it carefully to focus on where they can create the most value—knowing they will disappoint some stakeholders every day.

“Be explicit about who and what earns your attention,” says Wallenstein. “Regularly assess whether your time allocation aligns with your strategic intent and be deliberate about the tradeoffs you’re making.”

Wallenstein cautions CEOs not to skimp on bringing their top team together or to sideline people issues during crunch periods. “Assuming they can manage without you may feel efficient, but it can create real risk if left unchecked,” she says.

More to Prove with Less Bandwidth

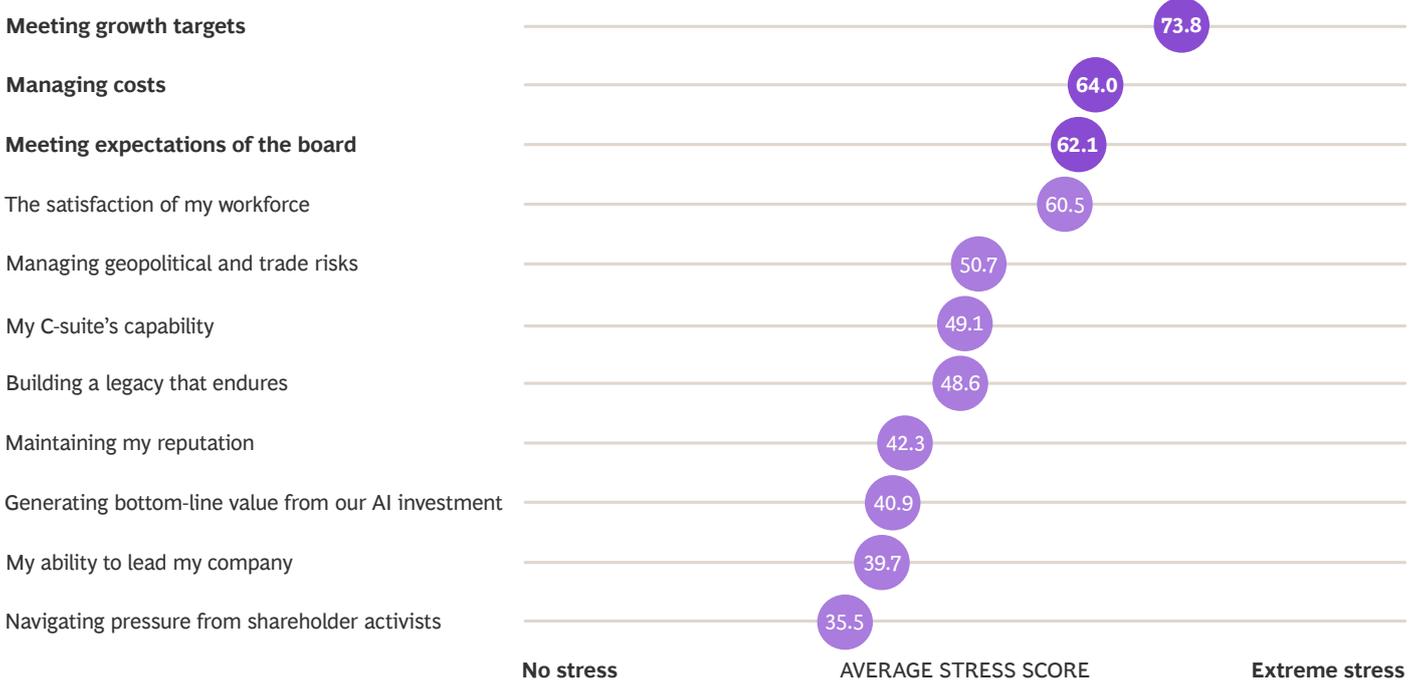
The stressors weighing most heavily on CEOs are as old as the job itself: meeting growth targets and managing costs. (See **Exhibit 2**.) Behind those pressures, though, lies a one-two punch of external shocks that cast a shadow over performance outlooks and intensifying board scrutiny. A third of CEOs in our study say they have more to prove to their board now than they did just two quarters ago.

“Balancing delivery against short-term targets with long-term growth has always been a CEO stress point,” says Judith Wallenstein, a BCG managing director and senior partner and the global head of the firm's CEO Advisory. “But today they need to do it with much less time and under the watchful eye of a savvier board that feels under more scrutiny themselves—and passes this tension on to the CEO.”

EXHIBIT 2

The Sources of CEO Stress

What do you anticipate will be the most stressful part of being a CEO in the next six months?



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).

Note: Participants were asked to rate each factor in terms of how much stress they predicted each element would cause them, with '0' being no stress at all and '100' being extreme stress.

As Wallenstein notes, the number of issues CEOs must manage has grown exponentially in recent years, while boards have been upskilling themselves on geopolitics, tariffs, AI, and other pressing subjects reshaping the business landscape. “The result is that the questions they (board members) are posing to CEOs now are far more granular and informed than even six months ago,” she says.

That heightened scrutiny is also unfolding against what 60% of CEOs believe will be a “challenging” or “very challenging” operational environment in the months ahead.

As these forces converge, they channel leadership bandwidth toward immediate performance. Our survey results reflect this: more than half of leaders say near-term pressures consume a disproportionate share of their time. As one respondent wrote: “Our goal is to create long-term value, but visibility is only short-term.”

Stressful Stakeholders Sit Close to Home

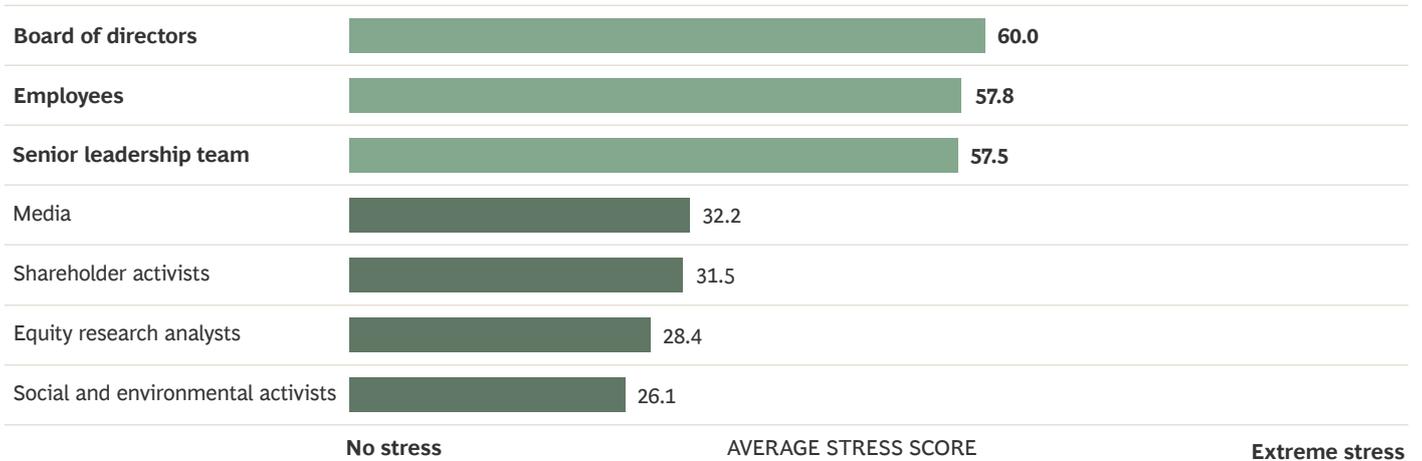
First the good news: a vast majority of CEOs (89%) report strong board relations, with 94% describing themselves as “fully aligned” or “generally aligned” with their boards. So, CEOs view themselves and their boards as genuinely in sync.

Nevertheless, boards top the list of the seven most stressful audiences for CEOs in our study, with the exception of those leading the very largest companies (\$5 billion-plus), who rank boards as their third most stressful stakeholder. (See **Exhibit 3.**) These findings suggest that no matter how strong the relationship may be, the pressure to maintain good board relations never recedes.

EXHIBIT 3

Leaders Face Increasing Scrutiny from a Diverse Set of Stakeholders

Rate each stakeholder in terms of how much stress they have caused you in the previous quarter



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).

Note: Participants were asked to rate each stakeholder in terms of how much stress they caused in the previous quarter, with '0' being no stress at all and '100' being extreme stress.

“It’s important to not lose sight of the fact that boards do determine CEO compensation and evaluation,” says Barton.

Our data shows a strong correlation between board alignment and CEO stress: those who report being “generally misaligned” have an average stress score of 80 out of 100, compared with 62 for CEOs who are “fully aligned.”

As previously noted, that dynamic is only intensifying as boards become more engaged and better informed, putting CEOs under greater scrutiny. But having a more engaged board can also be beneficial.

“Many boards are seeking specialized expertise where it’s missing, bringing in external advisors, being much clearer about what makes a great all-around board member versus a subject-matter expert, and investing significant time in committee work,” says Wallenstein. “In many cases, that makes them stronger, more valuable thought partners to the CEO.”

One CEO in our survey captured the strain that results when a board is a weak thought partner, writing: “The main issue I have is when the board has made unsustainable commitments to shareholders and is therefore applying unrealistic expectations to me and senior management.”



CEO PRESSURE VALVE

Don’t outsource your CEO report or board memos.

“Some CEOs have their chief of staff write their CEO report and other memos to the board, and it doesn’t take long for board members to realize it, and stop reading,” says Wallenstein. “When a CEO personally writes a board memo, or a bimonthly ‘CEO report to the board’ email themselves, it’s a sign of respect. I haven’t met a single board member who doesn’t massively appreciate it.”

When Senior Leadership Teams Keep CEOs Up at Night

Employees rank as the second most stressful stakeholder group across companies of all sizes in our study, followed by senior leadership teams (SLTs). For CEOs of the largest companies in our study, SLTs rank as the most stressful stakeholder.

This helps explain why more than half of CEOs in our study expect to make changes to their top team in the next six months. (See **Exhibit 4**.)

One CEO even used the comments section to express their frustration with their SLT: “People on my C-suite do not live up to my high expectations. Now, what to do with them?”



CEO PRESSURE VALVE

The occasional offsite won’t create a high-performing senior leadership team—or a mediocre one.

“I know very few CEOs who wouldn’t bring in a great coach twice a year for an executive offsite to work on trust and team dynamics,” says Wallenstein. “But two days a year isn’t enough. If you expect the top team to chase results together continuously, and have each other’s backs at all times, then strengthening how they work together has to be a continuous effort as well.”

Wallenstein also advises CEOs not to discount how changing even one member of an SLT can make a huge difference and impact the entire team architecture—further underscoring how continuously working on top team performance matters.

EXHIBIT 4

Senior Leadership Team Changes Ahead for Most CEOs

Do you plan to make changes to your senior leadership team in the next six months?



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).



CEO PRESSURE VALVE

If CEOs see their CFO as a potential competitor, they should clarify responsibilities.

“Value creation is not solely the CEO’s burden. It’s the CFO’s obligation too,” says Gregory Rice, a BCG partner and director and co-lead of the firm’s shareholder advisory and activism effort. Rice recommends CEOs form a real partnership with their CFO with clearly apportioned responsibilities.

“When both sign on to the value creation strategy with the board, if there’s a shortfall, it doesn’t land exclusively in the CEO’s lap,” he says.

A stressful relationship with the SLT can also evolve into perceived vulnerability.

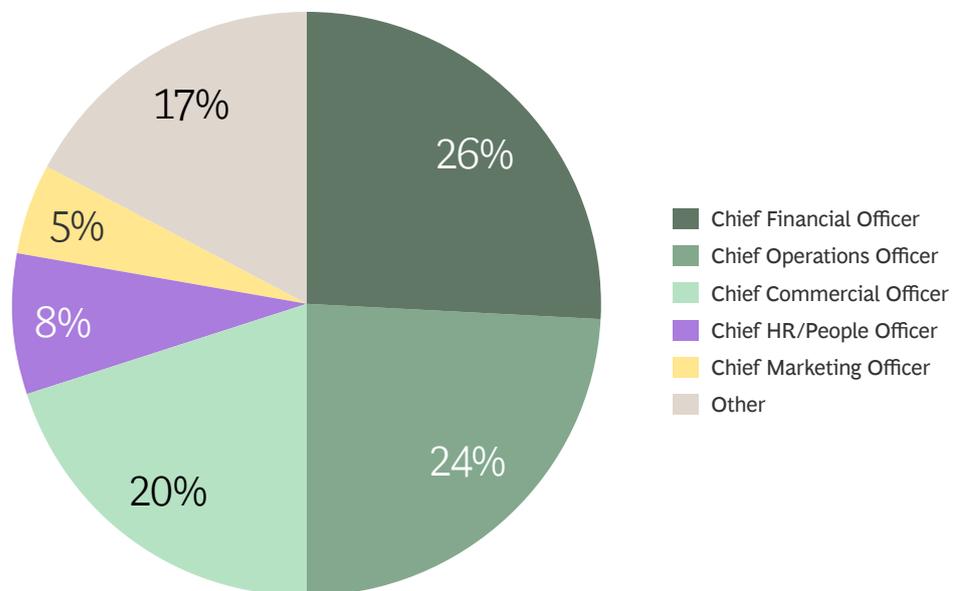
When asked which senior leader poses the greatest threat to their job security, more than a quarter of CEOs named their chief financial officer. The CFO’s proximity to board members, whom they routinely brief on financial performance, forecasts, capital allocation, and risk, can earn them both credibility and influence. Over time that could position them as the natural heir apparent to the CEO.

While having a strong successor should be a part of every CEO’s legacy plan, it’s only human to feel exposed when a replacement is waiting in your own C-suite, especially during times of heightened volatility or disappointing results. (See **Exhibit 5**.)

EXHIBIT 5

Who CEOs See as the Biggest C-Suite Risk

Which member of your C-suite poses the biggest risk to your job security?



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).



Low Stressors Today Could Become Large Risks Tomorrow

The Calm Before the AI Accountability Storm?

Most CEOs (84%) feel more energized by the imperative to innovate than stressed by it, which suggests that leaders see AI more as an opportunity than a pressing burden. This matches the findings of BCG's AI Radar, in which 82% of CEOs said they feel more optimistic about AI's potential this year compared to last.

CEOs recognize the need to get AI right: **three-quarters of them** said they own AI decisions in their organizations. And more than any other member of the C-suite, CEOs express confidence that AI investments will ultimately pay off.

Yet, despite the imperative to successfully transform with AI, the technology does not rank among the top five CEO stressors. It sits at number nine out of a possible eleven.

“That doesn't surprise me,” says Jessica Apotheker, BCG's global chief marketing officer and CMO of the firm's tech build and design division, BCG X. “AI pulls CEOs out of the daily performance grind by giving them the opportunity to learn something new, and to become a visionary who makes a meaningful impact on the trajectory of their company.”



CEO GUT CHECK

Are you focusing too much on AI literacy and not enough on how it will reshape the work people do?

“When leaders fail to define what AI is meant to enable—how it will roll out and what it means for each role—employees fill the silence with fear,” says Apotheker. “They ask themselves: Am I being replaced? What’s expected of me now? And those anxieties can seriously hamper adoption.”

Rather than launching a broad upskilling campaign, Apotheker advises CEOs to initially focus the technology in a few carefully chosen functions and to show employees in those functions exactly how it changes their role and how to work with it effectively. At the same time, leaders should clearly communicate to the entire organization why those areas were selected and signal which functions will be next.

For now, AI is energizing for most CEOs rather than being a source of day-to-day leadership pressure. Indeed, only 28% feel “high” or “very high” urgency from key stakeholders to deliver bottom-line value from their AI investments within the next six months. For CEOs of larger companies, that share rises to 42%, underscoring how mounting expectations can shorten delivery horizons. (See **Exhibit 6**.)

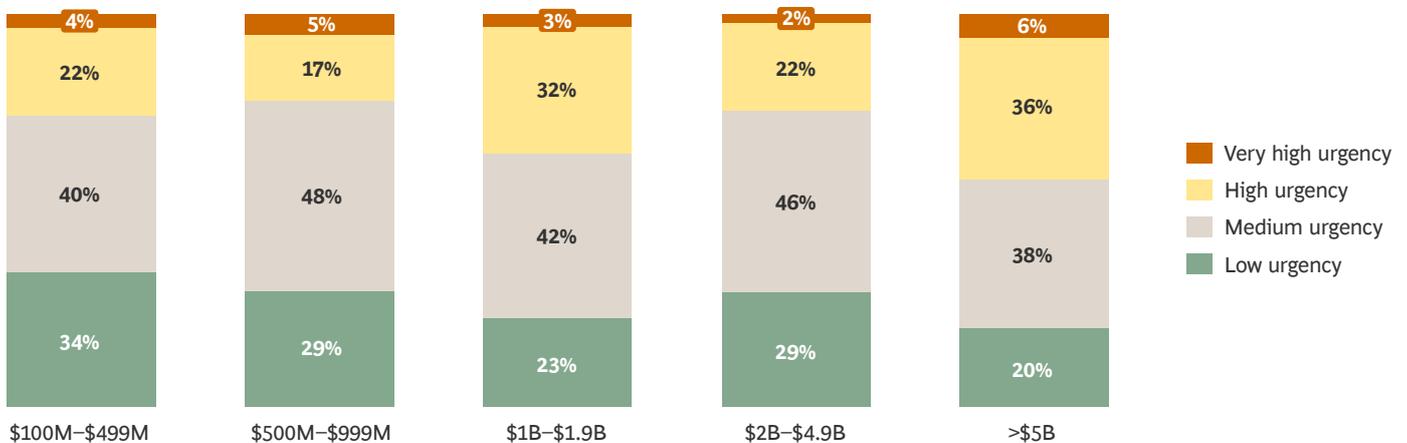
“Vision and confidence alone aren’t enough to keep investors onside with your AI transformation plans,” says Apotheker. “If you announced a big reshaping of a function at your investor day last year, then you have one year to show a striking proof point that this journey is on track, and then four more quarters to show you’re achieving ROI at scale.”

EXHIBIT 6

AI Is Not Yet a Primary Source of Day-to-Day Pressure for Many CEOs

How much urgency are you sensing from key stakeholders to realize bottom-line value from your AI investments in the next six months?

LEVEL OF URGENCY REPORTED, BY COMPANY REVENUE



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).

Note: Because of rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

A Blind Spot on Shareholder Activism?

In ranking 11 potential challenges for the months ahead, CEOs placed shareholder activism last. That may sound surprising for leaders obsessed with quarterly results, but it makes sense when you consider what prompts activists to engage in the first place.

“Activists show up when there’s a material gap between price and value,” says Gregory Rice, who co-leads BCG’s shareholder advisory and activism effort. “That gap widens when the company has made operating or capital-allocation missteps and is underperforming relative to its peers or to its historical performance and has disappointed investors.”

While CEOs of larger companies report marginally higher sensitivity to shareholder activism, they still rank it low among near-term stressors.

Shareholder activists also fail to crack the top three most demanding audiences for CEOs at companies of any size in our survey. Here, too, leaders of larger companies report somewhat higher strain related to activists, but even they place the group relatively low among their most challenging stakeholders.³

“It’s logical that CEOs aren’t sitting around abstractly worrying about shareholder activists,” says Jody Foldesy, a BCG managing director and senior partner who leads the firm’s global work in shareholder activism. “They’re executing their plan and controlling what they can control. However, if business performance slips, then they may start worrying more.”

How much should they worry? Our CEO Job Security Model finds that when a company is targeted by shareholder activists, the likelihood of CEO turnover increases by 24%.

Meeting quarterly expectations is critical to deterring that risk. However, CEOs undertaking 12- to 18-month transformations also need room to maneuver, especially in volatile markets. That requires looking beyond near-term performance to the composition of the shareholder base and its expectations.

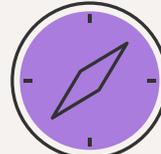
“CEOs should pay a lot of attention to their shareholder base and cultivate investors who understand and support their longer-term value creation strategy,” says Rice. “You’ll still have to deal with pod shops and other short-term-focused holders. The long term is still a series of short terms. So you still have to deliver results, but over time you want longer-term investors underwriting your strategy because they can help absorb volatility as the plan plays out.”



CEO PRESSURE VALVE

Private-company CEOs have their own form of “activists.”

“CEOs of private companies may not answer to public markets, but institutional owners such as venture capital, growth equity, and private-equity sponsors impose equally rigorous performance expectations,” says Rice. “Meeting them requires the same discipline as managing activist risk.”



CEO GUT CHECK

Do you know your top shareholders as well as you know your top customers?

“CEOs don’t spend enough time creating the right shareholder base or building relationships with high-quality investors who can underwrite their long-term plan,” says Rice. “A lot of incremental trading volume is driven by investors who have a shorter-term focus and less tolerance for volatility. So, when there’s uncertainty and multiple potential outcomes, the long-term investors you cultivate may have more patience to look through it.”

3. To further scrutinize these findings, we put the same questions to 47 CEOs of public companies with between \$1 billion and \$5 billion or more in revenue. The results of this second, more narrowly focused survey further confirmed our initial data: shareholder activists did not crack the top five stressors or stressful stakeholders for this group.

“

When discontent festers, it generally does so far from the CEO’s view.

Are CEOs Too Complacent About Employee Discontent?

Employees rank as the second most stressful stakeholder group for CEOs in our study, regardless of company size. This finding aligns with broader workforce-engagement trends. Globally, the share of employees who report feeling actively engaged at work has stagnated for years and currently hovers at 21%, according to research by Gallup.

When discontent festers, it generally does so far from the CEO’s view. When asked what the toughest unseen aspect of the CEO role is, one of our survey respondents cited “employee engagement at the bottom layers of the organization.”

That structural distance can be tough for any CEO to bridge effectively.

“As a CEO, it is extremely difficult to feel the unfiltered pulse of the organization,” says Wallenstein. “When you do have people who are very vocal, they’re usually vocal about an area of discontent, and you have no idea if these voices are representative of the whole.”



CEO PRESSURE VALVE

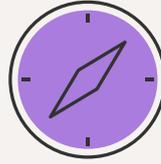
Consult a veteran “company” person who can tell you how your employees really feel.

“A relatively long-tenured employee, two to three levels removed from the C-suite, low ego and well respected, can be a great source of advice for CEOs,” says Wallenstein. “They’ve seen it all and can serve as a proxy employee to gauge how the rank and file really feel about leadership.”

At least one CEO commented on the role their board plays in feeding employee discontent, writing: “A good CEO cares about the people first...I preach that and live that. But the board doesn’t. I find myself forced into impossible situations where I am forced to contradict my own messaging and let down my people to meet the unrealistic demands of those not involved in the day-to-day.”

But losing sleep over employee discontent is more an exception than the rule in our study. Fewer than half of CEOs we surveyed (38%) are “concerned” or “very concerned” about rising levels of disgruntlement. (See **Exhibit 7**.)

That complacency carries risk if discontented employees are poised to jump ship as soon as labor-market conditions turn in their favor. According to our CEO Job Security Model, a 10% drop in employee net entry increases the likelihood of a CEO exit by 12%.⁴



CEO GUT CHECK

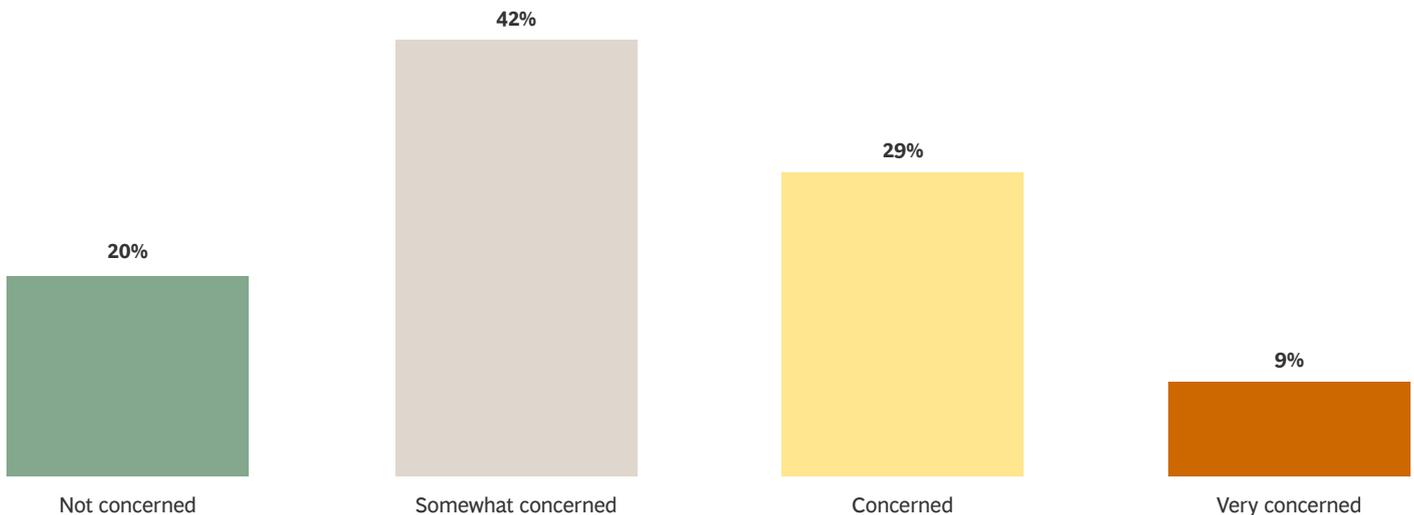
Are you too removed from how employees really feel?

As information moves up the organization, it is often filtered and softened—leaving CEOs with an incomplete view of morale, culture, and execution risk, says Wallenstein. To get a clearer read, CEOs can hold small-group listening sessions and host town halls where questions are unscreened and allowed to flow freely. “If someone asks a question that doesn’t seem to warrant CEO attention, such as why prices were raised in the cafeteria, answering it won’t hurt,” Wallenstein adds. “It signals transparency.”

EXHIBIT 7

Employee Disgruntlement Isn’t a Major Concern for Most CEOs

How concerned are you about rising levels of employee disgruntlement?



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).

4. Employee net entry rate is defined as the percentage difference between the number of new hires and the number of employees who leave, relative to the total workforce for a given time period. Our calculation is based on annual reported numbers.

Legacy and Loneliness

The Growing Complexity of Being Remembered Well

On balance, most CEOs are not preoccupied with how future generations will remember them. Some 72% say they are “confident” or “very confident” that the plans they are putting in place today will **secure their legacy**.

Still, that leaves nearly 30% who don’t feel that way.

Wallenstein believes this is driven in part by the greater complexity of securing a legacy now compared to even five years ago, when national and international conversations were galvanizing around climate, sustainability, and social issues. But that focus has frayed as polarization has deepened within and across societies.

“You have a much more divided workforce, so you cannot assume that everyone shares the same set of values anymore,” says Wallenstein. “How do you create a positive legacy if the definition of the positive in and of itself is contested?”

Many CEOs equate legacy with financial performance or a signature deal. But that thinking is too narrow, Barton argues.

“Legacy isn’t just what you delivered financially,” she says. “It’s whether the people in your organization had more opportunity, stronger skills, and deeper engagement because you were there. And it’s whether you built new capabilities and ways of working that made the enterprise more effective and freed up resources for innovation. That’s the kind of legacy that lasts.”



CEO PRESSURE VALVE

Legacy extends beyond the enterprise.

Once out of the role, CEOs have far greater freedom to engage in causes that may have felt too polarizing while they were occupying the top job. “When you step out of the CEO role, you gain degrees of freedom,” says Barton. “The relationships, credibility, and platform you built while in office can be directed toward issues that were deeply personal but difficult to champion while you were leading a broad stakeholder base. That’s where personal legacy can really take shape.”

“

The CEO is an emotional shock absorber in that all stakeholders—whether it’s the board, leadership team, employees, customers, suppliers, regulators—everyone expects the CEO to fix everything as it relates to them.

“

I have to shield my executive team from the pressures that come from above. They don’t see it and they shouldn’t.

“

I manage the worst and most difficult problems that the rest of organization could not solve. I am lonely between leadership and Board.

“

The feeling that you are alone in your decision making and there is no one to validate or challenge you.

Pressure and Isolation

Reconciling fragmented expectations is just one of many pressures that contribute to CEOs feeling isolated in their organizations. Is it any surprise, then, that CEOs overwhelmingly report feelings of loneliness?

When asked to identify the toughest aspect of being at the top—the part that few people see—CEOs offered their candid reflections, including those quoted above. Unvarnished comments like these underscore the emotional price today’s chief executives are paying for the privilege of shaping a company and an industry.

“In most leadership roles, you can test ideas in real time—brainstorming, debating, thinking out loud with the people around you. That changes in the CEO seat, when a half-formed idea can be mistaken for marching orders,” says Barton. “Leaders stop processing out loud and start self-censoring more, which intensifies their loneliness.”

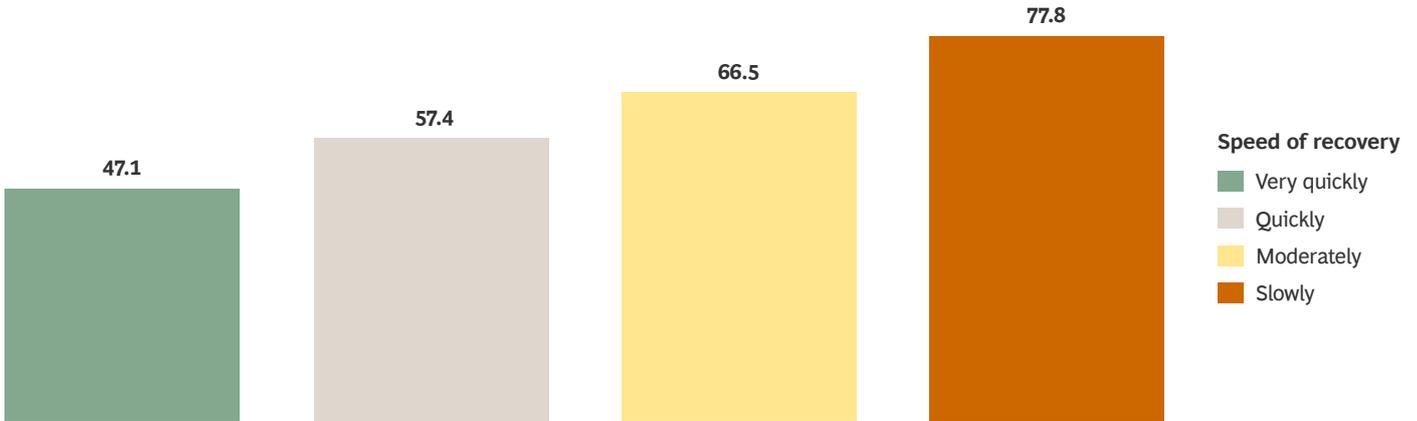
But Barton emphasizes that it’s important for CEOs to know that they are far from alone in managing these issues.

“What often surprises CEOs is how universal the emotional weight of the role is,” says Barton. “No matter the industry, there’s a shared intensity, a sense of constant accountability. When leaders come together and speak candidly, they realize they’re not alone in carrying that load.” (See **Exhibits 8 and 9**.)

EXHIBIT 8

As Emotional Exhaustion Rises, CEO Recovery from Intense Stress Slows

Average emotional impact score (0–100)

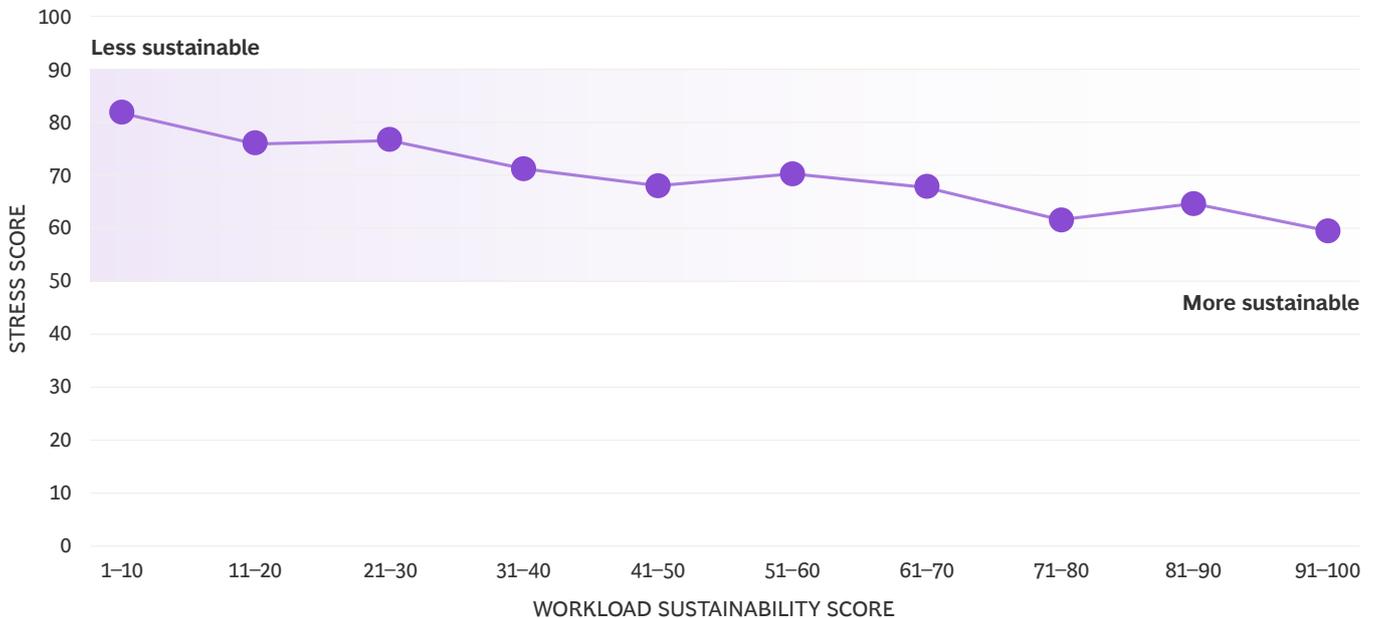


Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).

Note: Participants were asked to rate how the emotional impact of the job made them feel, with '0' being not at all emotionally drained and '100' being extremely drained. We then looked at how the average level of emotional impact related to the speed of recovery from periods of intense stress.

EXHIBIT 9

Lower Stress Can Make CEO Workloads Feel More Sustainable



Source: BCG CEO Insomnia Index Survey, January 2026 (N = 500).

“

A calm mind makes better strategic calls than a tired one—resilience is now a CEO’s most valuable asset.

“

Stress is a silent killer, and without your health, the job is meaningless.

“

Find balance outside of work as well as inside the walls of the office.

“

Let’s not be a superhuman; build a support system.

This may explain why 25% of the advice CEOs shared with us focused on prioritizing mental and physical well-being.

Barton advises CEOs not to discount the role safeguarding energy plays in maintaining mental and physical well-being.

“Pay attention to what energizes you and what drains you,” she says. “Over time, being surrounded by energy drainers takes a real toll on your mental and physical health, so protect your time and build a circle that sharpens and sustains you.”

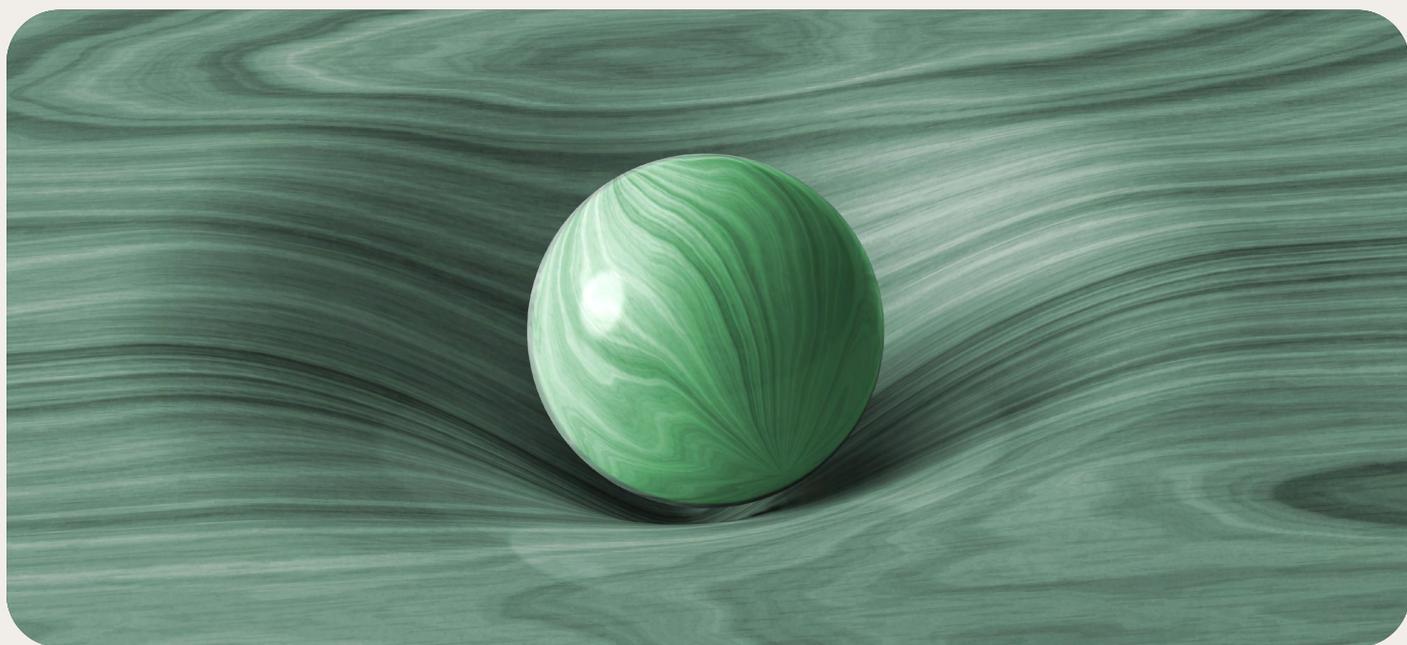


CEO PRESSURE VALVE

Tap into a trusted peer network where you can have honest conversations

“When CEOs come together in small, candid settings, they’re often surprised by how much commonality there is in the role, regardless of sector,” says Barton. “Sharing what worked, what didn’t, and what they didn’t see coming is incredibly affirming.”

Methodology



The CEO Insomnia Index blends firsthand CEO perspectives with rigorous analytics to reveal the personal and organizational dimensions of executive stress. It centers on six core stress drivers specific to the role of CEO: business performance, external uncertainties, innovation demands, board and investor sentiment, talent, and reputation.

The Index draws from two data sources:

- A proprietary survey of about 500 CEOs from leading companies (\$100 million or more in revenue). The survey was designed to assess stress levels, recovery periods, and sustainability while offering deep dives within the six core stress drivers, focusing specifically on the hallmarks of workplace stress: tension, pressure, and scrutiny. The survey period was January 7–21, 2026.
- Five years of CEO turnover data from the S&P 1200.

To fully capture the pressure CEOs face, each driver was examined in two ways:

- Personal stress levels, as self-reported in the CEO Insomnia Index Survey.
- Organizational stress signals, modeled in the CEO Job Security Model.

The CEO Insomnia Index top-line score is based on the average response to a single question: “During the past quarter, how would you rate your overall level of job-related stress, with ‘0’ meaning no stress and ‘100’ meaning extreme stress?” This question was adapted from the Perceived Stress Scale developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein in “A Global Measure of Perceived Stress” (*Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 1983), with the 0–100 range selected to allow greater sensitivity to variation.

CEO stress is defined as a state of mental worry or tension caused by the demands of the CEO role.

Because individual survey responses are anonymized and cannot be linked to company outcomes, CEO turnover was used as a proxy for company-level stress. The model uses a logistic regression approach, with actual CEO exits from the S&P 1200 over the past five years as the dependent variable, predicting the likelihood of CEO turnover in the next quarter. Independent variables include net entry rate, sentiment analysis from our earnings call data, negative media mentions, total shareholder return, and more.

A special thanks to Erik Nook, director of the Logic of Emotion Lab at Princeton University, for his consultation on methodology and approach.

Featured Experts



Jessica Apotheker is a managing director and senior partner in the Paris office of Boston Consulting Group. She is the firm's global chief marketing officer and CMO of its tech build and design division, BCG X.



Christine Barton is a managing director and senior partner in the firm's Nashville office and the North America lead of BCG's CEO Advisory.



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