



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI Isn't Keeping CEOs Up at Night—and That Could Be a Problem

By Paul Michelman

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AI is clearly essential to the [CEO agenda](#). Nearly three-quarters of the CEOs surveyed in [BCG's AI Radar](#) identified themselves as the primary decision maker on AI, and more than 90% said they plan to continue or even increase their AI investments this year. What's more, roughly half of CEOs believe their job security will ultimately depend on getting AI right.

With stakes this high, one might expect company leaders to regard AI as a primary driver of stress. But that's not what our research has found. According to the [BCG CEO Insomnia Index](#), generating

bottom-line value from AI ranks 9th out of 11 potential CEO stressors, well below growth delivery, managing costs, and meeting board expectations.



CEOs expressed outsized enthusiasm for AI, notably more than their C-suite counterparts. That may be because, for the moment, accountability remains ill-defined. Only about a quarter of CEOs reported high or very high pressure from stakeholders to deliver bottom-line AI value in the next six months.

These findings are striking, because overall stress levels among CEOs are elevated. When asked to rate their overall job-related stress over the last quarter, CEOs averaged a score of 66.7 out of a possible 100—above the clinical threshold for high stress.

If leaders aren't feeling as stressed about AI, that's likely to be a fleeting phenomenon. Their reputations and their legacies are on the line: they've taken personal ownership of AI, made public commitments, and doubled their investments, often without being held accountable to the metrics boards typically use to keep score. That won't be the case for much longer.

The AI Grace Period Is Ending

If AI is becoming an existential imperative for so many businesses, why isn't it causing more stress among CEOs?

The answer may have something to do with agency. More than 80% of CEOs surveyed for the Insomnia Index described innovation as energizing rather than stressful—suggesting that AI

currently offers a sense of forward motion in an environment otherwise dominated by constraints.

Timing could also play a role. AI's importance has escalated faster than the mechanisms used to evaluate it. While CEOs widely believe AI will shape competitiveness and even their own job security, it has not yet been fully integrated into the scorecards, review cycles, and decision forums that determine near-term leadership consequences. As a result, AI remains, for CEOs, psychologically separate from the pressures that create day-to-day stress.

The BCG CEO Insomnia Index: Relentless Stress, Rising Blind Spots

CEO pressure comes from all sides—performance, boards, employees, senior teams—but what feels most urgent isn't always what drives CEO turnover.

[CEO PRESSURE INSIGHTS →](#)

That separation is unlikely to hold. As AI investment accumulates and public commitments multiply, boards will begin to ask not whether the company is “doing AI,” but where and how it is delivering measurable impact. At that point, CEOs will be evaluated on execution, not exploration.

Ironically, the most enthusiastic adopters of AI may be the most vulnerable. CEOs who have taken personal ownership of AI and made bold public commitments have also raised the bar for themselves and their organizations. Every announcement accelerates stakeholder expectations—and narrows the window to deliver measurable gains in performance.

An AI Wake-Up Call

Today, CEOs face a multipronged AI challenge: mastering the technology itself, ensuring its safe implementation, and transforming their companies while gaining buy-in from workers and stakeholders. All of this while AI advances at breakneck speed and cybersecurity threats proliferate.

For CEOs, the window for defining AI success on their own terms is narrowing. That doesn't mean organizations should rush outcomes or manufacture urgency, but it does mean they should track AI progress with clear KPIs. AI accountability can be established through explicit benchmarks such as revenue growth directly attributed to AI initiatives, measurable cost efficiencies, or gains in customer engagement.

Leaders who use this period to establish clear use cases, credible timelines, and explicit success metrics—aligned with board expectations—will be better positioned as the focus on AI shifts from aspiration to accountability.

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