

EGON ZEHNDER GLOBAL STUDY REVEALS CEOS ARE MORE SELF-AWARE, YET NEED TO BECOME MORE RELATIONAL AND ADAPTIVE

Survey of nearly 1,000 global CEOs reveals recent social and economic challenges drove unprecedented levels of self-reflection and development – changing CEO perspectives and the leadership role

ZURICH – September 16, 2021 – Egon Zehnder, the world’s preeminent leadership advisory firm, today announced the results of a study which surveyed 972 CEOs worldwide, capturing the pulse on how CEO roles and expectations are evolving at the hand of momentous global challenges and emerging trends. The study uncovered that self-reflection and personal development have jumped to be among the top of CEO priorities as they become increasingly self-aware, realizing that the key to prosperity is to improve the human side of their leadership.

As heightened demands for workplace equality and new pressures around hybrid work continue to dramatically shape business culture, CEOs worldwide are reevaluating their role, how they engage with their team, as well as how they hold their organization – and themselves – accountable for making their businesses future-ready. Today, CEOs view prioritizing their own development and tapping into the intrinsic sources of energy of the people in their organizations as crucial to navigating through complex business environments.

Key findings include:

- **90% of CEOs report they have moved to the center of increasingly louder, more diverse and diverging voices.** When asked about the impact of recent circumstances on their organization, most CEOs highlighted accelerated decision making and change, and greater economic uncertainty. These shifts speak to the complexities and rapid evolution that is reshaping business – and that CEOs will answer to more stakeholders and be measured in new and emerging ways.
- **83% of leaders find it essential to reflect on their own leadership style – up from 66% in the 2018 study, [The CEO: A Personal Reflection](#).** CEOs are expanding their ability to be adaptive, relational, and self-aware. They are committed to listening to diverse perspectives and are increasingly seeking feedback from new places – including team members, chairs, mentors, consultants, and other CEOs. In addition, female CEOs are more likely to gather feedback from a wide range of sources – and are more likely than male counterparts to seek guidance from fellow CEOs, mentors and family members.
- **78% of CEOs strongly agree that they need to continue their self-transformation – three times as much from 2018.** CEOs also agree strongly on the importance of the “dual journey,” a path where leaders believe viewing their personal development and their organization’s growth as an interrelated journey will affect optimal change. Our most striking finding is the near-unanimous agreement among a thousand leaders that, “As CEO, I need the capacity to transform myself as well as my organization.”
- **Two-thirds of CEOs report that the ultimate metrics that steer their decisions have remained consistent, despite new social and economic business expectations that they express support for.** Given this conflict, it’s not clear whether CEOs have a direct path to deliver on their ambitions with traditional financial metrics as the dominant decision driver for most CEOs.

- An analysis of open-ended answers has shown that nearly **500 CEOs, more than half of all respondents, see relational capabilities as a key blind spot.** Specifically, less than half of CEOs (44%) report they feel fully aligned with their teams, and even fewer with their boards – pointing to heightened levels of tension and increased need for collaboration.

“CEOs recognize that today’s unprecedented business complexities require a significant shift in leadership – and that change must begin by looking inward with new levels of self-reflection and personal development. This isn’t self-indulgent naval gazing; it’s what our teams, organizations and stakeholders expect of our CEOs,” said Jill Ader, Global Chairwoman of Egon Zehnder. “Now, more than ever, traditional business acumen must be equally balanced with empathy and compassion in order to gain their teams’ and organizations’ emotional commitment, navigate business complexities and build productive, inspiring workplaces.”

Navigating through these complex environments demand CEOs increase their personal capacity to be adaptive, relational and self-aware, stressed Kati Najjipoor-Schuette and Dick Patton, who co-lead Egon Zehnder’s CEO advisory group and co-authored this study. Especially today, these capacities need to be increasingly balanced with traditional leadership strengths, strategic planning and a relentless performance orientation. Mastering these skills requires leaders to increase their capacity to listen, trust in a broader network of stakeholders and communicate more authentically than ever before.

As a result of honing these skills and taking a more human-centric approach to leadership, CEOs will evolve the resiliency, leadership and adaptability of themselves – and their organizations.

For more information on Egon Zehnder’s CEO Study, which surveyed 972 CEOs worldwide, visit www.egonzehnder.com/it-starts-with-the-CEO.

About Egon Zehnder

Egon Zehnder is the world’s preeminent leadership advisory firm, inspiring leaders to navigate complex questions with human answers. With more than 55 years of experience advising clients on chief executive leadership, we know that the selection of a CEO is the midpoint of a process, not the end. That’s why we partner with our clients to deliver a comprehensive and effective CEO transition, succession, development and onboarding support. We help organizations get to the heart of their leadership challenges and offer honest feedback and insights to help leaders realize their true being and purpose. Our 525 consultants across 63 offices and 37 countries are former industry and functional leaders who collaborate seamlessly across geographies, industries and functions to deliver the full power of the Firm to every client, every time.

We believe that together we can transform people, organizations and the world through leadership.

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