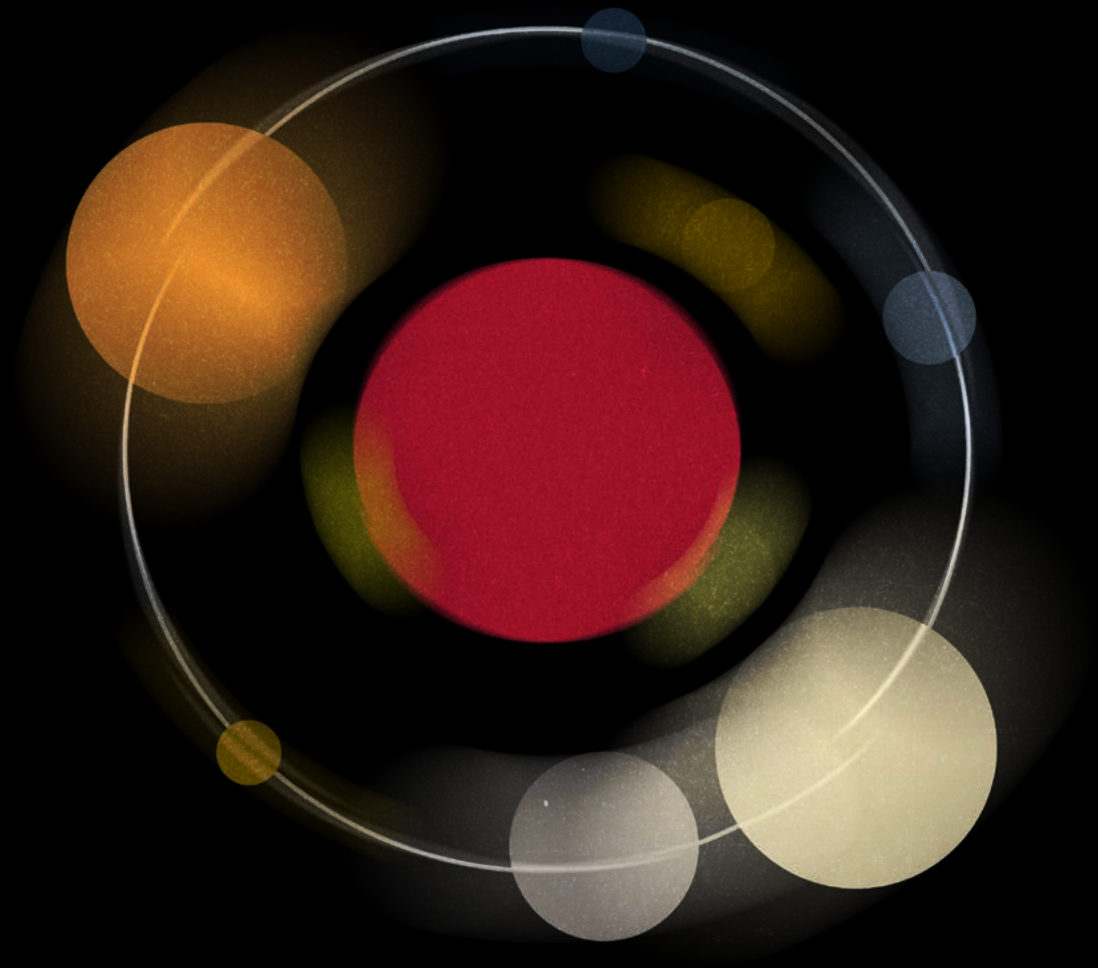


EgonZehnder

# The Anatomy of Growth

Why some companies surge  
ahead while others stall



Survey of 500+ global revenue-driving C-suite  
executives reveals what some leaders do differently  
to drive impact and results.



## Growth is every leader's obsession—but not every company cracks the code.

At the most fundamental level, any company's ultimate job is serving the end customer—the clearest and most reliable path to driving business growth. Yet, our study of 500+ revenue-driving executives (CMOs, CROs, CGOs, and more) reveals a stark divide: While 72% of organizations grew last year, only 29% achieved rapid growth (exceeding a 10% growth rate). Small firms are pulling ahead, with 32% surging past the 10% growth mark compared to just 20% of larger players.

What separates the winners from the stalled? It's not luck—it's leadership. In this report, we uncover the bold moves, structural shifts, and strategic partnerships that fuel breakout performance.



# The Anatomy of Growth Leaders

What sets revenue-driving leaders apart in high-growth companies?

## Growth Snapshot

**72%**

Growth is on the rise for 72% of organizations. **43%** grew less than 10% and **29%** grew rapidly (10%+).

**Small firms, big wins**

**32%**

grew rapidly, compared to 20% of medium/large firms.

### Growth standouts

Financial Services (53%), Consumer (45%), and Industrial (46%) are outperforming other industries.

**11%**

In Financial Services, only 11% report flat or declining growth, significantly lower than Industrial (39%), Consumer (36%), Technology & Communications (32%).

**41%**

Technology and Communications is growing fastest (41% growing 10%+), followed by Financial Services (36%).

### A tale of two growth curves

**36%**

of B2B organizations reported rapid growth (over 10%), compared to 20% of B2C organizations.

**52%**

Meanwhile, B2C organizations were more likely to grow moderately: 52% reported growth under 10%, versus 34% of B2B organizations.

## Thought Partners Drive Strategy—and Results

**43%**

of leaders act as *strategic thought partners* to the CEO, shaping company direction.

**28%**

are *operational collaborators* focused on execution.

**17%**

play an informal advisory role.

**7%**

report little CEO interaction.



**IMPACT:** Leaders who work closely with the CEO are more likely to see **rapid growth (33%)**, while those with little CEO interaction often face **flat or declining results (42%)**.



## Influence & Empowerment Fuel Growth

**52%**

report they now have broader influence across the C-suite and board (rising to 59% for those overseeing all growth-driving functions).

### Empowerment matters

Feeling more empowered is associated with stronger growth.

**65%**

of leaders in rapidly growing organizations feel more empowered, compared to:

**53%**

of leaders in flat or declining growth organizations.

**43%**

of leaders in flat or declining organizations feel less empowered vs. 24% in rapidly growing ones.

## Alignment Accelerates Growth

Companies with strong alignment among revenue leaders achieve rapid growth

**39%**

of the time—more than double the rate for companies with siloed leadership (18%).

### Top alignment mechanisms

**88%**

Cross-functional leadership meetings.

**87%**

Shared KPIs/OKRs.

**72%**

Informal collaboration.

## Restructuring for Growth

**31%**

report increased centralization of revenue-driving functions in the past year.

### Drivers

Efficiency, alignment, customer experience, agility, and post-M&A reorganizations.

**19%**

moved toward decentralization.

### Drivers

Flexibility, accountability and ownership, organizational adaptation, structural changes, and talent.

## Growth Superchargers

### Top Skills to Cultivate

### Most needed leadership qualities

**40%**

Resilience

**36%**

Adaptability

**29%**

Courage

**44%**

AI/data literacy

**48%**

Building high-performing teams

**Top skills and capabilities for growth acceleration**

**33%**

Cross-functional collaboration

**32%**

Customer and market insight

# What Sets Growth Leaders Apart

Our findings reveal that companies that grow the fastest have revenue leaders **who partner strategically with the CEO, create alignment across the executive team, have influence across the C-suite, and shape organizational structures that enable collaboration.**

## Strategic Partnership Drives Growth

Proximity to the CEO is common among revenue-driving leaders, but access alone isn't enough. While most senior leaders have a close relationship with the CEO, our data shows that alignment and collaboration are more likely to predict growth, as explored later in this report.

**43%** describe themselves as strategic thought partners, shaping company direction.

**28%** act as operational collaborators, focused on execution.

**17%** play an informal advisory role, and only 7% report little interaction.

Being a strategic partner to the CEO correlates strongly with rapid growth (33%), while limited interaction is linked to flat or declining outcomes (42%).

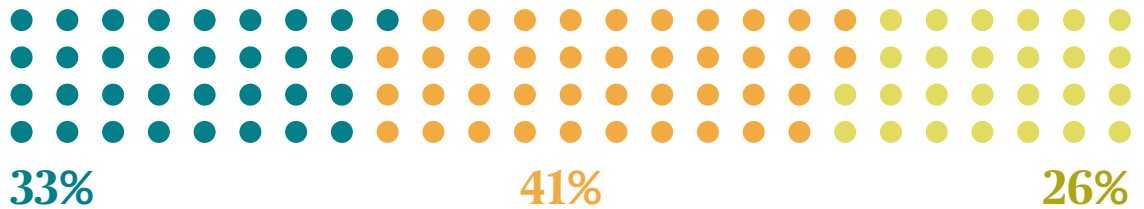
### If You Were CEO for a Day

We asked leaders what CEOs could do better to accelerate growth—and they had clear answers. From integrating sales, marketing, and operations to elevating customer insight and making faster, smarter decisions with real-time data, they surfaced five bold moves worth paying attention to.

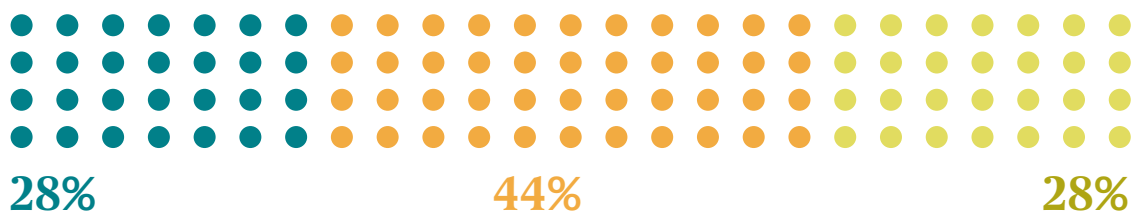
➤ **See their ideas.**

## Which of the following best describes your relationship with the CEO?

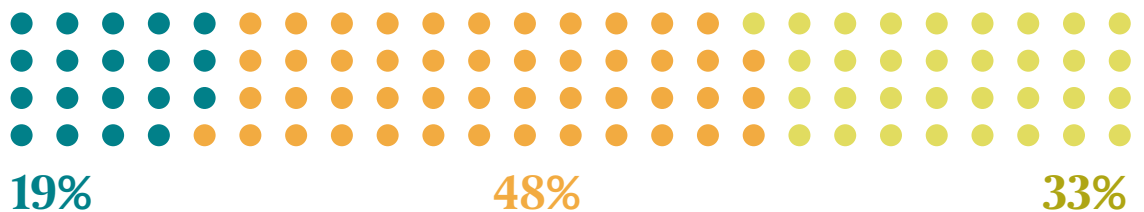
Strategic thought partner (frequent collaboration on company direction)



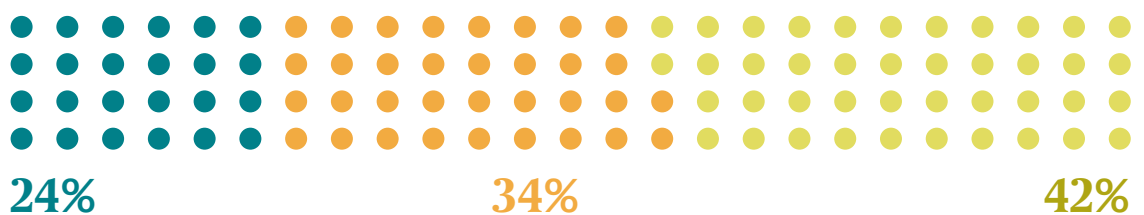
Operational collaborator (focused mainly on execution and delivery)



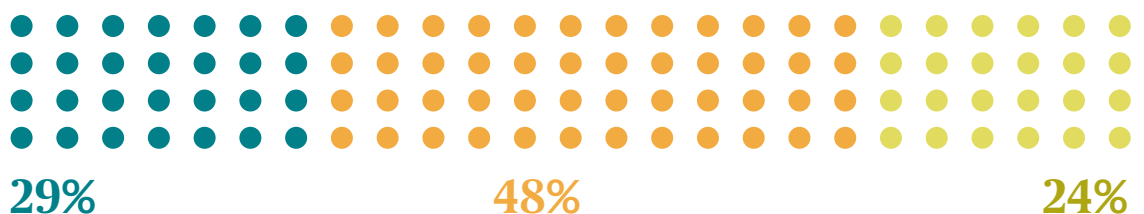
Informal advisor (occasional input and updates as dictated by the business)



Little to no interaction



Other, I would describe it differently as...



● Growing rapidly (more than 10% increase)

● Growing (less than 10% increase)

● Flat or declining

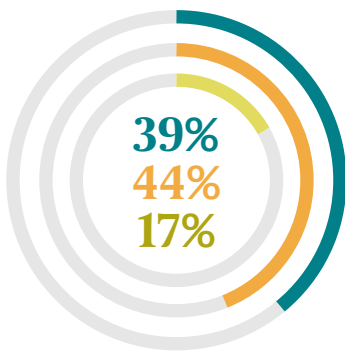


## Alignment Is a Growth Multiplier

When revenue leaders operate in isolation, growth often stalls. The data is clear: Companies with strong alignment among revenue leaders (e.g., Chief Marketing, Commercial, and Sales Officers, etc.) achieve rapid growth 39% of the time—more than double the rate of companies with siloed leadership (18%).

**Organizations with high alignment between the revenue driving leaders show more rapid growth.**

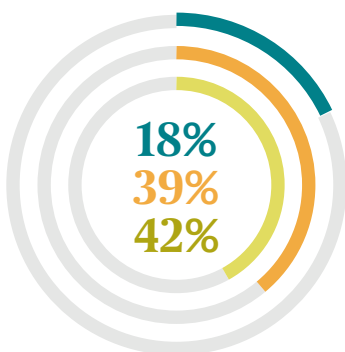
Strongly aligned (shared goals, regular collaboration)



Moderately aligned (some overlap, occasional collaboration)



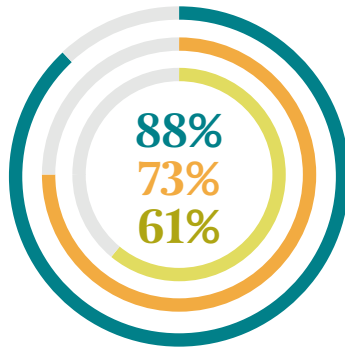
Poorly aligned (siloed or conflicting priorities)



- Growing rapidly (more than 10% increase)
- Growing (less than 10% increase)
- Flat or declining

To enhance alignment, revenue leaders are relying on cross-functional leadership meetings (88%), informal collaboration and communication (72%), and shared KPIs or OKRs (87%) as their main mechanisms.

Cross-functional leadership meetings



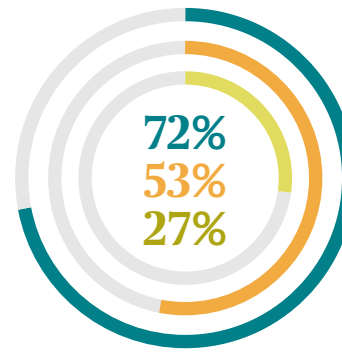
Informal collaboration and communication



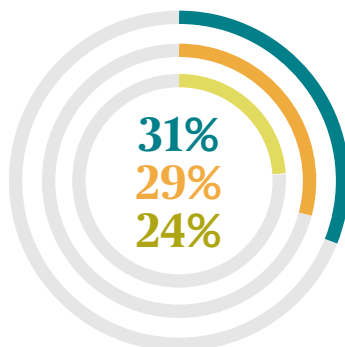
Shared KPIs or OKRs



Joint strategic planning sessions



Shared reporting structures



■ Strongly aligned  
■ Moderately aligned  
■ Poorly aligned



“While growth might fall on one leader’s shoulders because of their title, the reality is growth is everyone’s responsibility. Let’s take the example of deploying hundreds of millions of dollars to build 40 new restaurants, which could be a 3-year process. Technically our Chief of Development “owns” this growth but that also means HR has to build and train 40 new teams, Supply Chain has to source construction materials and equipment from all around the world and on time, Operations has store openings all across the country, Marketing has to create awareness to get guests to come in to the new restaurants, Legal will negotiate leases or property acquisition after real estate finds the sites, and Finance has to create the capital plan to make all this happen. If any one of these things doesn’t happen, we won’t achieve our growth goals and it won’t be sustainable—that’s why growth is 1) everyone’s responsibility and 2) needs to be highly coordinated across functions, starting with the Lead Team.”

**Kevin Hochman**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Brinker International

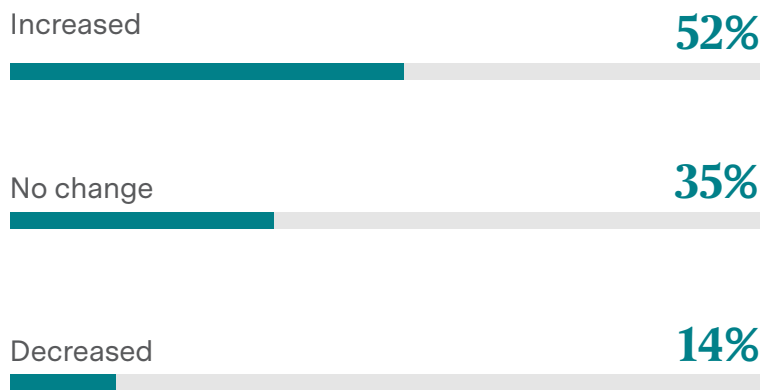




## Influence and Empowerment Are Rising

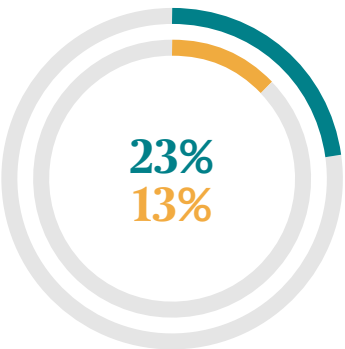
Revenue-driving leaders are expanding their influence beyond execution. Over half (52%) report feeling a broader span of influence across the C-suite and board over the last year, rising to 59% among leaders who oversee all growth-driving functions.

**Has your access/influence within the C-Suite and/or the Board of Directors changed in the past year?**

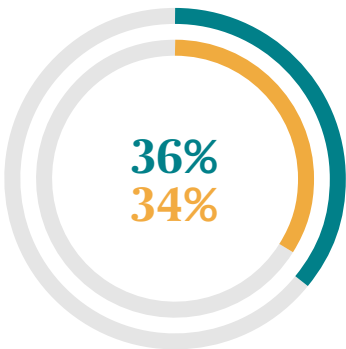


Has your access/influence within the C-Suite and/or the Board of Directors changed in the past year?

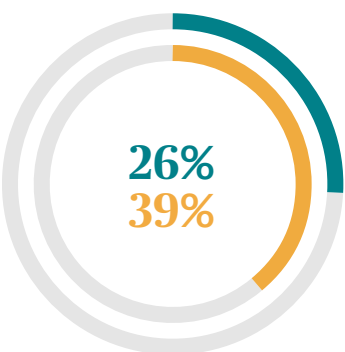
Significantly increased



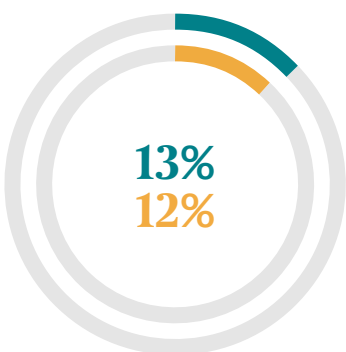
Somewhat increased



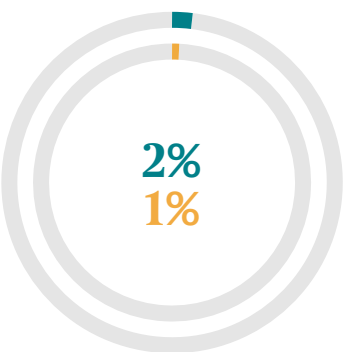
No change



Somewhat decreased



Significantly decreased



- A single role representing all topline growth driving functions (e.g., CMO, CSO, CRO, or Chief Growth Officer)
- Multiple distinct roles (e.g., separate CMO, CSO, CRO)

As leaders gain more influence, they also report feeling more empowered. This boost in empowerment connects to better company performance: 57% of leaders in growing companies feel empowered, and in the fastest-growing organizations, 65% feel this way.

**59%**

More empowered

**34%**

Less empowered

**7%**

Same

**56%**

More effective

**35%**

Less effective

**9%**

Same

**69%**

More collaborative

**23%**

Less collaborative

**8%**

Same

**39%**

More siloed

**50%**

Less siloed

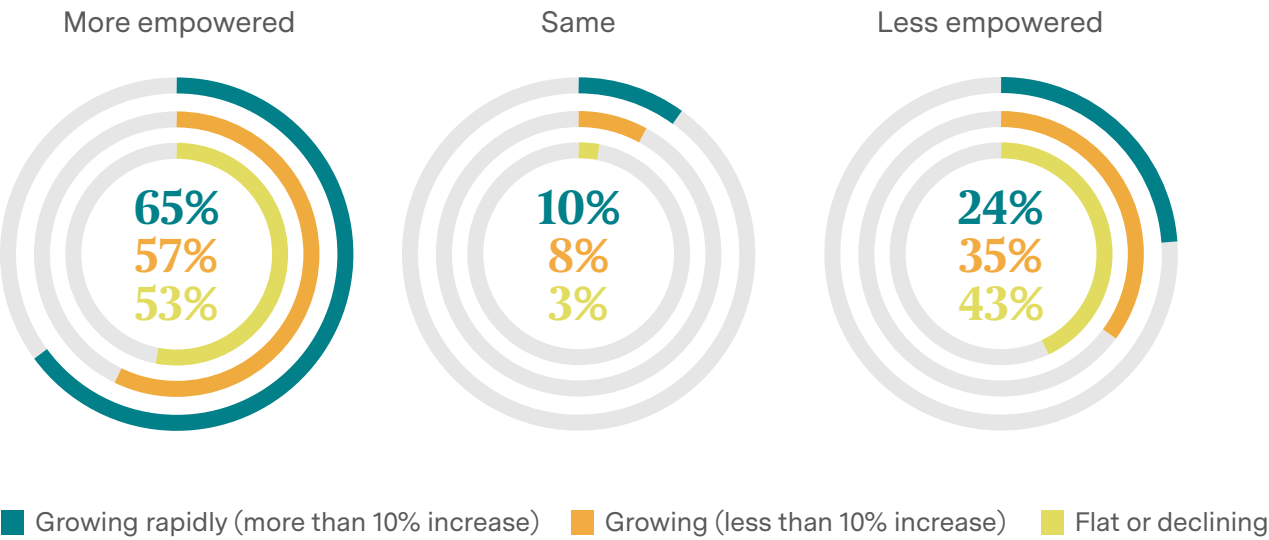
**11%**

Same



**Feeling more empowered is associated with higher growth.**

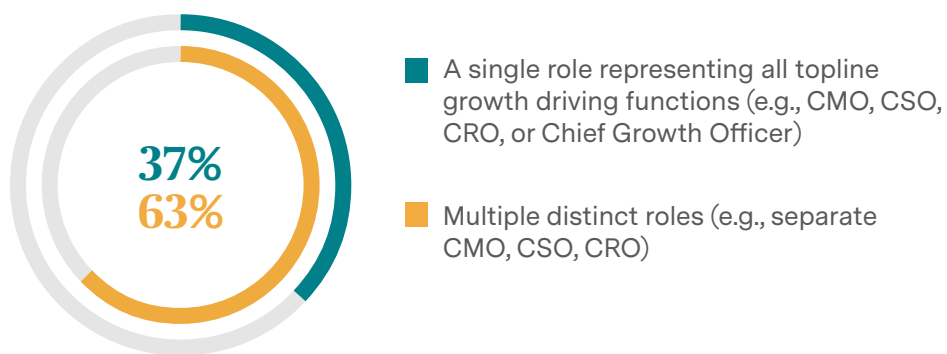
In the past year in my leadership role, I feel...



## Leadership Structures Are Shifting

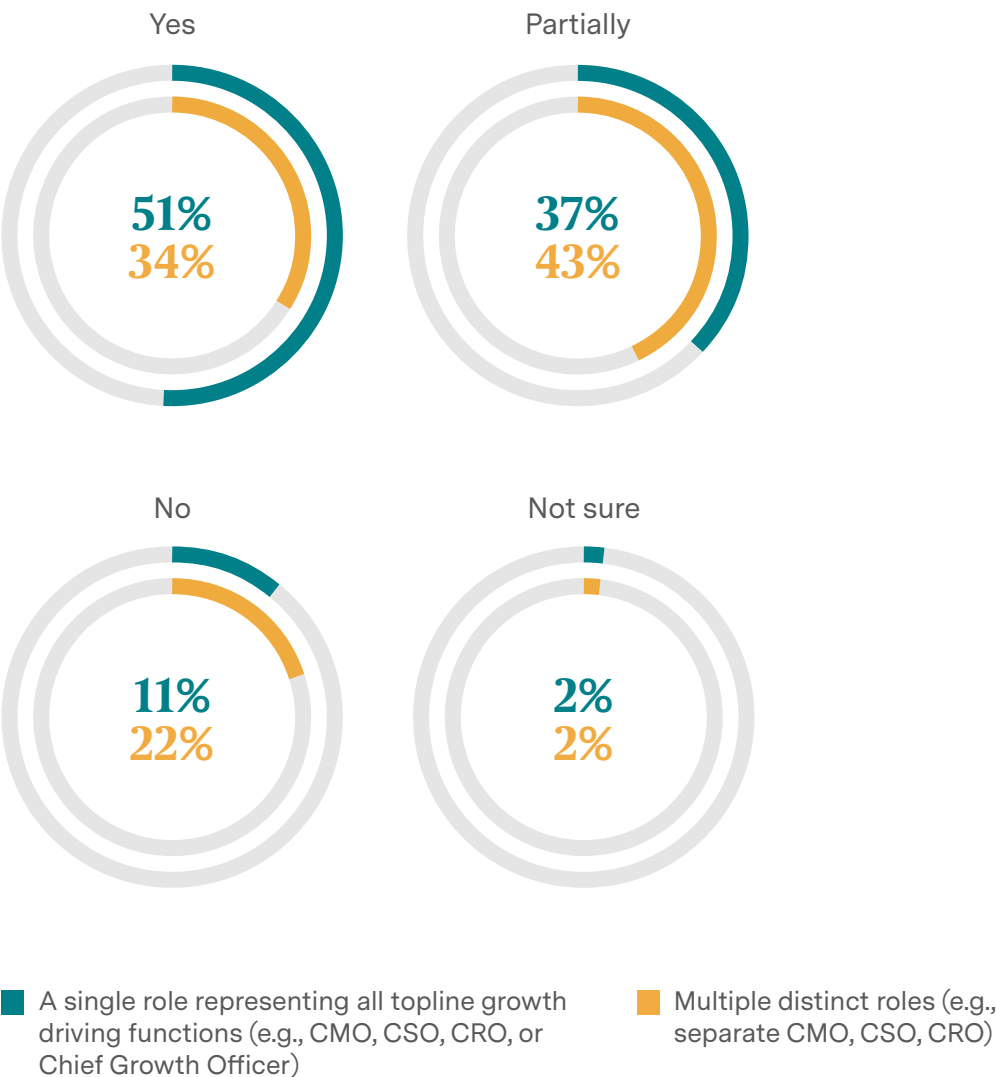
It's common for revenue responsibility to be spread across C-suite roles, with distinct disciplines, such as Chief Marketing Officer, Chief Sales Officer, Chief Revenue Officer, etc.

**Which of the following best describes your organization's revenue-driving leadership structure at the C-suite level?**



However, a single enterprise “Growth Owner” boosts execution confidence. When topline functions (sales, marketing, etc.) sit under a single executive, leaders are significantly more likely to say the structure is well-suited to strategy (51%) compared to 34% in multi-role models.

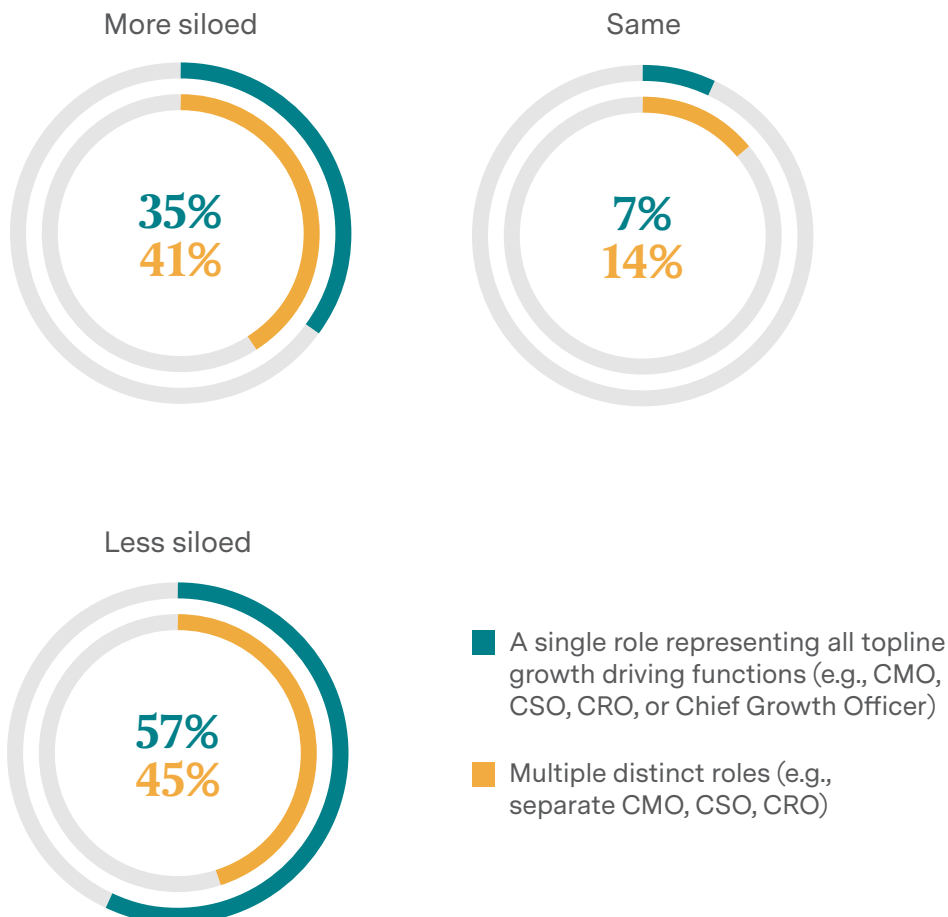
**In your view, is the current revenue-driving leadership structure well-suited to executing the organization’s strategy?**



Leaders with consolidated revenue-driving responsibilities also report feeling less siloed than those where these responsibilities are split across multiple roles. This suggests that clarity and centralization can help reduce fragmentation and improve collaboration.



In the past year in my leadership role, I feel...



To maximize growth and collaboration, organizations are re-evaluating how they structure their leadership teams. Nearly one-third of leaders (31%) report that the function has become more centralized in the past year, while 19% report that it has moved toward decentralization.

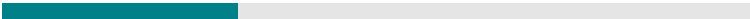
### Industry Snapshot: Leadership Structures Across Industries

**Financial Services** has the most decentralized revenue-driving functions (73%), followed by **Consumer** at 63%.

**Industrial** has the highest share of centralized single roles (46%), followed by **Consumer** at 37%.

### Has your revenue-driving leadership structure changed in the last year?


Yes, it's become more centralized **31%**

A horizontal bar chart with a teal segment representing 31% of the total length.

Yes, it's become more decentralized **19%**

A horizontal bar chart with a teal segment representing 19% of the total length.

It has changed in a different way **5%**

A horizontal bar chart with a teal segment representing 5% of the total length.

No change **45%**

A horizontal bar chart with a teal segment representing 45% of the total length.

There are several main drivers behind these structural changes:

- **Experimentation with mixed models.** Companies are centralizing some functions while decentralizing others.
- **Role reshuffling and specialization.** Some organizations are redefining roles and creating specialized positions such as Chief Customer Officer and Chief Growth and Innovation Officer.
- **Leadership changes.** Many firms hired new executives or reduced the number of C-level positions.
- **Post-M&A reorganizations.** When companies merge or are acquired, structural changes are common.
- **Consolidation and new business verticals.** Some organizations are grouping functions by segments and adding new categories.
- **Greater focus on alignment and cross-functional collaboration.** This can encompass both teams and regions.

When functions lean toward centralization, it was most often to drive efficiency and cost optimization, to create stronger alignment across teams, to create consistent customer experiences, to drive accountability and focus and to simplify processes and adopt new digital ways of working more seamlessly. “Ownership and decision making re: revenue should be centralized at the top of the organization,” a respondent said.

For those that became more decentralized, it was often driven by the need to empower local leaders within their markets, enable faster and more flexible decision-making, establish clear P&L accountability and ownership and to allow greater organizational agility and adaptation. “Markets are diverging...A centralized model doesn’t help to be close enough to local markets and consumers,” another respondent shared.

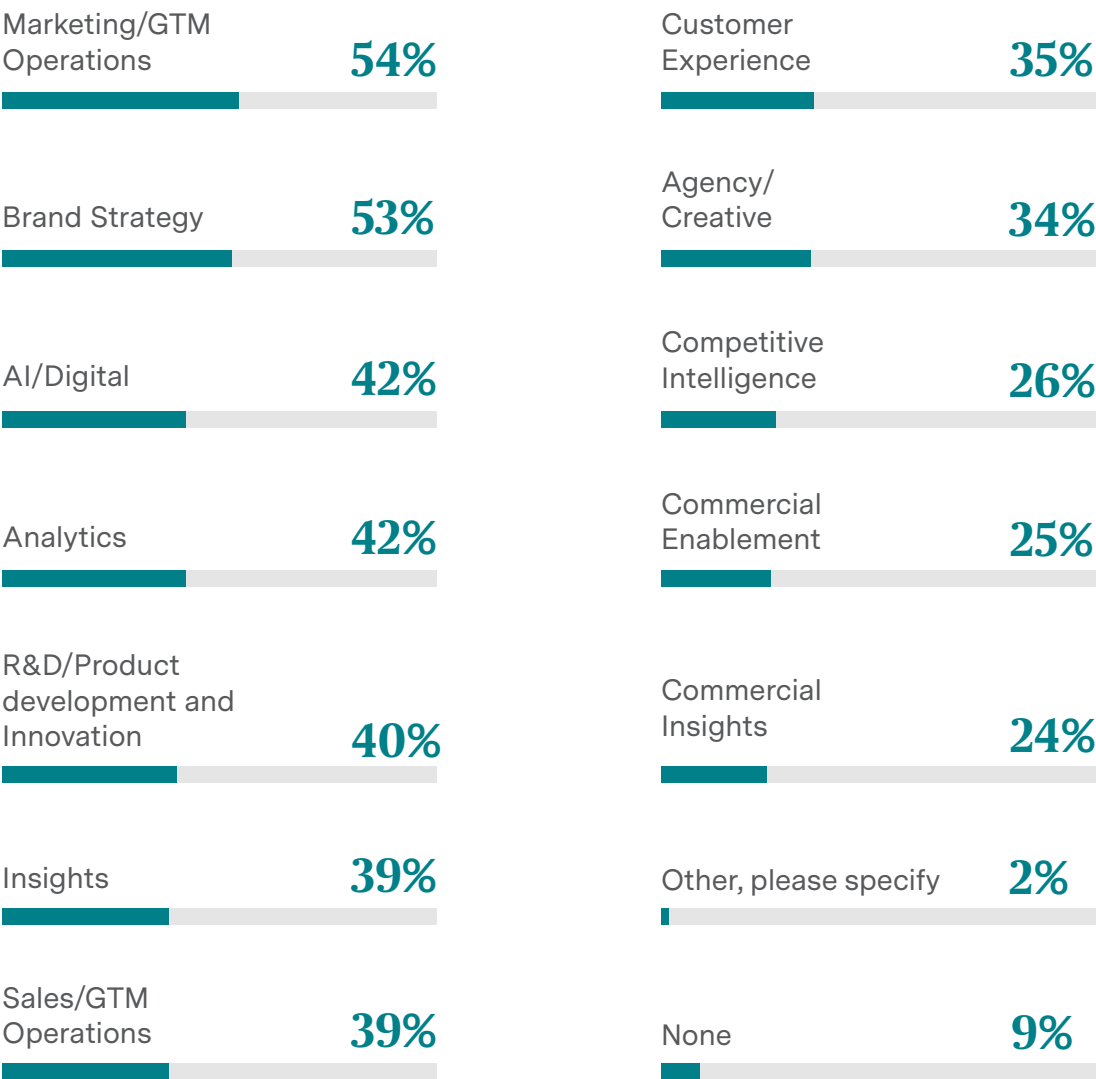
**In the past year in my leadership role,  
I feel...**



# Centers of Excellence (CoEs) Have Gone Mainstream

Companies are centralizing the capabilities that most directly drive growth, differentiation, and speed—turning expertise into a strategic asset, not a support function. The most common are Marketing/GTM Operations (54%), Brand Strategy (53%) AI/ Digital and Analytics (42%) and R&D/Product Development and Innovation (40%).

**What enterprise Centers of Excellence (CoEs) and/or centralized functions, if any, does your organization have today? Select all that apply**

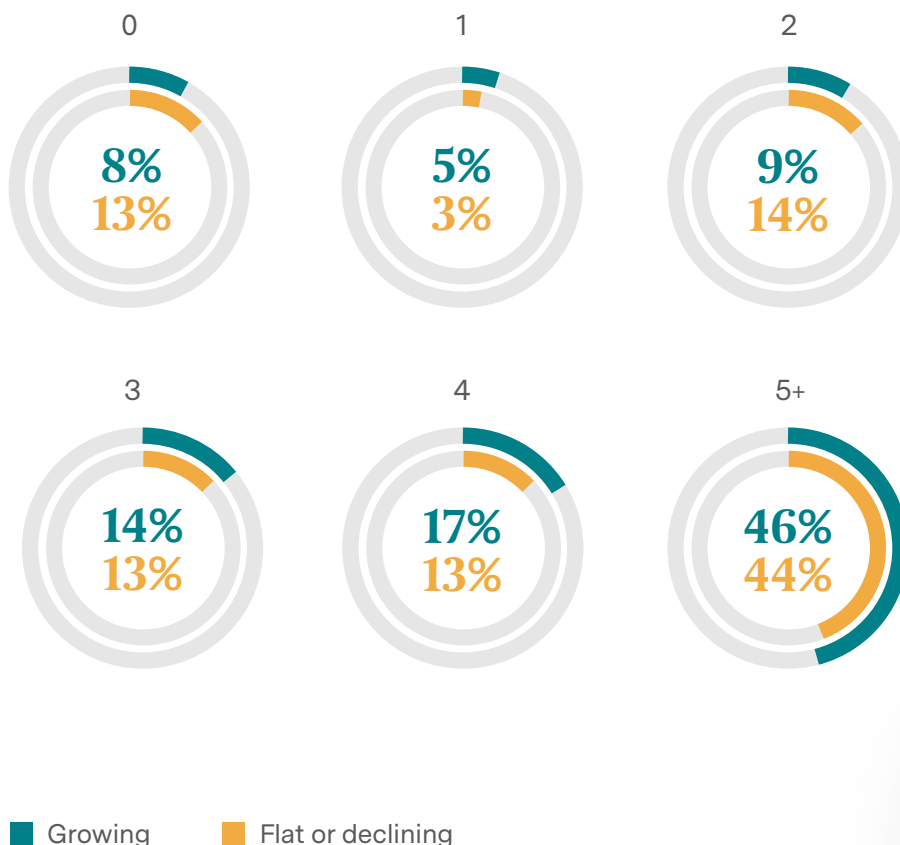


As growth becomes harder to generate and execution more complex, Centers of Excellence have emerged as a critical leadership lever for delivering outsized results at scale, and the data shows that growing companies tend to have more CoEs. Nearly half report having five or more, while lower-performing organizations cluster at the bottom end of the spectrum.

By centralizing scarce, high-impact capabilities, such as go-to-market operations, brand strategy, AI and analytics, and innovation, CoEs allow leaders to institutionalize what works, eliminate fragmentation, and speed decision-making across the enterprise. They create organizational “muscle memory,” translating strategy into repeatable execution rather than isolated wins.

Crucially, these CoEs also serve as integration hubs, aligning data, talent, and investment around the few capabilities that directly drive revenue growth and competitive differentiation. In an era defined by rapid technological change and rising execution risk, leaders who build strong CoEs are better positioned to compound advantages faster than competitors who rely on decentralized, ad hoc approaches.

#### Growing organizations have more CoEs.



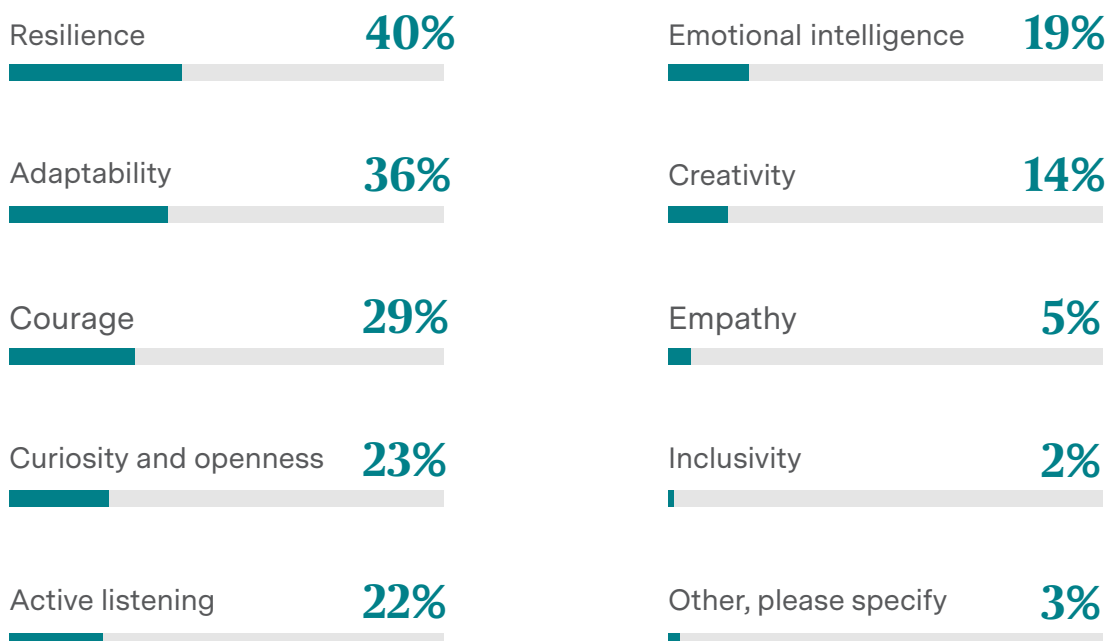
# Growth Superchargers: Resilience, People, Adaptation

While acting as a strategic partner to the CEO, aligning leadership teams, and building structures that enable collaboration are the main predictors of growth, how revenue-driving leaders show up is also key to supercharging growth.

Our survey found that a combination of building and enhancing leadership capabilities and skills is crucial to their effectiveness.

Leaders highlighted resilience (40%) and adaptability (36%), followed by courage (29%), curiosity and openness (23%), and active listening (22%) as their top choices.

**In your position currently, which of the following do you consider most important to strengthen your leadership? *Select up to two***





Despite the hype and pressure surrounding AI, leaders aren't abandoning the fundamentals. However, AI has emerged as one of the biggest developmental priorities. When asked which skills will matter most in their roles, leaders prioritize:

**48%**

Building high-performing teams

**44%**

Advanced data and analytics and AI literacy

**33%**

Cross-functional collaboration

**32%**

Deep customer and market insight

The prominence of AI, ranking just behind team leadership, signals that the next wave of growth leadership will require both human-centered and tech-driven skillsets.

“

“True innovation happens when everyone feels ownership over our shared mission. As Chief Growth Officer, I’m focused on unlocking that potential by bringing together teams that have traditionally worked in separate lanes. When we align around common goals with clear accountability, we don’t just execute better. We elevate each other and create space to think bigger.”

**Stacy Taffet**

Chief Growth Officer  
The Hershey Co.




This sentiment reflects a broader drive among revenue leaders to move beyond execution and unlock strategic potential through alignment and collaboration.

Beyond driving topline growth (71%), the majority of respondents said they focus on shaping brand strategy (53%), and leading product marketing and go-to-market efforts (45%). Yet, when asked about the balance between operational execution and strategic leadership, two-thirds (66%) said they want to spend more time on strategy. Only 29% are satisfied with the current mix, and a mere 5% would prefer less strategic involvement. This gap underscores a growing tension: Leaders aspire to play a bigger role in shaping long-term growth, but operational demands still dominate their time.

**What is the balance of time you spend between operational activities and strategic leadership?**

100%-75% operational **15%**



75%-50% operational **40%**



50%-75% strategic **33%**




75%-100% strategic **12%**




**How should your time ideally be balanced to maximize your impact?**

100%-75% operational **0%**



75%-50% operational **6%**



50%-75% strategic **57%**



75%-100% strategic **36%**



66% would like to see an increase in strategic leadership, 29% would like to keep it as it is and 5% would like to see a decrease in time spent on strategic leadership.

# Recommendations for Driving Sustained Growth, Not Growth Spurts

The more than 500 revenue-driving leaders we heard from make one thing clear: **Growth is the result of deliberate choices in leadership and structure.**

Organizations that surge ahead empower revenue-driving leaders to act as strategic partners, foster alignment across functions, and create systems that enable collaboration rather than silos. These companies don't just respond to change but anticipate it, equipping leaders with influence, clarity, and the tools to drive transformation.

Yet, challenges remain. Leaders are balancing top-line acceleration with sustained profitability, embedding AI into their strategies, and navigating economic uncertainty, all while striving to spend more time on strategy than execution.



Some practical recommendations that leaders can implement include:

1

### **Appoint one accountable “Growth Owner”**

Or formalize a Growth Council chaired by the CEO.

2

### **Institutionalize alignment mechanisms**

Shared OKRs, unified GTM dashboards, and weekly revenue councils.

3

### **Protect strategic time for revenue leaders**

(minimum 20% weekly) and push operational decisions downward with clear RACIs.

4

### **Close the analytics gap**

Embed AI/data capabilities into decision-making, not just reporting.

5

### **Measure collaboration as rigorously as revenue**

Because leaders feel more siloed even as they feel more empowered.

6

### **Build the right CoE portfolio, prioritizing quality over quantity**

Aim for fewer, better integrated CoEs (Marketing Ops, Brand, Analytics/AI, CX) with a single governance spine and clear decision rights to avoid duplicative analytics and slow GTM.

Growth doesn’t happen in isolation. Leaders thrive when the environment amplifies their capabilities—and organizations succeed when they empower leaders to think bigger and act boldly. The path forward is clear: **Companies must invest in alignment, capability-building, and leadership resilience. They must break down silos, embrace technology as a growth enabler, and give leaders the space to think bigger.** Growth is dynamic, constantly impacted by complexity and innovation. Revenue-driving leaders who combine bold vision with disciplined execution won’t just be positioned for growth; they’ll surge ahead.

# If You Were CEO for a Day: Five Bold Moves to Drive Growth

If given the reins for just 24 hours, revenue leaders say they'd start by tearing down walls. The most common rallying cry? **Alignment and Integration**. Leaders want marketing, sales, and operations to stop working in isolation and start sharing goals and KPIs. "I'd focus on deepening alignment across our go-to-market teams to drive solution-led growth," one respondent said.

Others would pivot hard toward more **Customer-Centricity**, making loyalty and experience the north star. "I'd ensure we always start with the customer—their needs, perceptions, and motivations," said another.

Technology is also high on the agenda. Calls to **invest in AI and analytics** were clear, with leaders envisioning real-time dashboards and sharper forecasting. "Implement a Real-Time Revenue & Strategy Alignment Dashboard," a respondent urged.

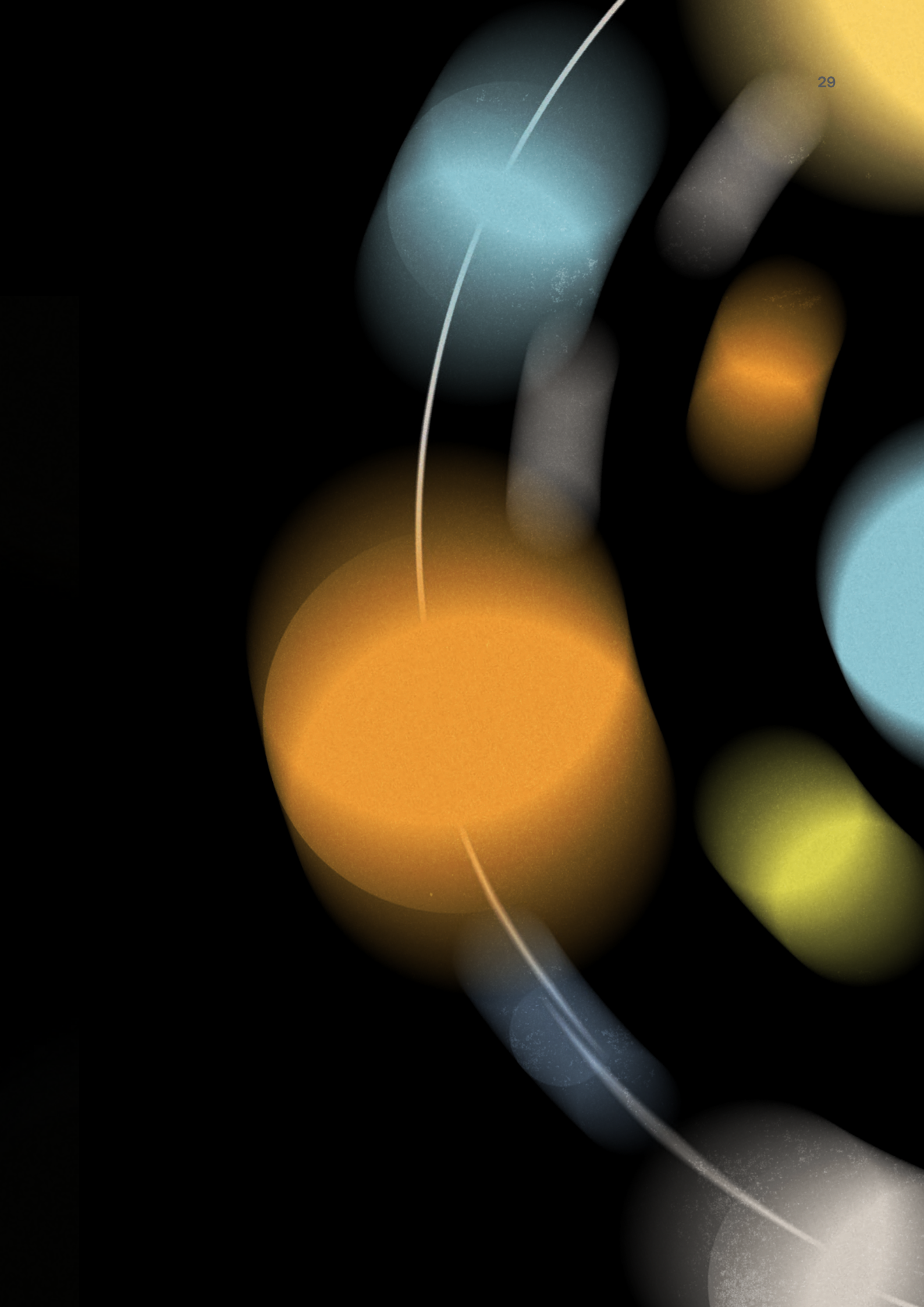
Simplification is another mantra: "Focus on fewer, bigger, better," reads one quote, as executives push to strip away non-value-adding complexity. Alongside that comes a demand for **Empowerment and Accountability**, moving decision-making down the ranks and clarifying roles.

Finally, the human factor: **Culture and Talent**. Leaders want to elevate top performers, foster entrepreneurial spirit, and—sometimes ruthlessly: "Kill the old dragons and nurture the young ones."

The connecting thread in all these priorities is a hunger for speed, clarity, and bold bets, whether that's on people, technology, or ideas.

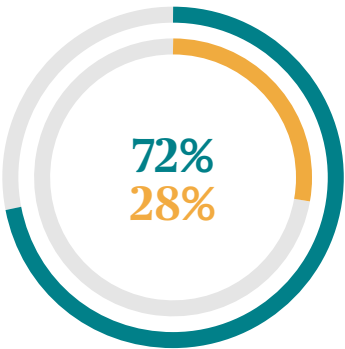






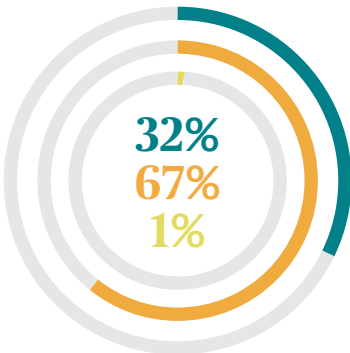
# Demographics Individual

Were you internally promoted or externally hired into your current role?



■ Externally hired  
■ Internally promoted

What is the gender you most identify with?



■ Female  
■ Male  
■ Prefer not to answer

How long have you been in your current role?



■ Less than 2 years  
■ 2-5 years  
■ More than 5 years

### What is your age?

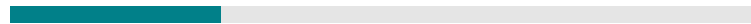
35-44 **14%**



45-49 **25%**



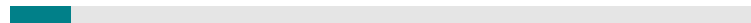
50-54 **28%**



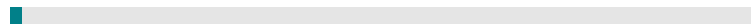
55-59 **24%**



60-64 **8%**

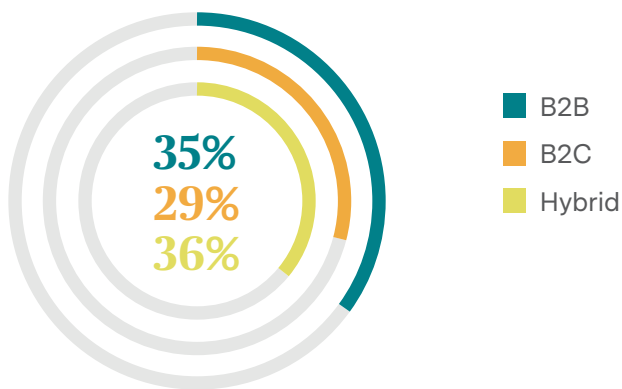


Prefer not to answer **2%**

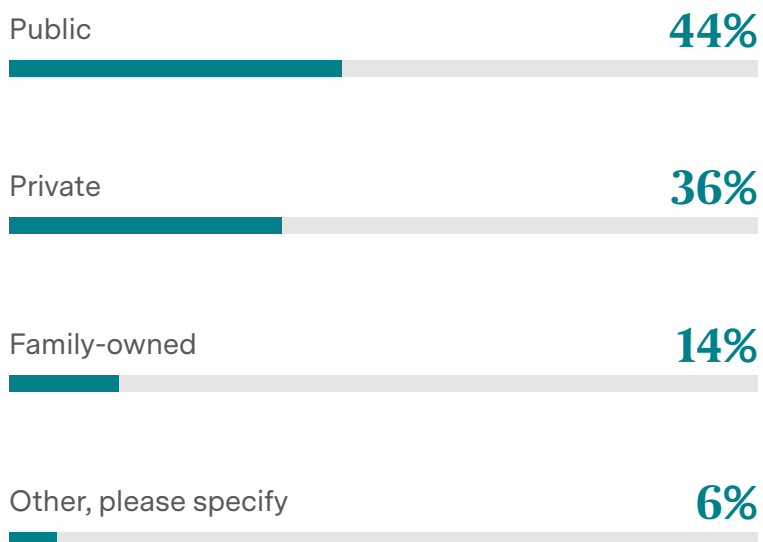


# Demographics Organization

Which model do you operate in?



What is your company's ownership structure?



**Which of the following represents the main activity of your organization (i.e., accounts for the largest proportion of revenue)?**


Consumer **35%**



Industrial **14%**



Technology and Communications **14%**




Financial Services **11%**



Healthcare and Pharma **7%**




Services including Professional Services **7%**



Private Equity **1%**



Public & Social sector **1%**



Other, please specify **10%**



**What is your company's annual revenue in USD?**

Less than 500 million **22%**



500 million to 1 billion **16%**



1-5 billion **28%**



6-10 billion **9%**




11-15 billion **6%**




16-20 billion **3%**



21-50 billion **9%**



More than 50 billion **8%**



## About Egon Zehnder

Egon Zehnder is the world's preeminent leadership advisory firm, inspiring leaders to navigate complex questions with human answers. 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.

We are built on a foundation that supports partnership in the truest sense of the word and aligns our interests with the interests of our clients. Our 600 consultants across 70 offices and 36 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 partner closely with public and private corporations, family-owned enterprises, and non-profit and government agencies to provide executive search, leadership solutions, CEO search and succession, board advisory, and diversity, equity & inclusion.

Our services include discovering leaders, developing leadership, advancing governance, shaping successions, and unlocking transformations. We partner with Mobius Executive Leadership to offer highly experiential, personalized and transformational programs for senior leaders.

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

For more information, visit [www.egonzehnder.com](http://www.egonzehnder.com) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

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