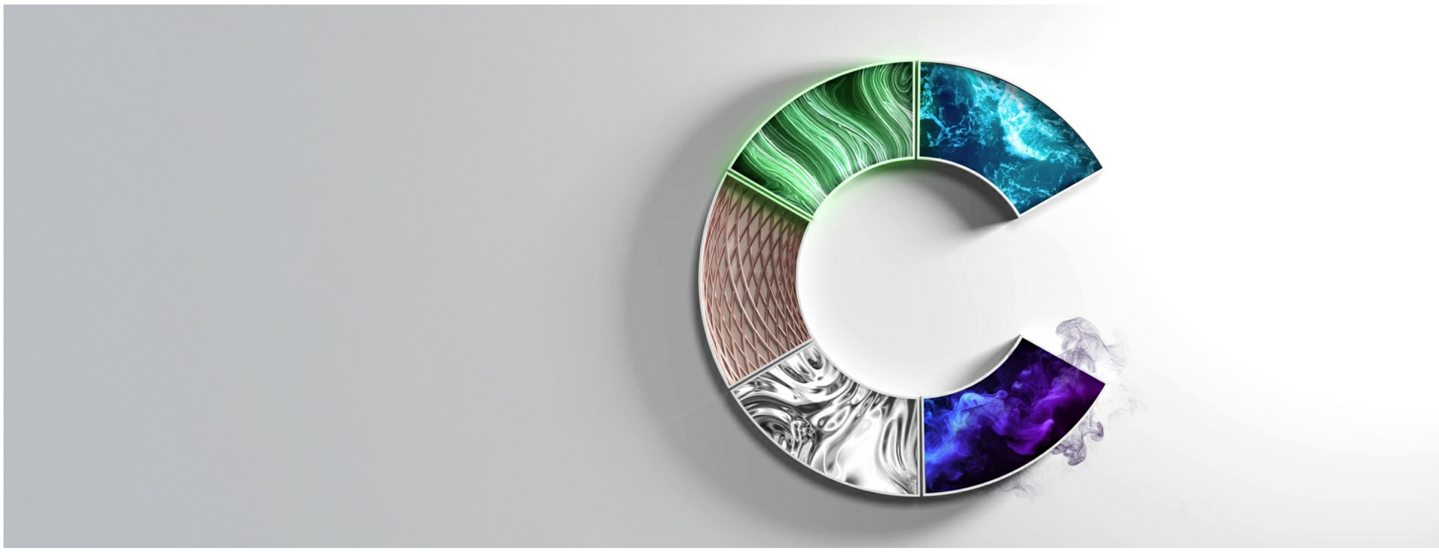
IBM UK Newsroom

New IBM CEO Study Reveals UKI Leaders Are Actively Embracing Agentic AI to Supercharge Business Growth

• Almost two thirds of CEO respondents in the UK and Ireland (65%) say their organisation is actively adopting AI agents and is prepared to implement them at scale

• 58% say they are pushing their organisation to adopt generative AI more quickly than some people find comfortable, and 64% recognise the potential productivity gains are so great they must accept significant risk to stay competitive



LONDON, UK – 3 June, 2025 – A new study by the IBM (NYSE: IBM) Institute for Business Value confirmed the era of AI experimentation is over — with two-thirds of UKI CEOs firmly believing their organisations' competitive edge will hinge on a robust generative AI strategy, businesses are shifting gears and rapidly adopting and scaling AI agents with success defined by tangible business results.

Agentic AI is revolutionising decision-making, delivering predictive insights that allow businesses to anticipate change before they lift a finger. Helping functions like HR, finance, IT and customer service automate complex tasks, gain insights and drive productivity. In a world of market fluctuations, geopolitical shifts, and evolving customer demands, AI-driven productivity is the competitive edge CEOs cannot afford to ignore.

The IBV CEO Study, which surveyed 2,000 CEOs globally, revealed that 64% of UKI leaders see automation's productivity gains as worth the significant risk to remain competitive, while 66% feel they must take more risks than rivals to stay ahead. Additionally, 62% of leaders surveyed said they invest in technologies before fully understanding their value to avoid falling behind. However, smart leaders are taking smart risks that involve strategic experimentation, learning, and incremental innovation to pave the way for larger bets in the future.

"As expectations around AI shift towards competitive advantage and quantifiable ROI, CEOs are embracing risk as an opportunity to drive business performance", explained Rahul Kalia, Managing Partner, UK and Ireland, IBM Consulting. "AI-first mindset has gained traction as CEOs navigate disruption while driving growth."

As AI investment is set to more than double in the next two years, businesses in the UK and Ireland are faced with the pressure of rapid transformation. To rise to the challenge 82% of UKI executives are committed to sustaining or accelerating their efforts—yet challenges persist, with 45% encountering disconnected technology due to swift investments and 77% facing growth barriers from inconsistent standards. To help enterprises integrate agents across diverse environments, apps, and data, IBM is providing a comprehensive suite of enterprise-ready agent capabilities in watsonx Orchestrate to help businesses put them into action.

This is complemented by organisations prioritising building trust and transparency in AI. This includes developing explainable AI models, implementing rigorous data privacy and security measures, and adhering to strict ethical guidelines. By fostering trust through clear governance, ethical assessments, and explainable AI, businesses can ensure their technological advancements are both effective and responsible, driving sustainable success.

“AI is helping to drive significant productivity gains as organisations face talent shortages and pressure to innovate fast”, explains Edgar Randall, UK&I Managing Director at Dun & Bradstreet. “But real transformation requires trust, not just speed, and that trust comes from strong governance, transparency, and the quality data that fuels AI. Organisations that build responsible AI practices from the start, based on solid data strategies and ethical use, will be best positioned to boost productivity, make smarter decisions, and sustain growth.”

Other key UKI findings include:

CEOs face competing pressures of short-term ROI and long-term innovation

- Surveyed CEOs report that only 25% of AI initiatives have delivered expected ROI over the last few years and only 16% have scaled enterprise wide.
- To accelerate progress, two-thirds (63%) of CEO respondents say their organisation is leaning into AI use cases based on ROI, with 72% reporting that their organisation has clear metrics to measure innovation ROI effectively.
- Just over half (52%) of CEO respondents say their organisation is realising value from generative AI investments beyond cost reduction.

CEOs see strategic leadership and specialised talent as essential to unlocking AI value, amid expertise and skills gaps

- 69% of CEO respondents say their organisation’s success is directly tied to maintaining a broad group of leaders with a deep understanding of strategy and the authority to make critical decisions.
- CEOs cite lack of collaboration across organisational siloes, aversion to risk and disruption and lack of expertise and knowledge as top barriers to innovation in their organisation.
- Surveyed CEOs say roughly one-third (30%) of the workforce will require retraining and/or reskilling over the next three years, while 68% say their organisation will use automation to address skill gaps.

To view the full global study, visit: https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/en-us/c-suite-study/ceo

***Study Methodology**

The IBM Institute for Business Value, in cooperation with Oxford Economics, surveyed 2,000 CEOs from 33 countries and 24 industries between February and April 2025. Survey questions covered several key areas, including organizational performance, strategic priorities and innovation challenges. The survey also explored how companies manage change, adopt technology like AI, make decisions, leadership approaches, talent strategies, cultural readiness for transformation, collaboration efforts and regulatory concerns.

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global research and performance data with expertise from industry thinkers and leading academics to deliver insights that make business leaders smarter. For more world-class thought leadership, visit: www.ibm.com/ibv. To receive more insights, subscribe to the IdeaWatch newsletter: https://ibm.co/ibv-ideawatch.

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