

Odgers / CEO Executive Management Survey

2026

*Navigating uncertainty:
Resilience, adaptability and the AI imperative*

Macroeconomic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions dominate the executive agenda, cited by more than half of all respondents (52.4%). Closely behind, changing customer needs and expectations (45.2%) reflect the structural shifts in demand that leaders must navigate alongside macro headwinds.

Introduction

In the beginning of 2026, Odgers invited Denmark's top CEOs and members of executive management teams to participate in the annual **CEO Survey**.

The survey explores the most pressing issues facing Danish business leaders today, spanning the current geopolitical landscape, people and leadership priorities, and the evolving role of the board.

This year's survey received responses from Danish Top 200 senior executives, offering a rich picture of how Danish business leaders are navigating an era defined by geopolitical volatility, accelerating AI adoption, and shifting talent dynamics.



Current Geopolitical Situation



People & Leadership



Board Collaboration



Executive Summary

- The majority of Danish CEOs expect moderate revenue **growth** of 2–5% in 2026, yet macroeconomic **uncertainty** and geopolitical **tensions** remain the top concern, cited by over half of respondents.
- **Strategic adaptability** is overwhelmingly identified as the most critical executive capability (92.9%), reflecting the premium placed on leadership agility in turbulent conditions.
- AI is rapidly moving from experimentation to strategic integration: 51.2% of executives describe **AI as experimental**, while 21.9% say it is already core to or mission-critical for their strategy.
- Board collaboration remains a development area: 62.5% of CEOs believe **the board could contribute even more**, with management sparring cited as the most desired area of improvement.



Current Geopolitical Situation

Revenue growth expectations remain cautiously optimistic, with 40.5% expecting 2-5% growth. Investments in the US (42.9%) and global supply chains (26.2%) are the geographies most impacted by geopolitical uncertainty. Near-shoring is still nascent, with 61.9% not yet pursuing it, though regulatory compliance and cyber resilience are rising priorities.



People & Leadership

Strategic adaptability (92.9%) and decisiveness (66.7%) top the list of critical executive capabilities. AI is increasingly shaping operations and supply chains (70.7%) and pricing & revenue management (51.2%). Succession planning has improved, with 68.3% of companies now having a formal plan in place.



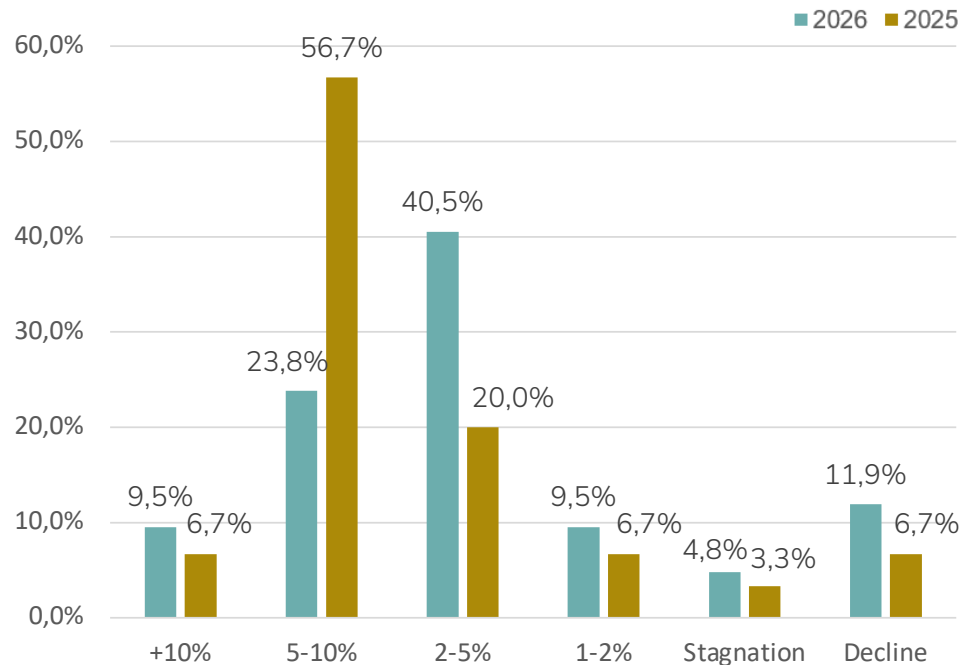
Board Collaboration

62.5% of CEOs see room for greater board contribution, particularly in management sparring (64%) and sector/industry experience (52%). While 62.5% believe their board has the relevant competencies, 37.5% identify gaps.



Revenue Growth Expectations Remain Optimistic

Which level of revenue growth do you expect of your company in 2026?



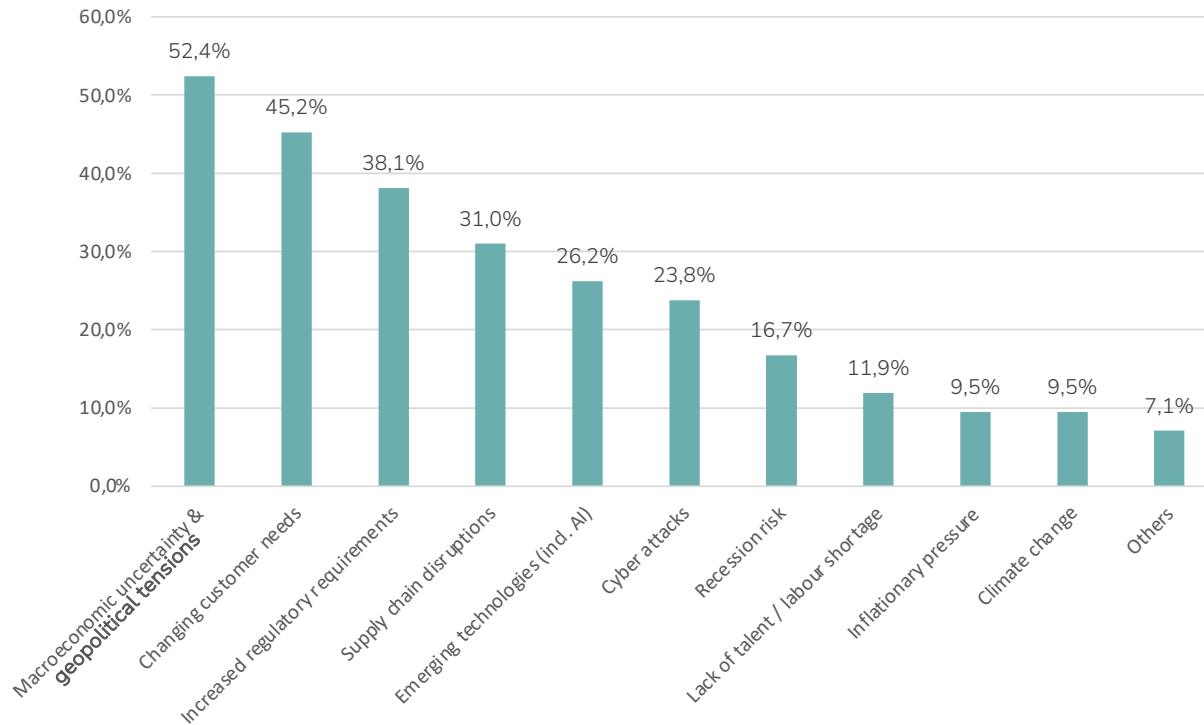
The dominant expectation is moderate revenue growth of 2–5%, reported by 40.5% of respondents. A further 33.3% anticipate stronger growth of 5% or more, signaling continued confidence in underlying business fundamentals. Meanwhile, 11.9% expect a decline, and stagnation or low growth (1–2%) account for an additional 14.3%.

Expectations have shifted notably compared to last year. In 2025, 56.7% of surveyed executives expected revenue growth of 5–10%, whereas only 23.8% hold the same view this year. At the same time, just 20% anticipated growth of 2–5% in 2025 - a share that has doubled in 2026.

Overall, Danish executive sentiment points toward cautious optimism, with growth still expected, though at more moderate levels than seen last year.

External Uncertainties

Which external uncertainties affect your leadership agenda the most today?

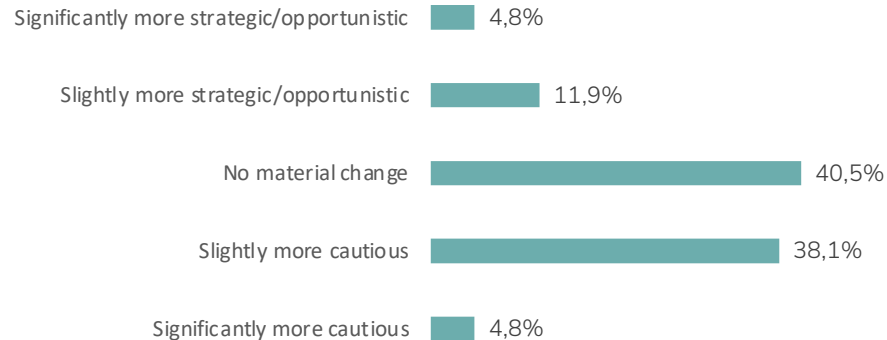


Macroeconomic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions dominate the executive agenda, cited by more than half of all respondents (52.4%). Close behind, changing customer needs and expectations are highlighted by 45.2%. Increased regulatory requirements (38.1%) - including CSRD, NIS2, and DORA - together with supply chain disruptions (31%) and emerging technologies such as AI (26.2%) round out the top five external uncertainties shaping leadership agendas today.

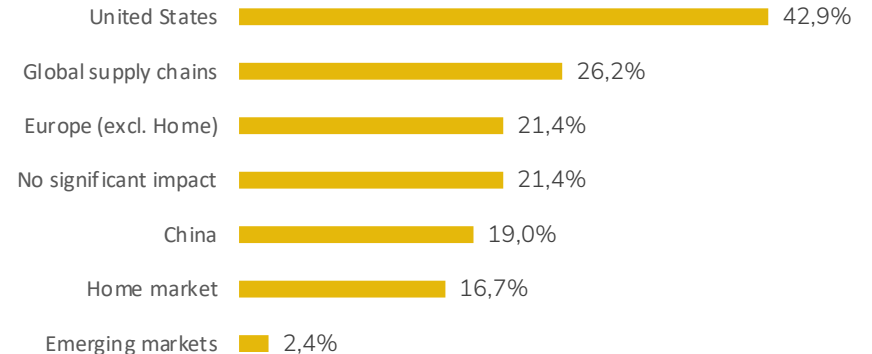
Together, these dynamics point to a leadership environment defined by volatility, shifting stakeholder demands, and accelerating technological change.

Geopolitical Uncertainties

Has recent geopolitical uncertainty made your company's investment strategy more cautious or more strategic/opportunistic?



In which geographical areas has geopolitical uncertainty had the greatest impact on your investment decisions?

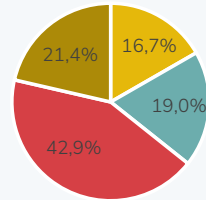


42.9% report that geopolitical uncertainty has made their investment strategy more cautious, while a similar proportion (40.5%) indicate no material change. The US stands out as the geography most affected by geopolitical tensions, influencing investment decisions for 42.9% of respondents. Global supply chains (26.2%) and European markets (21.4%) are also notably impacted, whereas 21.4% report no significant geographical effect.

Cyber Resilience Rises as a Priority; Near-Shoring Remains Nascent

Layoffs in 2026

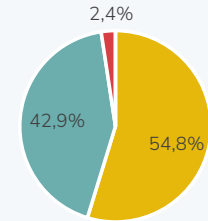
35.7% of CEOs consider layoffs somewhat or very likely in 2026, while **42.9%** say it is not likely. A further **21.4%** remain undecided. This shows a significant shift from 2025 where only **20%** of respondents expected layoffs



- Yes, very likely
- Yes, somewhat likely
- No, not likely
- Undecided

Cyber Resilience

56.1% of executives plan to increase their cyber resilience investments in 2026, with **41.5%** maintaining the current level. Only **2.4%** have no plans to strengthen cyber defenses, reflecting the growing strategic importance of cybersecurity.



- Increase
- Keep same level
- No plans to strengthen cyber resilience
- Cloud Exit plans to strengthen cyber resilience

Near-shoring / Re-shoring

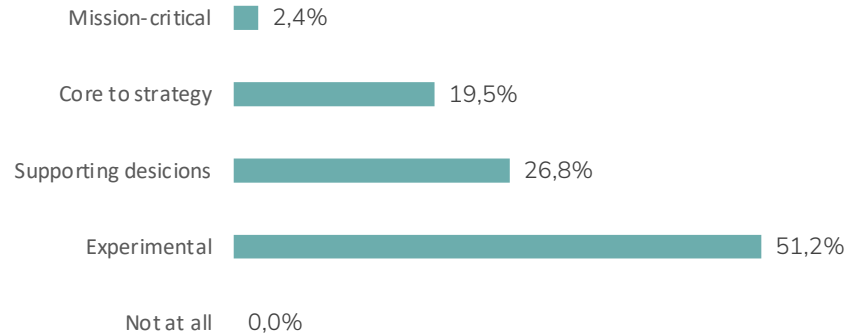
61.9% of companies are not currently pursuing near-shoring or re-shoring to Europe. However, **21.4%** are under evaluation, **9.5%** have partially implemented it, and **7.1%** are actively scaling. The primary drivers behind near-shoring are supply chain resilience (**45.2%**) and geopolitical risk (**35.7%**).

International Talent

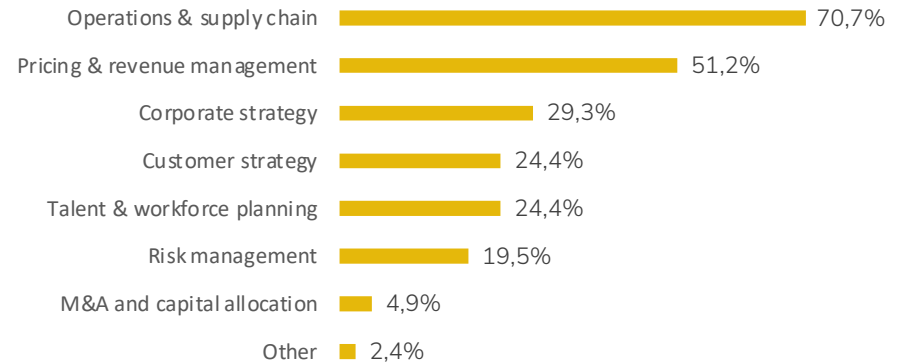
61.9% of the surveyed executives see a need for greater and easier access to international talent – **26.2%** as an immediate priority and **35.7%** as a longer-term factor. **31%** do not have any immediate needs, while only **7.1%** do not expect it to become an issue.

AI Influence and Commercial Integration

To what extent is AI currently integrated into your company's decision-making processes?



Which strategic domains are most influenced by AI insights today?



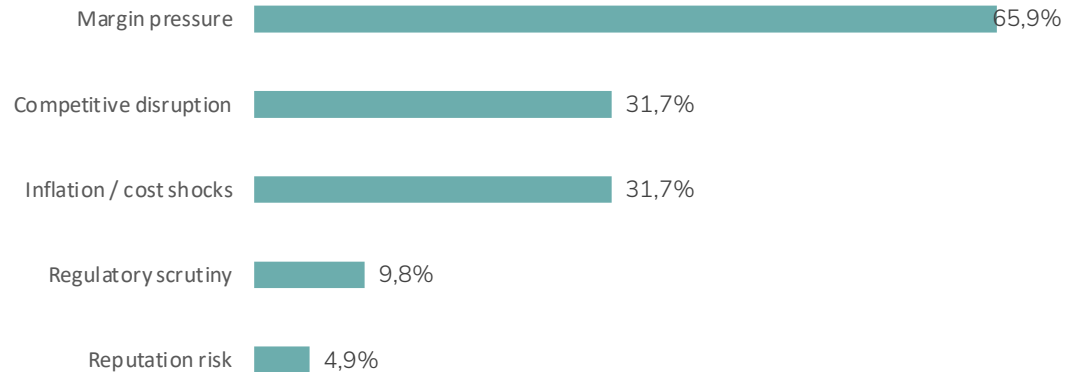
AI adoption appears to be progressing. Just over half of the surveyed executives (51.2%) describe their use of AI as experimental, while a smaller but notable share report that AI is already supporting decision-making (26.8%) or embedded in strategic work (19.5%). None of the respondents state that AI is absent from their decision processes.

AI's influence is most pronounced in operational and supply-chain-focused areas (70.7%) as well as in pricing and revenue management (51.2%). Areas such as corporate strategy, customer strategy, and workforce planning show broader, yet still developing, levels of integration.



Pricing Projects

Pricing strategy focus increases in general – if you recently initiated a price project, what triggered the project?

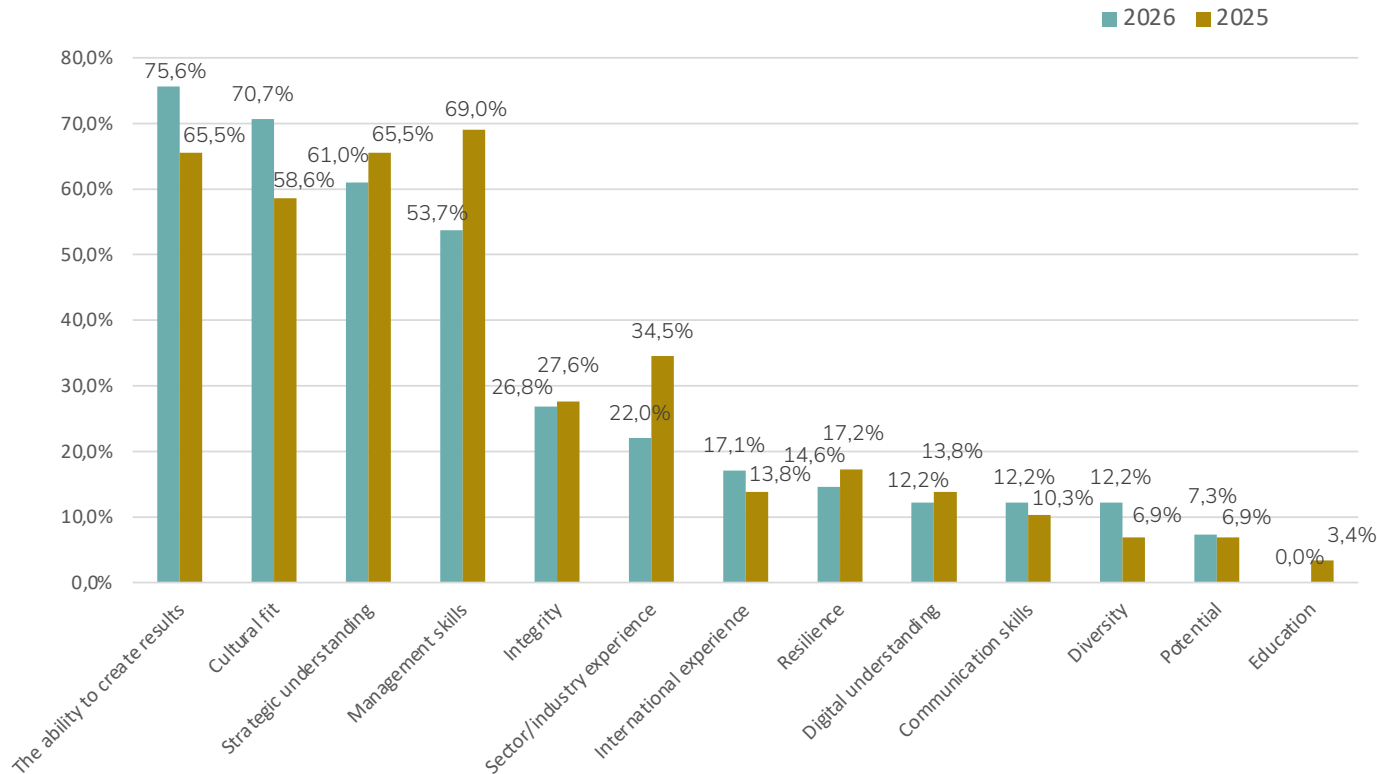


The survey responses indicate that pricing strategy is receiving heightened attention across Danish companies, with several factors triggering recent pricing initiatives. Margin pressure stands out as by far the most frequently cited driver (65.9%). Competitive disruption and inflation or cost shocks follow as equally common triggers (31.7% each), demonstrating how both market dynamics and cost developments are prompting organizations to reassess their pricing approach.

Regulatory scrutiny (9.8%) and reputation risk (4.9%) appear far less common as primary catalysts, suggesting that while these factors are present, they are not the dominant forces shaping pricing decisions at this stage.

Overall, the findings point to pricing initiatives being driven primarily by economic and competitive conditions, with regulatory and reputational considerations playing a more limited role.

Main criteria when recruiting new members of the Executive Management Team



Overall, when recruiting new members of the Executive Management Team, respondents highlight the ability to deliver results and cultural fit as the most critical criteria. Strategic insight and management capabilities also remain important factors.

This question has been part of the Odgers Executive Management Survey since 2005, and the ability to deliver results has consistently ranked at the top. This year, it stands out as particularly prominent.

Recruitment criteria for Executive Management have shifted slightly compared to last year. The ability to deliver results has increased from 65% to 75%, while cultural fit has risen from 59% to 70%. Management skills, however, have declined from 69% to 55%.

For the second consecutive year, sector and industry experience has seen a marked decline, from 34% to 22.5%, signaling a sustained movement away from sector-bound executive profiles.

Recruitment: Competencies Growing in Importance

The surveyed executives believe the following competencies will grow in importance when recruiting new members of the Executive Management Team in 2026:

- Emotional resilience & resilience in changing surroundings
- Strategic outlook & -execution ability
- AI & digital competencies
- International experience
- Cultural understanding & adaptability
- Team spirit & people skills
- Market- & customer understanding
- Agility
- Integrity
- Emotional intelligence
- Leadership acumen
- Ability to manage a complex agenda with multiple stakeholders

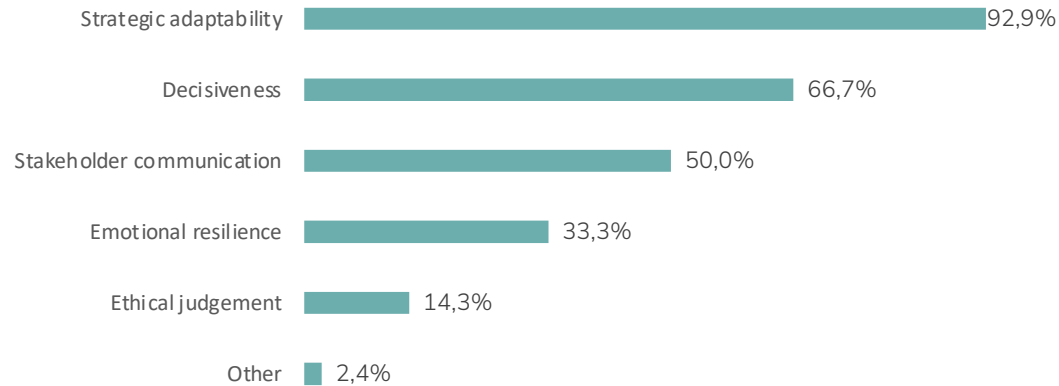
In 2025 the surveyed executives believed the competencies that would grow in importance were:

- Change readiness
- Resilience
- People skills and holistic thinking
- Open-mindedness
- Ability to mobilize and empower
- Integrity and responsibility
- Strategic understanding
- Ability to create results
- Digital understanding
- Leadership skills
- Risk management & change management
- Business development
- Transformation and execution
- Relevant experience



Critical capabilities in uncertain environments

What capabilities are most critical for the Executive Management in uncertain environments?



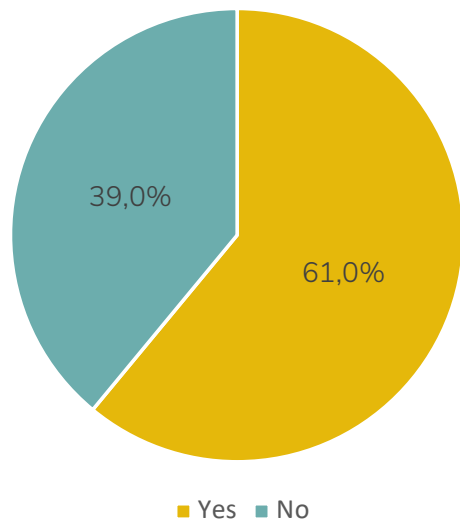
The survey results show that executives view several capabilities as particularly important when navigating uncertain environments. Strategic adaptability stands out clearly as the most critical capability (92.9%), indicating a strong emphasis on leaders' ability to adjust direction and priorities as conditions shift.

Decisiveness (66.7%) and stakeholder communication (50%) follow as essential components of executive performance in uncertain environments.

Emotional resilience is also highlighted by one-third of respondents (33.3%), pointing to the human demands placed on leaders in turbulent periods. Ethical judgement (14.3%) is cited less frequently, though it remains a relevant aspect of leadership in complex situations.

Company Mental Health

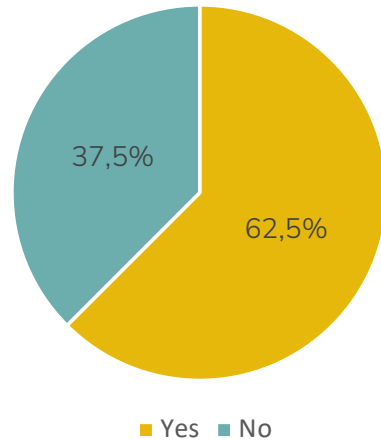
Focus on Mental Health in organizations is growing. Does your company follow a set of guidelines for improving Company Mental Health



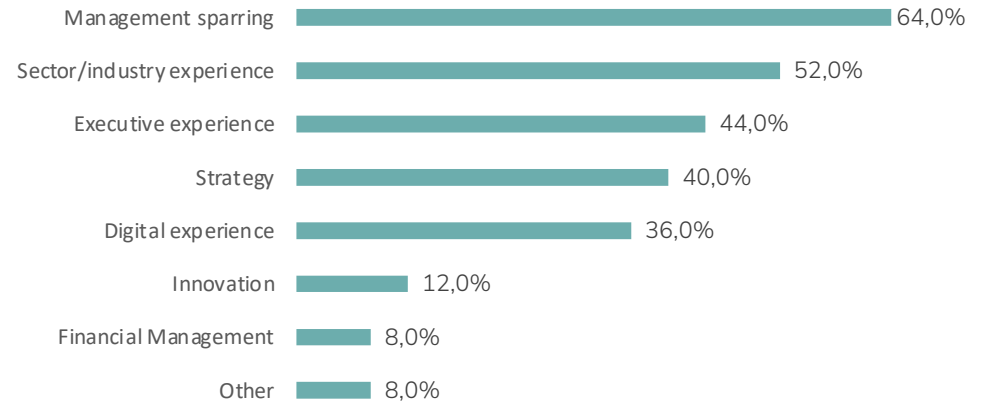
The survey findings indicate growing organizational attention to mental health. A majority of respondents (61%) report that their company follows a set of guidelines to support mental health, while 39% do not. This suggests that structured approaches to mental well-being are becoming increasingly common, though not yet universal across Danish companies.

Board contribution

Do you see areas where the board could contribute even more?



If yes, in which areas do you believe that the board could contribute even more?

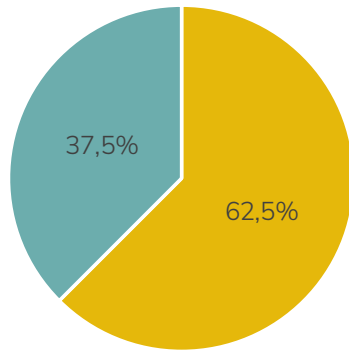


A clear majority of surveyed executives (62.5%) believe their board could contribute even more to the company's success. Among those who see room for improvement, management sparring is the most desired area (64%). Sector and industry experience (52%) and executive experience (44%) follow as the next most frequently cited needs. Digital experience (36%) also features prominently, aligning with the broader theme of digital and AI-driven transformation highlighted throughout this year's survey.

Compared to 2025, management sparring, sector and industry experience, executive experience, and strategy remain the areas where boards are perceived as having the greatest potential to strengthen their contribution.

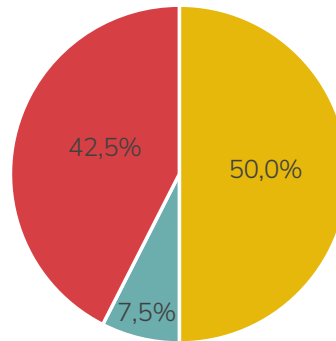
Board Competencies, Evaluations and Gender Balance Act

Do you believe that your board has the relevant competencies?



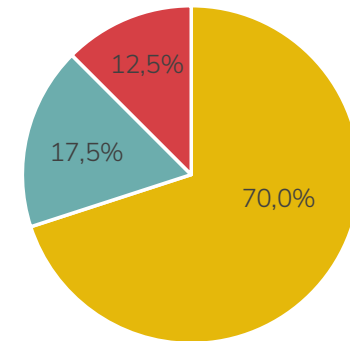
■ Yes ■ No

Does your company conduct systematic and regular board evaluations?



■ Yes, we conduct them regularly
 ■ No, but we plan to implement them within the next 12 months
 ■ No, and we have no plans to implement them

Does your company conduct systematic and regular evaluations according to the new Gender Balance Act?



■ Yes, we conduct them regularly
 ■ No, but we plan to implement them within the next 12 months
 ■ No, and we have no plans to implement them

While 62.5% of surveyed executives believe their board possesses the relevant competencies, a significant 37.5% identify gaps. The most frequently cited missing competencies include digital and AI expertise, financial management experience, sector-specific knowledge, and hands-on executive experience. On board governance, practices appear divided: 50% conduct regular board evaluations, while the remaining 50% do not undertake systematic evaluations, and most of these have no plans to introduce them. Compliance with the new Danish Gender Balance Act is more advanced. 70% report conducting systematic and regular evaluations in line with the requirements, and a further 17.5% plan to implement them within the next 12 months.

About Odgers

Odgers is one of the world's leading executive search and leadership advisory firms, with more than 60 offices across 30 countries. In Denmark, Odgers has been a trusted partner to Danish businesses and organisations for decades, helping them identify, attract and develop exceptional leaders.

Our Executive Management Survey is conducted annually to provide Danish business leaders with a unique benchmark of the issues, priorities and challenges shaping the executive agenda. The survey draws on responses from CEOs and senior executives across a broad range of industries and company sizes.

Odgers combines global reach with deep local expertise, enabling us to advise clients on leadership challenges that span borders, sectors and organisational levels. Our practice areas include executive search, board advisory, leadership assessment and succession planning.





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