

---

## Press release

<b>Date</b>	30 January 2025
<b>Contact</b>	Rita Carolan <a href="mailto:r.carolan@hlb.global">r.carolan@hlb.global</a> +44 (0) 123 456 7890
<b>Pages</b>	03

---

### **69% of global leaders believe AI is the most important technology for driving sustainable growth**

LONDON - HLB, the global advisory and professional services network, has today released its [Survey of Business Leaders 2025](#). The research highlights how organisations have a dual focus on embracing technological advances while simultaneously investing in their people to optimise operations and sustain profitability in an increasingly complex business environment.

This year's survey reveals that high-performing organisations, identified as *Profit Accelerators*, are overcoming challenges by focusing on three key levers of profitability—operational efficiency, innovation, and talent management.

- **Operational Efficiency:** 65% of Profit Accelerators prioritise large-scale operational transformations, such as modernising technology systems (52%) and streamlining processes (45%).
- **Innovation:** With 67% of leaders identifying Artificial Intelligence (AI) as the most important technology for the next five years, Profit Accelerators are already harnessing AI to enable predictive analytics, rapid prototyping and data-driven customer personalisation.
- **People Investment:** 60% of Profit Accelerators focus on learning and development to improve workforce effectiveness. Nearly half of them report having a high performing and engaged workforce.

Marco Donzelli, Global CEO of HLB, commented:

*"Leaders recognise that technology alone cannot drive success. It is the combination of cutting-edge tools with skilled, adaptable workforces that promotes true innovation and growth. By prioritising learning and development, who we identified as Profit Accelerators are not only leveraging AI for advanced capabilities like predictive analytics and rapid prototyping, but they are also investing in their people to ensure sustainable performance. This allows them to stay ahead in an increasingly competitive market while maintaining resilience in the face of global challenges".*

## **Leadership gaps pose opportunities for growth**

Despite optimism, the report shows a striking self-awareness among leaders about the gaps in their organisations' core capabilities.

- Only 21% of leaders believe their operating models are functioning at peak efficiency, while 76% acknowledge the need for significant improvement.
- Just 37% of leaders report having a highly engaged and high-performing workforce, highlighting the critical need for workforce transformation.
- When it comes to innovation, only 35% describe their efforts as successful, indicating vast potential for improvement through technology and collaboration.

These numbers reinforce the need for more targeted strategies to boost performance, particularly around workforce engagement and digital transformation.

## **AI as a critical enabler**

Artificial Intelligence is playing a pivotal role in helping organisations close these gaps. Leaders increasingly see AI as essential, not just for improving operational efficiency but also for augmenting human capacity. Applications in workforce engagement include AI-driven training programs, streamlined recruitment processes, and predictive workforce analytics that support better decision-making across teams.

## **Rising risks demand strategic focus**

The report highlights the growing complexity of external risks, with cumulative risk concerns rising from 54% in 2020 to 58% in 2025. The top concern for business leaders is economic uncertainty, a worry for 78% of business leaders. Emerging concerns include a 23 percentage point increase in environmental risks over 5 years and a 21 percentage point increase in cybersecurity threats over the same period, stressing the need for resilient practices and strong risk management strategies.

## **Building the road ahead**

The 2025 research makes it clear that sustainable profitability is most achievable through strategic, long-term actions in three areas:

1. Driving tech-led operational transformations to unlock efficiencies and boost resilience.
2. Building innovative, people-centred cultures that can adapt to evolving challenges.
3. Using AI and advanced analytics not just as tools, but as catalysts for end-to-end transformation.

## **About HLB**

HLB International is a global network of independent advisory and accounting firms and through the power of 46,755 professionals across 157 countries, we combine local expertise and global capabilities to service client's needs. Learn more about HLB's global services and capabilities: [www.hlb.global](http://www.hlb.global)

HLB refers to the HLB international network and/or one or more of its member firms, each of which is a separate legal entity. Please see [www.hlb.global/legal](http://www.hlb.global/legal) for further details.

© 2025 HLB International limited. All rights reserved.

## ***Methodology***

The HLB Survey of Business Leaders 2025 is based on responses collected between September and November 2024. The research features 1,242 business leaders spanning 55 countries and a diverse range of industries. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data was gathered, with survey responses supported by in-depth interviews conducted with four experts. These interviews provided valuable insights into topics such as artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and workforce innovation, supporting the findings of the report.