

50

PROCUREMENT  
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# Untethered World

Leading in a Time of Chaos

**When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, business leaders were already concerned about the increasing speed of change. Then came crisis after crisis after crisis, with no end in sight. Managing the effects of economic shocks, shortages, wars, and political unrest has become part of leaders' remit, stacked atop all the traditional requirements needed to succeed in business. How can leaders adapt?**

World 50, G100, Procurement Leaders, and EHIR exist to help executives discover better ideas, share valuable experiences, and build relationships that make a lasting impact. To help members address the questions above, we offer Untethered World.

This project—which stems from a survey of 209 group members conducted in April and May 2022, along with 28 in-depth member interviews—consists of a website, this PDF of findings, a podcast series, and downloadable slides segmented by industry and size that contain raw data from the research. Certain elements of this project are available exclusively to members of the World 50, G100, Procurement Leaders, and EHIR communities.

**\$4T**

Total Revenue

**\$7.4T**

Total Market Cap

**209**

Executives

**189**

Companies

**7.7M**

Employees

**15**

Countries

This report contains four main sections:

**Less Time To Do More  
It's All About the Employee  
More Pressure to Speak Out  
New Leadership Requirements**

*For the best user experience, please use Adobe Acrobat.*

# Executive Summary

## 1. Leaders' responsibilities have exploded.

93% of respondents said that “non-traditional business issues,” such as employees' mental health, social and political issues, supply shortages, and war have become a very significant or somewhat significant factor in their decision-making over the past three years.

## 2. Employees hold the power.

There has been a reversal in leaders' priorities from three years ago, and it has been dramatic: **The single biggest consideration** for leaders making a complex decision is now **the reaction of employees**. This is followed by brand image, consumer reaction, and then shareholders and boards.

## 3. Leaders face more pressure to speak out.

Leaders are increasingly expected to take a stand on issues from climate change to race to international politics. **95% of our respondents agreed that they have come under more pressure to lead on social and political issues** in the past three years, with 100% of CMO respondents and 96% of CEOs agreeing.

## 4. Leaders are managing more stakeholders.

**91%** of those surveyed indicated that they are now **managing a wider range of stakeholders** than before the COVID-19 pandemic. That includes employees, customers, investors, and boards—as well as external influencers.

## 5. Retention, diversity and inclusion, and sustainability are top of mind.

Where *are* leaders focusing their attention? At the top of the list, with **92%** spending more or significantly more time addressing them, are two topics: **employee retention and driving diversity and inclusion initiatives**. 91% of respondents reported spending more time driving sustainability.

## 6. Adaptability and vision are the most important leadership traits.

We asked respondents to rank the leadership traits most important for managing in today's volatile environment. **Adaptability and vision were noted as top priorities, followed by resilience and empathy**—ahead of classic skills as stakeholder management and risk assessment.

## 7. It's OK to admit vulnerability.

The constant uncertainty of recent years has forced leaders to acknowledge what was once considered taboo: the things they can't control. In our survey, **62% of respondents said they feel either very vulnerable or vulnerable** when making a complex decision relating to a major external crisis, with **64% of CEOs** saying the same. Only 5% of respondents said they did not feel at all vulnerable.

# Less Time To Do More

**The ability to manage complexity and turbulence has always been critical to the success of any senior executive. It became even more important as the rapid-fire pace of social and technological change accelerated.**

**Then came 2020.**

**COVID-19 turned the world upside down. It was the rarest of black swan events, a once-in-a-generation global shock.**

**Except it wasn't.**

As the pandemic raged on, shocks kept coming. Business leaders were faced with massive social unrest that spread around the world after George Floyd's murder in Minnesota, and this coincided with a major shift in the power of the employee and a widespread talent shortage. Accelerating climate change added to the chaos, affecting production, shipping, and supply chains. The Russian invasion of Ukraine forced companies to rethink operations and undertake humanitarian efforts. Political polarization put businesses in the unfamiliar position of taking sides on everything from masks and vaccines to immigration.

The responsibility for dealing with all these issues has fallen upon leaders, in addition to all the traditional requirements of running a business. Said Hubert Joly, former CEO of Best Buy and now a director at Ralph Lauren and Johnson & Johnson: "The world in which leaders lead has changed fundamentally in the last two to five years. It seems we are going from one crisis to the next, all unprecedented in nature. We used to be measured on the four walls of our business; now we are being asked to weigh in on a whole range of issues. Nonbusiness issues have become business issues. It's part of the job now."

Yet from this chaos have come positives. Many leaders have reported breakthroughs in innovation and creativity, and there has been a long-needed shift in the skill set required to succeed. Said Raj Thakkar, vice president for global sourcing and logistics at GE Gas Power: “From a leadership perspective, there’s no better time. I tell my team that this is what differentiates between the rookies and the pros.”

To understand these trends and uncover best practices, we surveyed our members in April and May 2022, receiving responses from 209 senior-level executives representing a total revenue of US\$4 trillion and 7.7 million employees. We then supplemented our results with in-depth interviews with 28 other top leaders. We heard from CEOs, CHROs, supply-chain heads, chief communications officers, board directors, and many others. They were candid, openly sharing their vulnerabilities along with the realization that they did not—could not—have all the answers. They discussed what has worked for them, and what hasn’t. And they told us they believe this chaotic environment will continue, which means they are developing a new tool kit for leading.

This report synthesizes our members’ perspectives about the Untethered World in which we live, and the strategies they are putting in place to cope and compete. We hope you find it useful.

**If say, you're in the food business and there is no wheat because of the supply chain and specifically the war in Ukraine, that is core, even though you didn't think of war as your core business responsibility, you know, 10, 15 years ago, right.**

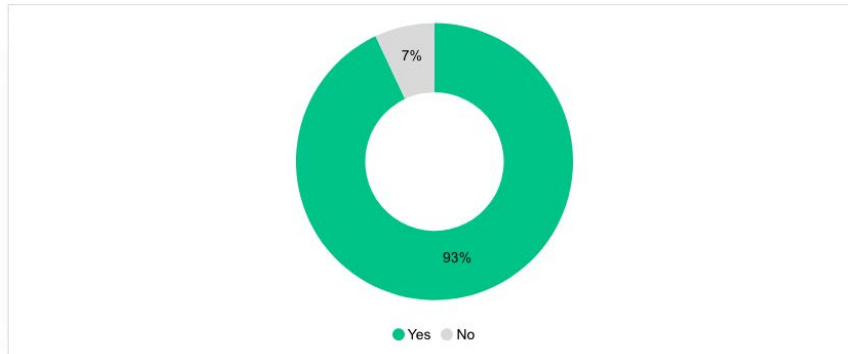
**Radha Subramanyam**  
President, Chief Research & Analytics Officer  
CBS Vision

UW

If you think your responsibilities have increased over the past three years, you are not alone. Virtually **all** of our respondents—**93%**—agreed that “**non-traditional business issues**” **have become a significant factor in their decision-making**. Nearly the same number—**91%**—said they are managing a wider range of stakeholders than before the pandemic. And **95%** of them agreed that the pressure to lead on social and political hot-button topics—once considered out of bounds by most businesses—has increased over the past three years. Said Simon Zinger, group general counsel at gaming company Entain: “Four to five years ago, [these] issues took up 5% to 10% of my time. Today it is closer to 40%. Nothing else has slipped; more has been added to the role.”

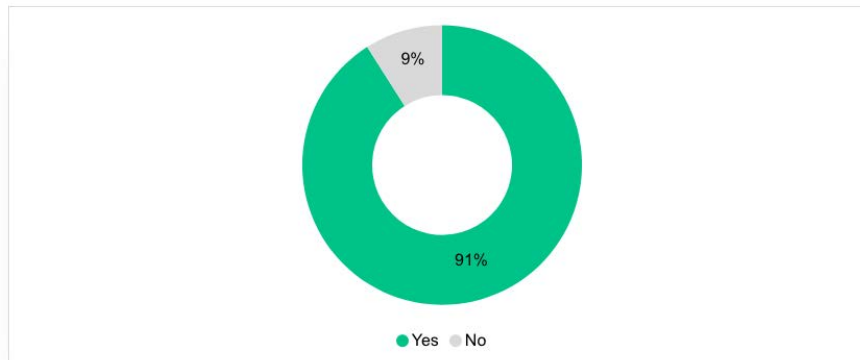
**Figure 1**

Are non-traditional business issues (i.e., social and political issues) a more significant part of business decisions now than they were three years ago? (n=209)



**Figure 2**

Are leaders managing a wider range of stakeholders than they were three years ago? (n=209)



This increased emphasis on issues that may not directly affect sales or profits has dramatic implications for any leader, regardless of function.

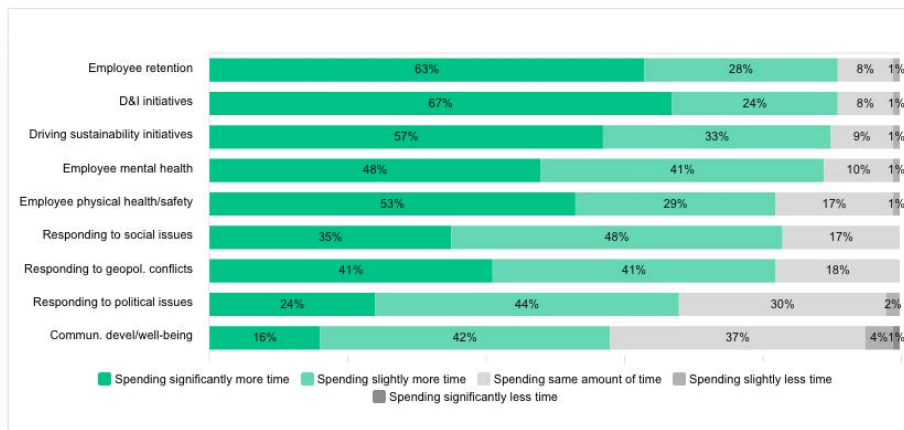
First is the stress of dealing with surprise after surprise. For many leaders who advanced in their careers by being organized and strategic, the need to react in the moment feels uncomfortable. Second is the unrelenting pressure, which has led some executives to opt out entirely via “The Great Resignation,” while others have thrown themselves in even deeper.

The global nature of many of these crises means that all functions and levels are involved. Take the war in Ukraine, for instance, which affects HR professionals trying to evacuate and relocate employees, supply-chain leaders finding new ways to get goods from the area, and CFOs, who must restructure balance sheets. Political polarization in society—and the increased pressure on businesses to speak out—makes chief executives political targets and puts chief communications officers into positions of constant crisis planning. And we don’t need to be reminded of the pandemic’s impact.

“Now, over 30% of my time is focused on the subject of sustainability around carbon circularity,” said Dan Futter, chief commercial officer at Dow. “We’re trying to think how we can better design supply chains so we can improve. The biggest change is the focus on carbon. We’re trying to balance cost, performance, the robustness of [the] supply chain, and how can you minimize the carbon footprint. It’s a dramatic change in day-to-day preoccupations.” At Pioneer Natural Resources, executives created a *Shark Tank*–style “technical review board” to invite ideas for sustainability and allow other topics to bubble up from employees.

**Figure 3**

How has the time spent by leaders on the following topics changed in the past three years? (n=200)



The focus on the employee and on diversity and inclusion will be further analyzed below. But what is particularly worth noting is not just the order of the topics listed above, but also one critical fact: **More than half of respondents are spending more or significantly more time on each of the topics listed**, with 58% as the smallest percentage on community development and well-being.

Take risk, for example: Nigel Murtagh, managing director and chief risk officer, Charles Schwab, says once a risk is identified, it never actually goes away. ““I can’t think of risks that I say ‘Oh, that’s behind me now,’” he says. “We use every risk as part of the planning process moving forward. We really never leave anything in the past.” Ben Rosenthal, senior vice president and chief risk officer, New York Life Insurance, has specific advice for anticipating risks: “I advise other leaders to think through various scenarios, shoring up the capital base and making sure you’re well prepared for any kind of liquidity shock. Right now we’re at a point where there’s a very tight labor market. There is potential to be a quick reversal of that, where there’s a lot of unemployment in a stagflation environment. What would that mean? Would we regret some of the activities we’re taking today or would we be comfortable with them?”



## **GE Gas Power:**

### Tackling Inflation Head-On

Working through an inflationary environment is an obstacle that GE Gas Power has overcome in the past. But after decades of price stability, few GE employees have lived through a version of this latest black swan event. Dealing with inflation requires different muscles, so the company decided to invest in its people. Raj Thakkar, vice president of sourcing, and his colleague Randy Rowe, executive sourcing operations and transformation leader, quickly developed a program to bring their teams up to speed during this latest shock to the business. “In these turbulent times, you have to look at the whole picture when you analyze the impact on operations and customers,” said Rowe. Beginning in early 2021, employees underwent a three-part training module designed to prepare them for a difficult inflationary environment.

The program begins with what Thakkar calls “The Golden Rules.” A few senior sourcing team members created a list of 12 constructive and practical ideas to respond to various inflation challenges—a handy cheat sheet that can be applied to any inflationary situation. [Click here to review four of the ideas.](#) Training sessions are then conducted regarding these 12 ideas. A few examples include collaborating with the engineering team and suppliers to alternate material, “should cost,” and near-shore diversification.

To supplement this internal training, GE partners with a third-party firm, which creates a standardized approach for the procurement sourcing process while taking the current situation into account. Covering 12 vertical skills through 16 modules, the course—now led by employees—teaches fundamentals and templates focused on spin analysis, supply market analysis, supplier profiling, clean sheeting, the negotiating process, ongoing supplier management, and more. Enrollment spans multiple levels of the organization, with an emphasis on entry-level and midlevel employees, along with some more experienced team members looking for a refresher. So far, 80 employees have gone through the academy, with 40 more slated for the second half of 2022. GE plans to enroll 300 people total in this training, and all of them incorporate their current projects into the training.

The procurement function has an enormous impact on safety, quality, and cost. Thakkar and Rowe understand that the ongoing volatility means their employees need to be mentally prepared. So rounding out GE’s training is strong mentorship, with an emphasis on soft skills and mental health. Senior leaders coach fellow team members on interpersonal skills, resilience, trust building, and more. GE’s leadership and human resources teams realized they also needed to focus on helping employees develop resilience, so team members received coaching on social interaction and how to build trust in today’s virtual environment. It was more important than ever to activate the community, explained Rowe. “In a marketplace with high inflation, it is critical to upskill and educate our people to prepare them for the uncertainty to come,” he said.



# **It's All About the Employee**

**The pandemic will have many legacies, but one of the largest will unquestionably be the rise of employee power relative to other stakeholders. It began out of necessity: In order to keep employees safe while keeping things running, businesses had to compromise by letting many white-collar employees work anywhere at any time, while also caring for workers' mental health and even supporting their home technology. Still, many employees chose to leave just as the global economy came out of hibernation. Some called this "The Great Resignation," others "The Great Reset."**

**Whatever the name, it was—and remains—the biggest shift in power in a generation. Said Olivia Kirtley, director at Papa John's and U.S. Bancorp: "The biggest concern for the future—it's always people. Do we have the right people now? Are we developing the right talent for new and different challenges—not only to prevent crisis but for the growth strategy?"**

The Untethered World survey brings this power shift into stark relief. We asked members to rank their priorities today versus three years ago. What we found is astonishing: **Employees' reactions** have become the **single biggest consideration** for leaders making a complex decision. Employees' reactions ranked higher than boards, brand images, investors, and shareholders. When members were asked how they would have ranked these topics three years ago, employees' reactions ranked sixth.



The implications stretch across the company and go all the way to the top. For boards, which have always been focused primarily on the fiduciary responsibility of the company to make money, a new question emerges: Exactly **how** do they make money—and is it in a way their employees support?

Figure 4

Please rank the following considerations influencing leaders when making complex decisions today vs. three years ago.\* (n=190)

Group	Rank (2022)	Three years ago
Employee reactions	1	6
Brand image	2	2
Consumer reaction	3	5
Board expectation	4	1
Shareholder reaction	5	4
Investor sentiments	6	3
Public opinion	7	7
Supplier relationships	8	8

\*We asked respondents to compare their own priorities to what they believed they had been three years ago. We did not survey them three years ago.

The way companies recruit and hire has already shifted dramatically. It is now a requirement for businesses to demonstrate a clear development path for potential hires, and to build a culture that makes people want to stay. Compensation is just one part of that: In a recent World 50 study, 90% of members said they were increasing wages either somewhat or a lot. But members were clear that while pay raises are table stakes, the only way to retain employees is by asking them what they are seeking in a career and—so long as it is financially feasible—making it happen.

This emphasis on people goes far beyond the human resources function. Said Domingo Mirón, chief risk officer and market unit lead of Spain, Portugal, and Israel at Accenture: “I now spend a large part of my time on people. Now I’m responsible for making sure all 20,000 employees in Spain, Portugal, and Israel are engaged, committed, and happy working at Accenture.” Mirón then explained that despite the organization’s huge size, Accenture thinks of employees not as a monolith but as a collection of individuals. “Growing their skills, being on an interesting project—those are just as important as compensation. We changed our coaching processes and talent planning to be closer to the needs of every individual.” That also has implications for managers. “The flexible, responsible work model requires managers to be work organizers,” he said. “They used to be work planners.”

Members have tried to address employee needs through employee wellness and mental health programs. In 2020, cloud storage company Dropbox decided to shift to a “virtual-first” work model. As part of this shift, every employee receives an annual “perks allowance”—a stipend they can use on anything, such as wellness, home office equipment, or child care. The idea behind this benefit is to give employees the flexibility to focus their perks on what really matters to them.

**Making progress in diversity and inclusion** has become another huge focus for everyone in the C-suite. A full **92%** of respondents said they were spending either slightly or significantly more time on diversity and inclusion than they were three years ago. For many executives, it was a wake-up call—proof they did not fully understand what their own employees faced on a regular basis. Said Simon Zinger of gaming company Entain: “After the tragic events of George Floyd and the real awakening of how important it is to deal with racial injustice, I looked at what I was doing myself as a person. I knew that more should be done and could be done, but I didn’t know where to start.” Zinger’s soul searching led to a shift in focus, not only on recruiting diverse talent but also on establishing metrics such as measuring retention to ensure underrepresented groups are, in fact, succeeding once on staff.

Left unsaid is the question of whether increased employee power will last should the world fall into a global recession, something many members think is looming. If companies begin to lay people off, and shareholders clamor for better results, will the pendulum swing back again?

## Σntain

### **Entain: Responsive Leadership**

In 2020, executives around the globe found themselves called to publicly demonstrate their commitment to their employees. It was the latest proof point that leaders must stand for more than just the bottom line, and that such qualities as empathy and purpose had become the new standards for a successful leader.

Amid this turbulence, Simon Zinger, group general counsel for Entain, decided to craft a vision statement of sorts—[The General Counsel Oath](#)—that would serve as a touchstone for legal leaders, compliance officers, and ethics officers. Zinger insisted that what leaders needed in this moment was not a to-do list, but a “framework for how [they] behave.”

“It was quite a chaotic time, in the sense that you had a number of companies making commitments,” Zinger said. “You had a number of general counsels making commitments as well. And I was just looking and searching for the right path or the right answers or the right approach, or the right framework, and I couldn’t find it.” So he drafted what he thought of as a “roadmap”—not just for himself and his team, but for others like him who felt unmoored.

In addition to providing guidance on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics, the oath helped articulate, in Zinger’s words, “How you work with your team, how you work with your colleagues, how you help your company have a more positive social impact—and then how you treat other people just as human beings.” When the oath was first launched in August 2020, Zinger shared it with a number of journalists and other general counsels, which resulted in not only press buzz around this new framework, but also endorsement of the oath by several notable organizations.

Some leaders have shared the oath with their own teams, “using it as a platform to explore the areas in the oath and to communicate their personal commitment as the team leaders,” he said, while others have used it for more personal and professional development or guidance. Asked what section is most meaningful to him, Zinger said, “The last line: ‘I recognize that my skills and leadership position are privileges, and I will use them to advance the well-being of the people, organizations, and communities with whom I interact.’” [A downloadable version of the oath can be found here.](#)

# More Pressure To Speak Out

**A mix of three trends—the polarization of society, the ability of anyone to harness social media to create PR campaigns for or against certain issues, and the massive power of employees—means that leaders are increasingly forced to make choices about what to say and when. In our survey, 95% of respondents agreed that they are under increased pressure to lead on social and political issues, with 100% of CMO respondents and 96% of CEOs agreeing. Said former Best Buy CEO Hubert Joly: “It may be dangerous to weigh in, but it’s also dangerous to ignore societal issues. [Businesses] are now involved in a larger set of issues.”**

**Figure 5**

Are leaders under increased pressure to lead on social and political issues than they were three years ago? (n=209)

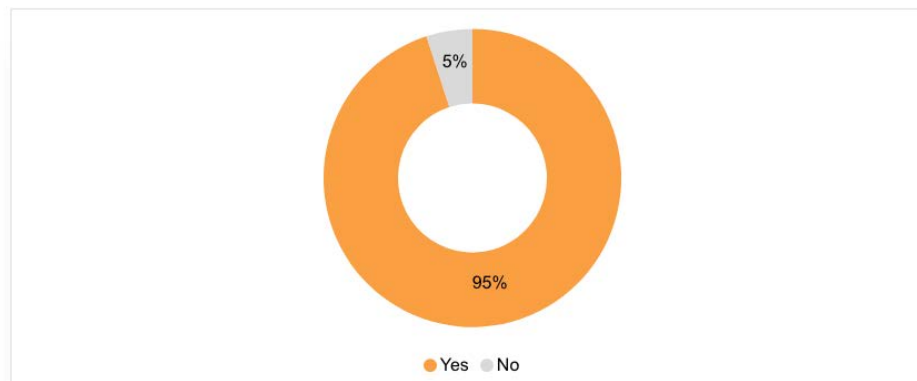
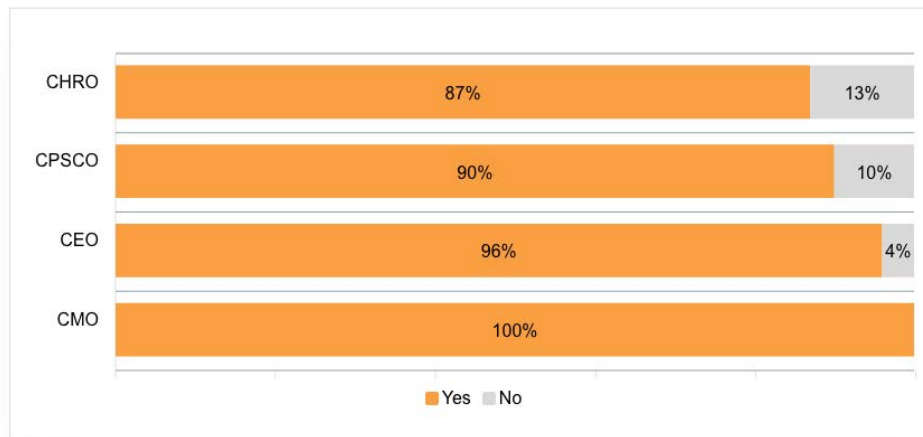


Figure 6

Are leaders under increased pressure to lead on social and political issues than they were three years ago? (n=67)



Over time, as purpose became a critical part of organizational identity, some companies began using their voice to support or oppose certain political issues. But after the murder of George Floyd, what was a trickle became a flood as corporate websites filled with passionate denunciations of the tragedy and statements connecting change to their own internal efforts.

The statements were mostly well-intentioned—but also opened up companies to criticism if they opted not to speak out about other situations. Why would a cosmetics company speak out against animal testing, but then ignore a law that affects women, who account for most of their consumer base? Who decides what is worth responding to and how? What is the definition of a crisis?

As the speed of events—and the even faster speed of public backlash from some of those events—accelerated, companies had to move from an ad-hoc process to a much more formalized approach. Said Jano Cabrera, chief communications officer at General Mills: “If you look at any company, they speak on some issues and not others. The filter they should have is, ‘Does this align with the company values? Is our voice expected to carry weight? Are we speaking on behalf of all employees or some?’ It’s like solving a Rubik’s Cube; you need to line up different sides to make it work.”

Even with a great process, the situation remains fraught, and many executives shared their concerns about how hard it is to strike the right balance. Leaders must also prepare for a possible hit to the bottom line, as highlighted by Disney’s struggles in Florida after the company at first did not react to and then spoke out against the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. It’s no surprise that members cited “brand” as the second most important factor when making complex decisions, after the employee response, according to the survey (Figure 4).

What all of this means is that no decision will please every employee or customer. Said Accenture’s Mirón, “We are a principle-based company. The board is supportive of each of our decisions. But in a large company like ours, there could be some people who think we made the wrong decision. We expect that.”

Have businesses overreached, or are they doing the right thing for their stakeholders? There is no clear consensus. Some executives believe it is their responsibility to advocate because they are filling a void left by governments and other institutions. Joly said, “We are at a point where employees, customers, shareholders are looking to businesses to help address major environmental and social issues. Of course, we have to be careful, right? We’re not elected officials. I checked; I don’t sit on the Supreme Court. I’m not the president of any country.”



**Corporations' purposes are greater than just making profits for shareholders. I think shareholders recognize that they want more than just profits. CEOs should not be focused on just the stock price, but the strategy.**

**Hilary Rapkin**  
Chief Legal Officer  
WEX

Others see the current period as a slippery slope but think they have a responsibility to act. Said D.G. Macpherson, CEO and chairman of industrial supply company Grainger: “People in general don’t have trust in government, so they are looking to business leaders to help them understand. I had to get smart about what was going on. Being a calming but factual voice is important.”

## Medtronic

### **Medtronic:**

#### Operationalizing a Crisis

When COVID-19 wreaked havoc in March 2020 and companies scrambled to adapt, medical technology company Medtronic had just updated its approach to crisis management. It seemed like good luck, but it came out of bad luck. The company, the largest employer in Puerto Rico other than Walmart, had suffered massive damage to its facilities due to Hurricane Maria. The disaster pushed the Medtronic team to build out a robust crisis-response function that has been able to act on the multitude of challenges facing business today. Said Anita Tuch, vice president of enterprise risk & facilities: “It took crisis planning from the back room to the front room.”

Unlike many other companies, which often run their crisis response teams out of HR or communications, Medtronic decided to put its team under the operations function, [dividing it into three segments](#): enterprise risk, crisis management, and business continuity. “Enterprise risk is higher-level—what gets reported at the board level,” Tuch said. “Inability to deliver on the portfolio or missing out on game-changing developments are examples.” Crisis management consists of coordinating responses among people, operations, and reputation teams. Business continuity efforts focus on the identification of critical operations, the order of restoration, and recovery strategies. All of these groups now report to Tuch.

But what qualifies as a crisis? That determination is made by a crisis filter team—typically Tuch and a fellow vice president—which uses a list of criteria and has two executive sponsors. The two sponsors are executive committee members: Medtronic’s CHRO and executive vice president of global operations. The actual crisis management team includes communications, security, HR, employee relations, and supply-chain representatives. Together, they make decisions with input from each of these groups. The regional team focuses on providing consistent corporate and site support whenever needed, but the local team takes the lead by keeping operations going on the ground while engaging with the corporate team.

When a crisis emerges—be it the war in Ukraine or another COVID-19 outbreak—the lead is given to one of these three groups, starting with a core group of 10 people that can be scaled to 40 as needed. This team hierarchy creates a clear chain of command while at the same time enabling “great collaboration across the business,” explained Tuch.

The plan was activated during the recent lockdown in Shanghai, where Medtronic has a presence. The corporate team worked with local crisis leadership to find ways to support employees as well as patients during this critical time, while the reputation team presented a statement to the executive committee. According to Tuch, it worked because of the formalized collaboration. “You have people who are giving this more mindshare because it’s part of their daily responsibilities,” she said.



# New Leadership Requirements

**“Whac-A-Mole.” That’s what Wanda Austin—former CEO of the Aerospace Company and now a director of Amgen, Virgin Galactic, and Chevron—called the way executives have had to lead over the past three years. Leading in an untethered world meant that success depended upon how quickly you could react. Retooling a factory to manufacture PPE on the fly? Getting a corporate technology system set up for at-home work in a week? Speed became the default setting as more and more systemic shocks occurred.**

Yet as chaos has become the norm, many members cautioned that the react-first approach is not only unsustainable but also may not be strategic. Speed is good, but only if it’s aligned with strategy. That’s what survey respondents told us. They ranked **adaptability and vision** as the most important capabilities for leaders in today’s environment. Said Radha Subramanyam of CBS: “The one positive that came out of COVID is the realization that the world is not going to adapt to us. We have to adapt to it. It’s the only way to move forward.”

My observation is that we've always been in an untethered world. It just hasn't been front and center.

UW

**Wanda Austin**  
Former President and Chief Executive Officer,  
The Aerospace Corporation; Director, Amgen,  
Chevron and Virgin Galactic



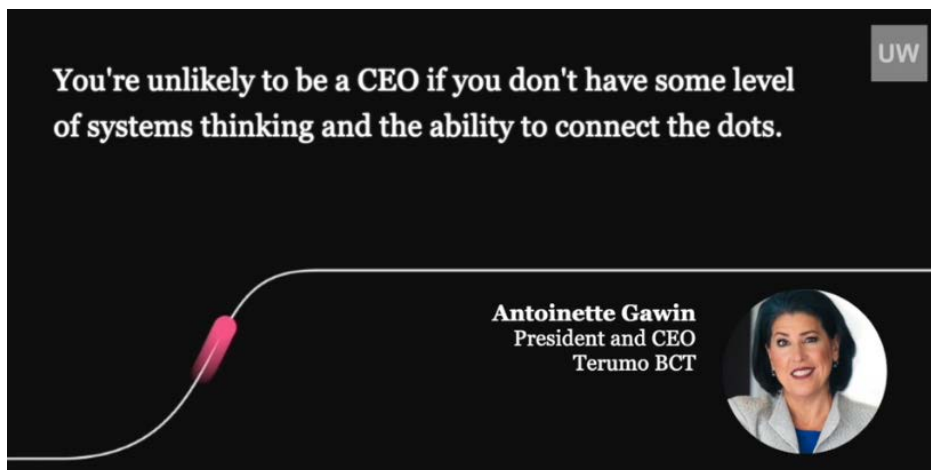
Figure 7

Please rank the following skills or capabilities leaders need in the current environment. (n=181)

Skills/Capabilities	Rank
Adaptability	1
Vision	2
Resilience	3
Empathy	4
Risk assessment	5
Personal courage	6
Stakeholder management	7
Political awareness	8
Social media awareness	9

Ironically, leadership in an untethered world may turn out to be more about slowing down—something that feels strange, almost luxurious at the moment. Said Luis Ubiñas, a director at AT&T, Electronic Arts, and others: “I advise [leaders] to take a deep breath. Don’t make decisions before they need to be made, without all the information, without understanding potential negative consequences. Stop, breathe, think.” Another key is to focus on the priorities that are truly vital, said Margaret Keane, executive chair and former CEO of financial services company Synchrony. This is particularly important for CEOs, she said. “The most critical thing a CEO has to do is figure out her top three to five priorities. You need to align yourself to where you want to be in five years and have the right team around you.”

After adaptability and vision, members ranked **resilience and empathy** as critical capabilities for leading in this environment. It’s worth noting that all of these “soft skills” outranked both risk assessment and stakeholder management. “Who we put in positions of power is the most important decision we make,” said Joly. “When recruiting, I used to put a lot of emphasis on experience and expertise. Increasingly, I’ve now spent more time on what kind of a leader this person is. Today, leaders need to be clear about their role, which is to create an environment for others to thrive in.”



# Vulnerability: Once Unacceptable, Now Embraced

Not long ago, vulnerability was for the weak. Now, admitting and embracing it is quickly becoming a requirement for any authentic leader. In our survey, **63% of respondents said they feel either very vulnerable or vulnerable** when making a complex decision relating to a major external crisis. What's interesting is not so much that they feel that way, but that they admit that they do. Said Jackie Yeaney, former chief marketing officer of data visualization company Tableau: "The notion of vulnerability has become a centering point for me. I realized how important it was to share with my team as much as I could because it opened the door for them. Midway through COVID, my youngest son had serious mental health issues. I felt helpless. In an all-marketing call, I shared with the team and cried. I had over 50 people reach out to me with their own stories. People need the permission and realization that they aren't alone."

Figure 8

How vulnerable do leaders feel when making a complex decision regarding a major external crisis?  
(n=189)



This openness extends all the way to the top of the organization. Although you'd expect that fewer senior leaders would admit to vulnerability, it's actually the opposite: **64% of CEOs said they feel either very vulnerable or vulnerable. Only 5% of respondents said they did not feel at all vulnerable.** That requires some retraining by executives who succeeded by projecting confident competence. Said Grainger CEO D.G. Macpherson: "The skill that's most important in leaders now is to be clear you don't know everything. The historical leader who served from the top of the mountain is not very helpful."

We hope that you have found this research useful, and that some of the perspectives expressed by fellow members are helpful as you address these challenges. Please share your feedback with us or ask further questions by contacting [info@untethered-world.com](mailto:info@untethered-world.com).

Credits:

**Product Managers:** Lisa Lindsey, Blaire Sumner, Beryl Wang

**Editorial Team:** Jennifer Reingold, Abubakar Mehdi, Beryl Wang, Jacqueline Leftwich, Liz Kahle, Harry John, Caroline Barden, Carlton Hargro, Logan Porter, William Austin King, Mary Catherine Lindsay, Cheryl Della Pietra

**Research and Analysis Team:** Abubakar Mehdi, Jon Webb, Lisa Lindsey, Adam Schatzmann, Parth Patel, Peter Ellender

**Design/Website Team:** Dean Chung, Evie Anderson, Leon Menezes, Scott Long, Dino Babic, Janice Martin, Andrea Posi, Boris Popik

**Marketing and Communications:** Alyson Levitz-Jones, Olivia Jones, April Echols, Anna Lee, Steebs Tapia, Jemma Smith

**Podcast Team:** Haley France, Mario Gutierrez, Anna Rayford, April Echols

**Advisors:** Bob Bierman, David Rae, Jennifer Bird Newton, Bahar Magnuson, Scott Dale

About:

Founded in 2004, World 50 consists of private peer communities that enable CEOs and C-level executives from globally respected organizations to discover better ideas, share valuable experiences and build relationships that make a lasting impact. The busiest officer-level executives and their most promising future leaders trust World 50 to facilitate collaboration, conversation and counsel on the topics most crucial to leading, transforming and growing modern enterprises. World 50 communities serve every significant enterprise leadership role. World 50 members reside in more than 27 countries on six continents and are leaders at companies that average more than US\$30 billion in revenue. World 50 is a private company that serves no other purpose than to accelerate the success of its members and their organizations. It is composed of highly curious associates who consider it a privilege to help leaders stay ahead.

With the recent additions of G100, Procurement Leaders, and EHIR, World 50 has positioned itself to serve leaders across all senior leadership roles, functions and geographies.