Key findings in the insurance sector

Seizing the future

101 insurance CEOs in 43 countries participated in PwC's 19th Annual Global CEO Survey

Like many industries, insurance is grappling with rapid technological change, shifts in customer behaviour, and growing competition from new market entrants.

However, change offers huge opportunities. Other industries will be looking to insurers to help manage increasingly complex and uncertain business and geopolitical risks.

To capitalise on these opportunities, insurers need to embrace new ways of working, novel ways of interacting with customers, and alternatives to traditional products and services.

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Preface

This report is a summary of the key findings in the insurance sector, based on a survey of 101 insurance CEOs in 43 countries and in-depth interviews with Peter D. Hancock, President and Chief Executive Officer, AIG (US) and Dr Nigel Wilson, CEO, Legal & General (UK).

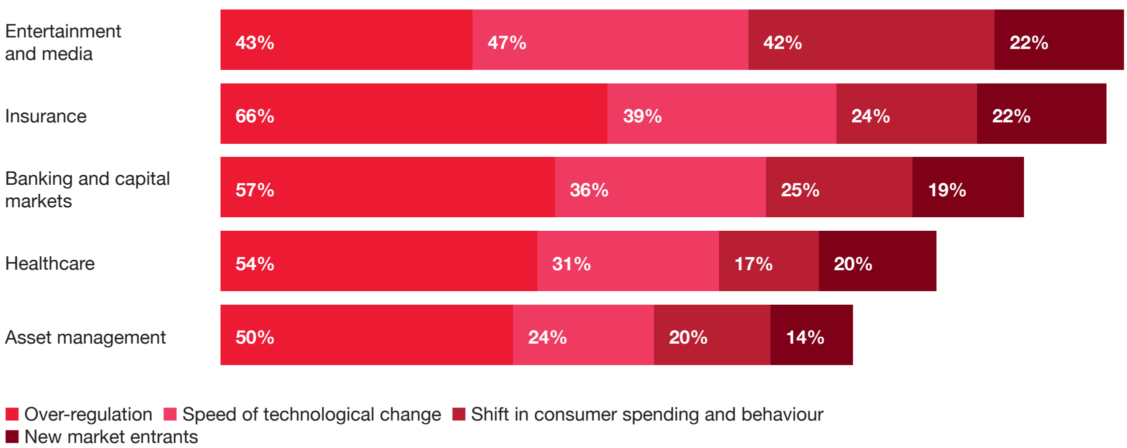
Insurance is undergoing fundamental transformation. The scale of the upheaval is highlighted by insurance CEOs' concerns over the impact of regulation, technology, changing customer expectations and new market entrants. If we put these various forces of change together, the only sector facing greater potential disruption is entertainment and media (see Figure 1).

And the shake-up experienced by entertainment and media offers a telling indication of what could lie ahead for you as an insurer as you come up against accelerating shifts in consumer demand and mounting competition from digitally-enabled new entrants. Are the products and services you offer still relevant in this fast-changing marketplace? Are you able to respond to customers with the ease and speed they've come to expect? Could your prices be undercut by low-cost competitors? Are you able to meet the more exacting expectations placed on your business by employees, governments and other key stakeholders?

Figure 1 Impact of key forces of change (top five most impacted sectors)

Q: How concerned are you about the potential threat to your growth prospects from the following?

CEOs stating 'extremely concerned'



Combined significantly and somewhat concerned ratings for insurance are: Over-regulation 94%, Speed of technological change 69%, Shift in consumer spending and behaviour 64%, New market entrants 65%

Source: 101 insurance CEOs participating in the 19th Annual Global Survey

"As we look forward, our clients want integrated risk solutions that take the insight we acquire to help them reduce the cost of risk. So it's more of a consultative relationship with the client, coupled with our financial capacity to take on their risks."

Peter D. Hancock
President and Chief Executive Officer, AIG (US)

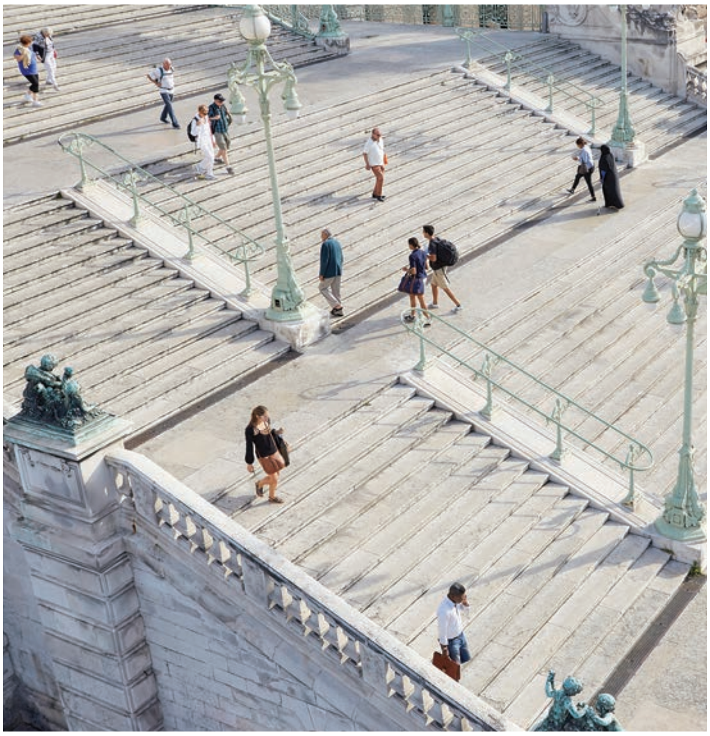
Yet, as we've been exploring in our 'Insurance 2020 and beyond' series and previous Global CEO Survey reports, the latest developments in technology, analytics, and customer expectations also offer once-in-a-generation opportunities for competitive reinvention and renewed growth. Companies from other industries are looking to insurers to help them manage the emerging and increasing risks they face in a complex and uncertain business and geopolitical landscape. This is leading to new openings, ranging from a major expansion in higher value-adding risk advisory and loss prevention services to new business models built around direct policyholder connectivity (e.g., wearables and Internet of Things sensors). This would represent a broadening of the industry's purpose from risk protection to more proactive risk prevention.

As the latest CEO survey findings underline, the insurers out in front are embracing technological disruption as a growth opportunity rather than a threat, and harnessing the creativity of their people to tap into new value chains and transform operational speed and cost. They're also seeking out new sources of data and making the most of client touch points to enhance customer experience and outcomes.

Stephen O'Hearn
Global Insurance Leader, PwC

Disruption and opportunity

Challenges are coming from all sides as stalling economic growth in much of the world holds back demand, technology raises stakeholder expectations, and regulation not only creates headaches in itself, but also gives management less time to tackle other pressing developments. Smart insurers aren't just driving down costs and bolstering margins in traditional business, they're looking at how to open up new sources of profitable growth.



Economic headwinds are strengthening once again. Only 28% of insurance CEOs now believe that the global economy will improve over the coming year (compared to 40% in last year's survey), reflecting a general dip in optimism across all sectors. Thirty eight per cent of insurance CEOs are very confident about their ability to increase revenues over the next 12 months, (compared to 44% in last year's survey) though they're more optimistic about their longer term prospects.

The leading global economies of the US and China continue to be the foreign markets insurance industry leaders are most likely to target for growth. The proportion of insurance CEOs who are targeting China has actually risen since last year, suggesting that they don't see the current market dislocation in the world's second biggest economy as a brake on long-term growth.

Considering long-term price and margin pressures, 70% of insurance CEOs are planning to implement a cost reduction initiative over the next 12 months. Because cost cutting by itself can't ensure a boost in returns over the long-term, savvy companies are opting for sustainable process improvement initiatives that increase efficiencies and improve productivity (the opportunities are explored further in 'Top issues: Are you fit for growth'?).

Technology is the trend that insurance CEOs see as most likely to transform stakeholder expectations over the next five years. Telematic sensors, data analytics, and other sources of digital insight and connectivity are paving the way for real-time risk evaluation and pricing, and continuous customer engagement. The new generation of analytics can not only enable your business to anticipate what will happen (predictive analytics), but also shape outcomes such as reduced accident rates or improved health and well-being (prescriptive analytics). This more proactive and preventative approach marks a change in purpose for insurers, which will deliver considerable social as well as financial value. In fact, 25% of insurance CEOs say they have changed their organisational purpose in the last three years to take account of their broader impact on society and a further 9% are considering this.

"There will be tremendous technological disruption in the next ten years. We lived in the analogue era for 500 years. We're only ten years into the digital era..."

Dr Nigel Wilson
CEO, Legal & General (UK)

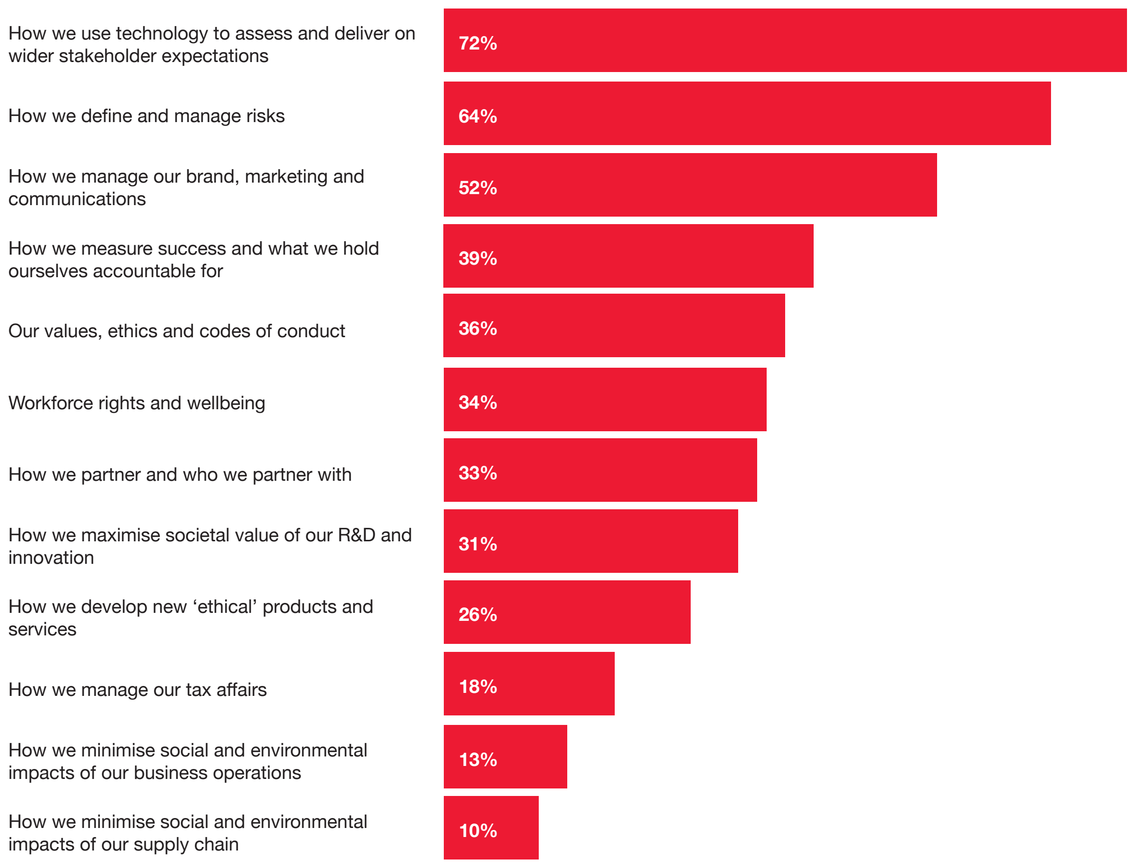
In turn, artificial intelligence and robo-advisers can significantly cut costs by automating routine transactions and research, which can not only reduce fees, but also allow agents and brokers to spend more time developing customised solutions and focusing on more complex and higher value accounts.

However, technology is also creating new benchmarks for customer experience, response and cost and making it easier for customers to judge and compare your business against competitors and other industries. The ability to

Figure 2 Priorities for change

Q: To what extent are you making changes in the following areas in response to changing stakeholder expectations?

Respondents stating 'Significant change'



Source: 101 insurance CEOs participating in the 19th Annual Global Survey

65%

of insurance CEOs see new market entrants as a threat to growth, considerably more than banks (56%) and asset managers (52%).

"I think our social purpose and the associated emotional engagement from our colleagues is one of the keys to developing a winning successful strategy for Legal & General. Why that is important is it creates tremendous trust amongst our customers and other politicians who are helping to shape the future, whether those are local politicians or national politicians, and they want to engage with trustworthy companies."

Dr Nigel Wilson
CEO, Legal & General (UK)

meet these challenges can often be hampered by slow and unwieldy legacy systems and traditional ways of working. Nearly 70% of insurance CEOs see the speed of technological change as a threat to growth and more than 60% are concerned about shifts in consumer spending and behaviour. Many of these new competitive benchmarks are being set by FinTech entrants, which are constantly probing for gaps and weak points in the marketplace, applying digital insights to sharpen customer understanding, and utilising cost-efficient digital distribution to undercut incumbent competitors.

If established insurers don't move quickly enough to meet changing customer expectations, Dr Nigel Wilson of Legal & General believes that the "void" will be filled by others. "There are some really smart people in PE [private equity] that are entering our industry. There are lots of smart but currently very small Fintech companies. We will see new competition from China and Japan that we've never seen before, and we'll potentially see firms from Africa, where they've really been very successful at adopting and adapting mobile technology and where they've leapfrogged the European model and moved to a new model. So, if we don't step up others are going to step in, and we're already seeing the beginnings of that happening at the moment."

Even bigger changes lie ahead as technology creates new sources of collaboration and revenue. For example, data from car and equipment sensors can be shared with manufacturers and repairers and thereby pave the way for new joint ventures in design and maintenance. It's possible that revenue models could increasingly gravitate from premiums to premiums plus subscriptions. Some insurers may reinvent themselves altogether – from protecting against risk to managing and monetising information, for example.

On the frontline of a more unstable world

The market volatility that has dented global economic confidence in the short-term is compounded by growing instability and uncertainty. As the survey highlights, the threats businesses face are becoming more complex, crossing the borders of geopolitics, regulation, cyber security, societal development, people and reputation. Two-thirds of the CEOs from all the industries taking part in the survey (66%) now see more threats facing their business today than there were three years ago (among insurance CEOs this is 63%). Geopolitical uncertainty has jumped from fourth in CEO concerns last year to second this year, cited by 74% of business leaders.

As an insurer, you're very much at the frontline of this more unstable world. The uncertainty is making it harder to manage your exposures. But it also opens up opportunities as businesses look to you to provide the risk analysis, advice and protective coverage they need to navigate through this difficult landscape. Accordingly, 64% of insurance CEOs are making significant changes to the way they define and manage risks in response to changing stakeholder expectations.

Seventy nine per cent of insurance CEOs see cyber threats as a barrier to growth, more than their counterparts in banking and capital markets. This mirrors the findings of the latest 'Banana Skins' survey, in which non-life insurers see cyber risk as the biggest risk facing their businesses. As an insurer, you also hold considerable amounts of sensitive client data, so effective safeguards are essential in sustaining trust in your enterprise.

Helping businesses to protect against cyberattacks offers huge potential growth for insurers – we estimate that annual premiums could reach $7.5 billion by the end of the decade[1]. But cyber risk could also expose insurers to significant losses, both through specific cyber coverage and their

1 Insurance 2020 and beyond: Reaping the dividends of cyber resilience (https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/insurance/publications/assets/reaping-dividends-cyber-resilience.pdf)

2 UK Cybersecurity: The role of insurance in managing and mitigating the risk, UK Government, March 2015

technology, errors & omissions, and other existing business lines. A UK Government report estimates that the insurance industry's global cyber-risk exposure is already in the order of £100 billion[2] ($140 billion).

The survey highlights other risks that, while significant, are lower on insurers' risk register than for CEOs across all sectors. In particular, while 74% of business leaders in the survey as a whole see geopolitical uncertainty as a brake on growth, making this their second biggest concern after regulation, only 64% of insurance CEOs see it as a threat (tenth on their list of industry concerns). This may reflect the fact that many of the main focal points of instability also have relatively low insurance penetration.

There are clear parallels with climatic instability. The underestimation of the impact of shifting industrial production to flood-prone regions, which was highlighted by the $11 billion losses from the Thai floods of 2011. This showed what could happen if insurers do not adequately take account of political uncertainty, as well as geographical and weather-related risks in markets for which there is far from comprehensive risk data.

"…data is going to be a key part of having a competitive advantage in our target markets. We have a triangle of data – internal, existing external, and new data. The internal data is the wealth of data we've accumulated for years. That's coupled with the external data that's multiplying at an astonishing pace, as well as a third body of data, which is data that we create through sensors or other mechanisms, where we actually have to spend capex to gather more data."

Peter D. Hancock
President and Chief Executive Officer, AIG (US)

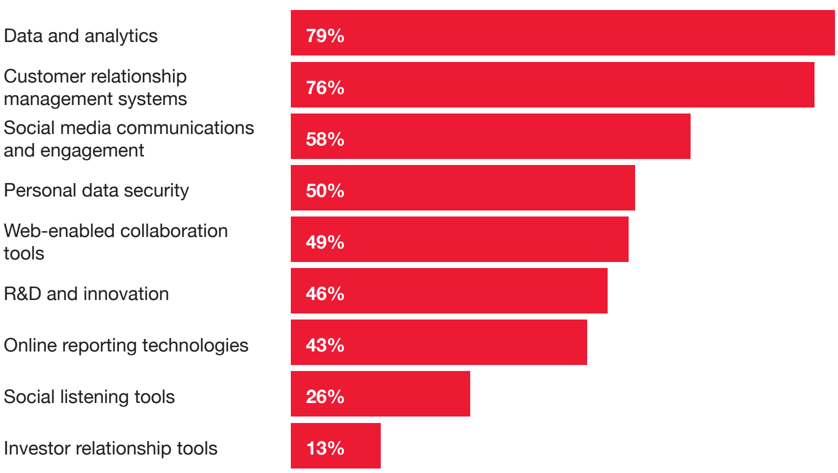
Regulation continues to change the business

Ninety four per cent of insurance CEOs see over-regulation as a threat to growth, more than any other sector. With Solvency II having gone live at the beginning of the year, the influence within European markets is clear. Many other markets also face significant changes, not only in prudential but also conduct and data protection regulation. Key developments include the UK's Retail Distribution Review and US Department of Labor Fiduciary Standard, which have significant implications for how insurance is sold and the fees customers pay. The changes are spurring many insurers and providers of retirement products to consider augmenting or changing their adviser or broker channels.

But the strategic impact is as much about uncertainty over the changes that may be coming and existing ones' lack of clarity. Forty-six percent of insurance CEOs cite unclear or inconsistent standards or regulations as a barrier to meeting changing stakeholder expectations. Such uncertainty can hold up restructuring, acquisitions and new product development. It also gives CEOs less time to review business models and look at how to sustain competitive relevance in the longer term.

Figure 3 Technologies that strengthen engagement

Q: Moving to technology, please select the connecting technologies you think generate the greatest return in terms of engagement with wider stakeholders



Source: 101 insurance CEOs participating in the 19th Annual Global Survey

Only 50% of insurance CEOs cite personal data security as a priority for strengthening engagement, even though customers and other stakeholders will only share data if they trust the recipient to use it safely and responsibly.

Strategies for change

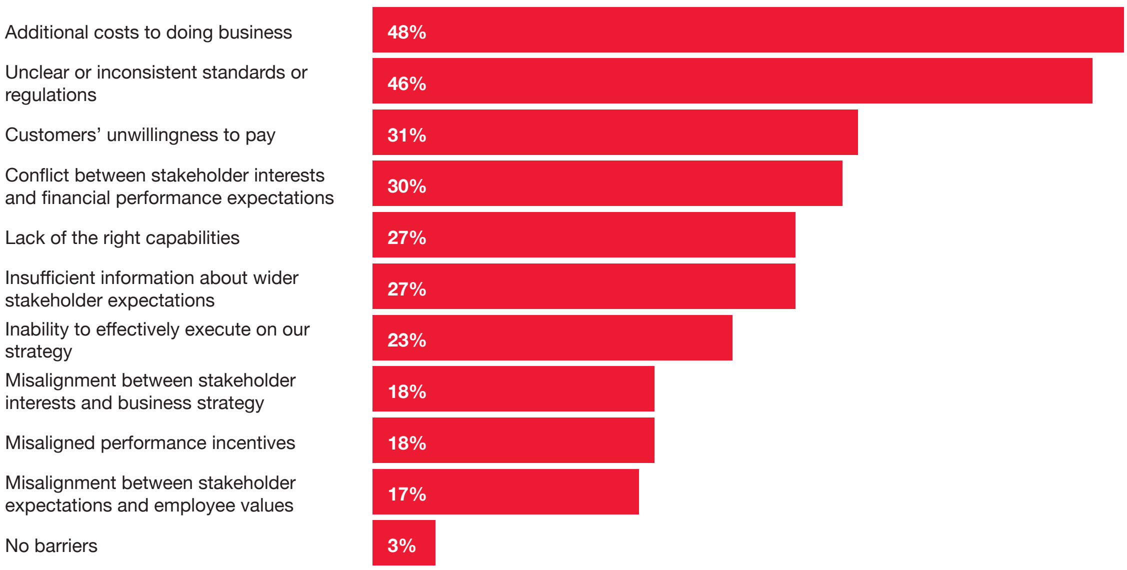
More than 70% of insurance CEOs are making significant changes to the way they use technology to assess and meet stakeholder expectations (Figure 2 on page 5). But as Figure 2 further highlights, far fewer are seeking to back up their use of technology by maximising the social value of innovation, which suggests that social value has to compete with other seemingly higher and more urgent priorities.

Technology and innovation will be critical in delivering the outcomes stakeholders want at a cost customers and investors are willing to pay. The insurers developing pre-emptive protection against cyberattacks or safer road usage through sensor-based pay-as-you-drive insurance show that it is possible to deliver more for less.

Insurance CEOs cite data and analytics and customer relationship management systems as providing the greatest potential contribution to improving engagement with stakeholders (see Figure 3). But do they have the right information to drive this analysis? What your business knows about its customers is curtailed by limited interaction (e.g. annual renewals, occasional claims or pension contribution changes) and the data is primarily historical. However, this is a marketplace being reshaped by new regulations, new legislation, and changing customer expectations, which demands a more forward-looking perspective. Moreover, only around half of insurance CEOs cite personal data security as a priority for strengthening engagement, even though customers and other stakeholders will only share data if they trust the recipient to use it safely and responsibly.

Figure 4 Barriers to meeting expectations

Q: Which of the following barriers, if any, is your organisation encountering when responding to wider stakeholder expectations?



Source: 101 insurance CEOs participating in the 19th Annual Global Survey

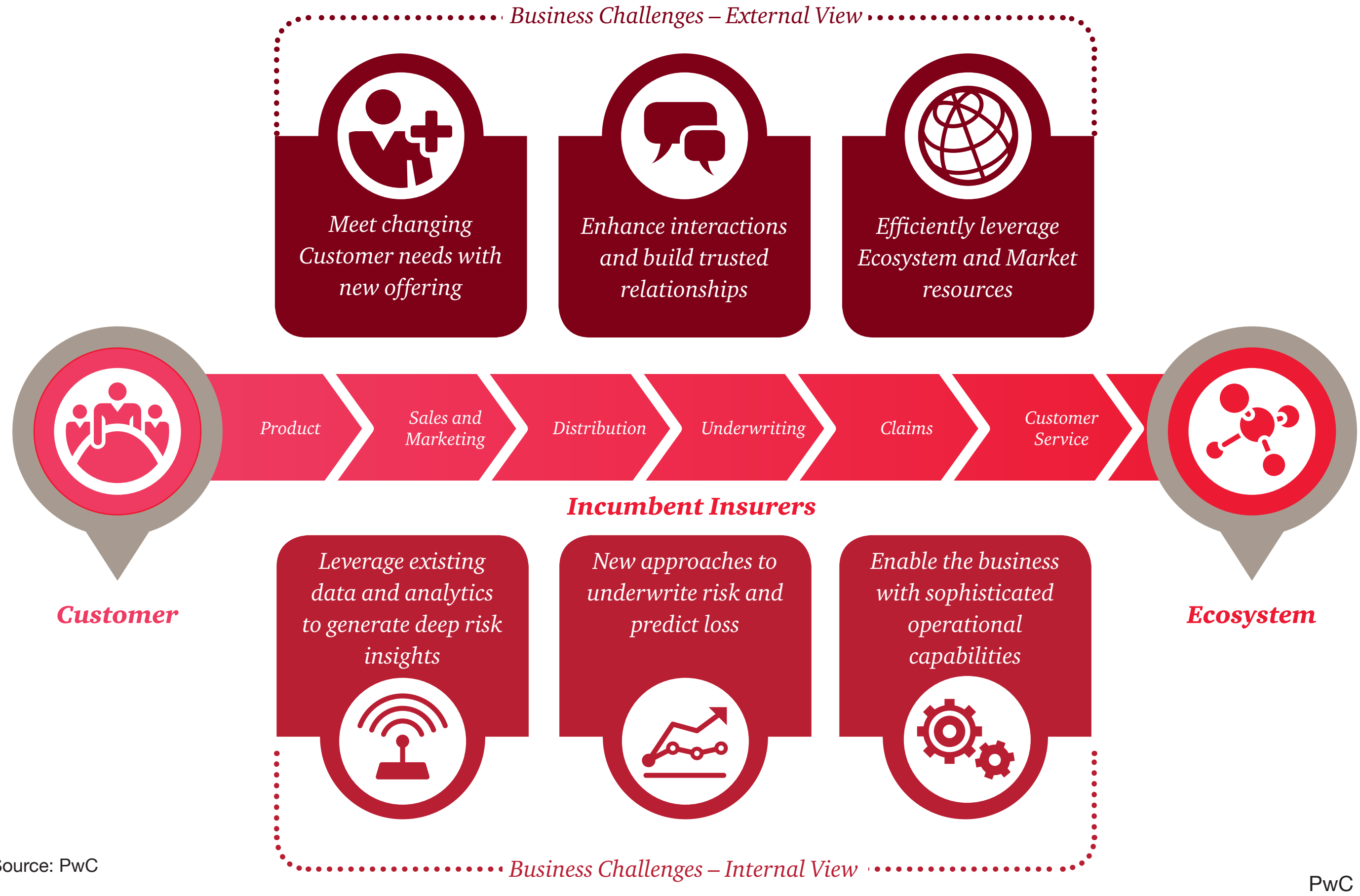
Barriers to meeting expectations

Increased costs and customers' unwillingness to pay are cited as significant barriers to meeting stakeholder expectations (see Figure 4). This highlights the challenge of balancing business and societal needs (the requirement to provide flood or basic pension cover at reasonable costs as part of the social licence to operate are clear instances) and the potential conflict between investors' and other stakeholders' expectations.

The difficulties of this balancing act are heightened by the increasing fragmentation within economies, societies, and legal systems. Sixty per cent of insurance CEOs believe that the world is moving towards multiple economic models and more than 80% towards multiple rules of law. Less than a quarter anticipate the creation of a single global marketplace or greater legal harmonisation. This fragmentation could erode the advantages of scale and reach enjoyed by multinational insurance groups, though it would also make it harder for smaller insurers to extend their international footprint.

So in the face of so much change and so many competing demands, how and where do you begin to respond? Figure 5 charts the internal organisational challenges that need to be addressed to meet changing customer expectations and keep on top of market disruption. Capitalising on the opportunities to enhance customer interactions and develop new offerings requires deeper insights, new approaches to underwriting and a major step-up in operational efficiency and capability. This in turn demands transformational rather than just piecemeal change within many insurance businesses.

Figure 5 Business imperatives



Source: PwC

Attracting and retaining the right people remains a challenge

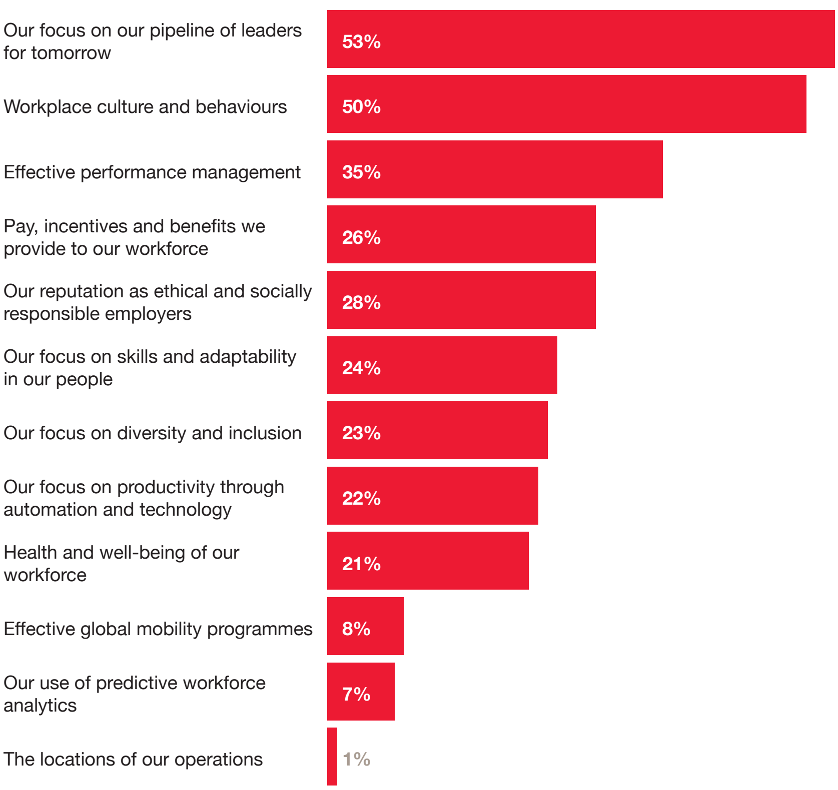
Seventy per cent of insurance CEOs see the limited availability of key skills as a threat to growth, much the same as last year (71%), suggesting that progress in this area has been difficult. Given the scale of the skills shortages and the ageing of much of the insurance workforce, the response seems muted. Less than a quarter of insurance CEOs are changing the way they manage talent to ensure they have the skills and adaptability they need (see Figure 6).

71%

of insurance CEOs see the limited availability of key skills as a threat to growth

Figure 6 Talent management priorities

Q: What aspects of your talent strategy are you changing to make the greatest impact on attracting, retaining and engaging the people you need to remain relevant and competitive



Source: 101 insurance CEOs participating in the 19th Annual Global Survey

It's important to ensure that your organisation's values and objectives match the expectations of the younger generations that are entering the workforce. Nearly 60% (59%) of insurance CEOs say top talent prefer to work for organisations with social values which are aligned to their own, making this much more important than competitive compensation (36%).

Keeping pace with shifts in taxation

Two-thirds of insurance CEOs see the increasing tax burden as a threat to growth. Tax management is being complicated by the spotlight on how much tax corporations pay, which is at the heart of the social licence to operate and a potential source of reputational risk. Yet, only 18% of insurance CEOs are making significant changes to how they manage their tax affairs.

Insurers also face significant changes in international rules, the OECD's BEPS Action Plan in particular, which will shift the tax focus from where capital is held to where activities are performed and products are used. This raises questions about where business is domiciled. The increased focus on where value is created will also heighten the risks and complexities surrounding transfer pricing and could make some current tax structures inadmissible. However, less than half of insurance CEOs say that their board is actively involved in determining the business' tax strategy from a wider stakeholder perspective.

Moving your business forward

The insurance industry is facing escalating disruption. But there are also significant opportunities opening up in the marketplace, with the revolutions in analytics and digital distribution at their heart. Fifty-four percent of insurance CEOs see more growth opportunities than three years ago and 52% are very confident about their growth prospects over the next three years.

So what can your business do to move out in front? Drawing on the survey findings and our work with industry clients, we believe that there are seven key priorities for survival and success in this fast changing market:

1 A new benchmark for customer-centricity

Customer-centricity is no longer just a matter of doing what's necessary to secure a sale. Customers have ever greater capacity to compare and switch, and regulators are focusing ever more closely on the appropriateness of products and the value they deliver.

To drive true customer engagement and loyalty, it's important to look beyond products, underwriting and rates. An outside-in view, where you examine a need from the customer's point of view and then determine how you can address it will help ensure both parties achieve the outcomes they want. This could range from deployment of Internet of Things sensors to help reduce equipment damage and breakdowns to using the latest interactive financial planning to help people make more informed retirement investment choices.

2 Embrace disruption

With barriers to market entry coming down, your fiercest competitor could as easily be a FinTech company as a traditional peer. It could also be a brand new operating or business model. It's therefore important to think about where your business might be vulnerable and what it can offer that competitors can't. It's also important to think about how to be innovative, rather than simply following the disruptors. In response, many companies have undertaken joint ventures or entered into strategic outsourcing arrangements that provide them new or complementary capabilities and thereby increase their competitiveness.

3/ Expand sources of information to understand emerging risks and their implications, changing stakeholder expectations, and strengthen engagement

Ever greater access to data doesn't just increase the speed of servicing and lower costs, it also opens the way for improved decision making typified by ever greater precision, customisation and adaptation.

The insurers out in front are making better use of the information that's already there by rationalising data feeds, improving reliability, and speeding up communication. They're also capturing new types of data and supplementing it with appropriate partner and external data sources.

Partnering with banks, retailers or affinity groups to gain information on behaviour, interests and spending patterns could open the way to the development of more tailored products and features. Further possibilities include combining sensor and social media monitoring with the latest generation of behavioural analysis to create a holistic picture of customer preferences.

4 Embrace a regulator-centric as well as customer-centric future

Regulation will continue to be costly, complex, and constantly changing. Rather than simply reacting to each new regulatory development, it's important to take a proactive approach to anticipating and analysing regulatory trends and building it into your strategic planning in the same way you would take account of customer sentiment and expectation.

5 A new approach to cyber risk

Cyber threats present both a business opportunity and critical risk. In the absence of actuarial data, many cyber insurers are forced to rely on blanket policy restrictions to control exposures. But, this reduces the value of coverage and could impede market growth. The key to market development is a more active partnership between you and your clients, with a more effective and regularly updated threat assessment at its heart. The most competitive insurers will make sure that their own cyber safeguards follow market leading practice, as well as developing the expertise they need to advise clients (we explore this further in 'Insurance 2020 and beyond: Reaping the dividends of cyber resilience').

6 A broader talent base

It's important to bring together people with diverse skillsets. This includes people with digital and insurance capabilities. It also includes more people with experience working in government and within client businesses.

The brightest and best candidates will actively seek out organisations with social values that mirror their own, as well as viable, rewarding career paths. It's therefore important to communicate both your purpose and the value this creates for society, and the real and interesting opportunities that you offer employees.

7 Integrating tax with strategic management

The need to balance tax optimisation and compliance in a highly sensitive tax environment will be central to achieving cost-efficiency and sustaining the social licence to operate. This will require tax teams to develop new skills, collaborative processes, and evaluation criteria. This includes a more proactive approach to anticipating changes, developing scenario analysis of the impact and working with your board to build these developments into business strategy (we explore this further in 'Insurance 2020 & beyond: Equipping your business for the global tax revolution').

Coming through stronger

In the face so many disruptive challenges, it's important not to lose sight of the huge opportunities that are opening up in and around your business. The more uncertain and unstable the environment, the more your risk insight and expertise will be in demand. You're also in pole position to capitalise on the new generation of analytics, sensor connectivity and machine learning technologies that are set to revolutionise our lives. To seize the future, you need to look beyond the traditional boundaries of insurance business to embrace new ways of working, new ways of interacting with customers and whole new possibilities in what your business can deliver.

"The challenges we face in the future will be different from the ones we faced before. However much experience we have, we need to keep investing in the technology and the training that can enable our people to be winners. If they don't have the tools or the training they need, they would feel like they've got one hand tied behind their back."

Peter D. Hancock
President and Chief Executive Officer, AIG (US)

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If you could like to discuss the issues raised in more detail please contact us.

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