SUCCESS WITHOUT STILLNESS:

LEADERSHIP IN MOTION

INSIGHT REPORT

How UK business leaders are progressing without certainty, adapting faster and redefining success.

TC GROUP BUSINESS ADVISORS & ACCOUNTANTS

We surveyed

1,500

business leaders across the UK.

Including

500

TC Group clients and owners.

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SUCCESS WITHOUT STILLNESS:

LEADERSHIP IN MOTION

Running a business has always needed character and resilience. What's changed is the pace, volume of decisions and constant pressure surrounding business leaders. The old pattern of disruption followed by a little recovery no longer reflects how many experience running a business today. Instead, they're operating in a state of constant movement, making decisions faster than ever and adjusting plans weekly rather than yearly, trying to control momentum as everything continues to shift.

AI, geopolitics, legislation, ESG and attitudes to work are fundamentally reshaping the business landscape and the discussion around change is everywhere we turn, but at TC Group, we have stopped to ask a more human question: how is all this impacting business leaders now and in the future?

40%

of leaders say political factors are the biggest challenge to their mental resilience.

Only

1 IN 8

business leaders feel fully in control.

We work alongside business owners every day. We see the pace increasing, the pressure building and the role of leadership becoming more complex.

This research was commissioned to move beyond headlines and better understand how business leaders are *actually* experiencing this reality:

- how they are making decisions
- how they are planning for the future
- and what they need to succeed when nothing stands still

We dig into the struggles, truths and triumphs of more than 1,500 UK business leaders, including more than 500 TC Group clients and owners. The findings share practical and emotional insight into what it takes to operate successfully in a reality where nothing stands still. They show that ambition has not disappeared; instead, leaders are adjusting how they plan, make decisions, and move forward as things keep shifting.

More than 8 in 10 leaders say they have clarity when making decisions, but that clarity is increasingly focused on the short term. The ability to stay clear-headed in the moment means that 72% feel confident navigating uncertainty, but 92% are unable to switch off without feeling guilt.

That is the paradox at the heart of this report. Today's business leaders are feeling clear-headed, but only for the next immediate decision. They are confident but carrying more pressure. They are responsible for more but feel in control of less.

Success Without Stillness: Leadership In Motion explores the leadership mindset emerging. We look at how business owners are shifting from planning to pivoting, managing decision fatigue, redefining control, changing how they think about people and learning how to succeed without standing still.

PLANNING TO PIVOT

STRATEGY BUILT ON FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORKS

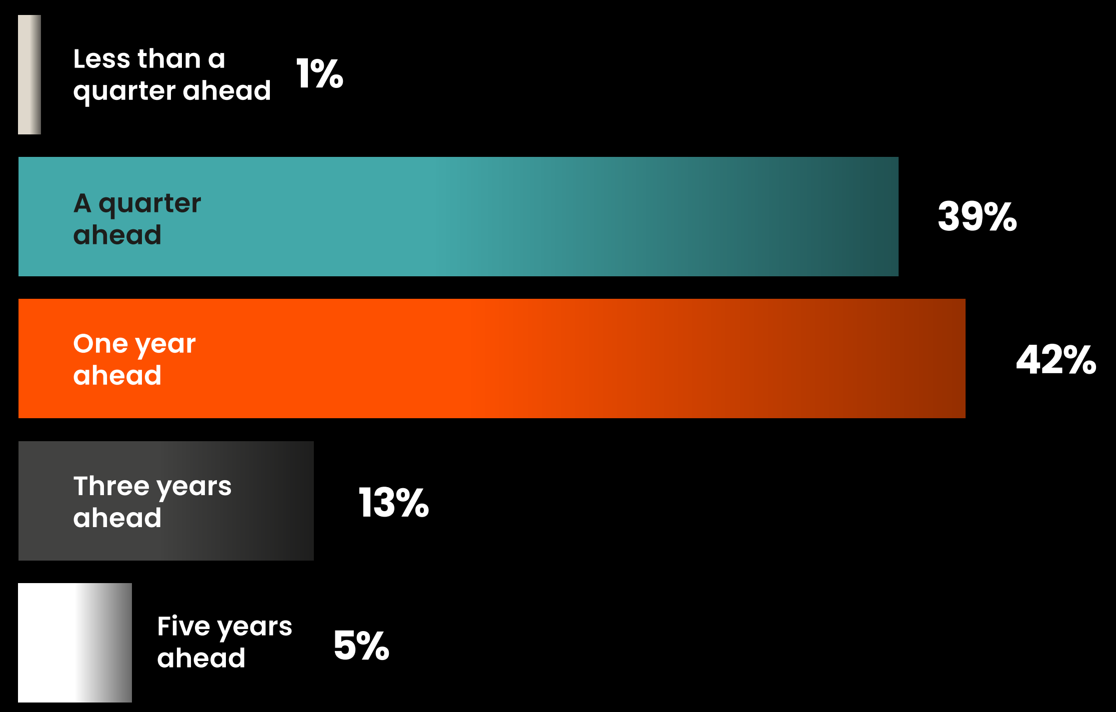
For many business owners, the rhythm of running a business has shifted completely.

For decades, business planning was built around the idea that certainty would eventually return. The three-year plan was the staple of strategic planning. Leaders created strategies, reviewed progress and adjusted plans at regular intervals. There was disruption, of course, but occasional disruption that could be managed as a temporary phase.

Our research shows that nearly three-quarters feel confident navigating uncertainty, but the reality behind that confidence is now more constrained. 58% are unable to plan a full year ahead, more than 6 in 10 can't confidently look past the next quarter, and an overwhelming 82% are unable to plan three years or more into the future. But 60% of leaders also said that clear strategy and business planning is their top source of resilience. Even when done in short sprints, it helps them to push through uncertainty.

This does not mean business owners have stopped thinking long-term, but that the relationship between vision and execution has changed.

HOW FAR AHEAD CAN YOU STRATEGICALLY PLAN FOR YOUR BUSINESS?



Business owners are balancing short-termism with long-term strategy, because responsiveness should not distract from achieving big goals. Some might read shorter planning horizons as a sign of business weakness, but they can indicate a more mature understanding of the current market.

"At the moment, we're doing a three-month rolling forecast of what we can achieve, and that is what is driving the business. Anything past that feels more like a target than a forecast."

Business leaders used to plan with optimism and still should, but many are now building strategies with resilience and reality at the centre. This is a subtle but important change. Optimism assumes things will improve, but resilience assumes things could improve but might not and prepares the business to keep moving forward either way.

"We used to look with optimism over forecasts and plans. I think we now do it more with a focus on resilience rather than optimism."

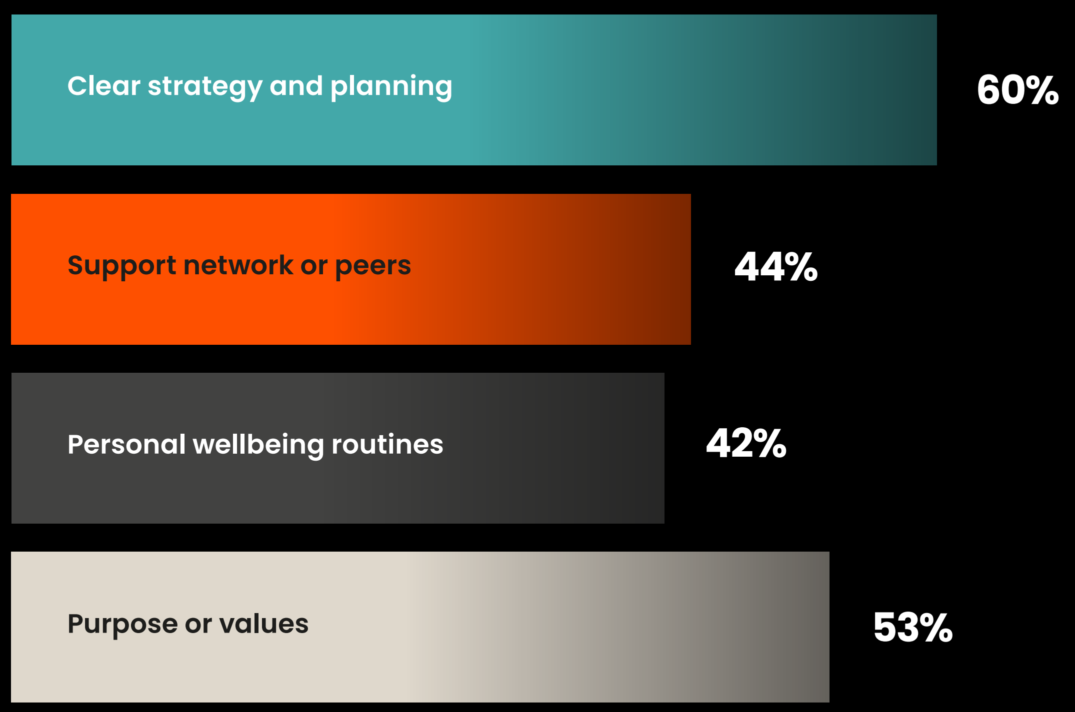
The key takeaway for leaders is to create flexible frameworks that can adapt as things change. The strongest businesses are likely to be those that have:

- a long-term view of what the business is trying to achieve
- a rolling understanding of what is realistic in the next quarter or year
- a willingness to change the route without treating every adjustment as failure

In the world we are operating in today, strategic success isn't measured by how closely a business sticks to the original plan. It is proven by whether the business can reactively make informed decisions when the plan needs to pivot.

> ***WE ARE SEEING BUSINESS OWNERS MOVE AWAY FROM RIGID LONG-TERM PLANS AND TOWARDS MORE FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORKS THAT CAN ADAPT TO CHANGE. AMBITION HAS NOT DISAPPEARED, BUT IT HAS TO WORK MUCH HARDER TO FIND WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD EVEN WHEN CERTAINTY NEVER ARRIVES.***

WHAT HELPS YOU PERSONALLY STAY RESILIENT AS A LEADER?



LEADERSHIP IN MOTION

HOW BUSINESS OWNERS ARE REALLY FEELING

The emotional side of running a business is nuanced. Our research found that whilst more than half of business owners describe their outlook in positive terms, with 57% feeling confident, excited or cautiously optimistic about the future. Beneath that, 13% report feeling uncertain, 9% anxious and 3% fatigued.

This mix shows that whilst many business owners are feeling the pressure, they are not paralysed by it; they are still finding energy, opportunity and purpose, even when the conditions around them are difficult.

“We’re doing well, but we’re not just coping, we’re progressing.”

WHICH STATEMENT RESONATES MOST RIGHT NOW?

I’m feeling positive about the future	39%
I’m building something exciting	28%
I’m rethinking everything	15%
I’m constantly firefighting	10%
I’m not sure anymore	9%

OUR CLIENTS ARE NOT STANDING STILL, EVEN WHEN THE CONDITIONS AROUND THEM ARE DIFFICULT. MANY ARE STILL CONFIDENT, AMBITIOUS AND FORWARD-LOOKING, BUT THEY ARE HAVING TO WORK HARDER TO COPE WITH INCREASED MOMENTUM.

1 IN 5

leaders identified personal burnout as their top challenge.

That distinction between coping and progressing is important. Coping implies survival, but progressing means that organisations can move forward, whether fast or slow, in any environment, when directed by great leaders.

“Uncertainty always brings opportunity for some businesses and it tends to be the ones that are forward-looking, no matter what.”

This perspective reminds business leaders that the current landscape can be reframed more positively. Stability is not the only condition under which good businesses grow. Some leaders are using uncertainty to sharpen their focus. What matters is how leaders harness teams, AI adoption and opportunities that may not have existed in a more settled market.

None of this makes the pressure less real. Leaders can still believe in their business while feeling the pressure of what it takes to keep moving. They can be proud of progress, while grieving the loss of simplicity.

THE WEIGHT OF CONSTANT DECISIONS

THE LEADERS FEELING GUILT AND FATIGUE

Being a confident decision-maker has always been key to business leadership, but the pace of decision-making, the revolving door of new challenges and the emotional responsibility that leaders feel is starting to take its toll in the form of decision fatigue.

"When I get home and have to decide what to cook for dinner, that just folds me over. I can't make any more decisions."

Leaders are not just making commercial decisions, they are making decisions on people, culture, costs and clients, often all in the same day. Decision-making carries emotional weight, not just commercial risk. Nearly a third of leaders regularly feel guilty about the decisions they make, and this weight carries into personal time and home life responsibilities.

1/3

of leaders regularly feel guilty about the decisions they make.

> ***BUSINESS LEADERS ARE CARRYING THE WEIGHT OF DECISION-MAKING MORE THAN EVER, OFTEN WITHOUT THE CLARITY THEY WOULD IDEALLY LIKE. OUR ROLE IS ABOUT HELPING CLIENTS CUT THROUGH THE NOISE, FOCUS ON THE DECISIONS THAT MATTER MOST AND FEEL LESS ALONE IN MAKING THEM.***

Among 18–24-year-old business owners, **21% say they always feel guilt**, more than three times the average among other groups. This points to a younger generation of leaders who are entering business ownership already carrying a disproportionate emotional burden, a trend that may become more common as the pressures of leadership continue to intensify.

Our research shows that decision guilt and fatigue is not a lack of capability; it's the result of sustained cognitive load. The modern business owner is expected to process more information, respond to more change and make calls with more responsibility and less certainty than before.

"What people don't realise, unless you're in the position we're in, is just how many decisions you do make on a daily, sometimes hourly, basis. There's a lot and it can be overwhelming."

The solution to this overwhelm lies in business leaders asking the question: Which of these decisions genuinely need to sit with me? Those with the discipline to know which decisions need their attention, which can be delegated, and which can be guided by external advisors will maintain their leadership advantage in the future. The leaders who build filters around decision-making are the ones most likely to preserve their resilience for years to come.

Nearly half of leaders turn to friends and family when making difficult decisions, but support extends further: around a third rely on professional advisors and senior colleagues, and close to 4 in 10 lean on their teams.

CONTROL IN A WORLD THAT WON'T SIT STILL

REDEFINING WHAT CONTROL REALLY MEANS

The pace of running a business today is impacting how in control leaders feel.

Our research found that just 1 in 8 business leaders feel fully in control, while more than half say they don't feel in control at all. An interesting view when balanced with 8 in 10 leaders saying they have clarity. This points to a shift in what control now means: not mastering every variable but creating enough clarity to act in a landscape that refuses to stand still.

A leader at TC Group described a useful framework she shares with clients for separating what can and cannot be controlled.

"We're helping clients put the things that you can control in a circle and everything that you can't control is outside the circle. You've got to plan for everything within the circle but make it adaptable."

This is a practical shift in leadership mindset. Control doesn't have to mean predicting every big picture outcome or stabilising the environment. It can be about creating enough clarity to make the next informed decision.

For leaders, that acceptance feels freeing. When everything feels urgent, separating what can be controlled from external noise allows attention to return to the places where it can make a real difference.

Control, in today's market, is not about having certainty; it's about clarity of focus.

That clarity can come from better management information, clearer forecasts, stronger advisory relationships, more disciplined cash flow management and a sharper understanding of the levers inside the business. It can also come from accepting the limits of control. Not everything can be fixed, forecast or neutralised.

"We build towards something and then somebody pulls the rug from under your feet. Then you have to look again at where you're going and what you're doing."

Three in four business owners also say they feel a strong sense of obligation to build a 'good' business. That sense of responsibility may also shape how leaders experience control. The pressure is not only driven by external noise, but by the internal weight of wanting to meet expectations across the business, from employee experience to customer and supplier relationships.

> ***AS A LEADER, YOU CANNOT CONTROL EXTERNAL PRESSURES, BUT YOU CAN CONTROL HOW CLEARLY YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR BUSINESS. WE HELP CLIENTS FOCUS ON THE NUMBERS, RISKS AND LEVERS THEY CAN INFLUENCE, SO UNCERTAINTY DOES NOT BECOME PARALYSIS.***

Only

1 IN 8

business leaders feel fully in control.

PREPARING FOR MULTIPLE FUTURES

PLANNING FOR MOVING TARGETS

If the future can't be predicted with confidence, planning needs to become more flexible. Scenario planning must become a practical tool for survival and growth for every business.

Our research shows that **39% of business owners can only plan a quarter ahead**, and only 42% plan a year ahead. A single fixed plan is unlikely to be enough.

"We're now saying to our board – here's a plan for 100% of that coming in. Here's a plan for 80% of it coming in. What's the plan if 20% of it comes in?"

The power of this approach is that it moves the conversation away from prediction and towards preparedness.

> ***PLANNING FOR MULTIPLE FUTURES IS HOW WE'RE HELPING OUR CLIENTS MOVE THROUGH CHANGE AND SUCCEED. WE'RE HELPING THEM TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE IN THEIR APPROACH, SO THEY AREN'T WAITING FOR CERTAINTY BEFORE THEY ACT.***

72%

business leaders are confident that their business could survive another major disruption.

The uncertainty today is one of the most important shifts for business leaders. 72% say they feel confident navigating uncertainty or a major disruption such as a recession, highlighting the adaptive resilience that modern SME leaders have built through experience.

Waiting for certainty can feel responsible, but in many cases, it becomes its own form of risk. A business owner who plans for multiple futures will not remove uncertainty, but they will stand a better chance of reaching their big goals when conditions change.

"The clients that we see struggling the most are not those facing the hardest conditions, but those that are waiting for some certainty in order to make decisions or plan for the future."

The value of scenario planning is as much emotional as it is commercial. It gives leaders a way to move from helplessness to readiness by keeping their options open.

RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND PROFIT

WITH GREAT TEAMS COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

Every conversation with a business leader ultimately turns to people. From managing a multi-generational workforce and scaling salaries to legislative change and AI adoption, everyone has a different view. But one common theme emerges, a feeling of greater responsibility for people than ever before.

Responsibility for people has grown significantly - **86% now feel accountable for employee wellbeing**. 69% of business owners also say they feel their greatest responsibility is to their employees.

With three in four business owners feeling a strong sense of obligation to build a 'good' business, that responsibility is not only commercial. It increasingly includes feeling responsible for culture, employee wellbeing and the kind of environment leaders create for others. Business owners not only feel responsible for managing an employee's day-to-day, but also for managing shifts in expectations, flexibility, development, progression, and retention in a world of change that impacts not just a business, but every individual within it.

"There's definitely a shift now in that employment is a collaboration. You want people to come to work and enjoy it, but equally you've got a responsibility to make those environments better and make it a nice place to work."

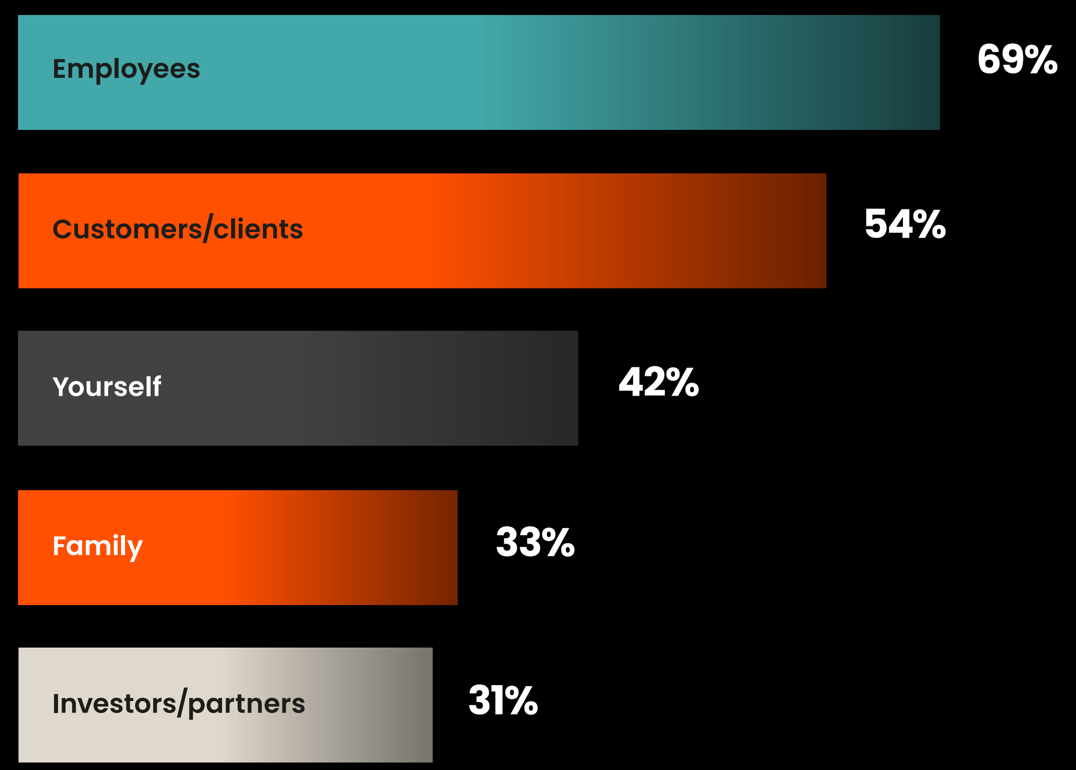
Alongside grappling with this added weight of responsibility for people, leaders pointed out that the types of people they hire today are very different to those they hired previously. In a faster, less predictable market, businesses need more changemakers, people who can adapt quickly, learn quickly, handle situations that lack clarity and remain motivated when things shift suddenly.

"The values we're hiring for now are different to what they would have been six years ago, we need more people who can cope with change."

Recruiting and retaining great people is becoming increasingly defined by behaviours and mindset rather than skills. When everything is moving fast, leaders who can create a culture that empowers people to grow, make decisions and embrace change will be the ones who succeed long-term.

PEOPLE ARE ONE OF THE GREATEST RESPONSIBILITIES BUSINESS OWNERS CARRY, BUT IT'S ALSO ONE OF THEIR BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES. WE SEE CLIENTS RETHINKING HOW THEY RECRUIT, RETAIN AND DEVELOP TEAMS SO THEIR PEOPLE STRATEGY CAN KEEP PACE WITH THEIR COMMERCIAL AMBITIONS AND NAVIGATE CHANGE.

WHICH STAKEHOLDERS DO YOU FEEL THE GREATEST SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS AS A BUSINESS OWNER?



LEADERSHIP COLLECTIVE

DEFINING A NEW MEANING FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The complexity of modern leadership means no business owner can go it alone. Even in the smallest SMEs, where there is most vulnerability to leadership isolation, success at pace depends on trusting a wider team, from internal talent to external advisors.

Our research shows that many leaders already recognise the need for stronger support networks. Around a third turn to senior colleagues (34%) or professional advisors (32%), while almost four in ten rely on their team members (39%). Together, these point to a positive shift towards more distributed leadership, even in businesses where ownership still sits with one or two individuals.

Among businesses with 10-49 employees,

16%

handle leadership challenges entirely alone, double the average of 8%.

"If you've got a really decent team underneath you, it changes everything. You can say someone else needs to take the lead or make the daily decisions. I will deal with the high-level strategic things. I wouldn't have done this before; everything felt like it had to sit with me."

Collective leadership does not mean business owners or leaders stepping away from accountability. It means creating the conditions for others to carry meaningful responsibility. This allows business owners to step away from the business, even for a short time, to gain clarity and drive shared decision-making.

"The people leading the team can do just as good a job as me and, in some instances, better. It's about giving the leadership team the skills and responsibilities to enable them to do my job, which has been a big shift for me."

Support for business leaders comes in the form of technology and AI too. While media narrative tends to focus on large businesses investing heavily in tech and the risk of SMEs being left behind, our findings suggest something more encouraging. Nearly 7 in 10 business owners feel ready to embrace AI, technology and innovation to support leadership. That points to a business community that is not standing still but actively weighing the opportunities and efficiencies that new technology brings.

As leadership becomes more distributed, the role of the leader doesn't diminish; it evolves. The same principle applies to technology. Just as responsibility is shared across trusted people, AI and technology become another layer of support for business owners: enhancing judgement, strengthening decision-making, and enabling leaders to operate with greater clarity rather than replacing them.

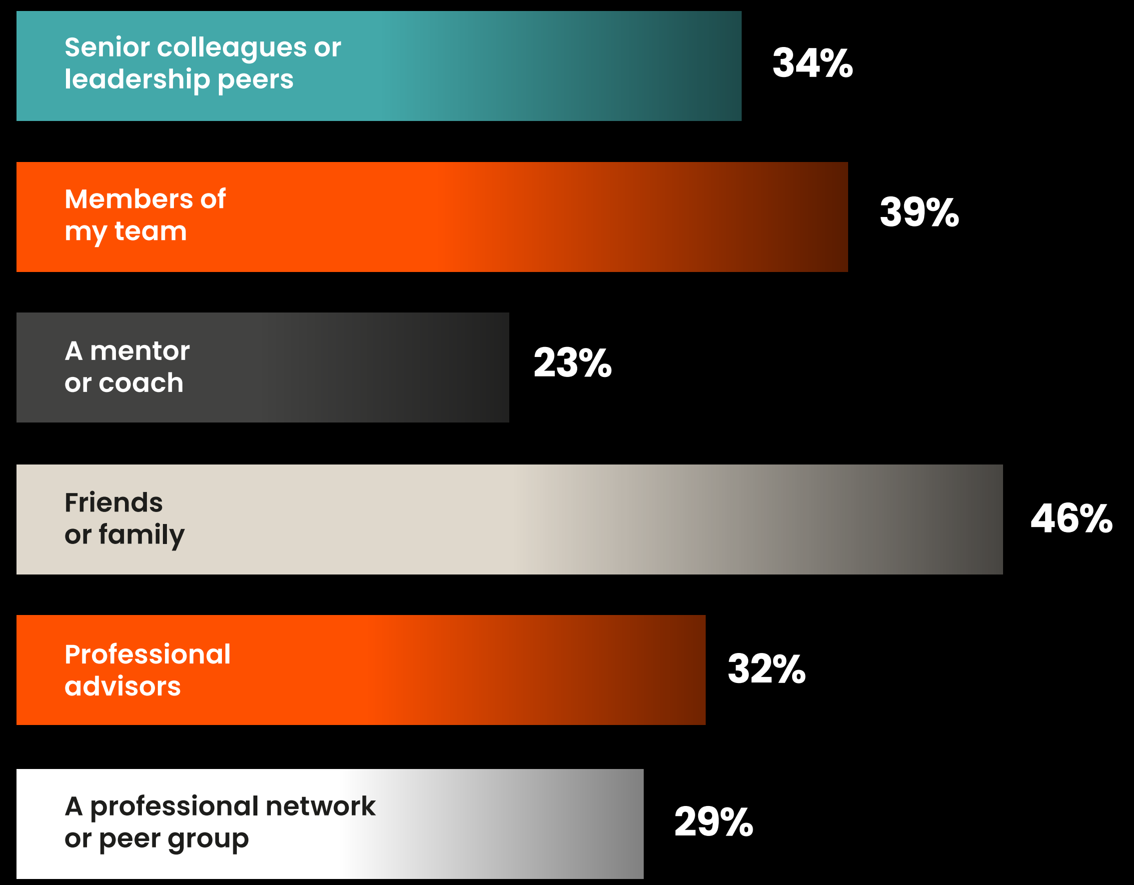
AI offers leaders more frequent insight, earlier intervention, and deeper strategic thinking time. But it should sit alongside human judgement to ensure leaders can navigate a rapidly changing landscape.

"I depend on a core team of people who really make the difference, the people who actually drive change in the business."

For business owners and their teams, the combination of the right people and the right technology is the real opportunity. By building the right people around them, giving those people the tools and authority to act and using technology to remove friction rather than replace judgement, leaders can begin to share the load without losing control.

> ***THE MOST EFFECTIVE LEADERS ARE NO LONGER TRYING TO CARRY EVERYTHING ALONE. WE WORK WITH CLIENTS TO STRENGTHEN THE TEAMS, STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES AROUND THEM, SO LEADERSHIP BECOMES SHARED, SUPPORTED AND THE BUSINESS CAN BECOME MORE SUCCESSFUL.***

WHEN YOU NEED SUPPORT AS A LEADER, WHO DO YOU TYPICALLY TURN TO?



WHEN FATIGUE HITS THE P&L

THE COST OF LEADERSHIP PRESSURE

Decision and leadership fatigue are a wellbeing challenge for leaders, but the consequences are increasingly commercial. Fatigue and anxiety affect decision quality, profitability, business value, risk appetite, team dynamics and the ability to lead effectively in a fast-paced environment.

"That constant level of thought and decision-making means you've got to be in a stronger mental position than you were in the past for the business to survive."

While many leaders are actively building resilience, with around four in ten using personal wellbeing routines to manage fatigue, the picture is mixed. More than half feel more resilient than in previous years, yet a smaller group reports declining resilience. This progress is set against a demanding backdrop, with almost four in ten citing external economic, regulatory or political pressures as their biggest challenge.

When questioned on business continuity, leaders reveal just how much their business relies on them. When asked how long their business could continue operating effectively if they had to take unexpected, extended leave, more than half of business leaders said under six months. 9% said less than a week, 18% said one to three weeks, 27% said one to two months and 27% said three to six months.

92%

of business owners say they can't switch off without feeling anxiety or guilt.

This over-reliance on a business owner not only adds to the layers of pressures described throughout the report but also increasingly places leadership wellbeing as a commercial vulnerability.

Our research indicates burnout hits those running businesses with 50–99 employees hardest, at 26%, versus 19% among 10–49 employee firms. This difference reflects the pressure of businesses in a period of growth transition, where the owner is still operationally involved but the complexity has multiplied.

For many leaders, the challenge is twofold: managing their own physical and mental sustainability while supporting employees facing similar pressures. Many are doing this in an environment where taking proper time away from the business feels inaccessible.

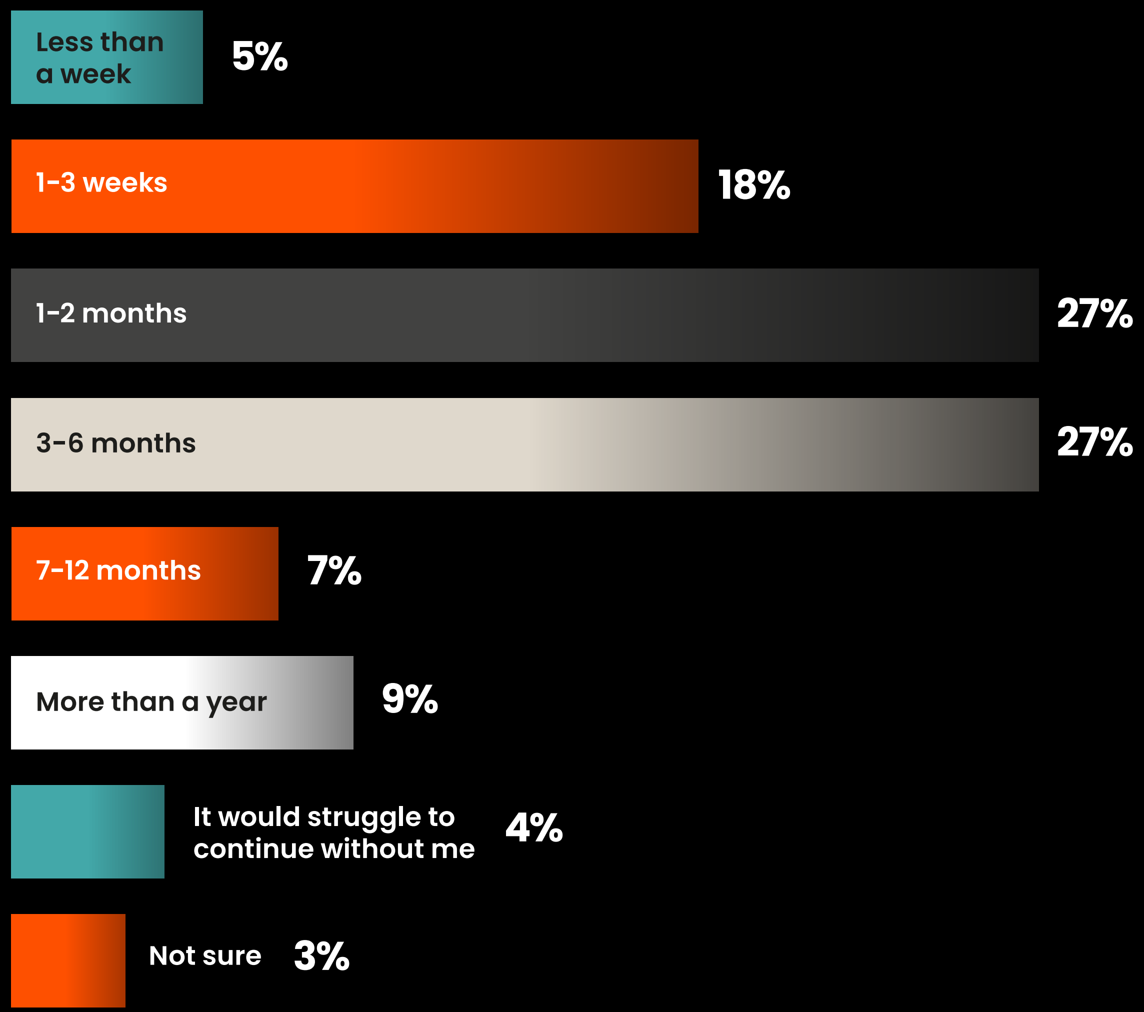
"Mental health is the biggest type of sickness we have, with people needing that time off and support out of the office. It does affect the day-to-day running of the business, absolutely."

In recent years, business owners have already proven extraordinary resilience. The question now is: how can that resilience be supported and improved? That may include building a better support structure, new technology, planning for multiple futures, creating wellbeing routines and shared responsibility.

What is clear is that wellbeing for business leaders is not a soft add-on or just a personal issue. Business owners need to work with their internal teams and advisors to relieve pressure.

> ***WE SEE TOO OFTEN BUSINESS LEADERS FEELING TRAPPED, INDISPENSABLE AND EXHAUSTED THIS IS WIDESPREAD AND BEING BAKED INTO MODERN LEADERSHIP. BUSINESS LEADERS NEED TO BE ABLE TO REST WITHOUT FEELING ANXIETY AND IN TURN PROTECT BUSINESS PERFORMANCE TOO.***

IF YOU HAD TO TAKE UNEXPECTED, EXTENDED LEAVE, HOW LONG DO YOU THINK YOUR BUSINESS COULD CONTINUE OPERATING EFFECTIVELY WITHOUT YOU?



FROM BOLD BETS TO CALCULATED MOVES

THE RISK OF STANDING STILL

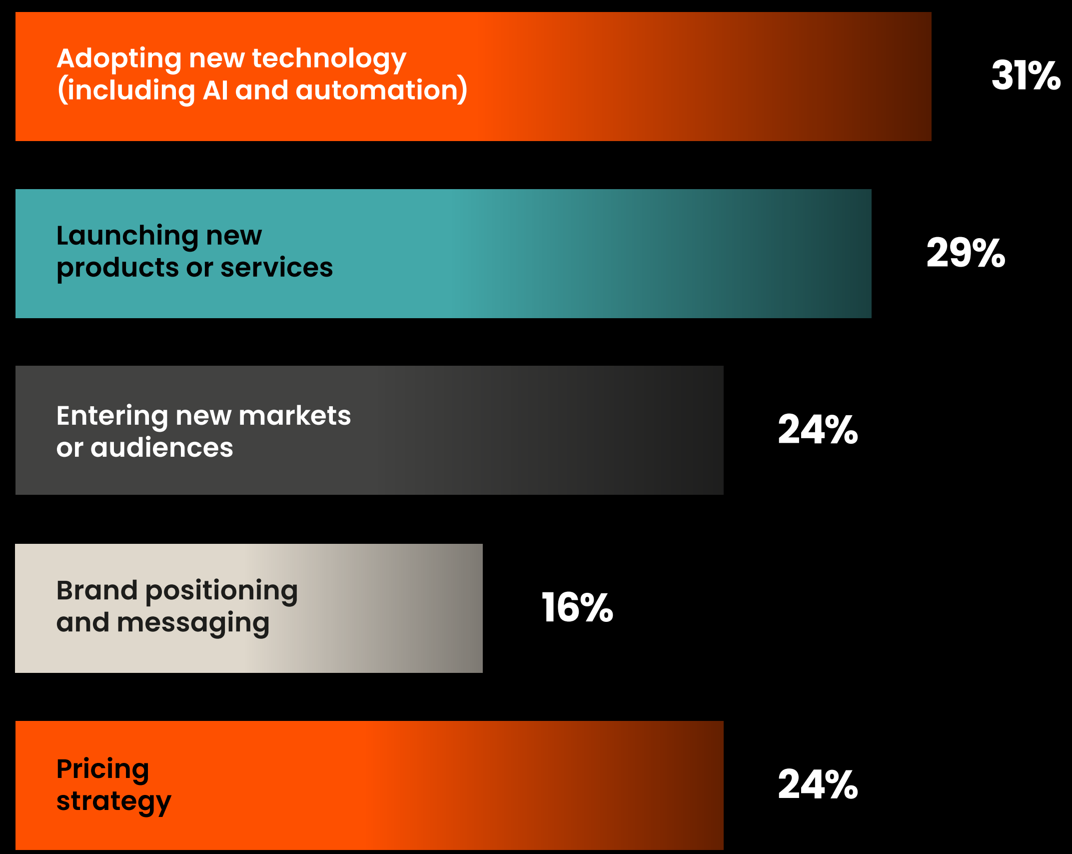
Entrepreneurial risk-taking has not disappeared, but it has changed. Our research found that 47% of business owners are more cautious now than in years gone by, while only 20% say they have become more willing to take risks. This could be seen as a decline in entrepreneurial spirit, and the headlines sometimes suggest it, but amongst our clients, the reality is far from it. Entrepreneurial spirit is thriving across industries every day. The reality is that leaders are taking a more calculated approach to risk.

“You do take a risk, but you make sure that it is a balanced risk or an educated risk now.”

Our research found that business leaders are most willing to take risks in:

- Adopting new technology (including AI and automation)
- Launching new products or services
- Investment in long-term innovation vs short-term revenue

IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF YOUR BUSINESS ARE YOU MOST WILLING TO TAKE RISKS?



47%

of business owners are less willing to take risks.

Interestingly, the area in which leaders say they are least willing to take risks is hiring senior talent, reinforcing a strategic vulnerability that is critical to business success. Investment is happening in technology, products and services, but not in the talent that will drive change, adopt new technologies and implement AI effectively.

Where leaders choose to take risks reveals a clear focus on innovation and growth. Business owners aren't standing still, but they are becoming more selective and avoiding risks that could weaken their foundations. This is where momentum becomes a strategy, but it requires a careful balance, especially when it comes to ensuring the right people are in place to move new initiatives forward.

In the past, standing still may have felt safe. Today, it's one of the biggest risks a business can take. Avoiding risk might protect you now, but it also makes you slower, less relevant, and less able to respond at pace.

"We take a moderate level of risk now. It's always calculated, but we still invest in the things that will serve us in the future."

The leaders best placed for the future are those who can distinguish between caution and paralysis and continue to act decisively. In a market where costs, technology, customer expectations and workforce dynamics are shifting fast, progress depends on making the right moves at the right time. Business owners who hold back too long risk drifting into outdated systems, tired propositions, weak succession plans and underdeveloped teams. Entrepreneurial instinct still leads, but it has evolved. It's no longer about bold bets, but about making calculated moves that keep the business moving forward.

“RISK HAS NOT DISAPPEARED, BUT IT HAS BECOME MORE MEASURED. WE ARE HELPING CLIENTS UNDERSTAND WHERE CAUTION IS SENSIBLE, WHERE ACTION IS NEEDED AND WHERE STANDING STILL COULD BECOME THE GREATER RISK.”

MOMENTUM WITH MEANING

THE NEW MEASURES OF REWARD

How owners define success today is changing. The traditional reward structure of business ownership has become less straightforward. Risk once held the promise of financial reward, autonomy and future security. Those rewards still matter, but for many leaders, the balance now feels more complex.

Our research shows that business owners are defining success more broadly than before. Personal growth leads as the top priority (40%), followed by financial success (38%), developing people (35%) and providing family security (34%). These are closely followed by creating something of their own (32%) and building a long-term legacy (32%), which are equally important to understanding how reward is being redefined.

Together, these findings reveal the tension at the heart of modern business. Leaders are driven by the personal and creative ambition to build something meaningful, while also carrying the protective instinct to provide security for the people who matter most to them. Financial success remains important, but it is no longer the only measure. For a significant proportion of business owners, the reward sits just as strongly in ownership, legacy, responsibility and the human impact of what they are building - a sense of purpose amongst the pressure.

However, the relationship with risk and reward is becoming more nuanced. While just over half (52%) still believe the reward is worth the risk, a quarter say it is becoming harder to justify (25%), some feel the reward has shifted from what they expected (16%), and a smaller group remain unsure it is worth the time and energy invested (5%).

> ***"FOR MANY OF OUR CLIENTS, SUCCESS IS NO LONGER DEFINED BY FINANCIAL RETURN ALONE. IT IS ABOUT BUILDING SOMETHING SUSTAINABLE, DEVELOPING PEOPLE, PROTECTING FAMILY SECURITY AND CREATING A BUSINESS THAT STILL FEELS WORTH THE EFFORT."***

This does not suggest that leaders are losing motivation or ambition, but the reasons for entrepreneurial pursuits, owning a business or taking on senior roles have shifted in line with the wider business landscape.

"Running a business has so many layers now, it's more complex than ever, but brings really different rewards for me personally than it did five years ago."

That's why momentum with meaning matters. Growth for its own sake isn't enough if it leaves the business owner exhausted. But standing still without direction isn't rewarding either. Today, success is broader and more dynamic, shaped by adaptability, judgement, progress and the ability to keep moving with intent. The reward may look different, but it hasn't disappeared. The new rewards of leadership are less about stillness and more about progress and momentum at every level. Seeing people grow and succeed, innovating, creating options for the future and progress is possible, even when conditions are far from ideal.

Fewer than

4 IN 10

business owners make financial outcomes their top priority.

25%

say the risk versus reward is becoming harder to justify.

THE ROAD AHEAD

SUCCESS WITHOUT STILLNESS: LEADERSHIP IN MOTION

If there is one thing this report makes clear, it's this: business ownership hasn't become easier; it has become heavier and, for some, the reward is getting harder to justify. Many of the leaders we speak to are carrying more than ever before, often without the certainty that once underpinned those decisions. And yet, what stood out to me most in this research is not how difficult things have become, but how business owners are responding. It's not hesitation, it's resilience. It's progress and the determination to keep moving forward, even when the path isn't fully clear.

That is the reality of modern leadership. Leadership in motion.

At TC Group, we recognise it because we are part of it. We are business owners too. We understand what it means to plan when conditions shift, to make decisions at pace, and to balance ambition with responsibility for our business, our people, and our family.

What this research shows is not a loss of ambition, but an evolution of it.

Leaders today are thinking differently. Shorter planning cycles are not a sign of weakness, but a reflection of a more adaptive, resilient mindset. Success is no longer defined purely by financial return, but by building something stronger, more sustainable and more meaningful over time. Leadership itself is becoming more shared, across teams, across advisors, and increasingly supported by intelligent technology that enhances judgement rather than replacing it.

That shift is exactly how TC Group is built to support our clients.

Our model is deliberately designed for this environment. We believe in long-term partnership over short-term gain, in ownership that drives accountability, and in combining human judgement with responsible AI to help our clients navigate complexity with confidence.

We bring together the strength of a national group with the local accountability of experienced business owners, people who understand the reality of running a business today because they are doing it themselves.

And most importantly, we stand alongside our clients, not just as advisors, but as partners, helping them make sense of uncertainty, move past survival mode, and forward with clarity.

Because the road ahead does not require perfect certainty. It requires clear thinking, trusted relationships and the ability to act with confidence when it matters most.

We see every day that the businesses who succeed are those who do not stand still. The strongest businesses are not those where one person holds all the answers. They are the ones where responsibility is shared, where good people are trusted, and where the right support is brought in at the right time to help them move through every environment. That support increasingly includes trusted business advisors, people who can challenge thinking, bring an external perspective and help leaders make clearer decisions under pressure and at pace.

That is where we believe we make the biggest difference. Not by simplifying the world our clients operate in, but by helping them navigate it, through better and faster insight, stronger foundations and more confident decision-making. By shaping stronger businesses, we help build more secure and meaningful futures for the people behind them.

The road ahead will continue to move.

Our role is to ensure our clients are ready to move with it.

Stephen Watts
Chief Operating Officer, TC Group

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INSIGHT REPORT

How UK business leaders are progressing without certainty, adapting faster and redefining success.

www.tc-group.com | 0330 088 711 | enquiries@tc-group.com