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Cisco Study: CEOs Embrace AI, But Knowledge Gaps Threaten Strategic Decisions and Growth

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97% of CEOs plan AI integration, but only 1.7% feel fully prepared. New research highlights what's getting in the way of progress – and how CEOs plan to shift ambition into action.

News summary:

- While 4 out of 5 CEOs recognize AI's potential, many worry gaps in their understanding will impact strategic decisions, risking missed opportunities and falling behind competitors.
- Over 70% fear losing ground due to gaps in IT knowledge or network infrastructure, with more than half already seeing competitive losses from underinvestment in technology.
- CEOs plan to stay ahead by investing in their people, modernizing infrastructure, and strengthening cybersecurity, with 96% relying on trusted partners to future-proof their network for AI.

AMSTERDAM, Feb. 10, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- **CISCO LIVE** -- A new study from Cisco, the worldwide leader in networking and security, reveals a paradox among CEOs While 4 in 5 recognize AI's potential benefits and almost all plan to integrate AI into their operations, many fear gaps in their knowledge will hinder decisions in the boardroom (74%) and stifle growth (58%) – risking missed opportunities and falling behind competitors. Yet, CEOs are not standing still. With support from their IT leaders and trusted partners, they plan to empower their people, modernize infrastructure, and strengthen cybersecurity to sharpen their competitive edge in an AI-driven future.

Cisco's Chief Product Officer, Jeetu Patel, underscores the urgency to act: "In a dynamic landscape where competition is fierce, speed decides the winners. Leaders who act decisively today to build resilient, future-proofed networks will be the AI-forward leaders driving real value for their business. Eventually there will be only two kinds of companies: those that are AI companies, and those that are irrelevant."

CEOs fear the mounting costs of inaction

Cisco's research shows more than 70% of CEOs are concerned about losing ground to competitors and missing out on opportunities because of IT and infrastructure gaps – fears that are already translating into real losses. Over half of CEOs (53%) worry that a lack of investment in technology is costing them competitive advantage, while two-thirds are concerned about the opportunity costs of not investing more in technology. The costs of inaction aren't hypothetical scenarios. If they don't invest in technology now, CEOs expect higher operating costs, lower profits, reduced productivity, and declining market share.

The bold act while others fall behind
For the leaders who confront their fears, the rewards will transcend simply "keeping up." CEOs are turning to AI for its transformative potential: driving efficiency (69%), spurring innovation (68%), and outpacing competitors (54%). But fulfilling that ambition requires CEOs to break down the barriers holding them back from realizing AI's potential: skills shortages, infrastructure gaps, and security risks (Figure 1).

While CEOs focus on the bigger picture, their CIOs and CTOs are often grappling with operational hurdles including the lack of compelling business use cases – a challenge CEOs rank lower (Figure 1). This tension perhaps reflects AI's exploratory phase, where the 82% of CEOs who recognize AI's potential benefits must support bold experimentation in the short term to uncover value in the long term.

Oliver Tuszik, President of Cisco EMEA, highlights the opportunity: "Whole businesses will be revolutionized if they can unlock AI's potential to innovate faster, simplify their operations, and withstand digital disruptions. But no one can do it alone. That's why 96% of CEOs are leaning on trusted partners to make the leap."

The CEO's Blueprint: People, infrastructure, and cybersecurity
Cisco's research reveals CEOs' plan to turn fear into progress – investing in knowledge and skills, upgrading infrastructure, and enhancing security to prepare for the demands of AI (Figure 2).

Delivering on this blueprint will require decisive technology leadership both within the organisation and through trusted partnerships. CEOs are increasingly looking to their CTOs and CIOs, with nearly 80% recognising their vital role in guiding business and investment decisions. More and more, technology leaders are business leaders who see modern networks and technology not just as tools, but as enablers of growth, resilience, and innovation.

CEOs know they can't deliver on their blueprint without expert support: 96% are turning to trusted partnerships to future-proof their network for AI. With bold technology leadership inside and beyond their organizations, the CEOs have the expertise to navigate uncertainties and translate AI's potential into tangible outcomes.

Cisco continues to help organizations overcome complexity and create opportunity in the AI era
Skills shortages, implementation challenges, AI-ready infrastructure, and cybersecurity are top concerns for IT teams and leaders across industries. Cisco's upcoming announcements aim to address these challenges: closing gaps between security and networking for AI data centres, empowering Service Providers with new revenue-generating tools, and equipping the next generation of AI-forward professionals with enhanced certifications.

Download highlights from Cisco's CEO research here
The CEO study, conducted by Opinion Matters (24 Dec 2024–2 Jan 2025), surveyed 2,503 CEOs from companies with 250+ employees worldwide. A companion study with 8,065 senior networking leaders will follow in the coming months, exploring the strategic and operational needs of AI-era networking

and security.

Additional resources:

- [Cisco's 2025 AI Briefing: CEO Edition – essential insight on CEO fears, ambitions, and action on AI and secure networks](#)
- Press release: [Cisco Unveils AI Defense to Secure the AI Transformation of Enterprises](#)
- Blog: [Protecting AI so AI can improve the world, safely](#)

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