

Vision 2026: In Depth

The Leadership Test of Our Time: How CEOs Lead Through Uncertainty

Teneo Insights / March 2026



Vision 2026, Teneo's annual CEO and Investor Outlook Survey showed that CEOs believe innovation, agility, creativity and connectivity are essential skills for the next generation of CEOs.¹

These are the capabilities leaders will rely on to lead their organizations and people through an era defined by uncertainty and complexity. With CEOs evenly split on whether today's geopolitical shifts are temporary or signal a long-term reordering of the post-war status quo, uncertainty has become a defining feature of the business environment.²

Rosie Steele
Senior Managing Director
rosie.steele@teneo.com

Micah Alpern
Senior Managing Director
micah.alpern@teneo.com

1. [Teneo Vision 2026 | CEO and Investor Outlook Survey](#)

2. [Teneo Vision 2026 | CEO and Investor Outlook Survey](#)

Many CEOs have become better at managing volatility since COVID-19. That experience sharpened their understanding of how to capture AI opportunities at pace, respond to geopolitical shocks and make decisions amid ambiguity. It gave them the chance to grow these essential capabilities, which they have continued to apply.

CEOs and C-suite leaders who navigate uncertainty well lead from the front as role models while remaining comfortable acknowledging what is not yet known. That stance requires a growth mindset, humility and high self-awareness, as well as discipline: knowing when to move fast, when to hold course and how to create the conditions for others to do the same.

The successful leaders of today and tomorrow will also embed these capabilities across their organizations. They will build the muscle that enables everyone to solve problems, pivot when needed and build resilience in the face of uncertainty. This means CEOs must determine how to mobilize the entire organization behind a new level of pace, agility, creativity and responsiveness, and how to inspire the mindset and behavioral shifts that keep the company ready to adapt.



Four Leadership Shifts

1. Create Connectivity and Mobilize Employees



The instinctive response to uncertainty is often to tighten controls: more rules, more approvals, more reporting. While this can feel reassuring, it slows the organization down precisely when speed matters most.

What is needed instead is mobilization and connection. That begins with clear direction and a call to action (“what matters most and why”), followed by removing barriers so teams are empowered to act quickly and make decisions. Leaders must connect employees across the organization to ensure they feel ownership and are not held back by siloes.

When the organization needs to pivot fast, it needs connected, mobilized teams who can get behind the change. The most common ‘red flags’ are seen in the following employee mindsets and sentiments:

- **Disconnected:** “This is not relevant to me, I’ll carry on as before”
- **Uncommitted:** “It’s just words, I’ll wait to see what happens”
- **Distant:** “This is another team’s problem”

This kind of lethargy creates friction that undermines and slows adaptation. In contrast, connected teams work together to deliver change. They are energized, equipped and aligned to pursue goals that drive company strategy.



2. Build Resilience

The ability to respond well under pressure must be developed on two levels.

Personal resilience is the capacity to ride the waves without overreacting. In volatile conditions, today's apparent certainty can quickly give way to overcorrection. Strong leaders can distinguish signal from noise, make bets and hold course rather than chase every new input.

Organizational resilience is structural – it lies in the capacity of critical teams and functions to absorb disruption. Many organizations have been optimised for efficiency, with lean teams, stretched expertise and little slack. In stable conditions, this appears to be good management. Under pressure, however, over-optimized teams cannot flex; they fracture.



3. Inspire Creativity

The promise of AI is to eliminate mundane tasks that bog people down, freeing up time for humans to use a uniquely human capability: creativity. In many organizations, creativity is the domain of a small group tasked with generating and implementing ideas. But in today's era of disruption and uncertainty, it must be a collective capability. Yet for most employees, this skill has long laid dormant.

The leader's responsibility is to unlock this collective creativity across the workforce. They must inspire people to believe that great ideas and solutions can come from anyone and anywhere. Then they must harness those ideas to better serve customers and drive performance. Leaders can foster this by challenging the assumption that "the plan" will remain stable, and by equipping people with the skills to solve problems creatively and operate productively amid uncertainty.



4. Focus Outward

Uncertainty calls for a new strategic management capability: the ability to plan across a wider range of future scenarios and make decisions despite incomplete information. 'Seeing around corners' must become a whole-system thinking approach.

This demands better insight and intelligence, rather than reliance on a single forecast, closer proximity to customers and active scanning for partners, technologies and signals that may reshape the market. Peripheral vision should be expected at every level, and organizations must establish the right mechanisms for 'bringing the outside in' to support this shift.

The Leadership Test of the Next Decade

AI, geopolitics and economic volatility will continue to demand innovation, creativity, agility and connectivity. The differentiator will be whether leaders can mobilize the entire organization so it collectively has the skills, decision systems, mindset and motivation to respond.

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