

The Most Important Leadership Quality for CEOs? Creativity

By [Austin Carr](#)



For CEOs, creativity is now the most important leadership quality for success in business, outweighing even integrity and global thinking, according to a new study by IBM. The study is the largest known sample of one-on-one CEO interviews, with over 1,500 corporate heads and public sector leaders across 60 nations and 33 industries polled on what drives them in managing their companies in today's world.

Fast Company's annual list of the [100 Most Creative People in Business](#) [1] just took on a whole new depth. And this year's list will be revealed later this month.

Steven Tomasco, a manager at IBM Global Business Services, expressed surprise at this key finding, saying that it is "very interesting that coming off the worst economic conditions they'd ever seen, [CEOs] didn't fall back on management discipline, existing best practices, rigor, or operations. In fact, they [did] just the opposite."

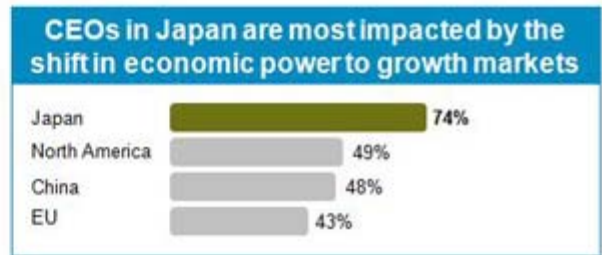
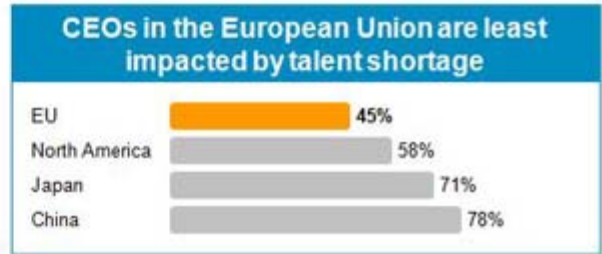
About 60% of CEOs polled cited creativity as the most important leadership quality, compared with 52% for integrity and 35% for global thinking. Creative leaders are also more prepared to break with the *status quo* of industry, enterprise and revenue models, and they are 81% more likely to rate innovation as a "crucial capability."



Other key findings showed a large disparity between views of North American CEOs and those from other territories.

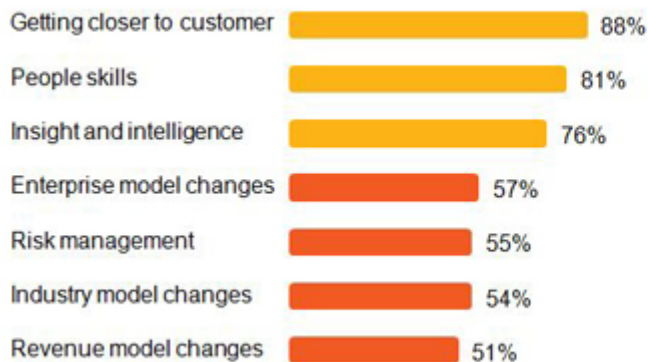
For example, in North America, 65% of CEOs think integrity is a top quality for tomorrow's leaders, whereas only 29-48% of CEOs in other territories view it as such.

Ironically, while company leaders in North America will bring more integrity to the job, they also expect far more regulation than foreign heads -- both presumably reactions to negative public perception and heavy government intervention following the recession. A full 87% anticipate greater government oversight and regulation over the next five years -- only 70% of CEOs in Europe hold this opinion, and 50% and 53% in Japan and China, respectively. Meanwhile, nearly double the amount of CEOs in China view global thinking as a top leadership quality, compared with Europe and North America.

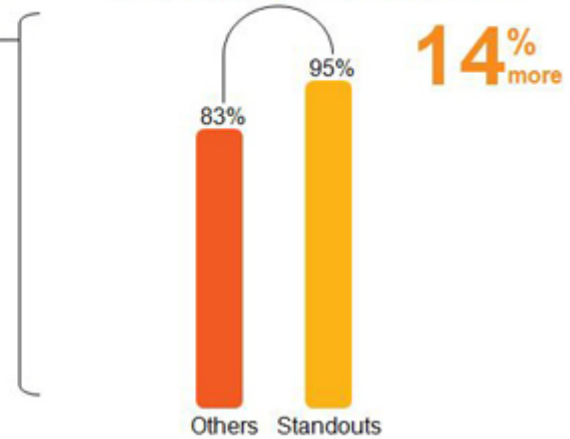


The area of focus the regions can all agree on is customer focus: 88% of all CEOs, and an astounding 95% of standout leaders, believe getting closer to the customer is the top business strategy over the next five years.

Dimensions to focus on over the next 5 years



Getting closer to customers



IBM will be holding a Web dialogue with experts to discuss the study's findings. You can find a link for the Web cast [here](#) [2], and a schedule as follows:

- **Creative Leaders Webcast** - 8am-9am EDT
- **Connected Customers Webcast** - 1pm-2pm EDT
- **Dexterous Organizations** - 8pm-9pm EDT

What do you think of the findings? Is creativity the most important leadership quality today? Don't forget to sign up for our [Most Creative People in Business conference](#) [3], which is sure to provide excellent insight on the topic.

[Sidebar image via [LitReview](#) [4]]

Links:

[1] <http://www.fastcompany.com/100/>

[2] <http://www.livestream.com/newintelligence>

[3] <http://mostcreativepeople.com/tickets.php>

[4] <http://www.litereview.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/light-bulb-idea.jpg>