



News Release

<i>Date</i>	Friday 25 January 2019
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Artificial intelligence – Switzerland lags behind global competitors

A new trend in research, development and application of artificial intelligence (AI) has broken out around the world. Yet Swiss companies are still only just starting to use AI. This is revealed by this year’s PwC CEO Survey. In a changing environment, companies are finding it difficult to choose the right strategy or technology for a promising future business model. If this continues, experts fear that Switzerland may miss the boat.

Zurich, 25 January 2019 – The results of the latest CEO Survey paint a clear picture: 85% of CEOs worldwide expect AI to dramatically change their business over the next five years (see [PwC’s 22nd CEO Survey](#)). Almost two-thirds of global decision-makers believe that AI has a greater potential impact than the Internet. The development status and promotion of AI vary from country to country.

Switzerland is adopting a passive stance

A global comparison shows that Swiss CEOs are exercising caution. Around 40% of the Swiss CEOs questioned state that they are not currently planning any AI applications. The global figure is just 23%. A further 23% of Swiss CEOs indicate that they will develop a plan for deploying AI within the next three years, whereas 30% have so far chosen a very limited approach. Fewer than ten percent say they have already implemented AI in their business.

A similar picture emerges when assessing to what extent AI changes the way business is conducted: 26% of Swiss CEOs do not expect any major changes due to AI. Globally, only 13% share this view. Accordingly, the number of CEOs who predict a significant change is 18% higher globally than in Switzerland.

The reasons for this are complex. Some Swiss companies have had other priorities in recent years, such as the strength of the Swiss franc. In addition, some companies have reservations about the performance of the technology, or are critical of automation. The handling and availability of data is another important aspect. The more comprehensive and complete the data available, the more effectively AI systems can learn from it. Government funding measures also play a significant role. This means setting a clear regulatory framework and promoting education and research.

“In comparison with other countries, Switzerland does not yet have an AI strategy at federal level, despite the favourable general conditions. Indeed, Switzerland has an excellent education system, great capacity for innovation and talented specialists,” comments Christian Westermann, data expert and head of AI at PwC Switzerland. “It is now up to the Confederation to establish the necessary framework for AI in Switzerland and to assist companies, as well as research and education institutions, with the introduction of specific measures. This is the only way to ensure that they will not be left behind, and will gain a business advantage in the future.”



AI at the heart of global digital change

Numerous countries such as China, France, Singapore and Japan have declared AI to be a key technology for digital transformation and have announced extensive plans to drive forward research and development in AI. There are also a large number of international strategies (e.g. from the EU, the UN, the UAE and India) that regulate AI partnerships. Significant investments running into the billions are being made. The initiatives differ only in their strategic orientation. Overall, they cover the areas of scientific research, talent development, qualifications and training, acquisitions in the public and private sector, ethics and integration, standards and regulations, data and digital infrastructure.

However, national AI strategies have one thing in common. They seek to create a comprehensive ecosystem. “A strong AI ecosystem is characterised by a strong network between science, business –i.e. companies and start-ups – and society,” adds Westermann. “Pioneering political measures and an overarching strategy are needed in order to build up an environment of this kind. In 2018, the Confederation set up a working group on artificial intelligence, which is due to present existing and new measures to the Federal Council by autumn 2019. I hope that this will create a basis that will continue to help Switzerland adopt a leading role in the field of technology and innovation.”

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The PDF of the study is available here:

<https://www.pwc.ch/de/insights/ceosurvey2019.html>

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