


HEIDRICK & STRUGGLES



First-Time Chief People Officer Guide

2026 Update

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As we experience the greatest economic, social, geopolitical and technological upheavals since World War II, having the right leaders, in the right place, leading in the right way is paramount – yet the single biggest barrier to delivering organisations’ ambitions is having insufficient talent to navigate unprecedented challenges.

Chief people officers are uniquely placed to overcome this obstacle by identifying and developing leadership to secure the sustainable success of their businesses, building cultures that attract and retain the best talent, and shaping the wider workplace. “It’s time we realised we are all in the people business,” an experienced FTSE 100 chair told us recently. “The people agenda and CPO role are absolutely centre stage.”

In 2021, we asked CPOs and CHROs from a range of global multinationals and UK listed businesses for their best advice for first-time chief people officers. Their responses formed the basis of the practical, experience-led **First-Time Chief People Officer Guide**, designed for everyone with ambitions to become a world-class CPO.

Faced with seismic change and increased complexity in the business landscape, we felt it imperative to publish this update, drawing on interviews conducted throughout 2024 and 2025 with CPOs and group CHROs from FTSE 100, FTSE 250 and private equity-backed companies.

Over the past two years, we have seen a distinct shift in what CEOs, investors and boards need from their CPO. They want a commercially minded executive committee member who can strategically drive business outcomes through the workforce and as the leader of their function. In this time, Heidrick has also witnessed an acceleration in CPOs’ involvement in and influence on business decisions at board level, partnering with the chair and CEO on non-executive director hiring, CEO succession and wider board effectiveness.

As one interviewee observed: “The challenge for the CPO role is the breadth of what the person in that seat needs to be. It isn’t sufficient to know the people and

culture discipline. Today, you’re expected to be a commercial business leader and an expert on risk, sustainability, AI and geopolitics in order to advise the CEO and board in holistic ways.”

And as the world of work evolves, the CPO must also ensure businesses adapt to create the right working environment, conceived and designed by HR specialists, to meet the needs of their employees. “Our job is to anticipate and fulfil the shifting requirements of a complex, multi-generational workforce with wildly differing expectations,” says a current high-performing CPO.

Stepping up as a first-time CPO demands courage, business acumen, a sophisticated level of influence, and the ability to navigate nuanced relationships with credibility. From our latest CPO conversations, we have distilled **eight foundations for success in a first-time role**.

1. Reinvent your leadership brand while protecting your authenticity.
2. Be a commercial business leader first, an HR leader second.
3. Build a trusted, functional relationship with the CEO.
4. Orchestrate board, remco and investor interactions.
5. Set a competitive people strategy.
6. Assemble the right HR team at pace.
7. Enable the business for the age of AI.
8. Adapt to the evolution of ESG.

1

Reinvent your leadership brand while protecting your authenticity



The CPO role, like all top jobs, can be exposing and lonely, so you need a trusted support network. An external mentor or coach will allow you to express concerns and frustrations that have to be sealed behind your professional game face, while other new CPOs can provide invaluable understanding and empathy. "If you build good relationships – creating a 'personal board' of internal and external contacts – you can access experience and advice quickly," says one interviewee. "Being part of a first-time CPO community has made a huge difference to my success."

A degree of reinvention may also be needed. The CPO has to win the trust and respect of the executive committee (exco) early in their tenure, something that can be particularly challenging for internal promotees. "Other members of the exco may have a pre-formed opinion of you and may not regard you as an equal," warns a current CPO. "I initially underestimated the level of sophisticated influencing I would need. You have to reposition your leadership brand and rebuild your understanding of the business through a new, broader lens. Keep what has served you well, recognise what to let go of, and be clear what you stand for."

Refining your personal leadership while remaining authentic to your values is central to making your mark as CPO. "The more experienced you become, the more important it is to be yourself, to have the courage of your convictions and to show who you are," says another experienced incumbent. "At the same time, although it's hard in a new role, showing your personality and vulnerability will add to your credibility."

As you work on your leadership brand, you also need to protect the wellbeing of the person behind it, avoiding burnout and building resilience. "Everyone underestimates the sheer volume of the unfamiliar and the complexity involved in the role," states one interviewee. "If you don't manage your energy and downtime, there is a risk both to your health and also to you delivering business value as a C-suite executive."

Setting clear boundaries around your schedule and availability is an important strategy, they add. "I realised that I was at everybody's beck and call and that people thought they could dump all of their problems on me. Now I protect my personal time and have clear lines on what I'm prepared to listen to. It's seductive to be everyone's confidant as a new CPO – it's a privilege, but I'm not prepared to listen to people whinge about their problems."

Nonetheless, it's important to make yourself available to the people within your organisation. "Find a way to be accessible," says another CPO. "Organisations are under pressure to perform in compressed timelines and it's easy to drive commercial agendas but lose connections to people. Recognise that they need a sense of purpose and be relatable, because that humanises you as a leader."

One of our interviewees offered this advice: "While you are in the powerful position to shape the people agenda, don't be a rescuer. Hold your CEO and C-suite colleagues to account for the quality of their people leadership." ●

2

Be a commercial business leader first, an HR leader second



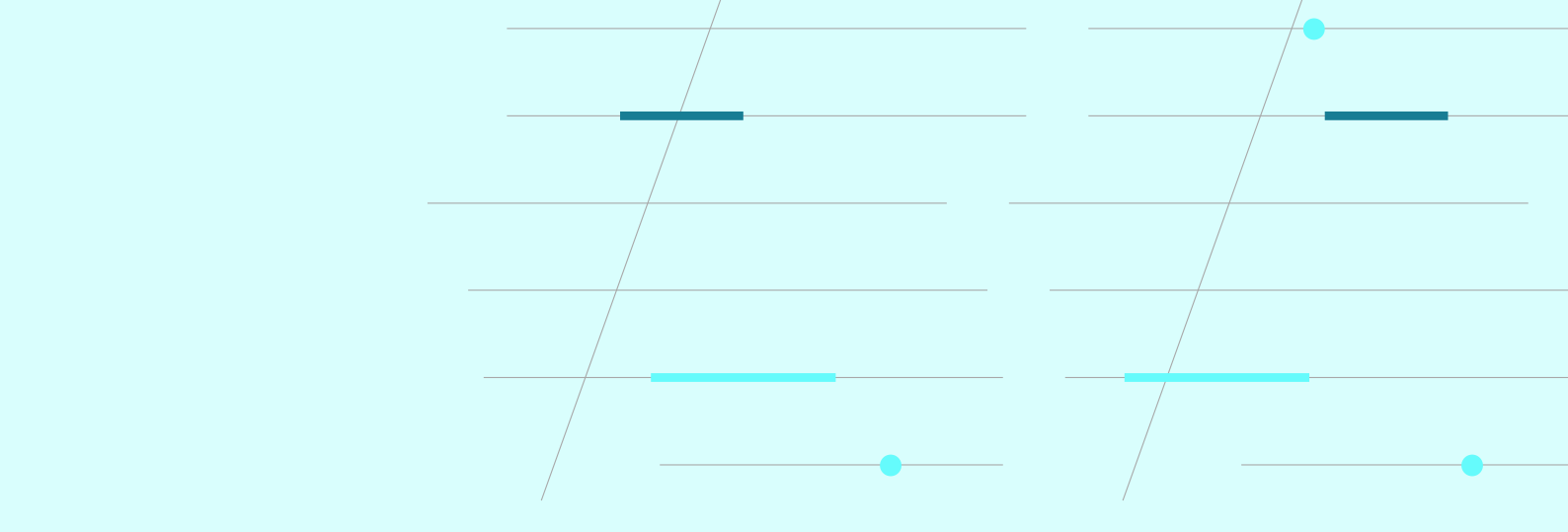
Our interviews reflect the end of human resources as a 'support function'. The CPO now shapes the strategic people and culture agenda as a key member of the exco, responsible alongside their C-suite peers for delivering business outcomes; develops the leadership capability needed for the future; leads a best-in-class people function to deliver commercial impact; acts as trusted advisor and coach to the CEO, chair, board members and exco team; and challenges the business to be purpose driven, upholding high standards of ethics and governance.

CEOs now expect as a baseline that the CPO can read a P&L, and has a strong working understanding of how people-related decisions impact it – not least because people costs comprise a high percentage of the operating cost, and CEOs need that investment to drive business outcomes. "CPOs have to be able to link their people strategy to financial outcomes, starting every strategic HR initiative by asking: what's the P&L line this touches, and how will we measure ROI?" says one interviewee. "CEOs can be sceptical of certain strategic people interventions, and you have to be courageous in holding your line on the positive commercial impacts for the business."

New CPOs have to get to grips with the mechanics of the organisation at speed, including where real value is created, and how it lines up alongside current and future competitors, so you can meet exco colleagues at a commercial level. "It's important to have the numbers at your fingertips and to talk the language of the business, so you can both contribute and challenge," says a current CPO.



CEOs can be sceptical of certain strategic people interventions, and **you have to be courageous in holding your line** on the positive commercial impacts for the business"



This knowledge is fundamental to developing a commercial people strategy. “People are the single biggest cost of any business, so identifying the top three metrics where you can generate the highest value is essential,” points out another CPO. “I realised that increasing just one productivity measure generates millions, so my goal is always to drive one change that creates enough savings to fund our biggest people investments.”

As CPO, you are also the person who sources the necessary strategic expertise for the top team to help it define its purpose and set a compelling direction that the business can mobilise behind. Your credibility hangs on bringing in the best partners who make the right impact and have good chemistry with the CEO and top team. “Leveraging my network to source our strategy partners was essential,” recounts one current incumbent.

The CPO’s place on the exco is increasingly impactful but also more demanding, and navigating its dynamics is vital in aligning its members, report our interviewees.

“The triumvirate of CPO, CFO and CEO is the foundation of this,” says one. “If that three-way relationship works, you can build top team effectiveness by inspiring and influencing the rest of the exco to work together to deliver organisational strategies.”

However, it’s crucial you’re recognised as an independent voice – not simply an enabler of the CEO’s agenda, but an exco member and business leader who is an expert in creating value from the people asset and the people function. “In exco meetings, be intentional about how you show up,” advises

an experienced CPO. “Sitting next to the CEO can detract from your independence. I sit opposite them as I don’t want people to assume they whisper in my ear.”

Your individual dealings with exco members will define how successful you are in the role. Filter the information they share with you, examining why they are telling you, want they want, and what action needs to be taken. As one CPO explains: “I tell them, whatever you tell me I’ll address in a supportive way and treat in confidence. If there are implications for the business, I’ll assess the information, tell you that this is the case, and act if necessary.” ●

3

Build a trusted, functional relationship with the CEO



Speaking with CEOs today, it is clear that global structural forces are shaping a new world order, and leaders operating within it have less control and have to be more reactive. In these deeply challenging times, these CEOs need their CPOs to partner them through complex decision-making processes.

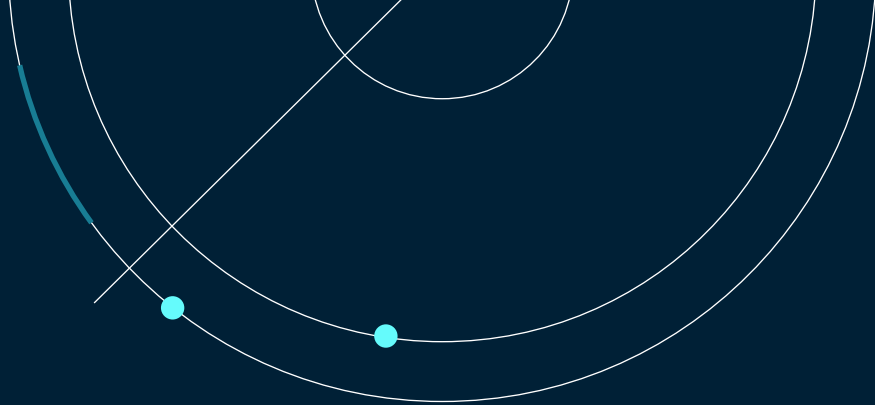
The CEO is every CPO's most important working relationship, one that should be based on independence, mutual respect, and a balance of support and challenge. "You are in a unique position to share with the CEO what is actually going on in the business. You can give them the unvarnished facts. I see myself as a sparring partner in the same way the CFO is. This takes courage and skill," points out a current CPO.

The CEO should recognise that you have an aerial view of the business that makes you uniquely placed as an advisor. CPOs interact with multiple stakeholders and perceive trends, risks and opportunities that other exco members may not. "The CEO won't see the same things in the business as the CPO, so bring your ideas to them rather than waiting for them to come to you for solutions," advises one interviewee. "If you see a commercial issue, say so – help them solve problems where they have blind spots."

Undeniably, the CEO/CPO power dynamic can be intimidating for a new appointee. "I know many CPOs whose first jobs have been overly influenced by the CEO and who have even lost control of their HR function responsibilities," warns a current incumbent.



CEOs are different in terms of how much they want to be challenged, and **I've needed to be adaptable while remaining true to what I stand for**



Progressive CEOs will see the people asset as a key differentiator in driving commercial value, and will have baked people investment into their business strategies. But CEOs who have yet to experience the optimised value of commercial people strategies and investments will need more convincing.

You need to quickly identify how the chief executive leads, and their red lines. "Knowing your CEO, what makes them tick and what kind of legacy they want to leave is at the root of a successful partnership," says one interviewee. Understanding what's important to them will inform an operating cadence that works both day-to-day and strategically. "I established an 'always on' relationship, which created a natural flow," adds another.

"I'm on my third CEO and each has had a different idea of what they want the CPO to do," says an experienced CPO. "For one, it was to root out underperformance. Another wanted me to speak truth to power. CEOs are different in terms of how much they want to be challenged, and I've needed to be adaptable while remaining true to what I stand for."

The CPO's key role in advising the remuneration committee (remco) and nominations committee (nomco) can create conflict. "In these situations, be Switzerland," suggests a current CPO. "Have a clinical, dispassionate view of the organisation and the people. Adopt only an enterprise-wide position, maintain high integrity, then let the CEO know what you need from them." Mentors can be useful in navigating this area. There are many potential approaches, so seek broad advice then make your own judgement call.

CEO succession planning can be one of the most challenging areas for CPOs, particularly if the incumbent is hesitant to engage in the process. Research by Heidrick's CEO & Board Practice shows that the most effective CEO succession planning starts within six months of a CEO taking office, but convincing them of this can be hard, with **40% of board members and CEOs** saying succession planning isn't a priority.

A highly experienced CPO told us: "Taking the long view is the only way to ensure continuity of leadership, keep your best people and have the richest pool of talent to choose from when the time comes." Success requires strategic foresight, open dialogue, and the resilience to navigate potential resistance. Says another interviewee: "However the CEO feels, our role is to advocate for a well-structured, future-ready succession strategy that aligns with organisational needs, and includes both long-term and emergency planning." ●

4

Orchestrate board, remco and investor interactions



To deliver business strategy, the CPO has to simultaneously manage a multitude of stakeholder relationships, including with the board, chair, remuneration committee and investors. The shared wisdom from many experienced CPOs is that you need to develop into a sophisticated stakeholder manager. "You have to build credibility in the eyes of all these stakeholders, while also being perceived to manage their confidentiality and recommendations in an objective and helpful way," says one.

Over the past couple of years, Heidrick has seen an accelerated increase in CPOs becoming more involved and influencing business decisions at board level; both in hiring decisions and board effectiveness. Ensuring the right board is in place now and in the future is also high on the agenda. CPOs have a key role in board succession, supporting the chair to define board competencies and forecast the skillsets needed for the future. Consequently, the CPO/chair relationship is becoming closer, more pivotal and more business-outcome driven.

Acting as a bridge between the chair and CEO is a particularly sophisticated job, requiring a nuanced understanding of the individuals involved and the nature and maturity of their relationship. "Your role as intermediary will be affected by whether their relationship is a positive one, a work in progress or problematic," warns one CPO.

"I didn't appreciate the delicate nature of the relationship and how I needed to build both sides, while also being visible and relatable to people that work with me," recalls another. "It's about being good at reading people, using your intuition and experience, being brave enough to ask the right questions and listening to what has and hasn't been said. It's subtle stuff."

The CPO is also the bridge between board committees, such as risk, audit and remuneration, aligning their positions and encouraging positive outcomes. Your role is to navigate, listen and broker the views of all parties, being honest, supportive, challenging and authentic. In this, a great summary is an art form. "Regular one-on-ones with the chair, remco chair and other key board stakeholders become pivotal – not just for setting the agenda but for building relationship equity," says a current CPO. "In times of crisis, established relationships are invaluable in navigating sensitive transitions and difficult business decisions with agility and unity."

Many first-time CPOs underestimate the amount of time spent on remuneration, including preparation for committee meetings, target setting and bonus outcomes. For CPOs without a reward background, this can be particularly challenging.



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There's nothing more emotive than how much senior leadership is paid, and being able to turn the heat down and remain evidence-based is critical. "Remco is far more complicated than you'd imagine," says one interviewee. "There are political machinations in the background. There's no playbook; you're dealing with different situations every time. Getting the right head of reward and advisors, accessing mentors and leveraging your network are all essential."

Another new relationship is with investors and shareholders, who increasingly value the people function and CPO role as commercial assets. "Culture is the secret sauce on an organisation's success in the eyes of more and more investors. These investors take an interest in talent and people topics," reports one CPO. "Investors are becoming increasingly receptive to hearing business strategy related to people and talent."

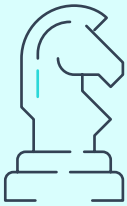
It's likely you'll be invited to investor meetings to outline the risks and opportunities related to remco policy and CEO succession. "Success comes down to the CPO fully understanding what the shareholders want," points out one incumbent. "A close working relationship with the CFO will help you gain a better perspective on the feedback and touchpoints they need."

Shape your story for this audience, demonstrating your objectives through concrete metrics and timelines, and data that backs up the narrative. "Work with investor relations to identify the organisation's key investors, their priorities and drivers behind their investment decisions, and whether they are passive or active," advises another interviewee. ●



5

Set a competitive people strategy



Today's business leaders have to balance competing needs across the whole enterprise value chain, delivering a win-win proposition for customers, employees, suppliers and shareholders, while also creating industry-changing propositions. The CPO therefore has to set a people strategy that will find, shape and support the right leaders, talent and culture.

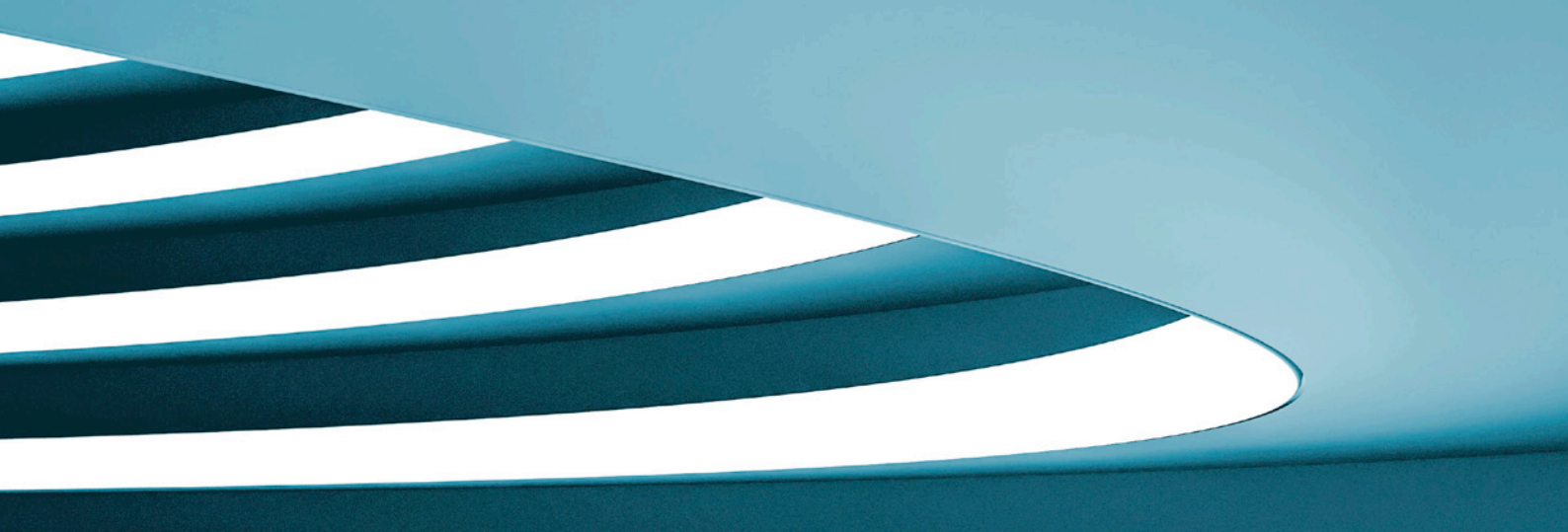
"You have to understand what the business needs to achieve and how people need to perform to enable that," explains a current incumbent. "Start with a diagnosis of the organisation: how it makes money, its financial history and existing situation, what types of skills it needs, what ways of working, what kind of capabilities, how the hierarchy is designed."

Formulating your people strategy is a complex process that begins at grassroots. "The first thing I do is a deep dive into every department, how they operate, what they do. You can't just look at the top. You've got to go into those functions and understand what their pieces are, how they operate," explains another interviewee. "In the early days, you've got the opportunity to ask all those questions without fear."

It's tempting to set a people agenda that is simply too big; instead your mantra should be to do fewer things really well. "Don't try to boil the ocean," says an experienced CPO. "There's only so much an organisation can cope with in one go, based on business maturity, available resources and people. Don't take on too much. You won't be judged on the amount you do, but how well it works. Meet the business where it's at, recognising what it's ready for and what it needs."



A business case needs to be made to articulate the value your strategy is going to bring. Don't present it as investing in the HR function. **This is about how investment into the people will benefit the organisation and deliver business results"**



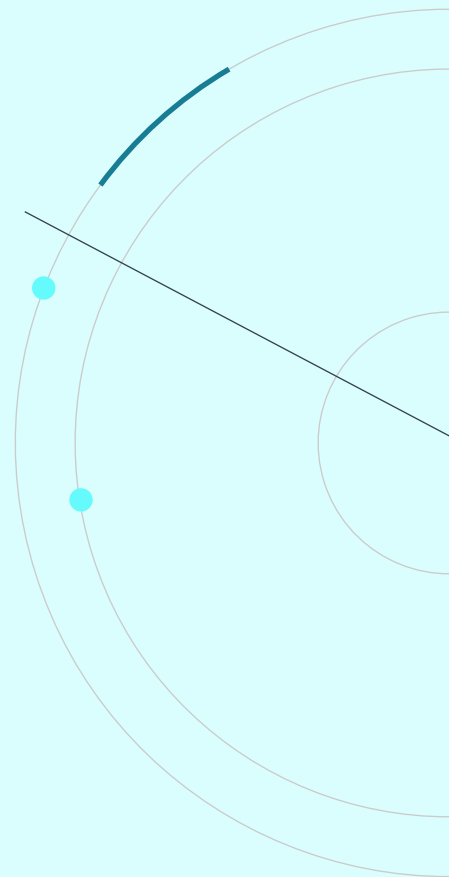
The HR strategy has to be futureproofed, and the CPO is responsible for forecasting labour expectations, then delivering future skills into the organisation to address the effects of rapid change. In today's uncertain climate, this means taking a talent-to-value approach, strategically aligning internal talent with the roles that drive the greatest organisational and commercial success.

"Talent-to-value is about identifying the roles that create business value, the skills those roles require, and how to develop and hire the people to fill those roles," explains one interviewee. This approach, coupled with a focus on performance culture, will increase talent density, growing the number of high performing people as a percentage of the overall workforce.

This is particularly apposite at exco level. The CPO has a critical role to play in ensuring the organisation is equipped to meet the changes to the business landscape driven by external political, social and technological forces. "The people strategy for the exco includes making sure its members – including the CEO – are skilled in navigating change, envisioning the future and taking the organisation towards that future, enabled by technology," says another CPO.

None of this is possible without budget, and the investment case for the HR function hangs on the financial feasibility of your strategy, and being bold in your budget ask. "The money you request has to fulfil the function's needs, demonstrably drive business results, and take into account the investment opportunity the organisation has," points out one contributor.

"A business case needs to be made to articulate the value your strategy is going to bring," states another. "Don't present it as investing in the HR function. This is about how investment into the people will benefit the organisation and deliver business results." ●



6

Assemble the right HR team at pace



No CPO can function without the right HR department behind them. “Your team is the critical enabler of you being an enterprise exco member,” states a current CPO. “You want the best talent in your team so you have the space to lead.” Getting overwhelmed and underdelivering on promises will quickly undermine your credibility – but you can’t commit to delivering on your strategy until you have the right personnel in place.

An early assessment – ideally pre-commencement – of existing capabilities is vital to being able to move forward at the necessary speed. “Before joining a company, I workshop and have one-to-ones with my new team to get a good sense of what I’m walking into. I’ll have a hypothesis on what the business needs them to achieve; whether the structure is right; and what the capability of the organisation and HR function is,” says one of our interviewees.

Another highly successful CPO always makes a point of pre-assembling a significant part of their own team before they take up a new role, hiring to complement legacy talent. This means they can hit the ground running and have the bandwidth to cope with the “drinking from a firehose” experience that can derail new CPOs.

An alternative way to bridge any competency gaps in the current HR team involves slotting in experienced **on-demand talent** rather than permanent hires, as one CPO explains: “I didn’t want to lose six months getting the right team in place, so on day one I brought with me an interim chief-of-staff and a transformation leader, so I could immediately move at pace.”

Utilising independent talent gives you breathing space to finesse your permanent team as your understanding of the business develops. “That first three-month window, getting to know the exco, the board and the business – that’s going to tell you what you need in your final team,” points out another CPO. “You may evolve an HR strategy that requires a different kind of skillset and you can’t afford to make all your hiring decisions too early, because it’s an expensive mistake.” ●



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7

Enable the business for the age of AI



Fundamental to the people strategy is understanding how artificial intelligence is going to impact the workforce. AI places business at a crossroads, and the CPO is the exco member who ensures the business has the talent and working practices in place to enable AI to meet business priorities. “The question the CPO needs to be asking themselves is: how can the application of AI enable us to achieve our business’s strategic priorities more effectively and quicker; and what does that mean for our people?” says a current incumbent.

Every CPO has to upskill themselves to become AI literate as quickly as possible, in order to formulate and run user cases for AI within the business, and so determine how the workforce needs to transform to become AI-enabled. Meanwhile, your HR strategy should include optimising how AI is **used within the HR function itself**. “CPOs will have a pivotal role in AI transformation across the organisation, enabling their teams and organisations to adopt and optimise the technology, meshing AI with people’s purpose, expectations, experience, expertise and leadership capabilities, and even managing fears within the workforce as the technology landscape changes working skills and experience requirements,” explains a current CPO.

In the past year, we have also seen a significant shift from GenAI to agentic AI, and CPOs should understand the implications of these autonomous agents performing more tasks and taking on a greater share of some types of work. As a result, the shape

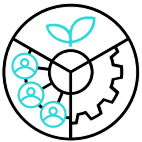
of the workforce will change; many high volume roles will be placed by technology and its adoption could drive business growth without headcount increasing, putting the people function at the heart of shaping AI-led business transformation.

Part of this process is helping the leadership of the organisation to see AI adoption as a **people-driven business transformation**. Exco members may differ in their perceptions of how readily their organisation can be AI-enabled – including the level of business transformation, the degree of culture shaping, and the new AI capabilities that will be needed to prepare it for AI adoption. They may also have to be coached on the business case for AI, which is fundamental to the AI strategy.

“AI enablement will succeed or fail due to the leadership team and their ability to drive complex transformation in those areas the business needs to be re-wired,” states one of our interviewees. “AI adoption has to be customised to clients and customers, and requires the re-engineering of workflows and the way people work and collaborate.” CPOs are positioned to promote exco alignment on where the organisation is on its AI-readiness journey, and upskill them to be change leaders. ●

8

Adapt to the evolution of ESG



In the last few years we have seen huge swings in the ESG pendulum. Attitudes to environmental, social and governance issues have been pushed to polarised positions by significant events, including the murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the seismic shifts in working practices sparked by the COVID pandemic, the reversal of DEI initiatives following the election of Donald Trump as US president, a step back from climate commitments following pressure from oil and gas lobbies, and defence spending prioritised over social security in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the war in Gaza.

The widening chasms in politics and society are reflected within organisations, meaning leadership must cross boundaries and bridge divisive issues. These differences can stop teams working together and leave people feeling alienated, and the CPO has to help equip the CEO and exco with the skills needed to overcome them. "These clashes can arise very quickly and you need to be ready for them, and help leaders whose business unit has internal, interpersonal conflicts," says one interviewee. "It's about engagement across different perspectives, bringing people together who have opposing points of view."


Every action has a reaction and in this volatile geopolitical landscape, it's vital businesses can not only deal with the current scenario, but also recognise that momentum on particular issues could quickly swing to a contradictory position. "A lot of HR people associate their personal values with ESG," states one CPO. "That's not the way forward because it doesn't take into consideration

the needs of the business and its multiple stakeholders. Your ESG policy has to align to business outcomes."

CPOs need to understand investor, customer and employee sentiments around social, political and environmental issues, because of the commercially crucial impact of complex activist topics. Investors in particular **expect CPOs to be abreast of ESG issues**. "Situations such as Ukraine, Black Lives Matter and Gaza required me to take a step back and consider the competing expectations of different stakeholder groups, including pressures coming from shareholders and employees," reflects another incumbent.



It's about engagement across different perspectives, **bringing people together who have opposing points of view**"



The uncertain landscape presents a positive opportunity, however, to underwrite the company's values and connect with employees to understand and communicate how evolving ESG issues directly impact the company and its workforce, and where the organisation positions itself. "People can only do their best work when they know where they stand with the business, and when its values match their own. Systems, behaviours and cultures all need to echo those values, and leaders should be able to talk about those values in the first person as something they care about," states a current CPO.

Specifically, CPOs should understand how ESG and DEI are evolving in their market. The language used and the way work is organised around related initiatives may change, but there can be no stepping away from leadership on these issues. This is, ultimately, the business that CPOs are in.

"However DEI is referenced, businesses need diverse workforces with different perspectives and backgrounds that reflect their customers, understand their target market, and produce the right products and the right services," outlines another interviewee.

"It's the CPO's role to ensure the organisation can continue to perform commercially by having the right level of diversity."

The same responsibility applies to all ESG commitments, they add. "That includes everything from compliance with human rights regulations to whether ESG targets are integrated into the remuneration scorecard for business executives." ●

CPOs' advice on how to thrive in the first 90 days

While there is no single blueprint for embarking on your role as a new CPO, established HR leaders agree there are key priorities for the first three months. Adopting these core behaviours and targets will set you up for long-term success.

1 Have a plan

Start with the end in mind – if you don't know where you're going, you'll find yourself somewhere else. Have a clear 90-day plan. Go in with a growth mindset and a focus on how you're going to support the organisation commercially. Your plan should start with strong principles and vision. Asking yourself what type of CPO you want to be will inform everything from your decision-making to how you conduct yourself.



2 Accept you don't know everything

There's a massive learning curve ahead, even if you've already been with the organisation for a long time. Your role has changed exponentially. Don't take existing relationships for granted, and treat the first three months as if you're working for a new company. Be prepared to be challenged – what's worked previously won't necessarily work again. And recognise that you won't become an expert within a month.



3 Deep dive the business

You're now a C-suite executive as well as the people leader. Find out how the business works, run the numbers, get the facts, and test the strategy, purpose and values behind top-level decisions. There's a window for learning, after which the CEO and chair will want your informed advice and opinions. Take a forensic approach to the first 90 days with a view to delivering these.



4 Capture the culture

Every organisation has its own pulse, and you need to move to that beat. Things might happen faster than you're used to or seem glacial by comparison to your previous company. Read the current culture and avoid initiating the 'immune reaction' until you have a strategy and enough support to reshape it



5 Be accessible

Visibility is a core trait. People have an expectation that the CPO will be available, so from day one meet managers, connect with individuals all over the organisation, and speak to people at every level to find out how things work. This is also an opportunity to set out what you stand for and define your boundaries.



6 Build a team for the long term

If you're firefighting at the start, the emergency team you assemble may not be the right one to enact your longer-term HR strategy. Work out which people you really need and get them in as quickly as possible. Acknowledge that within the team, former peers may now be your direct reports, and define how you are going to work together in future.



7 Stay neutral

Identify both the board's agenda and the CEO's, and how you can best support them. Fathom the relationship dynamic between the two, and adopt an authentic, sophisticated style that allows you to occupy the middle ground.



8 Practice patience

Don't be in a rush to make an impact. Listen, learn, validate – and also hear what is not being said. You only get one chance to be the new CPO, so take advantage of the window for asking questions. Don't take an early position that may be hard to withdraw from. Instead, focus on delivering multiple small wins.



Human Resources Officers Practice

We partner with organizations to help them identify strategic human resources leaders who are prepared to lead and create high-performing organizations. We help our clients find HR leaders with the business acumen, strategic and market insight, financial savviness, operational capabilities, and ability to harness data and technology to drive business success. These leaders must be culture shapers with the foresight, resilience, and adaptability to drive transformative change in organizations through strategic talent management.

Heidrick Consulting

We partner with our clients around the world to develop future-ready leaders and organizations, bringing together our expertise in:

- Leadership assessment, development, and coaching
- CEO, board, and team acceleration
- Organization acceleration and culture shaping
- Building diverse organizations and inclusive cultures
- Digital acceleration and innovation

Our proprietary analytical tools use data and technology to bring science to the art of human capital development and organizational design. As one united team, we develop a deep understanding of each client's unique situation and bring together a customized configuration of tools, approaches, and experts needed to build and maintain agile, resilient organizations at every level.

The result: great leaders, effective teams, and thriving, future-focused cultures—and organizations that can accelerate performance, effect transformative change, and boldly create the future they envision.

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