

Route to the Top 2025

India snapshot



In Q1 of 2025, Heidrick & Struggles surveyed 1,027 CEOs and directors globally¹, of which 75 were from India, to understand the evolving landscape of executive succession and leadership development practices.

While some boards are adopting better practices to support succession planning as a result of the Great Board Refresh in March 2024, many still face challenges amid rising stakeholder expectations and evolving market shifts. Our research reveals that few have fully embedded succession into their long-term strategic frameworks.

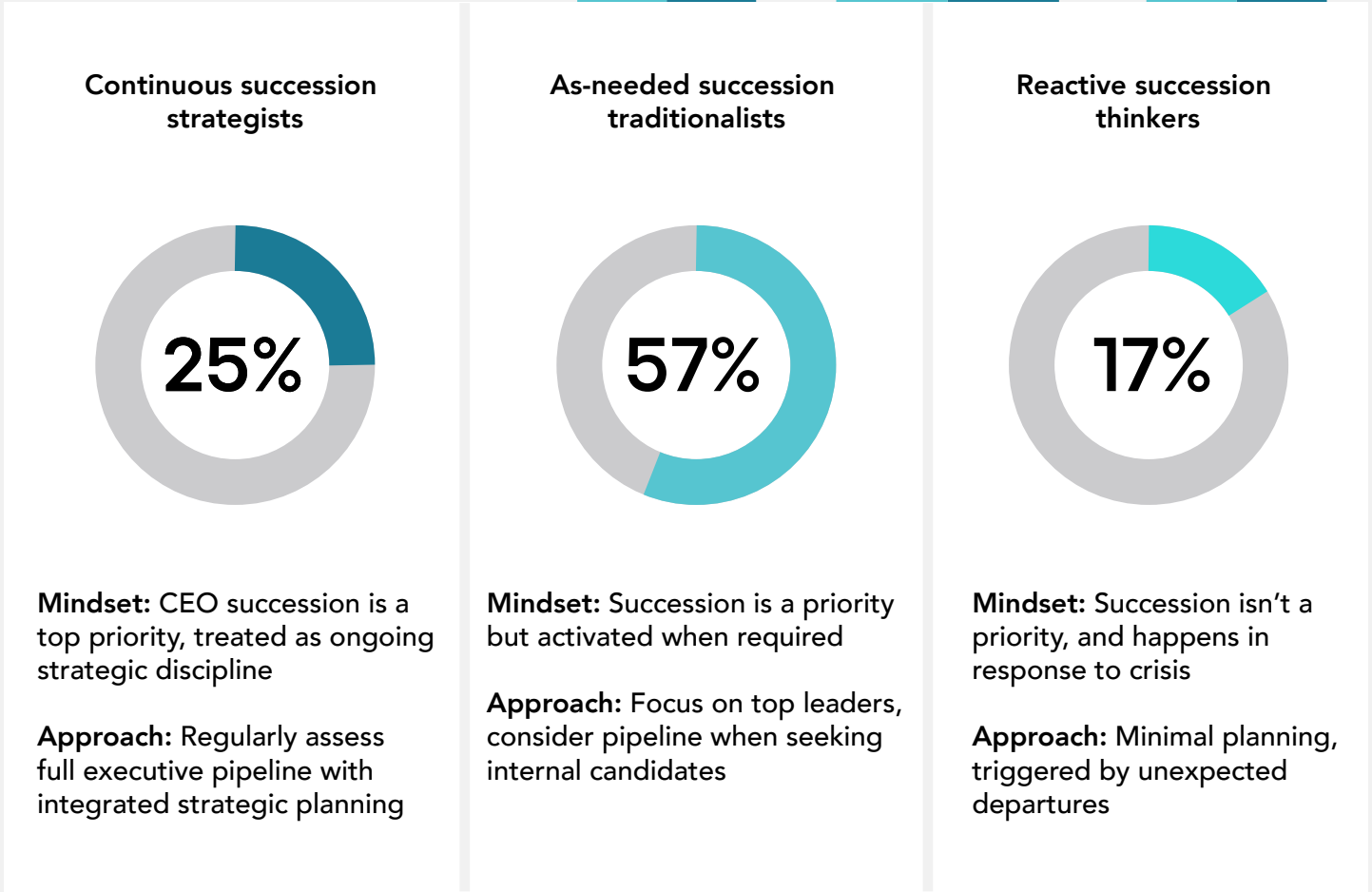
This snapshot offers key insights shaping succession planning practices among India's board members, why some boards aren't moving more intentionally and other observations we're seeing about the future of CEO succession planning.

¹Heidrick & Struggles, "Route to the Top 2025: Charting more effective ascents to the summit", July 23, 2025

CEO succession in India: A highly recognised priority, yet inconsistent implementation

Indian boards fall within three distinct succession planning profiles, each reflecting a different level of readiness and mindset about long-term leadership growth. Understanding these mindsets is crucial for boards that seek to elevate their succession planning effectiveness.

More than half of Indian boards fall into the **as-needed traditionalist category** — suggesting that while they are aware of the importance of succession planning, many still treat it as an episodic event rather than a strategic, continuous process that builds deeper leadership benches for sustained growth.



Indian CEOs and board members show a higher level of priority when it comes to succession compared to their global counterparts. However, they still face a critical gap in execution, with 44% acknowledging its strategic importance but often overlooking it because of other competing priorities.

	India	APAC average	Global
CEO succession is among our top priorities and is treated as such	37%	37%	26%
CEO succession is among our top priorities but is often overlooked given other priorities	44%	40%	33%
CEO succession isn't a high priority for us	19%	23%	40%

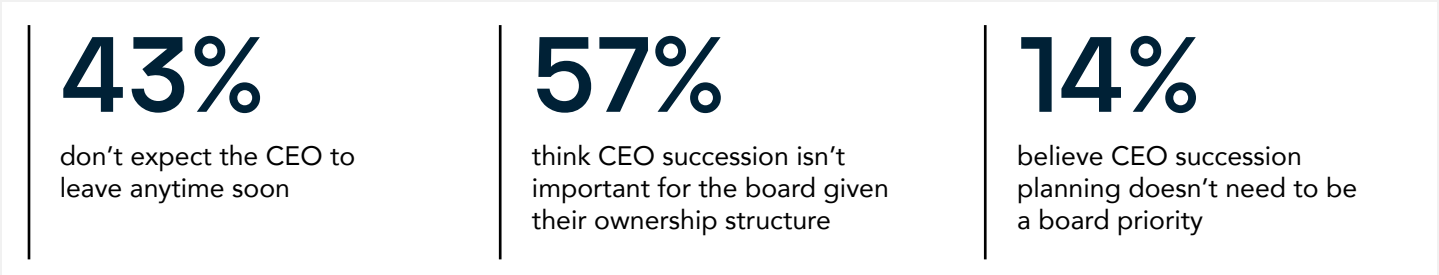
Barriers to continuous planning: Ownership, perceptions, and CHRO engagement

Among those **who recognise the importance of CEO succession** but struggle with consistent execution, three key challenges emerge:



This highlights how board leadership structure and governance dynamics play a critical role in enabling forward-looking succession planning.

For Indian CEOs and board members **who do not prioritise succession planning**, deep-rooted assumptions around timing and ownership often drive their inaction:



* Note: Low sample size

Limited boardroom engagement with CHROs — who serve as strategic partners in building resilient executive benches and evolving the board’s mindset around CEO succession — remains another key barrier.

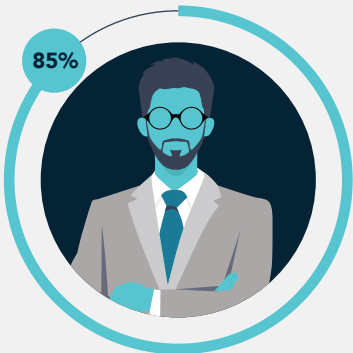
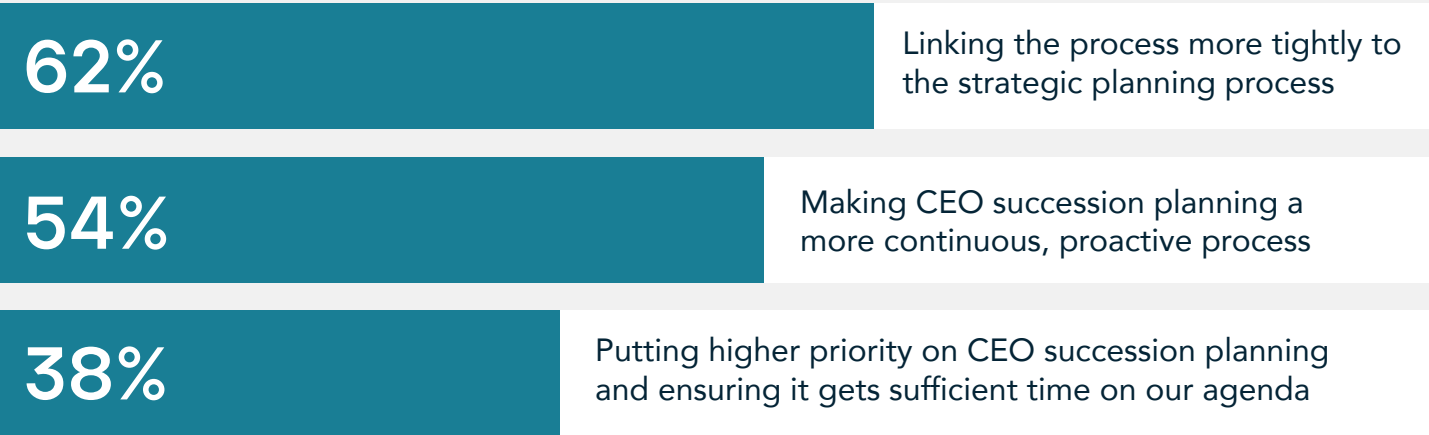
28% say their entire board maintains a direct relationship with the CHRO, CPO or their most senior HR leader

21% of CHROs have no interactions with the board

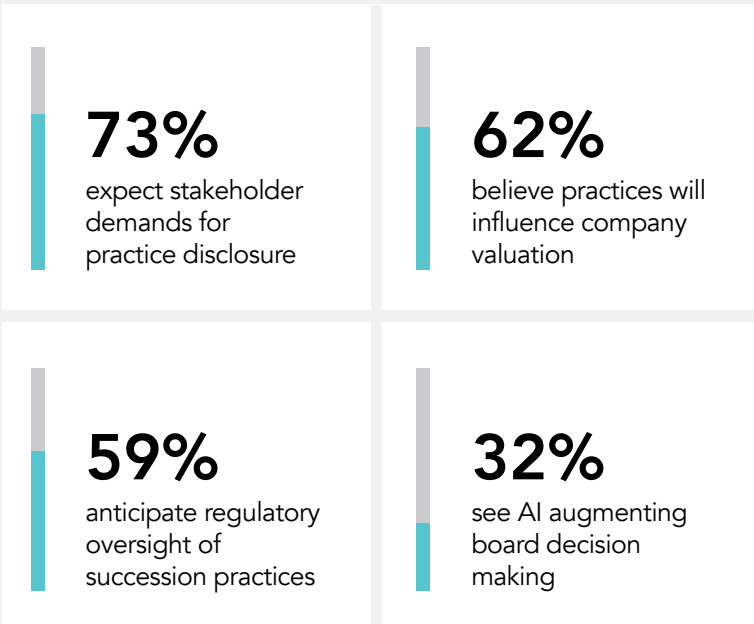
25% of respondents think CHROs/CPOs play a crucial role driving strategic board outcomes, underscoring the value they bring in shaping wider leadership development and succession planning with business needs.

The path forward: Future-proofing the succession pipeline

Amid greater stakeholder scrutiny and rising corporate governance, there is a clear need for a more sustainable, consistent, and integrated approach to succession planning. Indian boards call out three key improvement areas:



Looking ahead, **85%** of Indian companies expect some evolution in their CEO succession planning practices over the next 5 years, particularly around regulatory oversight and shifting stakeholder expectations – the third highest across all markets surveyed.





Indian boards have demonstrated strong awareness and a clear commitment to CEO succession, positioning themselves as stewards of leadership continuity. The next opportunity lies in closing the execution gap.

To future-proof their organisations, boards must embed succession planning as a continuous, proactive process — one that extends beyond the C-suite to build deeper, more agile leadership benches. As stakeholder expectations rise and governance standards evolve, a sustained focus on succession planning will be critical to strengthening long-term resilience and unlocking the next phase of growth.

CEO & Board of Directors Practice

Heidrick & Struggles' CEO & Board of Directors Practice has been built on our ability to execute top-level assignments and counsel CEOs and board members on the complex issues directly affecting their businesses.

We pride ourselves on being our clients' most trusted advisor and offer an integrated suite of services to help manage these challenges and their leadership assets. This ranges from the acquisition of talent through executive search to providing counsel in areas that include succession planning, executive and board assessment, and board effectiveness reviews.

Our CEO & Board of Directors Practice leverages our most accomplished search and leadership consulting professionals globally who understand the ever-transforming nature of leadership. This expertise, combined with in-depth industry, sector, and regional knowledge; differentiated research capabilities; and intellectual capital, enables us to provide sound global coverage for our clients.

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