

SEQUENCING THE DNA OF TOMORROW'S CEO

Leadership and succession for the next normal

PART ONE

CHALLENGES FACING CEOs

CEOs were already operating in a volatile, fast-changing business environment, but the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the challenges they must overcome to succeed

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- An unprecedented pace of change facing businesses means CEOs must deal with a long list of challenges simultaneously and without the luxury of long lead times, including adapting business models, changing customer expectations, prioritising employee wellbeing and delivering on ESG issues.
- The leadership DNA of a successful CEO is evolving, as leaders increasingly have to operate in a “VUCA” environment which requires adaptability, agility, authentic leadership and strategic vision built on a breadth of knowledge.
- The Covid-19 crisis won’t revolutionise the skills and traits desired in a business leader, or the basic principles of CEO succession, but it will accelerate trends already present before the pandemic emerged.
- Chairs and boards must prepare proactively for both internal and external CEO succession scenarios, which means knowing where they want the business to be in five years and what kind of leader will get them there. Courting potential external successors or grooming an internal successor takes time.

The rate of change in the landscape companies must operate in has accelerated dramatically in the last decade, fuelled by rapid advances in innovation and customer expectations. Historically, changes of a disruptive magnitude occurred on a reasonably cyclical basis, and were linear by nature. When the cycle came around, there was broadly a solution for dealing with it, based on prior experience. Today that disruption is not only much closer to being constant, but often it is also unprecedented.

Given there can be no playbook for the unprecedented, and that the faster pace of change facing businesses has been combined with slower general growth rates since the 2007-2008

financial crisis, the leadership DNA of a successful CEO has been gradually evolving for a number of years now. Add into the mix the most disruptive single event of even the most seasoned executives around the board table, in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic, and suddenly that gradual evolution of leadership DNA accelerates into a rather swift one.

In June 2020, Savannah Group surveyed 90 chairs and CEOs from FTSE and PE-backed companies about their views on how the traits and skills required of a business leader are changing. In the responses to an open question about the fundamental challenges facing CEOs in the “next normal” arising from the crisis, several key themes emerged.

What role best describes you?		
42.2%	CEO/MD/President	38 responses
41.1%	Chair	37 responses
8.9%	SID/NED	8 responses
6.7%	Partner/Investment Partner	6 responses
1.1%	CFO	1 response

What best describes the type of business you either work for or have answered with in mind?		
57.8%	Publicly listed business	52 responses
42.2%	Private business	38 responses

While the challenges highlighted by respondents included the short-term pressure on CEOs to lead the safe restart of operations, overcome supply chain issues, shore up cash flow and manage employees through change, many also emphasised the enduring pre-crisis trends that have been

amplified by the pandemic. These include ESG issues, talent attraction and retention, adapting business models to new customer expectations, and managing a wider range of stakeholders. All of this calls for a more personal and authentic leadership style.

OPEN FOR NEW BUSINESS

Many CEOs, naturally, are working on evaluating the optimal capital structure for the next business normal, and some are establishing a completely fresh strategic direction. Adapting their existing business model, therefore, is a critical challenge they face, noted the chairman of a FTSE 100 outsourcing group, who added that the model must “capture the benefits of lockdown working and reflect a new way of working, while delivering a new cost base”.

Nearly all companies are having to reflect on whether their strategy is relevant and right-sized in this new landscape. In light of this, CEOs must ensure the correct resources, talent and flexibility are in place to support any necessary adaptations to their business model, said the chairman of a global travel group. The CEO of the same firm agreed, adding that leaders must adapt not just the business model but also the “shape and size” of the organisation.

Numerous other survey respondents noted this challenge and a pre-crisis desire for agility which is now gaining speed. The CEO of a FTSE entertainment group stressed the need for “adaptability in an uncertain and shifting market”, while the chairman of a large media company said this was “crucial” to the sustainability of businesses in the next normal.

CEOs must not just identify the long-term impact on the needs of customers and staff, but determine how to leverage changes in a way that provides market differentiation and advantage. Those that do so while remaining true to the vision, mission and values of their organisation will be on a strong footing. “All of this whilst ensuring the financial health of your business is nursed back to 100 percent,” said the CEO of a large motorway service stations operator. Indeed, leading boldly through change and uncertainty is impressive, but taking advantage of growth opportunities is not possible without a strong balance sheet.

PROFIT WITH PURPOSE

“Most CEOs we speak to, regardless of how their company has been impacted, talk in forward looking terms. While many are still grappling with a lack of absolute clarity they have stronger scenario planning than before and should be able to adapt faster to any unwelcome surprises.”



SIMON GOUGH,
MANAGING PARTNER,
INTERIM

Alongside the need to understand how the Covid-19 crisis has affected business models, one chairman of a FTSE 100 manufacturer spoke for many when he said the pandemic may have “accelerated demand” for progress on ESG issues. The CEO of a FTSE 100 mining firm also pointed to “acceleration of ESG and social development expectations” as a key trend.

The CEO of a global aviation services group rated the ESG agenda alongside talent retention among his biggest challenges, while the chairman of a large gaming company told the study that business leaders today face great difficulty in convincing stakeholders of the social value of their organisation. In the social media age, the breadth of those stakeholders is

growing, meanwhile, to include governments, social groups and wider communities, as well as more traditional stakeholders such as shareholders, lenders and loyal customers.

One chairman of a FTSE 100 energy company pointed out that a greater focus on the ‘S’ in ESG has emerged in the wave of the pandemic. As part of that, CEOs need to “help their employees come to terms with the new normal, including higher levels of stress and mental illness”, he said. A lot of companies have relied on the goodwill of their customers during the pandemic. At times of uncertainty, consumers often reward brands that behave fairly and ethically, while penalising those that prioritise profit at the expense of everything else.

Organisations with a genuine social conscience, therefore, are likely to be more resilient to future extreme events. Leadership shortcomings on these kinds of issues are not easily forgotten, as has been demonstrated by the intense public scrutiny on the way companies approached their response to the pandemic. Savvy CEOs will see ESG not just as a challenge, but an opportunity to connect with customers and employees on a deeper level.

Indeed, the chair of a FTSE building materials group said CEOs must ensure their business has a “meaningful sense of purpose” that motivates employees and is attractive to all stakeholders. That requires a culture with strong values and appropriate behaviours as home working for many becomes the norm. “[CEOs need] to create a powerful vision and strategy, recognising new and emerging technologies and the need for agility, creating value for shareholders, and demonstrating how the business contributes to society.”

PEOPLE FIRST

Rebuilding productivity and thinking through new labour and capital paradigms will be subject to particular scrutiny in the context of managing a “green recovery”, claimed the chairman of a FTSE-listed house builder. The CEO of a luxury travel agency added that stakeholder management should have a “360-degree” outlook, including boards, investors, banks, staff, customers and suppliers, with an “increased focus on culture and diversity and retaining high-calibre staff who can switch to more resilient, attractive industries”.

People and talent were a common theme in the challenges highlighted by chairs and CEOs in the survey. One CEO of a large hospitality group commented: “I think the crisis will accelerate and magnify trends that were already apparent: greater employee participation, increased social awareness, leading rather than governing, more humility in salaries and compensation, and adapting to demands for more home working and work-life balance.”

The CEO of a department store chain identified three themes that have emerged strongly from the pandemic crisis: relevance, authenticity, as a business and as individual leaders, and sustainability. “All were important before but now have heightened significance. It will be hard for organisations to prosper without at least two of those three, if not all three.”

Other respondents, however, warned the crisis won’t rewrite the rules of business. Some changes will be permanent, some will be temporary, reminded the CEO of a FTSE builders merchant. While the specifics of this crisis are new, the principles of response are similar to previous downturns, and a few brash CEOs even dismissed the notion entirely that leadership must change. “No change to the past,” the CEO of a multinational travel group said. “You set a vision, then inspire, motivate and direct.” The reality is likely somewhere in between, and CEOs should aim at evolution, not revolution, in their approach to leadership.

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

The CEO of a FTSE-listed pub operator said leaders will need to offer reassurance and honesty, not idle promises, to employees with anxieties around job security. “This will require far more transparency and explanation of the things the business is doing, and the need to live the company’s values will never have been greater,” he said. “Change management is now at the forefront of my thinking. We need a new organisation fit for a new future, and moving from A to B needs careful planning, taking people on the journey.”

In this environment, companies will crave a more personal and authentic leadership style, which, according to the chairman of a FTSE 100 mining company, includes the ability to “envisage the unthinkable” and digest its importance. “[CEOs will need] mental agility, greater innovation, greater

prescience, improved communication skills and a huge dollop of sound common sense utilising good moral principles. The new world is not just about your business but increasingly how your business presents itself to the wider community.”

More than ever, businesses require calm, decisive, agile and compassionate leadership, opined the CEO of a multinational business in the food and beverage space. “This was true before Covid-19, vital as we navigate this human tragedy, and will be critical as we emerge into a new normal,” he said. “The biggest challenge facing CEOs in the post-crisis business world will be to provide this leadership, inspire their organisation with a compelling purpose, and have the courage to decisively reset strategy, working practices and culture.”

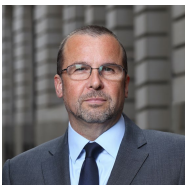


PART TWO

THE DNA OF FUTURE CEOs

What will define successful leaders in an increasingly volatile and uncertain world?

“Now, more than ever, successful executive leadership requires a balance of strategic and operational skills built on a foundation of diverse experience, combined with the agility to deal effectively with unprecedented challenges and the ability to inspire others.”



CHRIS DONKIN,
MANAGING PARTNER,
EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Three decades on from when the acronym “VUCA” was first coined by the US military to describe the more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world left behind at the end of the Cold War, its use is now more regularly applied in a business leadership context.

In recent years, virtually every sector has had to deal with accelerating rates of change, much of it driven by disruptive new technologies, threats of disintermediation, growing competition and the rise of new market players with radically different business models.

The current crisis, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, has accelerated the rate of change even further, forcing business leaders to deal with unparalleled levels of volatility and uncertainty, and limited reliable data with which to inform their decision-making.

As a consequence, chief executives, and the skills and experiences they have gained on the rise to the C-suite, have been tested like never before. Some have risen to the challenge; pivoting strategy whilst remaining engaged with the operational challenges, inspiring their organisation, and continuing to communicate effectively through remote working.

Others however, have been found wanting. Using another military analogy, one FTSE chairman described his CEO at the height of the crisis as “missing in action”, lacking the leadership skills and behaviours that distinguish his more successful contemporaries.

So, what is it that ultimately makes the difference? It’s become increasingly clear that a specific kind of leadership markers and competencies are most helpful in dealing with the challenges facing CEOs today and into the future.

In Savannah Group’s survey, agility and adaptability were ranked highest among the traits and skills that the chairs and CEOs felt will be most important to successful leaders in the next three to five years, cited by 81 percent of respondents.

The ability to inspire others and strategic vision followed, with 75 percent and 74 percent respectively. Agility and adaptability were also cited highest among the traits or skills seen to have risen in importance over the last six months, followed by resilience.

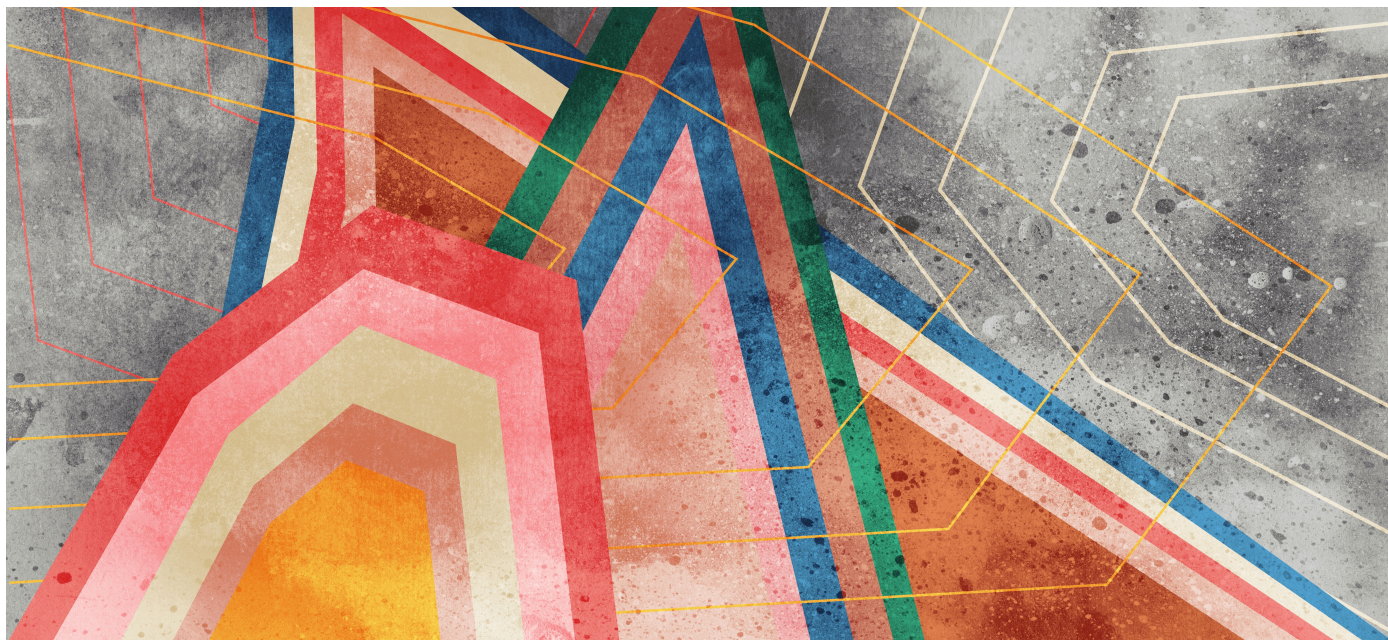


In terms of the experience important for a future CEO hire, commercial acumen and business growth were considered important or very important by 94 percent of respondents, while internal staff motivation and inspiration were considered important or very important by 90 percent of

respondents. Interestingly, fewer than half of the respondents felt that industry or sector knowledge was important or very important going forward.

Based on our experience of working with and studying

hundreds of chief executives across publicly listed and privately held businesses and validated by this research, Savannah Group has identified three core strands of 'leadership DNA' which have emerged as primary indicators of the most successful CEOs.



AGILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

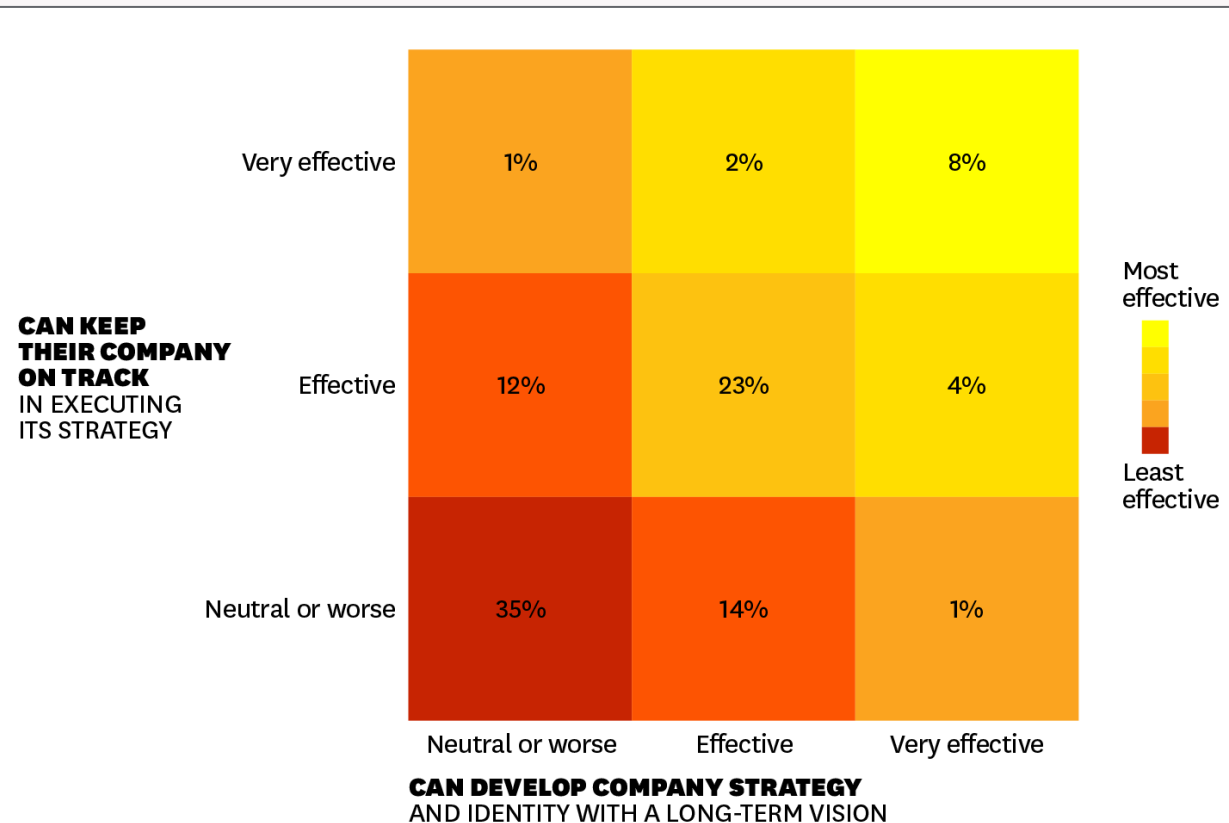
As the top-ranked traits in the study, their inclusion in the leadership DNA of future CEOs is a given. Rapidly changing business environments require strategically agile leaders, able to quickly adapt to changing situations, with a high degree of cultural sensitivity that makes them equally effective across the global span of their business operations. Agility is often fuelled by resilience, and this is only going to become more important in an increasingly VUCA business environment.

Agility includes the ability to switch back and forth between the strategic and the operational level, although few CEO's excel at both. A 2013 Harvard Business Review survey of nearly 700 executives across a variety of industries found that only 8% of leaders are outstanding at both strategy and execution. The number rises to 37% for those who are either

"effective" or "very effective" at both, but that means almost two-thirds of CEO's are "neutral or worse" at one or the other. Going forward, it will be even more important in the context of CEO succession to be able to identify both internal and external candidates who fall into that 37%. At the same time, agility is not simply the preserve of leadership, but needs to be nurtured throughout the organisation. A key example of this is remote working. While the trend, influenced by the Covid-19 crisis, has been to accelerate plans for flexible working and reducing office space, businesses shouldn't assume the pendulum can't swing back the other way, and sooner rather than later. Though the pandemic initially showcased the benefits of home working, as time went by it also exposed the flaws. As companies find the right balance between physical and virtual working, adaptability is a vital ingredient.

Top Leader's Effectiveness at Strategy Execution and development

Few are good at both



SOURCE "WHAT DRIVES A COMPANY'S SUCCESS?" BY PAUL LEINWAND AND CESARE MAINARDI, 2013

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STRATEGIC VISION BUILT ON A BREADTH OF KNOWLEDGE

The pandemic is an extreme example of an unprecedented challenge. No one has all the answers, because it's never happened before. When there are no precedents for the challenges you face, the best-equipped leaders are those with a diverse set of skills and a breadth of knowledge gained through wide and varied experience. Different companies, sectors, functions and geographies all add to the mix, enhancing a CEO's ability 'to know what to do when you don't know what to do'. Through an ability to

draw on multiple reference points and manifest that into a strong vision for a business, leaders can develop a more effective strategy and execute with greater confidence.

The same applies to their leadership teams. The greater diversity of knowledge and experience surrounding CEOs, the richer the insight they can draw on to deal with unprecedented challenges. One positive that did arise from the pandemic was the way in which it focused and

aligned the attention of entire leadership teams on a single objective.

In the absence of a crisis, however, the number of strategic imperatives at a company can quickly multiply, resulting in a lack of focus. Clearly no business can be run in a perpetual state of crisis, so the CEO has to ensure that clarity of vision is maintained, and that the organisation stays aligned behind a common goal and clear set of objectives.

In particular, which of these traits or skills has risen in importance over the last 6 months?		
70.0%	Agility and adaptability	63 responses
53.3%	Resilience	48 responses
43.3%	Ability to inspire others	39 responses
30.0%	Operational effectiveness	27 responses



AUTHENTICITY AND ENGAGEMENT

The most effective leadership styles are underpinned by drive, humility and inspiration. In his book "Good To Great", Jim Collins associates these attributes with 'Level 5 Leaders', capable of uniting organisations behind a clear vision and taking people with them. In a world of complex organisational structures and joint venture partnerships that require greater collaboration, leaders whose natural style is to influence and persuade, rather than command and control, are more successful.

As seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, crises illuminate leaders' strengths, but they also expose their weaknesses. Sometimes people's weaknesses in a crisis are just overplayed strengths. A typically collaborative

CEO can become over-reliant on the opinions of others. Equally, those who tend to be clear and decisive in a normal working environment can become dictatorial or overbearing. Yet whatever flaws are highlighted, the most authentic leaders, who engage well with all of their stakeholders, are most likely to thrive.

Exceptional leadership is as much art as science, and we cannot entirely codify it any more than we can bottle and sell it. Nevertheless, in a business environment increasingly defined by volatility, disruption and change, these elements of leadership DNA will be strong predictors of the most successful CEOs in the years ahead.

PART THREE

FUTURE CEO SUCCESSION

AS chairs observe an evolution in the skills and traits they want in a CEO, they also need to ensure they identify the best succession candidates both internally and externally

“In the FTSE 100, less than 10% of CEOs are women. With increased pressure for boards to have greater diversity, succession planning has never been more important.”

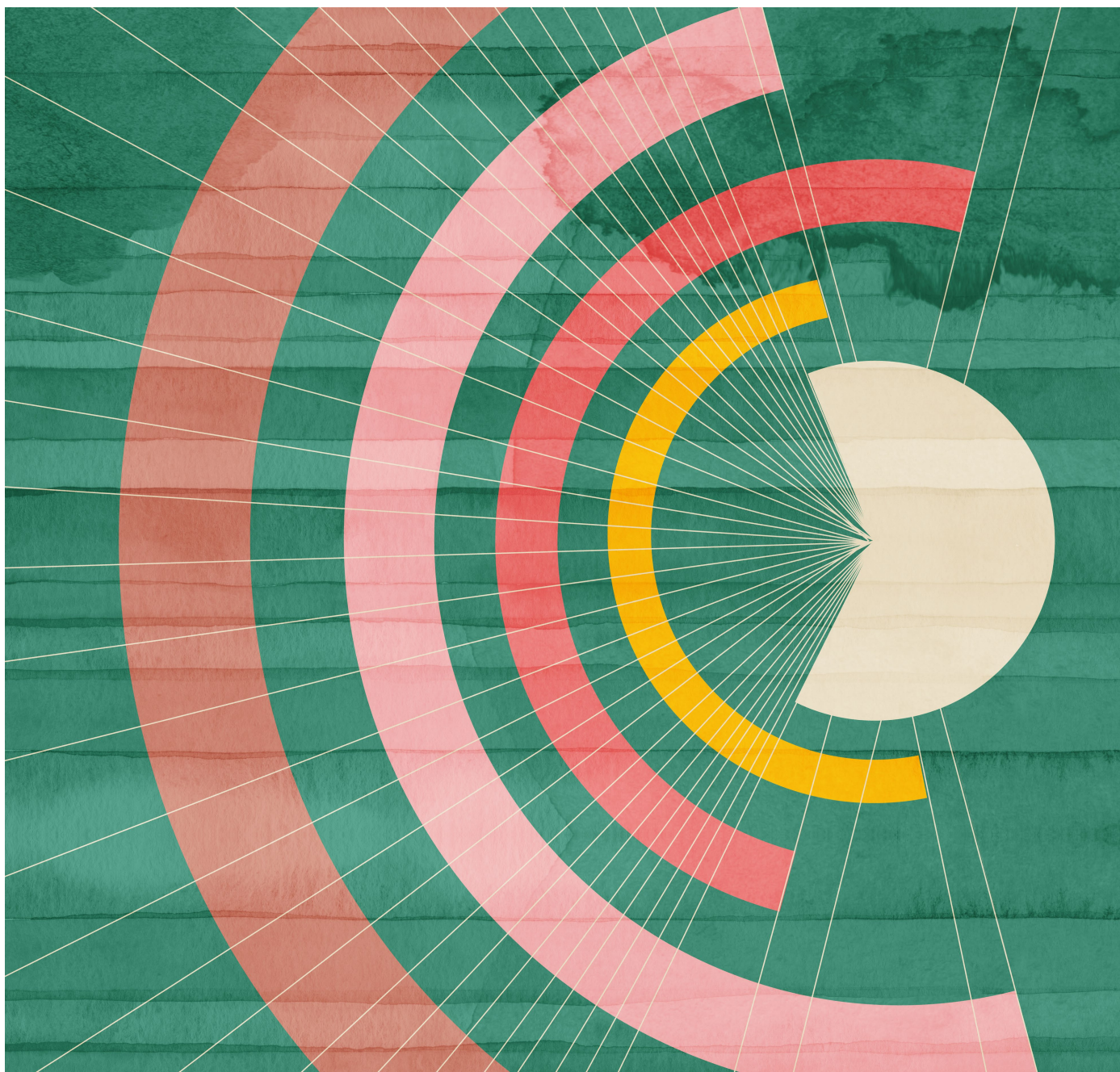


FIONA MOTLEY,
PARTNER, BOARD PRACTICE;
HEAD OF HR PRACTICE

The CEO appointment is by far the most visible in any business. It's also the most important, for obvious reasons. The CEO has the greatest single effect, positively or negatively, on how the company performs in the future, so planning proactively and sensibly for succession is a crucial process for chairs and boards to devise and execute.

There is no standard rule for CEO succession, as each one is different, both contextually and situationally. But what every succession does have in common is a level of risk, so the chair and other board members involved in managing the process must mitigate that risk as best they can. Typically, that means making a decision between internal versus external hiring.

If the company is well-run, has grown its revenue, profit and share price for the last five years, and is highly regarded by investors and City analysts, the risk profile of an internal 'continuity' CEO is relatively



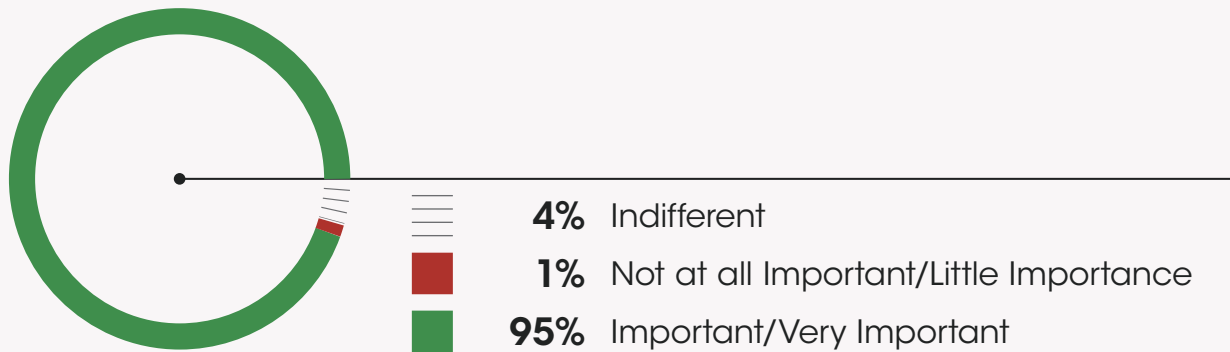
low. If, however, the business is underperforming, and the outgoing CEO was not positively regarded by stakeholders, then the lesser risk is bringing in a proven external hire who has been successful and highly regarded by investors elsewhere. In that scenario, an internal candidate may be seen as someone who's part of the problem, not the solution.

When a chair or board seeks an external CEO succession, there are further considerations to be weighed in terms of risk profile. As a rule of thumb, investors will often judge a CEO candidate against three defining factors: what they do (their current role), who they do it for (company and sector) and where they do it (geography). Historically, the prevailing wisdom, particularly

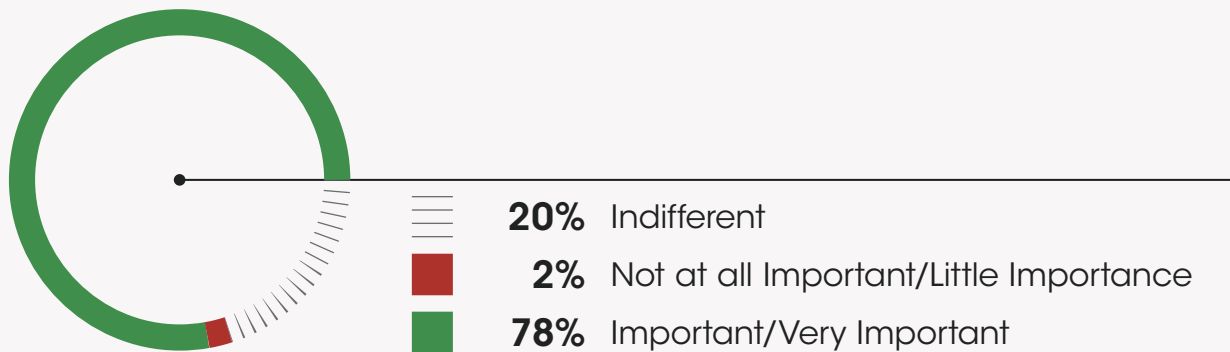
in the City, has been that changing more than one of those variables increases the risk profile significantly, even if the board think they have the perfect candidate. However, it would appear that such thinking is becoming less prevalent, with indirect but transferable knowledge and skillset increasingly valued over direct industry and sector experience, as our survey results show:

When you think about future CEO succession, how important do you think the following factors will be in terms of experience and track record...

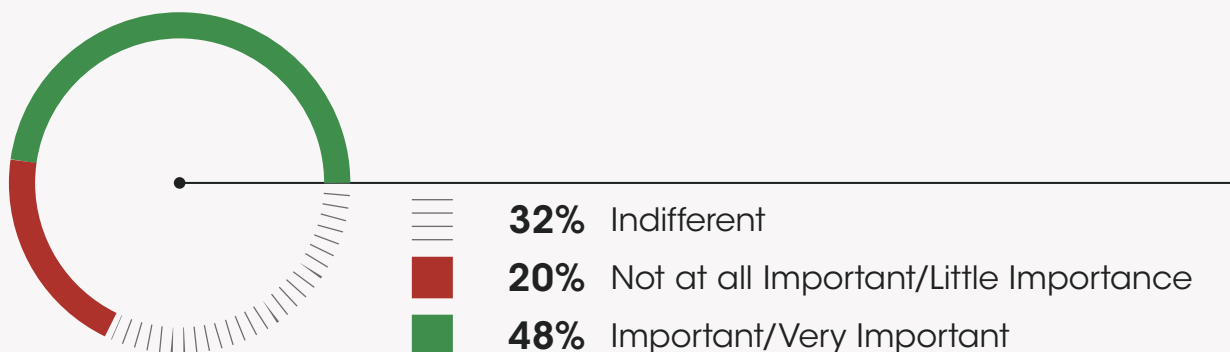
COMMERCIAL ACUMEN AND BUSINESS GROWTH



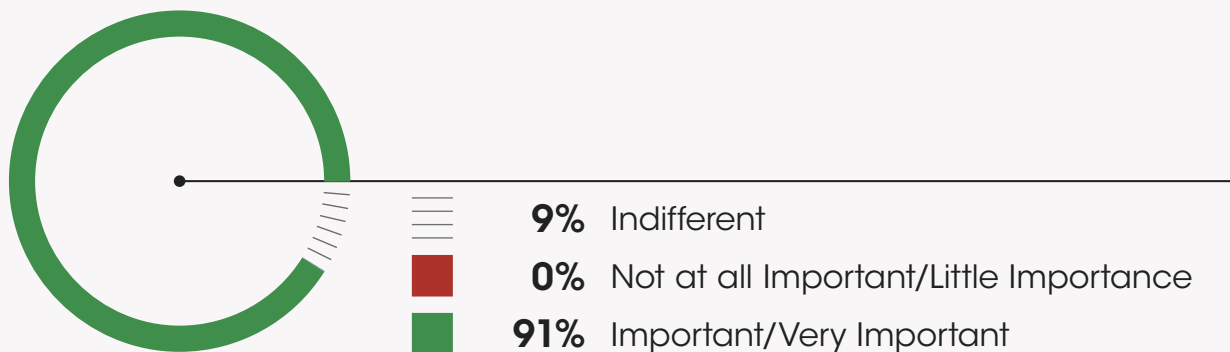
EXTERNAL INVESTOR AND STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT



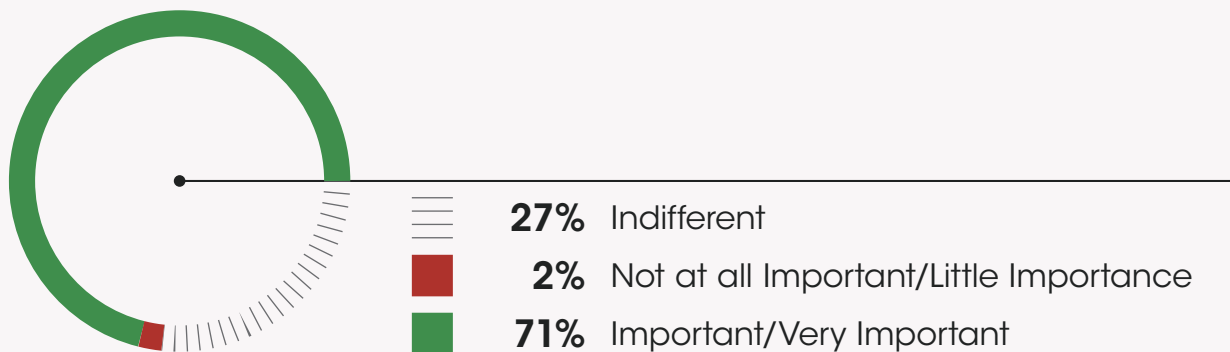
INDUSTRY OR SECTOR KNOWLEDGE AND NETWORKS



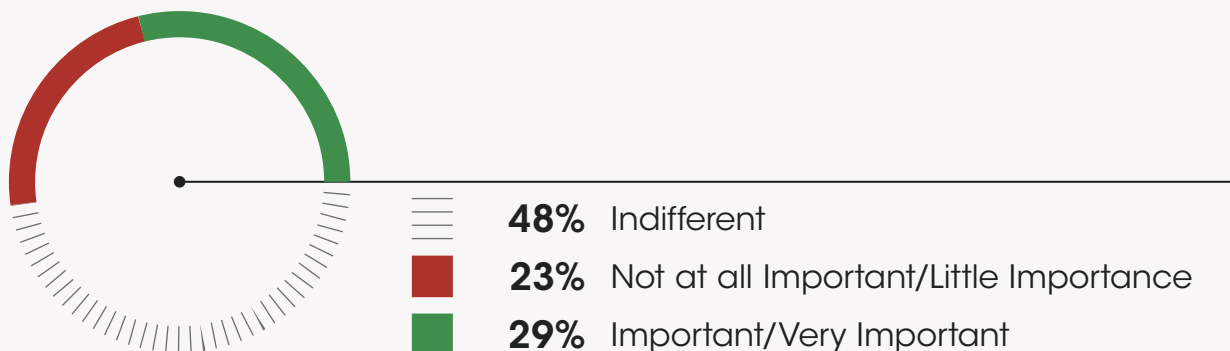
INTERNAL STAFF MOTIVATION AND INSPIRATION



BUSINESS RESTRUCTURING AND TRANSFORMATION



M&A AND POST-MERGER INTEGRATION



DIVERSE LEADERSHIP

The fact that the pandemic and the resulting economic downturn has been such a dramatic crisis for companies to deal with, has only amplified the risk profile of any CEO succession. It will also likely influence the internal versus external debate that boards have in future. Some businesses previously highly regarded by investors, for example, have struggled immensely, illuminating certain leadership shortcomings during a very public crisis.

Accelerating rates of change may also increase the likelihood of boards promoting or hiring CEO candidates from less uniform backgrounds: the recent promotion of the Chief Digital Officer of a FTSE 250 travel and leisure business to CEO being a case in point. The more leaders have to deal with new and unprecedented challenges, the more valuable it becomes to have the maximum

diversity; not just in the well-publicised inclusion sense – gender, race and sexual orientation – but truly in the fullest sense of the word, including skillset, background and breadth of experience. Indeed, the most successful CEOs are increasingly those who have had broader careers. The days of plucking CEOs from narrow, functional career and education paths are diminishing, as their limitations during times of perpetual change are exposed. The historical “copy-and-paste” leadership approach just doesn’t work anymore.

Chairs and boards, therefore, should evaluate CEO succession candidates on a deeper level, assessing the degree to which they have demonstrated an ability to lead with adaptability and agility. Such leadership also requires greater diversity across the wider executive team. Now more than

ever, no single leader can know everything. But they can draw on the breadth of their own personal experiences along with that of the people sitting around their management table.

It could be argued that the role of the CEO is evolving into something more akin to an executive chair; gathering input from everybody around the table, ensuring the less forthright are heard just as loudly as the outspoken, and debating those views constructively before making a final decision. For this to be effective, the CEO needs to be able to firstly assemble a diverse leadership team, secondly lead the process of developing vision and strategy by drawing out all of that shared knowledge and experience, and then structure the team to manage implementation at an operational level.

FINDING THE BALANCE

To successfully execute a CEO succession, boards must first be clear about where the business is going and where they want it to be in three to five years, rather than simply where it is now. A forward-looking approach will inform what kind of experience and skill set they want from a leader. Next, there needs to be an internal and an external succession process established, and both should be aligned. Few commercial organisations are able to succeed with no senior external appointments, but equally internal promotion is important for retaining institutional knowledge and building a culture that promotes development.

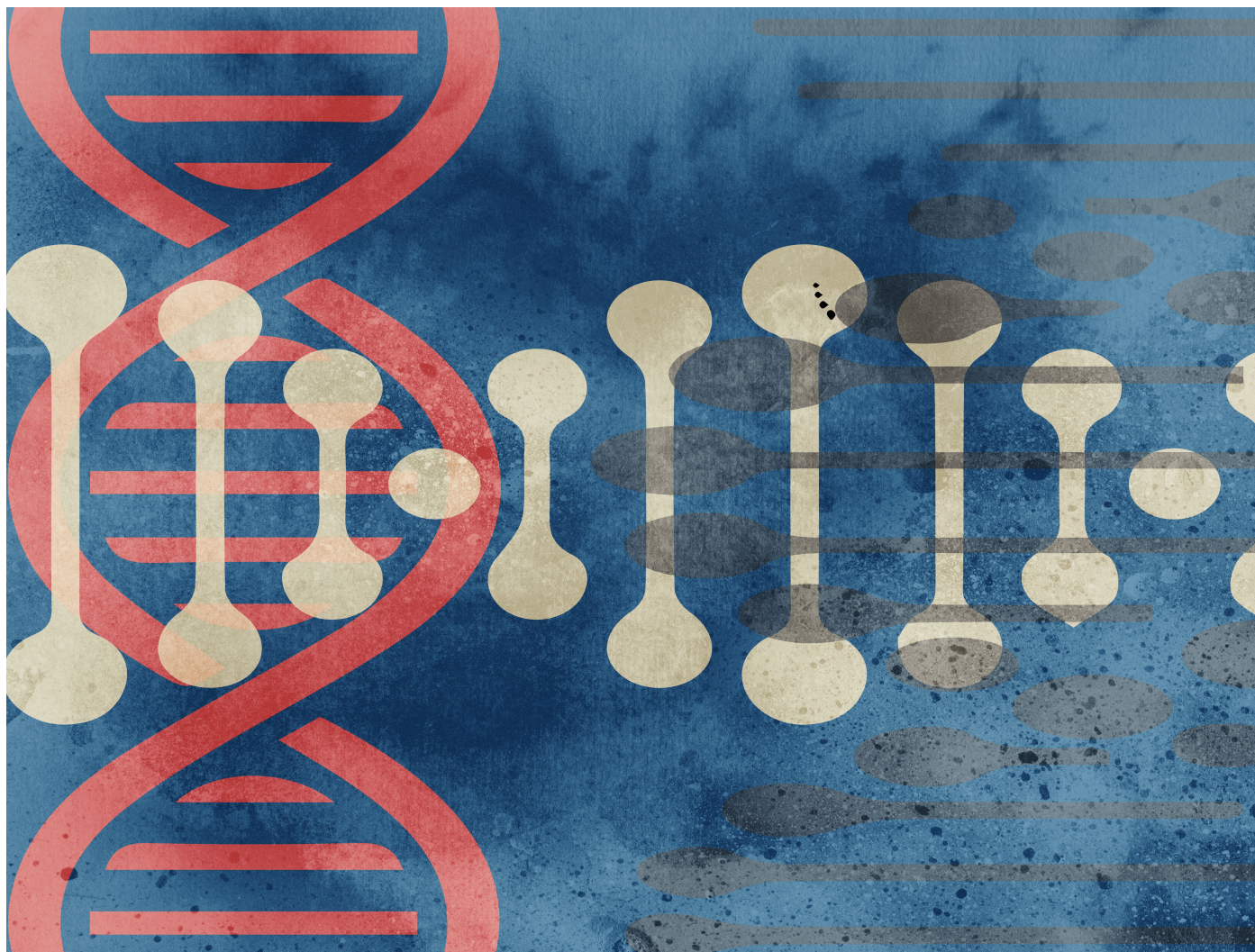
Boards, therefore, need to find the right balance between bringing in fresh talent and developing internal executives. This can be a challenge, with many organisations focusing too heavily on the internal process, until they realise their “bench strength” is insufficient, at which point they’re already in a reactive

process. A more integrated and holistic view, linked to the goals of the business over the next five years, will render much stronger results. This requires boards to clearly identify the skills and experience they will need in a CEO to achieve those goals, and whether those can be developed from within by nurturing high-potential internal talent. Even if they believe they can, they should still supplement that nurturing process by benchmarking internal candidates against the best external talent.

Though it has traditionally been considered best practice to begin a succession process 18 to 24 months before the CEO is due to depart, this is increasingly unviable given the rapidly changing nature of the business landscape. However, by designing an internal succession process that is supplemented by a natural process of external benchmarking, companies can more proactively plan for both eventualities while

reducing the risk profile. Meanwhile, they should be constantly working to accelerate the development of internal succession candidates and overcome any areas of shortfall, while monitoring who in the external

market comes closest to the future-focused set of criteria decided by the board. When that time does then come to change CEO, they are well advanced in both areas.





5 QUESTIONS BOARDS NEED TO BE ABLE ANSWER

1. Are we clear on the future direction and longer term strategy of the company?
2. Have we agreed the consequent requirements for CEO succession?
3. Have we weighed the pros and cons of internal versus external candidates?
4. Have we identified the highest calibre internal successor(s)?
5. Do we have an ongoing process to benchmark internal candidates against the best external talent, so we are prepared for an unexpected succession event as well as an orderly replacement process?

For more information, visit savannah-group.com

ABOUT SAVANNAH GROUP

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Savannah Group has the proven experience, knowledge and intelligence to advise and assist Chairs, CEOs, HRDs and shareholders in building effective boards and top management teams. To discuss how we can help, please contact one of our Board Practice members.



Fiona Motley
Partner

Fiona has over 20 years' experience within global executive search and has successfully managed a broad range of Board and senior level appointments across multiple sectors and geographies. She has an extensive Board network and places Chair and Non-Executive Directors for FTSE 100, FTSE 250, FTSE Smallcap and private equity backed businesses. Functionally, Fiona has a strong international track record within HR and as a Partner within Savannah she specialises in senior HR roles in addition to Chair and Non-Executive appointments.



Chris Donkin
Partner

Chris brings experience of over 500 Board and senior executive searches to his role as Head of Executive Search and the Industrial Practice at Savannah. His particular sector focus covers automotive and mobility, aerospace and defence, and wider manufacturing and engineering services. He advises clients operating at the intersection between established industrial markets and disruptive new technologies and was acknowledged recently by the Financial Times as "one of industry's leading head-hunters."



Tim Clouting
Partner

A Consumer specialist, Tim has extensive experience working globally with brands across many subsectors such as Leisure, Travel, Hospitality, Gaming, Omni-Channel Retail and Consumer Goods - advising global organisations on a wide range of executive resourcing, talent management and senior leadership issues. Deep functional expertise particularly around marketing, customer experience, digital, commercial, through to general management/operations and legal, compliance and regulatory affairs.



Tim Shaw
Partner

Tim is a Partner in the Board and Industrial Practice, where he leads our focus in Board and senior level appointments in Infrastructure, Construction & Services. His deep expertise across the built environment stems from over 20 years in organisational and leadership development, executive recruitment, benchmarking and assessment. This has led to over 300 successful searches with FTSE 100 and Fortune 500 organisations, as well as family businesses, private equity firms, infrastructure and pension funds.



Louisa Perry
Partner

Louisa brings 25 years of experience in executive search focused on hiring at board and leadership level within global and domestic organisations. She has specific expertise in hiring Chief Information Officers, Chief Digital Officers, Chief Data Officers, Chief Technology Officers, Chief Information Security Officers and their leadership teams.



George Williams
Partner

George is a Partner in the Sport, Media and Entertainment practice. He has a track record of recruiting board and executive talent into many of the sector's most innovative organisations. He works on a global remit and has a particular specialism in the sports industry.



Richard Ashton
Partner

Richard specialises in executive and non-executive appointments with a particular specialism in finance. Having qualified as an ACA with KPMG, he has spent over a decade working with a variety of public, private and private equity-backed business across all industry sectors.

