
Specialists, Caretakers, and Chameleons:

The C-suite in 2021

Sixteen years of transformation – and it's not slowing down

It's a challenging time for corporations.

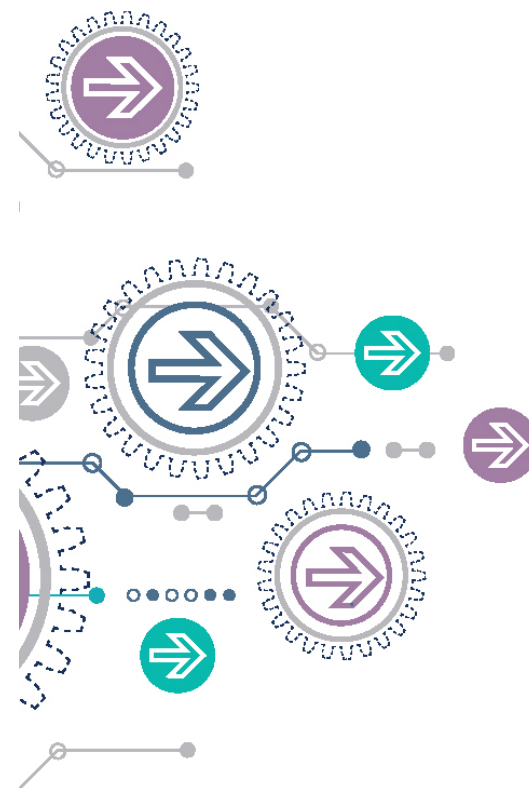
The first years of the twenty-first century have seen a period of rapid technological innovation, an explosion of entrepreneurial activity, and globalization on an unparalleled pace. Nations have experienced unexpected political upheavals. Markets have shifted and changed. So have the employees we lead. And executive teams have never looked quite this way before.

No longer is the C-suite defined by elder statesmen in corner offices at the pinnacles of long, successful careers in a single company. We now live in an era rampant with job hopping, a time in which twenty-somethings launch billion-dollar companies, and organizations face constant pressure to disrupt or be disrupted.

Executives understand the changes that have already happened – but are struggling to predict what changes will come next.

To that end, Russell Reynolds Associates partnered with Trendera in the summer and fall of 2016 to interview thirty executives and thought leaders from around the world to obtain their point of view on the forces that will shape commerce and industry, and what we can expect the C-suite to look like in 2021 (a full list of interviewees appears on pages 28-29). These individuals lived and worked around the world, represented both emerging and established organizations, and came from industry, academia, and professional services. These interviews covered the forces that are impacting all of us today, the changes in our working lives that are on the horizon, and the ultimate insight: What leadership teams will look like, and be doing differently, five years from now.

Some of these changes are good for business. Others will make our lives more complicated. But all of them, good or bad, may very well be the reality with which we have to contend.

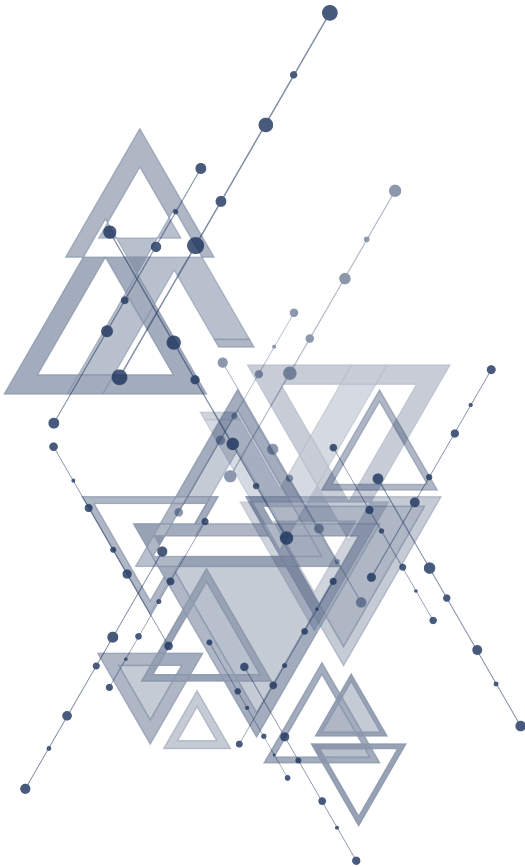


Forces at work

Changes in the C-suite – both its composition, and the types of people who fill those roles – is nothing new.

At the same time, employers have increasingly promoted up, or hired in, C-suite leaders who wouldn't have previously been accepted – experts from outside the industry, diverse candidates, and others.

In addition to these historical changes, our interviewees predicted ongoing changes and upheavals in areas including technology and data, organizations and structures, economics and cultures, and even the fundamental emotion (and perception) of “hope.”



A rise in the C-level

At the turn of the century, the C-suite looked very different than it does today.

The Chief Operating Officer (COO), traditionally the second-in-command in most organizations, started to disappear in the 1990s. Taking his place (and it was almost always a “his”) were functional specialists who were breaking out of their silos and taking on more strategic views of the business.

No longer were the heads of finance, HR, IT, procurement, and others “condemned to their niches for life,” as *The Economist* wrote at the time. Increasingly, they were taking on C-level roles reporting directly in to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and talking corporate strategy instead of functional tactics.

As these roles elevated, the size of the C-suite expanded. Power shifted in organizations as a result. The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) increased their focus from managing the budget to creating business value. The Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO) gained clout, too – shifting their historically back-office functions to places of increased visibility, and increased influence.

The rising number of C-level appointments indicates a significant change in corporate structure. The heads of specialist functional ‘silos’ (finance, human resources, IT, etc) are becoming more and more involved in talking corporate strategy with the chief executive and the board. Ten years ago, these specialist heads would have been condemned to their niches for life. ... They are being encouraged by the decline of the more traditional non-specialist number two, the COO. A recent study of 300 quoted American companies found that 20% of them abolished the COO position between 1986 and 1999.

- The Economist, “A Rise in the C-Level,”
24 February 2005

Each era has its own senior-executive profile. A century ago many of the largest corporations were led by entrepreneurs – Henry Ford, who founded his automaker, and Alfred P. Sloan, whose company had been acquired by General Motors. By the 1920s professional managers were hopping from company to company to fill high-level management positions. By the 1950s lifelong employees of corporations were working their way up the ladder to claim the top jobs. The executive profile continues to evolve.

- Peter Cappelli, Monika Hamori, and Rocio Bonet, Harvard Business Review, "Who's Got Those Top Jobs," March 2014

Who gets these jobs?

Writing in *Harvard Business Review* in March 2014, three academics – Peter Cappelli from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and Monika Hamori and Rocio Bonet from IE Business School in Spain – examined the 10 most senior executives at each of the Fortune 100 companies in 1980, 2001, and 2011 to see how the profiles of the C-suite have changed over a 30 year period. What they saw are leaders who are more likely to have worked elsewhere during their career, were better educated, and who were increasingly female and born outside the United States. Some of their results:

	1980	2001	2011
Average years to current job	28.4	24.1	26.1
Average years with current employer	20.6	15.2	16.9
Average years in each job	4.3	4.0	4.9
Executives who are "lifers" at company	53%	45%	30.5%
Executives with graduate degrees	46%	62%	65%
Executives educated outside the U.S.	2.2%	7%	11%
Ratio of men to women	100:0	89:11	82.3:17.7

Technology shifts, from the internet of things to the next big thing

Shifting from big data to big insight

"Big Data" has been the talk of businesses for the last few years, yet many organizations have struggled to gain actionable insights from their data. That will likely change in the next five years as tools become easier to use, data fluency becomes more common, and employees become more comfortable with making data-driven, or even artificial intelligence-driven, decisions.

Economic impact of "The Amazon Effect"

Amazon has repeatedly found ways to sell new categories and products online, revolutionizing ecommerce, and impacting brick-and-mortar stores. This trend will continue unabated, as startups and established businesses alike find new ways to use technology to disrupt established sales processes and retail practices.

Taking a digital break

Despite the proliferation of computers, tablets, phones, and other devices – or perhaps because of it – there is a growing awareness of the need to take a break. Some managers are telling employees to leave their devices at the door when attending meetings, and many professionals are starting to take technology-free vacations (a "tech detox"). These digital breaks change the relationship people have with their phones and tablets, and with the companies they interact with through their devices.

Our interviews with executives and thought leaders identified a number of trends related to technology, including:

Changing workplace demographics and practices

Our interviews with executives and thought leaders identified a number of trends related to workplace demographics and practices, including:

The gig economy

In an effort to control costs and manage organizational growth, companies will continue to turn to contract workers to take on jobs. For some professionals, this is a great opportunity, as they would prefer to be out on their own and have greater control over their work. For others, this represents an increasing lack of opportunity for full-time, stable employment with an organization that provides both psychological and tangible benefits. Regardless of how the workers look at it, for organizations it's an easier way to shave costs, outsource low-skill work, and focus more on high-skilled or high-value aspects of their operations.

The right to be my authentic self

Racial minorities and women have increasingly filled the corporate ranks, and recent years have shown a growing acceptance of employees with diverse religious views and sexual orientations, too. Companies have recognized the need to celebrate, not just tolerate, employees being their authentic selves at work. As this trend continues, workplaces will likely feel a growing need to create an environment where all employees – regardless of demographics, background, life-stage, or perspective – feel like they belong.

A decreasing desire to lead

Each generation views leadership differently, and there's a concern that younger employees, perhaps as a result of a strong feeling of egalitarianism, don't see being a leader as a goal worth striving for. If so, it may mean that team performance slowly drops as leaders fail to step up and take charge, or it may herald new thinking in organizational structures, with rotating leaders or leadership by consensus.

Global shifts and economic challenges

The end of continuous growth

Continuous growth has been a component of most economic models for decades, but many experts are starting to call that assumption into question. As emerging economies stagnate, and the United States and other developed economies struggle in a post-recession period, companies may not be able to rely on the overall growth of the economy to enable their financial success in the next five years.

Our interviews with executives and thought leaders identified a number of trends related to global shifts and economic challenges, including:

Shifting south and east

Populations shift over time. Many economic and demographic maps show an overall global shift south (to South America and Africa) and East (to the Middle East and Asia). Nations are negotiating existing, or establishing new, trade agreements that influence what can be sold where. For companies, this means new markets and customers, but also new regulatory environments and competitive threats.

Unexpected political events

There's a clear risk to any company that is unaware of the political climate, but there's also a growing risk to everyone from unexpected political events: Brexit, the Columbian peace accords, the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, etc. Previously well-understood political environments are likely to become more rocky, disrupting not only businesses, but entire economies and markets.

Blind to the future

Perhaps the most disconcerting idea proposed by the interviewees, and the one with the most wide-ranging implications, is the belief that an increasing number of people can no longer imagine what a positive future would look like.

Unlike previous generations, who perceived growing economies, easy employment, and a land of opportunity, younger workers today see challenging economic conditions, a lack of loyalty from corporations, and a long struggle in their careers while moving toward an uncertain retirement.

Right or wrong, real or imagined, this view will impact how individuals define their relationship with government, businesses, employers, and bosses, as well as the traditional institutions of marriage, home ownership, and others that impact financial behaviors.

The “trickle up” of new business practices

Lastly, a clear pattern of influence was established from these conversations: Emerging organizations are driving the trends in both corporate culture and structure, which then “trickle up” to their more established counterparts around the world.

Thanks to Snapchat, Google, Facebook, and other Silicon Valley stalwarts, some of the world’s largest global corporations, who employ tens of thousands of people, are exploring and hiring people who cultivate a start-up mentality and a future-forward focus.

Similarly, common practices in software startups – for example, Agile Development, a software development methodology involving self-organizing teams, frequent iterations, and a push toward minimum viable product releases – are beginning to move into established corporations, and into other parts of the business.

The C-suite in 2021

Despite differences in geography, industry, and age, study participants were remarkably unified in how they viewed the C-suite, and what transformations they expected over the next five years. That isn't to say that there weren't disagreements among the experts – there certainly were – but overall, a clear picture of ten trends emerged from the conversations, aligned to four broad themes: Roles, capabilities, behaviors, and mindsets



Culture wars: new executive roles



Trend

Taking a cue from the world's most visionary companies, our experts tell us to expect new C-suite roles to be created to promote people, culture, and a focus on the future. Not simply focusing on the warm and fuzzy elements of culture, these executives will enable companies to adapt faster and compete more successfully for critical talent. Of course, these new roles are much more prominent in emerging organizations, but they are gradually trickling up to older ones as well.

Forward-thinking C-suites recognize that organizational culture is the defining hallmark of a company's brand and the embodiment of its core values. As a result, new executive roles will be created surrounding the creation and upholding of an uplifting company culture that sits at the core of competitive advantage.

*Chief Culture Officers and Chief People Officers promote internal company culture and employee happiness. Experts with experience at younger, digital-first organizations, including **Sara Sperling**, formerly of Snapchat, particularly noted the necessity of these positions.*



Implication for C-suite in 2021

C-suite executives will increasingly occupy prominent leadership roles, working closely with CHROs, CMOs, and brand managers to shape, change, and promote essential elements of organizational culture.

The modern (C-suite) family: role shaping and customization



Smart organizations are looking at a person's skill set and then determining whether they can take pieces of three or four jobs even, and put them together and match that person's skill set, giving them an appropriate title and job description and that becomes a win-win for the organization and the employee.

– **Reveta Bowers**, former Head of the Center for Early Education

To be a top executive, it really benefits if you've done more than one type of large job. Different lines, staffs, functions, operations, sales, technology, whatever it may be, I think traditional companies tend to promote within their functional lines because that's where the expertise is. That's the path to lowest resistance, but I know that's short sighted for developing executives.

– **Martin Weissburg**, Executive Vice President, AB Volvo



Trend

We are growing used to everything being tailored to our own personal needs. From food to entertainment to everything in between, our world has become increasingly customized to who we are and what we want. It's no surprise then that many experts see existing roles in the C-suite evolving to become more individualized and suited to a person's specific strengths.

Furthermore, as the C-suite becomes a more collaborative and cross-functional place, the rise of role fluidity will enhance an organizations' creativity and overall effectiveness.



Implication for C-suite in 2021

Although many C-suite titles may remain similar, role individualization will likely lead each C-suite role (and roles in general) away from rigid job descriptions and toward work that better aligns individual strengths with organizational needs.

Head versus heart: The tension between data and soft skills



Trend

There is growing awareness across industries surrounding the need for complementary skillsets in the C-suite. Our experts attest that big data is truly taking over the working world, and without question the executives of the future must have a strong foundation of data analytics and tech savviness to keep up. Equally important is the need for softer skills and emotional intelligence in leaders who have exceptional hard skills. The executives of tomorrow will need to be masters of multiple capability sets to be successful.



Implication for C-suite in 2021

Data, data, and more data. Executives will gain fluency in data and analytics, and increasingly turn to data models for decision making, while at the same time aggressively converting terabytes of data into useful insights. At the same time, metrics will be created to gauge difficult to measure, yet essential leadership qualities such as emotional intelligence and relationship building skills. As behavioral science continues to advance, we'll have an extremely accurate and data-based depiction of how a successful leader looks and acts as well as tools to see how executives stack up.

In the future, the top executive teams will combine more technical people with business people.

– **Maxwell Maio**, General Manager, ZF-TRW Automotive Holding Corporation

You're going to have to get people who are really comfortable looking at things and making judgment calls, because analysis paralysis is already here. You have to have a gut, right? I can give you data that says we should build another store, but I can give you just as much data that says we shouldn't. At some point you have to have gut.

– **John Koryl**, President, Neiman Marcus

Chameleons trump experts: The rise of the agile specialist



There's a tremendous amount of ageism [in the C-suite] right now. It's all about millennials, and I do think that there is going to have to be some sort of reconciliation between people who are young and have great ideas about how to do things along with older people who actually have experience and who have been in good markets and bad markets. You need to have a good balance of people with great creative ideas and people who have experience and are a little more grounded in their experience.

– **Steve Stanford**, Senior Vice President of Business Development, Samsung

Within corporations in general, there are a lot of layers and pathways to get things done. To act quickly as opposed to going through multiple phases can help innovate more effectively.

– **Gigi Guerra**, Director of Curation and Collaborations, Target



Trend

Many of our experts have noticed, both in the workplace and in society at large, that adaptability is becoming more important than deep knowledge. Of course, that isn't to say that expertise is on the outs, but in a world that moves faster with each passing year, having an expert without the ability to move quickly is having an anchor in your organization. Accordingly, the ability to innovate and develop and execute solutions on the fly are currently perceived as some of the most valuable executive skillsets for the future.



Implication for C-suite in 2021

Going forward, C-suite executives must become Agile Specialists, executives who may not necessarily have the same level of expertise as their predecessors, but are just as valuable for their ability to act quickly and provide effective solutions to keep up with the times. These Agile Specialists are equally as valuable in the C-suite as leaders with deep expertise. In partnership, they make a powerful team.

Executives will need to adopt more of a scrappy start-up mentality in both their speed and approach to problems, which may also require a leaner staff to be able to pivot quicker.

The world is flat: Egalitarianism infiltrates the C-suite



Trend

One of the most impactful trends shaping the C-suite is the shift toward the structural flattening of hierarchy in the workplace, a direct result of a cultural move toward egalitarianism and democracy in general. And so it is beginning to go with company leadership, with even the biggest companies dispersing influence by creating less rigid hierarchies and more channels for input among their employees.

Although not all of our experts felt this was a good thing, many noticed the C-suite getting flatter organizationally and the influence of each executive decreasing, particularly in newer organizations.

While this might look like a benevolent gift of egalitarianism, it may possibly indicate a growing lack of desire for responsibility or true accountability among younger Millennials and Gen Zs. The real question: Will younger workers really want to be leaders and stand up to take responsibility in the C-suite?



Implication for C-suite in 2021

Although the jury is still out on the effectiveness and level of productivity within less hierarchical companies, for the trend toward egalitarianism will allow it to assume a stronghold within C-suites, particularly in emerging organizations.

This will necessitate the creation of new leadership styles as authority is distributed and dispersed. Leaders may begin to shun practices such as pulling rank and asserting individual authority in favor of adopting a more group-minded, democratic approach. The best leaders will find balance here, comfortably leading more egalitarian teams, while also active decisively when the situation calls for it.

We have a societal trend towards a much more egalitarian, accepting [work environment] where it's not cool to be the boss. When you talk about leadership, [Millennials especially] have a real hesitation almost as if, to them, being a leader means being bossy and outspoken and telling people what to do.

– **Rob Kaiser**, President, Kaiser Leadership Solutions

It's this idea that everyone has a place at the table. It's not 'I'm boss and I'm too busy for everything so you guys each have your designated roles.'

– **Lodro Rinzler**, Co-Founder and Chief Spiritual Officer, MNDFL

The parent trap: Moving from bosses to caretakers



A lot of executives have [fostered] less of a divide between themselves and the company. Whether it's age or whatnot, I think there's a lot more connection between [executives and employees]. There's friendship, they spend more time together.

– **Sara Sperling**, Partner, Oxege Consulting (formerly Snapchat)

You invest in your people and convince them to want to be a part of the team and want to make it better... [Future-forward] companies are creating a culture that is very open, collaborative, diverse, and also a lot of fun. There's this belief that you can have fun while you work and it shouldn't be a trade-off.

– **Ranjan Goswami**, Vice President of Sales, Delta Airlines



Trend

We used to fear our bosses. Then we started having beers with them. In the future, our bosses may not only be our friends, but our caretakers as well. Partly due to a fear of losing their talent, and partly due to an increase in survey-based management and frequent emotional temperature taking among employees, many experts felt compassionate leadership was becoming of paramount importance in the modern C-suite, particularly within more nimble, digital-first companies.

As a result, future-forward executives are making an effort to put their people first, making employees' wellness and happiness a priority in order to enable them to produce their best work. However, this well-intentioned philosophy could grow into a dysfunctional (not to mention costly) burden to bear as executives take on an increasing amount of responsibility for employees' welfare, potentially leading to a lack of independence and resilience in the broader workforce.



Implication for C-suite in 2021

In a few years, we'll see employers begin to take on an unprecedented level of responsibility for their employees' welfare, investing perhaps too heavily in positions and resources to sustain employees' physical, psychological, emotional, and even spiritual wellbeing. Smart leaders, though, will find ways to support their employees while continuing to develop their independence and resilience.

Rethinking success and loyalty in organizations



Trend

Younger workers and executives are redefining how things are done in the C-suite. For this group, there are new definitions of what success and loyalty will mean: Loyalty is not about how long someone stays, it's about the value of the contributions made during one's employment and the level of investment during his or her tenure, however long or short it may be.

With declining tenures, and increasing focus on non-financial goals, success can no longer be judged simply by profit: The future members of the C-suite will begin to view it in more holistic terms: By what the company is contributing to the world; the values it promotes, the lifestyle it offers, and the societal advancement it provides.



Implication for C-suite in 2021

While they will still be economically motivated, up-and-coming executives will be more comfortable putting their money where their mouth is, making decisions that may sacrifice (some) margin for the sake of the greater good, from sustainability to social issues.

Furthermore, expectations surrounding corporate loyalty will become more reflective of the times: Whether entry level or executive, few will stay—or be expected to stay—at a company for years on end. The concept of tenure may be reduced to tours of duty, and the idea of service redefined as a promise of complete engagement in the pursuit of common goals.

[Younger employees] are demanding what they want or creating it themselves. With regard to loyalty, it's becoming more of a psychological contract rather than a defined term of service.

– **Barry Posner**, Professor of Leadership, Santa Clara University

Perhaps the idea is that you have this period in which as an employee and employer, you both acknowledge that this isn't going to be forever. Maybe it isn't going to be for five years, maybe it's for three years. You both acknowledge that and then adopt the mindset of 'let's make the most of this time together and get the most out of this period together.'

– **Executive**, Partnerships Manager, Social Media Company

Leading through a shared purpose and vision



People are going to work to connect with a purpose. I think there needs to be purpose-driven leadership, because in our younger work force it is extremely important for them to connect with a cause.

– **Jan Wilmking**, Senior Vice President, Zalando

People today want to work for a company whose output advances a society, whose work gives them a feeling of significance and consequence.

– **Executive**, Venture Capital and Private Equity



Trend

Visionary CEOs have become corporate role models for Millennials, a generation of workers for whom it's not enough to simply collect a paycheck. Their desire to derive meaning and purpose from their work cannot be underestimated as they dream of working to advance a shared vision and devoting their efforts to an organization and team with values reflective of their own. However, moving forward, many of our experts say a visionary CEO is not going to be enough. The most successful organizations will have every member of the C-suite living and breathing the purpose and values of the company.



Implication for C-suite in 2021

The new generation of workers will flock to purpose-driven teams rather than standout individual leaders; thus we'll move beyond the visionary CEO to the purpose- and values-driven C-suite. Executive leadership teams, and the values they espouse, will be just as important and as much of a draw to an organization as those of the company and CEO.

Additionally, executives in 2021 will have an internal marketing obligation in the sense that they will be expected to promote their purpose and values to their company. This may be uncharted territory for many leaders who have spent entire careers staying out of the spotlight, or simply hoping that their results speak for themselves.

The weak shall be strong: Cultivating empowerment and approachability



Trend

Moving forward, nice—or at the very least, nicer—guys may just finish first. The domination of the command and control-based leader no longer resonates in today's workplace. Going forward, great leadership will be defined by empowering others and adopting more of an others-focused approach. In the future, a laundry list of degrees and titles may now be less important than a listening ear.



Implication for C-suite in 2021

Qualities that were previously perceived as weak in the workplace may become hallmarks of the great leaders of the future: empathy, humility, respect, empowerment, and a lack of ego. As executives rely more heavily on others and have an abundance of data insights at their disposal, their level of awareness will become wider as well. This improved understanding of their organization and surroundings, combined with qualities such as empathy and respect, will likely lead to changes in how organizations treat their workers, engage with their customers, and position themselves in the marketplace.

When you have to choose between someone who wasn't quite as strong but a great guy and someone who's the absolute best at their job but an [expletive], most would go for the former each time, because you don't want to disrupt the balance in culture. A great guy, you can work with, you can grow with, but the [expletive]'s going to poison the well.

– **Allison Kluger**, Allison Kluger Media Consulting; Co-Instructor, Stanford Business School

I think the executives need to have the skill of trust and to give up the responsibility and ownership and to accept new ways. I think people should have more trust in autonomy and I think building up the trust and confidence in people below them needs to be increased.

– **Conrad Bloser**, Chief Operating Officer, Lieferheld GmbH

Disrupting diversity—or—a comfort with constructive conflict



Diversity is no longer [limited to] gender diversity, it's diversity of experience. I think we now recognize that management teams that have greater diversity typically make better decisions. In order to use this diversity in the management team, you also need a slightly different relationship between the boss and the subordinate and it's a relationship in which the subordinates have to speak up more and have a responsibility to speak up more and a boss has a responsibility to listen more.

– **Ian Riley**, Vice President, LafargeHolcim

[In a diverse C-suite,] there's a strong exchange of ideas and there is constructive tension and I think that's a good thing.

– **Estanislau Bassols**, Chief Executive Officer, VR Beneficios



Trend

When it comes to innovation, most organizations would rather be the disruptors than the disrupted. But how does a company breed disruptive thought and true innovation? The short answer: diversity of everything.

Organizations are recognizing that diversity in the C-suite is not only important in terms of keeping with the times, it's also the only way to stay ahead in today's fast paced world. With diversity comes increased collaboration, cross-pollination of ideas, and cross-functional thinking.

So while we may have more nice guys (and gals) in the C-suite going forward, it's not going to be all rainbows and sunshine. Diversity will expand as executives seek disparity in everything, yet strive to maintain tolerance for it all. Living in conflict is not only to be expected, but celebrated.



Implication for C-suite in 2021

The future C-suite will strive to achieve diversity of everything—not only in gender, race, and age, but also in thought, perspective, experience, and chemistry—in an effort to cultivate purposeful conflict and innovative thought. Our experts anticipate that we'll likely see C-suite dynamics become more balanced and representative of the world at large, but possibly more confrontational and conflict-ridden as well. The ability to promote constructive conflict will increasingly be a critical skill for effective C-suite leaders.

Leadership strengths

In 2017, Russell Reynolds Associates and Hogan Assessments will jointly release a new leadership framework for the C-suite. The partnership, built upon a mutual belief that the dynamic nature of the world requires that we find ways to fully measure leadership potential and performance, will allow organizations to understand not only the core capabilities all leaders should have, but also those specific skills necessary to succeed in a C-suite role.

Core Leadership:

Leading a team

Executing for results

Relationships and influence

Setting strategy

C-suite Differentiators:

Heroic *and* vulnerable

Risk-taking *and* reluctant

Galvanizing *and* connecting

Disruptive *and* pragmatic

There is an inherent tension in the C-suite Differentiators. Each of the four pairs contain traits that are naturally at odds with each other: Heroic *and* vulnerable, risk taking *and* reluctant, galvanizing *and* connecting, and disruptive *and* pragmatic. Successful C-suite leaders must be able to span both traits within each pair as they lead their organization, channeling the strengths of each while navigating their inherent weaknesses.

No other factor plays a bigger role in determining the fate of organizations than the quality of their leaders, so understanding and measuring potential for leadership is the utmost priority for winning the war for talent.

- Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, CEO, Hogan Assessments

Four pairs of critical behaviors

The changes identified in this report will require leaders to adapt to a more egalitarian workplace, one where employees are simultaneously purpose-driven and less loyal. This will be a workplace where culture is critical and leaders must be both empowering and approachable, with teams remaining as adaptive as ever. What are some of the leadership traits that will be necessary to successfully navigate this future?

HEROIC AND VULNERABLE

leaders display perseverance in the face of challenges and know their own strengths, yet also are aware of their limitations.



GALVANIZING AND CONNECTING

leaders inspire trust through influence, charisma, and drive, yet also let others take the spotlight and empower others to create powerful networks within and beyond the organization.



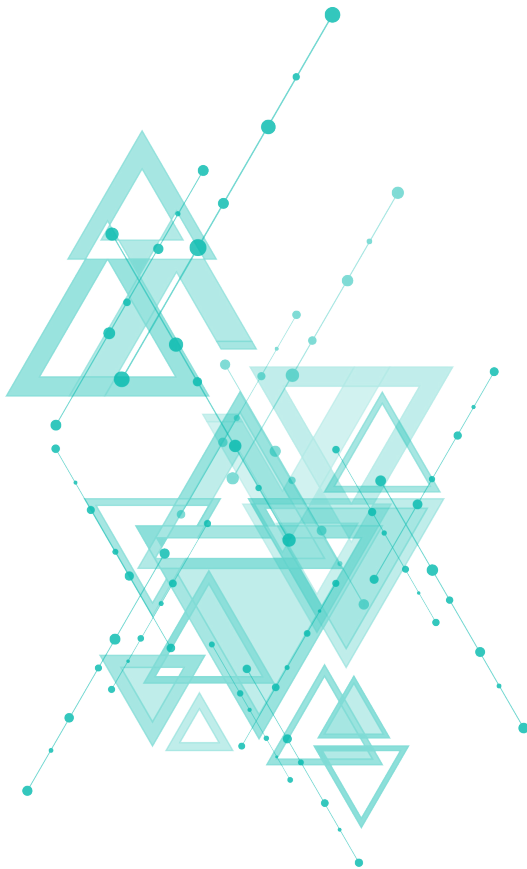
DISRUPTIVE AND PRAGMATIC

leaders challenge the status quo and make the case for fundamental changes, yet also act as an organizational filter during times of volatility and understand the practical limits on the amount of change an organization can absorb.



RISK-TAKING AND RELUCTANT

leaders thrive in ambiguity and adapt nimbly, yet also exercise caution in taking risks and foresee threats of the horizon.



Heroic and vulnerable

The heroic style – characterized by courage, resilience and grit – is necessary for business leaders to be able to enter difficult and unknown situations, but needs to be balanced with vulnerability since overconfidence in unknown situations can yield disastrous results. Vulnerability is a strength and exceptional C-suite leaders are self-aware enough to know when to listen to, and lean on, others.

Vulnerable heroes don't hesitate to lead the charge, but they also understand that they don't have all the answers. They're never paralyzed by indecision, but they're rarely unilateral in action. They engage their teams and seek guidance, but act quickly and decisively in the face of challenging circumstances.



Disruptive and pragmatic

Disruptive leaders see trends and patterns in a way others do not, and have the fortitude and willingness to challenge the status quo. But that is not enough. Exceptional C-suite leaders guide disruptive impact in their organization in a way that is productive and practical.

Pragmatic disruptors innovate and drive change, but they do so in collaboration with their teams. They recognize that bold visions will likely fizzle without the engagement of the broader organization, and they recognize that the perfect is often the enemy of the good.

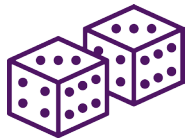




Galvanizing and connecting

The galvanizing leader is charismatic and inspirational – uniquely able to facilitate organizational action and forward momentum. But that is not enough. Exceptional C-suite leaders need to build internal networks, authentically connect with their organizations and drive collaboration. External partnerships and alliances, and less rigid walls between people and organizations, will be critically important for the future.

Galvanizing Connectors build tight-knit teams while also working to connect and engage their teams with a wider ecosystem of internal and external partners. They are highly inclusive but never insular. They build bonds within the team, and build bridges to the team.



Risk-taking and reluctant

The risk-taking leader is adventurous and is comfortable with ambiguity and complexity while remaining optimistic. But that is not enough. Exceptional C-suite leaders need to be appropriately grounded, seek alignment from key individuals and have a very clear sense of both the potential stakes and potential outcomes that come from taking the risk.

Reluctant Risk-Takers are willing to make big bets, but they do so cautiously and with a mature sense of the law of unintended consequences. They are uniquely able to resist trend chasing. They cut through the clutter of competing ideas and take risks where they matter.

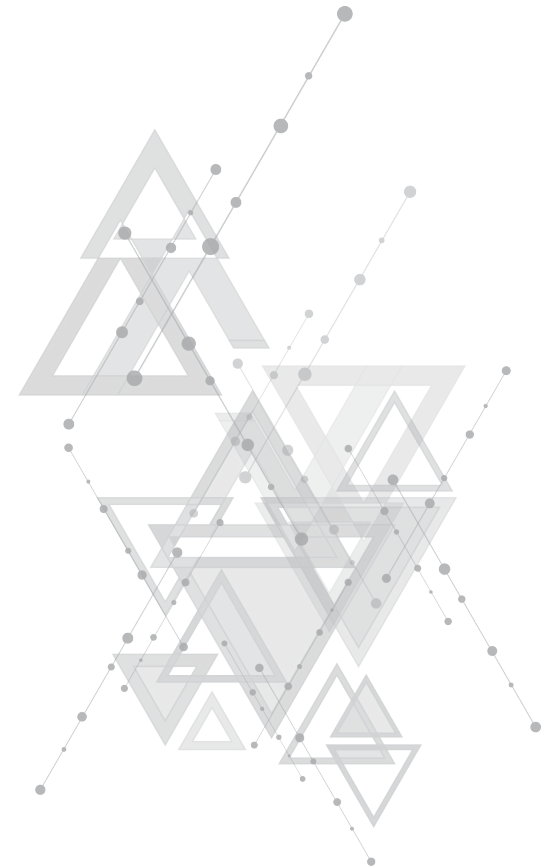
Study background

Russell Reynolds Associates partnered with Trendera, a firm specializing in trend forecasting, cultural analysis, and generational research, to identify trends in the structural and cultural evolution of the C-suite over the next 5 years.

In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the next generation of executives and the C-suite, Trendera conducted a series of comprehensive qualitative interviews among 30 influential executives and thought leaders during August – October 2016.

Participants represented a vast array of industries, including automotive, aviation, communications, consulting, education, healthcare, manufacturing, media, retail, e-commerce, social media, technology, and venture capital. Additionally, to ensure a wide variety of perspectives, concerted efforts were made to recruit executives from a mix of traditional and emerging or disruptive organizations as well those of different ages, experiences, and background.

The full list of executives and thought leaders follows.



Study participants

Adam Grant, Professor at The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania

Allison Kluger, President, Allison Kluger Media Consulting; Co-Instructor, Stanford Business School

Antoine de Saint Affrique, Chief Executive Officer, Barry Callebaut AG

Armando Netto, Chief Executive Officer, FleetCor Technologies, Brazil

Arthur Ochoa, Senior Vice President, Community Relations & Development, Cedars-Sinai Health System

Barry Posner, Professor of Leadership, Santa Clara University

Bob Hogan PhD, Founder, Hogan Assessment Systems

Conrad Bloser, Chief Operating Officer, Lieferheld GmbH

Estanislau Bassols, Chief Executive Officer, VR Beneficios

Executive, Founding Partner, Venture Capital Firm*

Executive, Founder of Multi-Million Dollar e-Commerce Retailer*

Executive, Partnerships Manager at Social Media Company*

Executive, Venture Capital and Private Equity*

Gigi Guerra, Director of Curation and Collaborations, Target

Ian Riley, Vice President, LafargeHolcim

Jan Wilmking, Senior Vice President, Zalando

* Requested to provide insights anonymously.

Study participants

Jim Kouzes, Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University

John Koryl, President, Neiman Marcus

Kate White, Writer and Speaker

Lodro Rinzler, Co-founder and Chief Spiritual Officer, M N D F L

Marcus Buckingham, Founder, The Marcus Buckingham Company

Martin Weissburg, Executive Vice President, AB Volvo

Maxwell Miao, General Manager, ZF-TRW Automotive Holding Company

Prasad Dasika, Senior Vice President, Tata Communications

Ranjan Goswami, Vice President of Sales, Delta Airlines

Reveta Bowers, Former Head of The Center for Early Education

Rob Kaiser, President, Kaiser Leadership Solutions

Ron Sugar, Former CEO, Northrop Grumman Corporation

Sara Sperling, Partner, Oxegen Consulting LLC

Steve Stanford, Senior Vice President of Business Development, Samsung

Russell Reynolds Associates

PJ NEAL manages the RRA Center for Leadership Insight. He oversees the Center's day-to-day operations, as well as planning the Center's research agenda and creating its intellectual property. He is based in Boston.

TODD SAFFERSTONE leads Corporate Partnerships and New Product Development at Russell Reynolds Associates. He is based in New York.

DEAN STAMOULIS leads the RRA Center for Leadership Insight. His consulting work includes advising organizations on CEO succession and selection, as well as leadership team composition and performance. He is based in Atlanta.

Russell Reynolds Associates is a global leader in assessment, recruitment and succession planning for boards of directors, chief executive officers and key roles within the C-suite. With more than 370 consultants in 47 offices around the world, we work closely with public, private and nonprofit organizations across all industries and regions. We help our clients build teams of transformational leaders who can meet today's challenges and anticipate the digital, economic, environmental and political trends that are reshaping the global business environment. Find out more at www.russellreynolds.com. Follow us on Twitter: [@RRAonLeadership](https://twitter.com/RRAonLeadership)



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