

CXOs In The Age Of Machines

We have had raging debates on CXOs of the future and with a good reason as well, as Boards and investors are grappling with an increasingly dynamic and complex business environment. Relevance of ‘relevant’ experience in a domain or a sector is no fool-proof method for success in the future as the marketplace is rapidly changing. But a few attributes have remained constant even in the so called ‘age of machines’. Success or failure of an organisation is a direct outcome of the ability of CXOs to maximize the human capital at his / her disposal.

To understand the radical shift in terms of the profile of a modern day CXO, it is important to rewind the clock a bit to see what worked then and what will work in the future. Here are some of the key take-ways from our experience of recruiting leaders over the past 30 years and our ongoing conversations with Boards, Investors and CXOs themselves.

- Personal integrity, respect for people and commitment to the spoken and written word are never out of fashion and are in fact defining attributes which shape a leader and an organisation. Businesses are under increasing scrutiny from regulators, investors, media and other such stakeholders, both internal and external. CXOs have to ‘walk the talk’ and be the role models.
- Modern day CXOs should have the ability to manage multiple stakeholder relationships ranging from people of the baby boomer generation to the millennials. This calls for a high degree of empathy and emotional maturity to interact with and understand various cross sections of employees and customers.
- A dynamic business environment shaped by technology and digital disruption irrespective of the industry calls for CXOs who are comfortable with a constant state of flux. Mental agility to shape and reshape thought processes in a short span of time will be critical for continued success.
- In the mumbo-jumbo of technology led disruption and agility, the value of ‘old-fashioned’ attention to detail and execution is not lost. Successful CXOs will continue to focus on outcome led robust execution.
- A fast paced business environment is also challenging and physically demanding. It takes a toll on the longevity and effectiveness of CXOs. It is imperative that the CXOs focus on their physical well-being which in turn directly impacts mental agility. Clean habits and fitness are increasingly important attributes for a successful CXO.
- A changing business environment may lead to an assumption that successful organisations have shorter CXO tenures. On the contrary, some of the most successful CEOs have had long tenures in their organisation and many a time have worked their way to the top. While this is a double edged sword, here is where Boards can play a critical role through continuous constructive challenge of the CEO and ensuring that he/she is up to speed and continues to deliver.



- For search firms today, in a connected environment, candidate discovery is the easier part of the search process. In a dynamic market, the successful search firm is one that stays agile in tracking & extrapolating market trends. Successful search consultants spend more time engaging with CXOs to understand their key motivation and success drivers. The search process now is more focused on ‘hiring for success’ and firms including ours have developed proprietary tools backed by years of research to deep dive into candidate behaviour and understand not only their ability to fit the ‘here and now’ aspects of the role but also their ability to change tack successfully as the role expectations change and morph rapidly - which they most certainly will..

However, there is no standard recipe for a blockbuster CXO!! Even in the age of machines, the value of human relationships will continue to be the bedrock for success.

