

# Game Changer Leadership Roles In The New Context

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## Introduction: A Changing Scenario

While the world is progressing through the pandemic environment, observers around the world are trying to figure out the coherence between ‘new normal’ and evolving uncertainties. While we await highly effective treatments and vaccines, the world is trying to come to terms with operating and living with the virus.

Businesses have been impacted quite significantly due to the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19. Many of them have had to scale down operations to adjust to shrinking demand, lockdowns, shifting consumer behaviors, and spending. At Stanton Chase, we have been tracking this topic closely.

In our recently released COVID-19 India leadership survey [report](#), we found that the pandemic impacted most companies across sectors.

Organizations have been forced to innovate new ways of operating for stakeholders across the spectrum to stay relevant.

Our [report](#) also highlighted the disruptions in business areas like operations, supply chain, finance, and hiring. The trend indicated that the companies would start hiring once the pandemic situation eases. During this period, it is extremely important for organizations to gauge future talent requirements and understand the impact of a strategic, differentiated [hiring approach](#).

Organizations that are proactive on strategic leadership acquisition tend to be a few steps ahead of the competition. Increasingly, we notice three critical game changer areas of strategic leadership acquisition for businesses in India. These areas, which clearly emerged from our survey results, discussions with clients, and market reviews, are strategy, digitalization, and supply chain.

The demand for highly competent and experienced leadership during increasingly uncertain and virtual environments become even higher. Changes in the work environment and employment pattern have clearly resulted in the need for advanced leadership with agility and ability to lead effectively through uncertainty in a virtual environment, with high trust and emotional intelligence.

## Three Potential Game Changer Roles

The need for stakeholder-focused boards and executives has never been higher. Based on the areas observed, we think three leadership roles would stand out and give companies a distinct advantage ahead of the competition: Chief Digital Officer, Chief Strategy Officer, and Head of Supply Chain. These roles and functions have existed in some organizations, but with the change in context due to the pandemic, organizations may find increased value in revisiting the roles and reassessing leadership talent for the new environment. We also expect that these leaders will be more active in the boardroom, bringing in their diverse experience and decision-making skill for expert advice and meaningful contributions.

### Chief Digital Officer:

Organizations are shifting toward digitalization with new work arrangements, unveiling distinctive challenges for Chief Digital Officers (CDOs) and an organization's functions. The CDO holds the responsibility of leading the business's digital transformation initiative while working closely with the CEO and leadership team to help create a response to the crisis. The current pandemic environment has created a great opportunity for CDOs to demonstrate agility and adaptability by reshaping the digital environment for businesses to survive and thrive.

The current crisis has compelled companies to test new channels and communications to deliver improved customer experience. CDOs need to help institute a combination of technology and talent capabilities to understand in real time what's working and what's not.

The CDO role will be more meaningful than ever in the new context. It is no longer considered merely a technical function working in silo with limited scope but rather a business role with a larger mandate with a tangible impact on revenue. The CDO has to deeply understand the various elements of the business and digitally integrate the internal and external ecosystems and stakeholder systems seamlessly, thereby providing value to all stakeholders and preparing the organization to navigate disruptions.

## Chief Strategy Officer:

The strategy function has evolved and attracted many former management consultants into corporate jobs. This role is also a relatively new addition to the leadership team. The Chief Strategy Officer helps the organization understand major evolving trends, see beyond the obvious, find blue oceans, navigate uncertainty, and enable the business to thrive in an uncertain world.

CSOs play a critical role in managing effectively through a downturn and turning challenges into opportunities. They ideally establish and work through an effective strategy management office to plan, communicate, translate, align strategy, develop

scorecards, coordinate, and track progress across the organization. CSOs also play a significant role in leading discussions on risk assessment and business continuity planning. In an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, it becomes imperative to assess risk. Organizations will need to do more reality checks through honest and robust conversations about risk and preparedness. For the CSO role to be effective, the board and CEO also have to be clear about the expectations of the role.

## Chief Supply Chain Officer:

The pandemic has forced many enterprises to pivot sharply as they struggled with supply chain disruptions. With geopolitical shifts, for many organizations (especially those in manufacturing), supply chains have become a major topic of focus. According to Bain & Company, companies that invest in supply chain resilience reduce product development cycles by 40% to 60%. By optimizing operation and having flexible supply chain processes in place, companies can expand output capacity 15% to 25%. This emphasizes the increasing importance and complexity for leaders in supply chain management.

Supply chain leaders who are better prepared than others to mitigate the COVID-19 impact have diversified their supply chains from a geographic perspective to reduce the supply-side risks from any one country or region. They have also reduced their reliance on any one supplier and proactively revisited inventory strategy to manage disruption. The foresight to sense an environment and invest in supply chain solutions to realize, respond, and even predict supply chain issues will help leaders bring their organizations to the forefront.

## CSO, CDO, and Supply Chain Leadership Roles Are Game Changers In The New Context

### Chief Strategy Officer

1

- Bring strategy to top of the executive agenda
- Lead executives in strategically sound directions
- Revisit assumptions, support to shape the future
- Bring corporate and business unit strategies together, logical resource allocation

### Chief Digitalization Officer

2

- Influence business model transformation
- Recraft digital strategy
- Redefine product road map
- Redefine customer reach and engagement
- Ensure seamless digital experience

### Chief Supply Chain Officer

3

- Adapt supply chain to changing customer, stakeholder expectations, and geopolitical trends
- Integrate new reality and digital technologies (IoT, smart sensors, cloud solutions, machine learning, mobility) for higher order outcomes

While some or all of these roles may have existed within organizations, the pandemic situation has led to a new context for these key leadership roles, as well.

## Continuous Evolution

We are already witnessing these areas and leadership roles receive increasing attention from CEOs and boards. The urgency of the current environment and the need to resolve related problems are hastening this process. In the new normal, organizations may also need to reassess their organizational structures, existing leadership capabilities, and talent pools (internally and externally) with a view to succession planning. Some companies may realize that they may need to rebuild or transform these functions in the new world.

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“For a CEO’s profile in today’s world, digital transformation competence and experience is becoming non-negotiable. From a global perspective, there is an increased emphasis for these areas of digitalization, strategy, and supply chain across sectors.”

**Flemming Riber**, Vice Chairman – Practice Groups, Stanton Chase Secretary

## Stanton Chase Global Perspectives

We see increasing demand globally and across almost all sectors for leaders who understand the digital conversion of businesses. Initiatives in digitalization, robotics, and automation are helping businesses become more efficient and increase their market share. Many organizations are looking outside their own industries for digital talent. For example, as part of the transformation and improving their digital footprint, a large company in the shipping industry hires leaders with digital competencies from other sectors like telecom. With respect to supply chain, companies with facilities in

other countries are implementing digital solutions to track, manage closely, and increase speed of operations. A leader must understand all the interconnectors in depth and how to apply them effectively.

Within an organization, when these areas gel and leaders work closely in an aligned manner, the potential to lead and thrive in the new normal grows exponentially.

# Aftermath of COVID-19 on Indian businesses:



## Key trends observed:

- » Board functions / operations – moving towards virtual / digital platforms & solutions
- » Spike in 3 critical leadership hiring – strategy / digital / supply chain
- » Talent / leadership development
- » Increased customer engagement / digitalization efforts



## Top attributes of a leader that help organizations in times of crisis

- » Emotional intelligence / empathy
- » Resilience
- » Decision making
- » Communication
- » Agility
- » Confidence and optimism



## COVID-19 changed the course of companies annual operating plan for the upcoming financial year

- » Companies are inclined towards IT/digitalization and customer engagement initiatives for investing
- » Business expansion plans are held off for the time being

## Leadership team and board members fostering the same agenda in time of crisis

- » Employee & organization safety
- » Remote working arrangements
- » Constant communication with employees and stakeholders
- » Cash conservation and cashflow management

55.7%

see either an increase or no change in employee productivity while working remotely



## Top 3 challenges faced by organizations



81.01%

struggling with supply chain / inventory management



78.48%

trying to cope with operational/production challenges



69.62%

facing cashflow challenges

## Emerging investment priorities



75.95%

prioritizing the investment in IT / digitalization



56.96%

believe in investing more towards people and leadership



65.82%

find business continuity plan / risk management as the another area to focus on

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[Download the whole report here](#)

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## About the Authors:



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