

Collaboration is key to creating a successful C-suite

The [2018 Deloitte Human Capital Trends report](#) found that the number one human capital issue identified by 51% of 11,000 respondents was 'C-suite collaboration'. Essentially, 'Cs' (high-ranking executives or chief officers) can no longer work in silos; to move beyond survival toward competing in a fast-paced, evolving world of work, organisations have to become agile and to collaborate more effectively. Deloitte calls this trend a 'symphonic C-suite': gone are solo Cs; cross-functional 'collabs' in flat organisational structures are the order of tomorrow. Like an orchestra performing in harmony.



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Despite the majority of survey participants being aware of the need for C-suite collaboration, a surprising 73% of respondents said they rarely see C-suite leaders working together. Suffice to say there's going to be a lot of change and disruption at the top before traditional hierarchies topple. That's going to entail Cs collaborating with other leaders, building cross-functional teams, decentralising decision-making and inviting all team members to contribute to a shared overarching strategy. Are our Cs prepared? Perhaps not.

Bianca Solomon, USB-ED human capital manager says, "The underpinning skill required for cross-functional collaboration is team cohesion. This requires personal and peer leadership to be leveraged and for c-suite teams to recognise and stimulate an appetite for broader commercial perspectives beyond their areas of deep specialty. Team development may play a meaningful role herein as the tools available today can effectively enhance the quality of relationships, rapport, and the resultant collaboration that it invariably fosters."

What happens if they don't adapt?

- Without agility, organisations will struggle to keep up and stay relevant. This means building nimbleness into a company's culture through continuous communication and – you guessed it – collaboration. Agile teams can only operate in agile organisations.

- Deep skills in completely new territories – like data analytics, artificial intelligence and robotic process automation (RPA) – are going to need to be acquired fast. To manage this, cross-collaboration will be key in order for different talents to work together to overcome gaps. Plus, Cs will need to be adept at finding and attracting the talent they need. And they'll need to provide ongoing learning opportunities for their employees. Without a constant succession pipeline of talent, a business' longevity is at risk.
- Finally, if organisations don't flatten their structures, only a select few can make decisions and that slows a company down. How slow can organisations really afford to be in a time of automated-everything and a race to get ideas to market? Answer: The tortoise loses from 2018 on.

So what skills do Cs need going forwards?

- **Millennials matter:** More millennials are stepping into C roles and there's rising recognition of collaboration as critical. This isn't a surprising correlation. Millennials seem to naturally gravitate to a more collaborative approach so it's important to encourage and groom this attribute in upcoming leaders.
- **A talent for talent:** Cs will also need to find and assess talent using all the tools at their disposal. Managing talent will be a different experience given the gig economy. How do you manage a workforce that is predominantly outsourced? Solomon says, "By working collaboratively to understand cross-functional contributions to the organisations holistic vision, executives may play a pivotal role in articulating what good looks like in a talent profile. Leadership development becomes a complementary means of capacitating them to manage talent in modern and unconventional ways which are much needed for the modern work environment."
- **Influence is important:** A strong vision and suite of soft skills will be imperative for leaders to earn followership. Cs will need to open channels of communication and invite perspectives that differ from their own.
- **Consistent performance is key:** McKinsey identified that stability is essential for agility. Businesses that consistently perform and have the foundations in place have better success with introducing agile attributes and teams. Cs need to be exceptional in their areas of expertise; this allows more openness to disruption.
- **The Netflix factor:** Stanford recently [wrote about Netflix's dynamic model](#), firstly looking at the 'Freedom and Responsibility' aspect, which allows for 'distributed decision-making' which lets lower-ranking managers make big decisions to enable the company to move forward fast. Secondly, there's openness and constant communication with the board, which attends monthly meetings with senior managers. Plus they read through 30-page, in-depth memos in advance so they're really ready for the get-togethers. The lesson for Cs? Delegate decision-making, make information transparent and accessible, get the 'board on-board', and seriously prep for meetings.
- **Go flat:** Flatter structures have multiple implications for Cs. As new roles come to the fore, others are becoming increasingly outdated. For example, a Chief Digital Officer is 'the new' Chief Information Officer. New roles mean top leaders will probably have more direct reports, which means ensuring everyone feels empowered to make decisions and contribute to the greater strategy. Cs need to ensure people have daily targets to work towards in line with the overarching strategy, plus shared processes and tools so everyone is working from the same blueprint.
- **Collaboration:** We've covered this but Cs have to put egos aside and work together to ensure a company's ongoing

success.

- **Finally, Cs need to learn fast:** From managing digital change to placing transformation firstly on the talent agenda, there's a lot Cs need to know how to do. This means continuous executive education is imperative to keep bridging core capability gaps.

"Executives need to capacitate themselves with continuous professional development in varied ways. Ideally they need to incorporate new, current thinking about their field and its related disciplines. Working as a symphonic suite means that the opportunity to cross pollinate learnings can be implemented more effectively as knowledge sharing and insights are readily exchanged within their multi-disciplinary Exco teams," Solomon concludes.

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