

Younger at Start-Up Helm; Number of CEOs in India Under 40 Up in 5 Years

At new-age companies and startups, the datasets indicate that executives below 40 often run the show whereas at NSE 500 firms, a typical Indian CEO today is 57 years old. Data sourced from Prime Database showed that the number of CEOs under 40 is on the rise over the past five years. From 15 CEOs in 2020, the number of C-suite occupants aged 40 and below has risen to 25.

Companies: Pursuit of Profit > 13

Old is Gold, but New-age Cos Prefer Younger CEOs

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Kiran Kabtta Somvanshi

ET Intelligence Group: Deloitte India's move last month to send 35 senior partners above the age of 55 into golden sunset stoked a debate whether India Inc was waking up to ageism. But soon after, more column inches were also spent defending the 'age is just a number' view when a 40-plus fit and hungry Rohan Bopanna, chest-bumping with his doubles partner, lifted a grand slam title Down Under to demonstrate the 'tenuous' link between age and performance.

Where exactly do India's biggest companies stand on this

seemingly never-ending debate on the shades of grey? Well, the datasets indicate below-40 executives often run the show at new-age companies and startups, with large and complex firms relying instead largely on battle-hardened corporate veterans who have negotiated multiple business cycles.

In NSE-500 companies, a typical Indian CEO today is 57 years old. That age profile is roughly similar with data on C-suite occupancy for Fortune-500 firms, where the average age of the top executive is 57.7 years.

That's only half the story, though. Data sourced from Prime Database also showed the number of CEOs under 40 is also on a rise over the past five years. From 15 CEOs in 2020, the number of C-suite occupants aged 40 and below has risen to 25.

This apparent dichotomy is best explained by the layers of complexity demanded by the

YOUNGEST

Age

Shikhar Aggarwal, 32, joint MD, BLS International Services

Abhyuday Jindal, 34 MD, Jindal Stainless

Sudarshan Venu, 34 MD, TVS Motor Co

Gautam Saraogi, 35, ED & CEO, Go Fashion (India)

Madhav Krishna Singhania, 35, Dy MD & CEO, JK Cement

Dr Abhinay Bollineni, 35, CEO, Krishna Institute Of Medical Sciences

Captains of NSE-500 Companies



OLDEST

Mohan Anand Chandavarkar, 87, MD, FDC International Services

Mahaveerprasad Surajmal Taparia, 86, MD, Supreme Industries

Nellore Radhakrishna Reddy, 82, MD, Rain Industries

Shri Paul Oswal, 81, CMD, Vardhman Textiles

Dr Lalit Kumar Khaitan, 80, CMD, Radico Khaitan

Source: primeinfobase.com

VIKASH

job – and the life-cycle and size of the employer: With an increasing share of startups and new-age companies in the \$4-trillion economy, both sets of professionals will be in demand, say experts.

"To be fair, larger companies are more complex and need to

deal with the risk of volatility. Therefore, the experience of the CEO begins to count as the stakes are very high," said Ramesh Puri, managing director, Executive Access, a leading search firm. "In startups and new-age companies, there will be preference for younger CE-

Os because of the dynamic nature and demands of a new-age business," he said.

ABILITY TO ADD VALUE

The average age of a typical CEO is also a function of longer tenures and the ability to stay relevant and valuable to a board or company promoter.

"This is bound to happen as the longevity and health of the people improve. They will be able to work longer and the average age of CEOs, generally, will steadily go up," said corporate governance professional V. Ranganathan, who is an independent director on the boards of four companies. "Parallely, there are new companies coming into the system and they are bound to have young people in their management teams. So, while the old economy companies will have more senior people, the new economy companies such as startups, fintech etc. will have younger CEOs."

According to Ranganathan, there is a third category of regulated companies that may have to follow the mandatory age limits for the CEO. For instance, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has fixed the maximum age of the CEO of a private sector bank at 70 years. Similarly, in case of promoter-driven companies, the appointment of the CEO tends to be a family's decision, with little or no intervention from independent directors.

Data on both the youngest and oldest CEOs of Indian companies showed that executives matching the extremities of the age profile occupy the C-suite predominantly at promoter-driven companies and startups. For instance, 36-year-old Karan Adani is the CEO of Adani Ports & SEZ. Similarly, 39-year-old Sahil Barua is the co-founder & CEO of the recently listed startup unicorn, Delhivery.

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