

Next In Boardroom Evolution—Survival of the Specialist

India Inc biggies hiring super-specialist COOs, CMOs, CTOs to help corner-room incumbents navigate emerging challenges

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Mumbai: Super-specialists had replaced general physicians at the top of the healthcare pyramid decades ago. In the world of pin-striped suits, too, they are making their presence count—right at the very top of the hierarchy.

As the world seeks to hurdle the steepest trade barriers in more than a century through unprecedented AI-spawned disruptions, the biggest names in India Inc—Bajaj Finserv, Godfrey Phillips, Microsoft, Tata Technologies, TCS and Zomato—are joining peers in hiring super-specialist COOs, CMOs and CTOs to help corner-room incumbents navigate emerging challenges that threaten the survival of even the best in business.

These companies, which lead their respective industries, geographies or product categories, say it has become impractical for a CEO to oversee every function

owing to rapid technological shifts, global market complexities, and intricate supply chains.

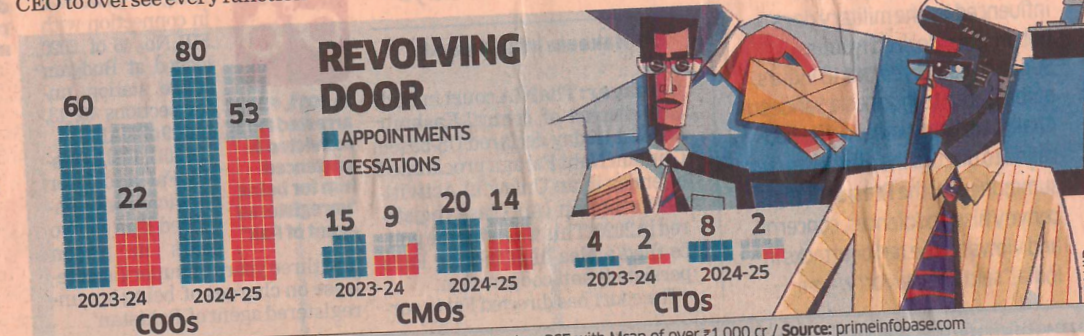
“Operational complexities have increased significantly in recent times, with many corporations

diversifying to mitigate business risks,” said KBS Anand, an independent director on various company boards.

“Consequently, business structures have grown larger and more

intricate. It is no longer feasible for a single individual to oversee every aspect of operations.”

C-suite movements—especially of COOs, CMOs, and CTOs—have recorded a surge since 2024. The last fiscal year saw a record 80 new COO appointments.



NOTE: Data for all cos listed on NSE and also those exclusively listed on BSE with Mcap of over ₹1,000 cr / Source: primeinfobase.com

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Incoming CEOs Seek Iron-Clad Contracts

Incoming CEOs are actively negotiating contracts to secure their interests, as a growing perform-or-perish culture raises the stakes for top leaders, report **Sreeradha Basu & Maulik Vyas** ▶ 8

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This was up from 60 in FY24, while COO exits more than doubled from 22 to 53, according to Primeinfobase.com estimates, highlighting the intense pressures and rapid strategy shifts at the operational helm of leading listed companies.

Delegating key responsibilities allows CEOs to concentrate on strategic priorities, industry officials said.

“The way of doing business has fundamentally changed,” Anand said.

The marketing vertical in India saw several movements at the very top. CMO appointments climbed to 20 in FY25, up from 15 in the previous year, showing the growing importance of market positioning and customer engagement in navigating the current economic headwinds.

For instance, Microsoft appointed Himani Agrawal as COO, LTI Mindtree appointed Nachiket Deshpande as COO, TCS appointed Aarthi Subrama-

nian as COO, while Swiggy appointed Sairam Krishnamurthy as COO, among several such similar appointments across India Inc.

As business operations grow more complex, companies could look at dividing leadership responsibilities between the CEO and COO. The CEO would tend to focus on strategic, mid to long-term issues, while the COO would manage the day-to-day operations. This is a growing trend, notes Rajiv Dube, a veteran board director with extensive experience at Tata and Aditya Birla Group.

Dube also points out that roles like chief technology officer and chief marketing officer have always existed under a different nomenclature and at different levels of organisations.

Today, these roles are much more comprehensive and form part of the top executive leadership.

These shifts signal a broader transformation in corporate leadership strategies as companies adapt to rapid changes in market conditions, consumer behaviour, and technological disruption, industry experts said.