

The call for expansive leaders in India



// Have you ever wondered about the definition of leadership – not just an academic definition but what it truly means for you? For the business? And... for the broader ecosystem?

Leadership is evolving and in this new age, leadership has become “expansive”. What this means is thinking about the enterprise and not just a singular business function, thinking holistically about talent and not just team management, having the promoter mindset and not just an employee frame of mind, agility to learn fast, act swiftly and navigate an increasingly nuanced business environment, having purpose, authenticity and empathy... and, perhaps most important of all – **being human!**

Pankaj Gupta
Partner, Heidrick Consulting



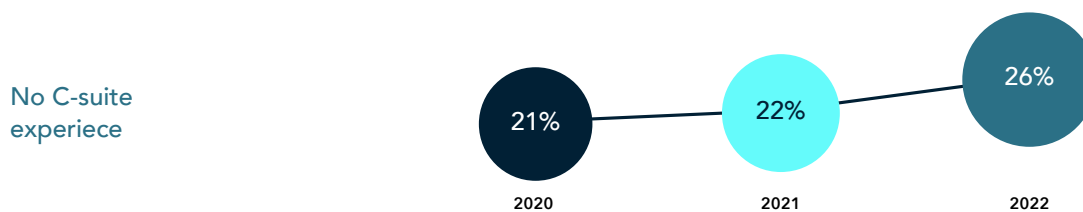
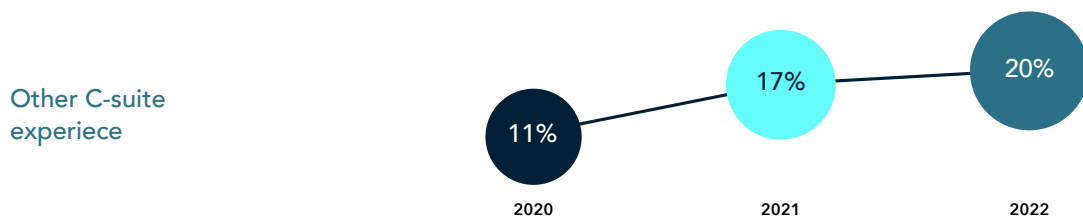
Challenges keeping leaders in the region awake at night



In 2022, our Heidrick & Struggles' Route to the Top report found that there was an increase in the share of all CEOs with more varied experiences, diverging from the traditional CEO or CFO roles.¹ Instead, their experiences more frequently include roles such as head of division, regional leader, and general manager. Over the years, companies are increasingly on the lookout for executives with different backgrounds as their varied skillsets helps them meet the new demands of a CEO.

As the role of the CEO becomes more complex and demanding, the CEO today needs to be resilient and ready for anything - from dealing with crises to empowering employees to navigating the changing expectations of boards and a growing range of other stakeholders.

Type of prior C-suite experience, all CEOs, 2020-2022 (%)



1. For more, see Route to the Top 2022, Heidrick & Struggles, November 11, 2022, heidrick.com

Here are **five ecosystem trends** that have caused the role of the leader to expand.

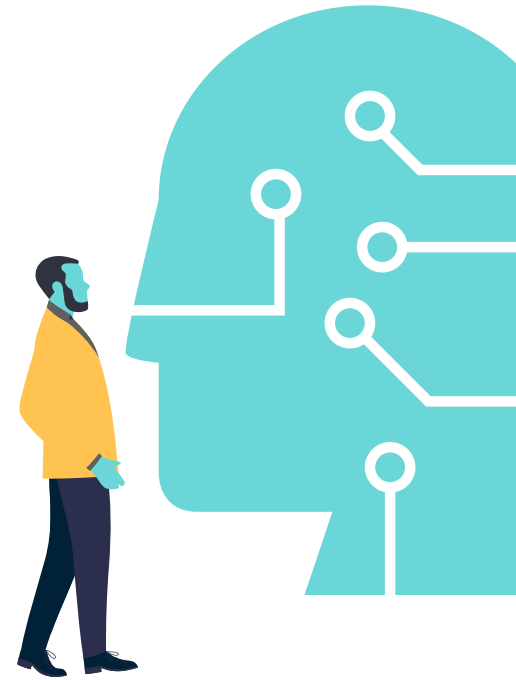
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Technological advancements

From artificial intelligence to automation, and data analytics, the evolution of technology has mandated leaders to transform their business models, strategies, operations – the list goes on. For all sectors including traditional ones, technology is no longer a “good to have”. It is core to their strategy and day-to-day action.



75%
of CEOs believe the organisations with the most advanced generative AI have a competitive advantage.²



02

Evolving customer demands

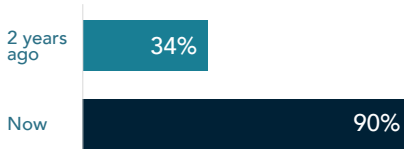
Alongside the growth in technology, customer expectations have also risen. Both B2B and B2C now have more options, and higher than ever expectations on customisation, speed and support.

Gen X consumers’ preference to shop for sustainable brands increased by nearly 25% and their willingness to pay more for sustainable products increased by 42%. Just two years ago, only 58% of consumers across all generations were willing to spend more for sustainable options.

Today, nearly 90% of Gen X consumers said that they would be willing to spend an extra 10% or more for sustainable products, compared to just over 34% two years ago.³



Gen X consumers willing to spend an extra 10% or more for sustainable products



03

Geopolitical and economic uncertainty

Geopolitical events and economic volatility call for leaders to navigate risks and develop contingency plans. Diversification strategy is now as important as cost optimisation. “China plus one” is the new guiderail for organisations across sectors.



2. IBM Institute for Business Value, CEO decision-making in the age of AI, June 2023, ibm.com

3. Forbes, Consumers Demand Sustainable Products And Shopping Formats, 2022, forbes.com

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Changing workforce dynamic

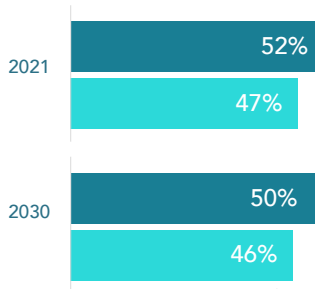
The workforce composition has evolved with multiple generations coexisting and diverse perspectives becoming more valued.

The COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic preferences also necessitated leaders to navigate unprecedented challenges such as managing virtual teams, maintaining employee well-being, and ensuring productivity in a remote work environment.

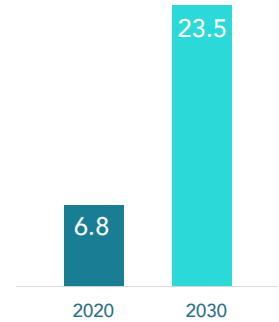
As of 2021, India's share of millennials and Gen Z stood at 52%, higher than the global average of 47%, which stated that the trend is expected to maintain momentum till 2030, where the share of India's Gen Z and Millennial population will be 50%, higher than the world average of 46%.⁴

The Indian gig workforce is also rising, As of 2020, there were 6.8 million gig workers in India, making up 1.3% of the total workforce. By 2030, this number is projected to grow to 23.5 million workers, or 4.1% of the workforce.⁵

India's share of millennials and Gen Z
■ India ■ Global



Indian gig workers (million)



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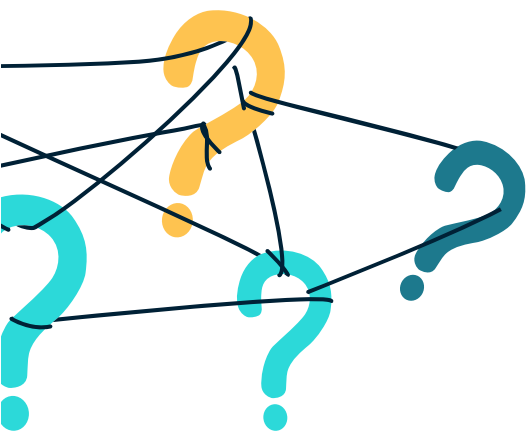
Ecosystem complexity

There has been increased diversification, partnership between competing and adjacent players, and increased investment by conglomerates and big tech. The business landscape is affected by the overlaps in areas of work, markets, customers and competition, increasing complexities across levels. Defining the contours of partnerships and at times even sales, is more challenging than ever.



Jio Platforms has raised **\$20 billion**

from digital giants like Google and Meta (Facebook) and leading technology innovators like Qualcomm and Intel. These giants, in turn, provide their services using Jio Platforms at prices suitable for the mass market in India.⁶



4. Nasscom, Gen Z And Millennials: Reshaping The Future Of Workforce, 2022, nasscom.in
 5. Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, India's Gig Workers Strike, Push for Better Wages, 2023, asiapacific.ca
 6. Harvard Business Review, How Working with Competitors Made Jio a Telecom Giant, 2021, hbr.org

What is an expansive leader?

Being an expansive leader refers to having an inclusive, collaborative, open-minded, enterprise level thinking mindset to leadership.



The Heidrick & Struggles leadership framework, which was defined through deep research in FT500 companies, found 11 drive factors which strongly correlated to the success of the “Super Accelerators” setting them apart from the rest. However, the relative ranking of which drive factors have most impact on successful leaders have evolved dramatically post COVID – We can see Adaptability has moved up 7 places and shaping strategy 3 places amongst our 11 drive factors.

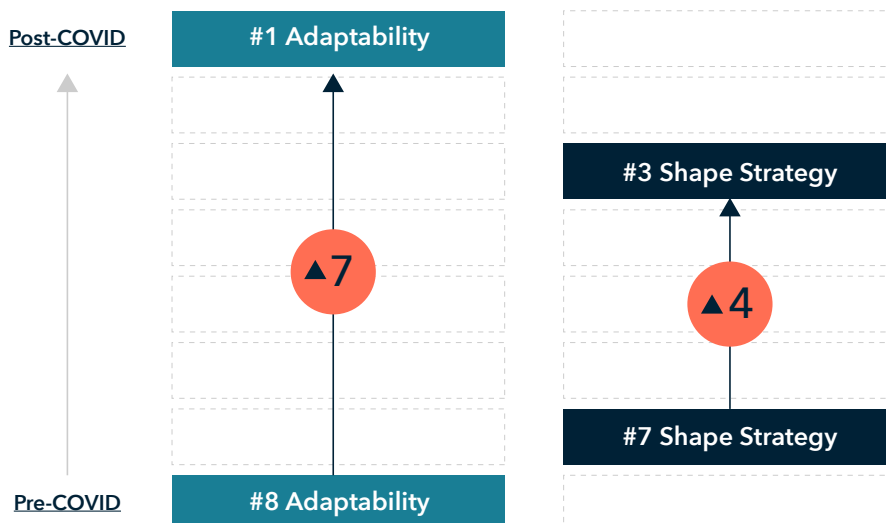
Thus, leaders today are expected to adapt and transform existing ways of thinking and perceiving the world, enabling individuals to question assumptions, embrace new perspectives. It requires open-mindedness, critical thinking, and a willingness to challenge and expand one's ingrained beliefs and assumptions to carry out their duties effectively.



73%

of employees who say they work at a purpose-driven company feel engaged, compared with just 23% of those who do not.⁷

How measures of successful leaders in APAC have evolved



7. For more, see Sense of Purpose: A Beacon in the Search for Talent, 2020, heidrick.com

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Such a leader encourages diversity of thought, actively seeks out new opportunities, and is willing to adapt and evolve in response to changing circumstances. When these leaders hire, they hire for the organisation (not just a role/ team). When they see P&L, they think and act as the owner.

The principles of expansive leadership are relevant to all levels of leadership, not just those in the C-suite. From top executives to mid-level managers, team leads, and even project coordinators, expansive leadership can foster a culture of inclusivity, innovation, and adaptability.

By practicing expansive leadership, leaders at all levels can encourage diverse perspectives, promote continuous learning, and facilitate the growth and development of their teams, which can lead to increased engagement, creativity, and overall organisational effectiveness.



93%

of executives in countries around the world said that diversity, equity, and inclusion are more important to their company in 2022 than at the beginning of 2020.⁸



When was the last time you did something for the first time? As functional knowledge keeps on increasing, select leaders remember this question.

Functional knowledge is important but it is only one of the variables, in the leadership equation. There are several other transferable skillsets, which make a winner in the C-suite. In the work Heidrick & Struggles does with leaders, we found many successful CEOs who have limited or no prior exposure to the sector they are currently in. The commonality and light house that helps guide these leaders and ensure they remain effective even in new environments is agility.”

Charul Madan
Partner, Technology & Services Practice, Heidrick & Struggles



8. For more, see Employees at the Center: What It Takes to Lead on DE&I Now, Heidrick & Struggles, September 22, 2022, heidrick.com

Essential skills for expansive leaders

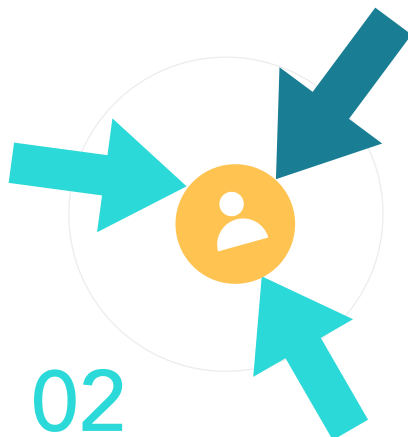


What does it take for a leader to be expansive? There are many skillsets but below are the top six which we found to be most pertinent.

01

Ecosystem leadership vs functional leadership

Emphasise ecosystem leadership over functional silos to gain a holistic understanding of the entire business ecosystem. Break down barriers between departments and collaborate across the organisation, leveraging synergies for greater efficiency and innovation. Recognise the interconnectedness of various functions and focus on driving collective success rather than individual achievements.



02

Ownership

Embrace a customer-centric mindset and go beyond the confines of your specific area of expertise. Take personal responsibility for the overall health of the business by thinking strategically and aligning your actions with the organisation's broader goals.

03

Navigation – compete vs partnership and much more

Skilfully navigate the complex landscape of competition and collaboration. While competition is essential, fostering strategic partnerships and alliances can significantly expand market reach and drive innovation. Leaders must discern when to compete, when to collaborate, and how to leverage these approaches to stay competitive and agile in the ever-changing business environment.



Should a sales lead also think about customer support and service, and marketing promises to the consumer?



Should a private label by a horizontal eCommerce platform, sell on other platforms?

04

“Levelling up” the game

Embrace a continuous improvement mindset, consistently pushing the boundaries of what is possible. Encourage a culture of innovation and experimentation at both the team and organisational levels. Seek opportunities to optimise performance, streamline processes, and stay ahead in a competitive landscape.

? Are you asking the question - What percentage of the revenue/ profits are being spent on innovation, and how?



05

Leader as “chief talent officer”

Assume the role of a “chief talent officer.” Invest in talent development, nurture growth, and place people in roles that match their strengths. Be part of problem solving for talent development rather than having only HR involvement.

“For me as a leader, my number one priority is to hire and build and develop the best team in the industry...Because if I get that right, then the other goals pretty much fall in line along the way. Strategy, people will figure it out. Execution will happen if you have a very driven and committed team. Customers will love working with you if you have great people and great leaders on the bus.”⁹

Amit Chopra

Managing Director, India & South Asia
Thermo Fisher Scientific

06

Learning ability

The rapidly changing business environment has demanded that leaders be more agile and adaptable than ever. Enable faster decision-making, often in situations characterised by high levels of uncertainty. Cultivate a continuous learning mindset by regularly seeking feedback, updating skills, and adapt to new situations to stay agile and effective.

93%

of executives surveyed said agility is critical to business strategy.

94%

of executives surveyed said new ways of working is critical to business strategy.¹⁰



As leaders chart on their path to being more expansive, they may want to keep in mind that while the goalpost is known, the process moves continuously and in thoughtful steps. In this journey, progress happens with a combination of self-awareness, an ecosystem of thought partners & mentors and a focused set of actions.

9. For more, see Interview with Amit Chopra, managing director, India & South Asia, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Heidrick & Struggles, heidrick.com

10. For more, see Agility for the long term, Heidrick & Struggles, heidrick.com

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