

# Chief Strategy Officer

## Skills, Experience & Necessary Traits

A good CSO candidate should be:

- **Deeply trusted by the CEO** – CSOs are often given carte blanche to tackle companywide challenges and seize new business opportunities, so there must be a strong bond of trust between the strategy chief and the CEO. A long professional and personal history between them isn't absolutely necessary – but it helps.
- **A matter of multitasking** – Our survey revealed that CSOs are responsible for upward of ten major business functions and activities, as diverse and demanding as M & A, competitive analysis and market research, and long-range planning. CSOs therefore must be capable of switching between environments and activities without losing speed.
- **A jack of all trades** – Less than one-fifth of our survey respondents spent the bulk of their careers (pre-CSO) on strategic planning. Most reported significant line-management and functional experience in disparate areas, including technology management, marketing, and operations.
- **A star player** – Most CSOs can point to impressive business results earlier in their careers. They usually view the strategy role as a launching pad, not a landing pad.
- **A doer, not just a thinker** – CSOs split their time almost evenly between strategy development and execution, but their bias is toward the latter. “Every company already has a strategy,” says Krishnan Rajagopalan, of Heidrick & Struggles. “CEOs are looking for a leader who can help implement it, not just refine it.”
- **The guardian of horizon two** – Senior teams generally have a good handle on short- and long-term issues. The medium term, that period from one to four years out, can fall through the cracks, however. CSOs must be able to refocus the organization's attention on horizon two, the critical period for strategy execution.
- **An influencer, not a dictator** – Strategy chiefs don't usually accomplish their goals by pulling rank. They sway others with their deep industry knowledge, their connections throughout the organization, and their ability to communicate effectively at all levels of the company.
- **Comfortable with ambiguity** – All executives today must exhibit this trait, but it's especially true for CSOs, whose actions typically won't pay off for years. The role tends to evolve rapidly, as circumstances dictate, requiring an extraordinary ability to embrace an uncertain future.
- **Objective** – Given their wide remit, CSOs have to be perceived as objective. An openly partisan CSO, or one who lets emotions or the strength of others' personalities cloud his or her vision, is sure to fail.