

# How to hire a future-fit CEO

By [Chania Stempowski](#)

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Hiring the wrong leader can have potentially devastating consequences. Now, more than ever, corporates need to be led with agility and an openness to rapid change. [Kodak](#), [Toys R Us](#) and [Blockbuster](#) are often cited as companies that failed because of a reluctance to evolve. Many people in senior positions today don't have the right qualities to lead a company in a world disrupted by technology.



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## Beyond experience

Following research Odgers Berndtson conducted with 70 CEOs and senior leaders of some of the world's leading multi-national companies, we have realised that much of what used to guide how we assess potential C-suite suitors is now less relevant. For instance, in the past, if a candidate ran a profitable insurance business for a number of decades, he would be a very good fit for the same position in the future. Today, past success is less indicative of future success. Now hiring based on competencies that include motivation and dexterity are as important, if not more so, than experience.

Cédric Sennepin, managing director at Leroy Merlin, elaborates on what this means for his business,

*“ We are always pushing everyone in our organisation to adapt, to change, to accept, to fail fast. I often say, ‘ignore the rules’. I urge all our employees to take responsibility for re-inventing our future and not being stuck in the past... ”*

Sennepin, a client of Odgers Berndtson, demonstrates a critical element of disrupted leadership, inspiring everyone in the organisation to want to innovate and evolve. One of the key traits of a future-fit leader is the ability to lead inter-generationally and to motivate and inspire a team, even if they have very different skillsets and perspectives to you. So, when a company introduces, for example, an e-commerce team, it is quite possible the CEO will not have an in-depth technical understanding of what the computer engineers and data scientists do every day. But that leader should have the strategic clarity, team building skills and thinking dexterity to make a powerful impact on the team anyway.



## Assess, assess, assess

In our role placing CEOs and other senior C-suite leaders, we have created a model to find leaders with the right qualities to lead in the digital revolution. The LeaderFit model suggests that any business searching for new senior leadership should consider approaching the process as follows:

### 1. Assess their ability to lead an organisation

Evaluate qualities such as the person's capacity to predict the future and develop a clear vision. In addition, establish that the leader also has the ability to drive this vision across the organisation, and, very importantly, the flexibility to change execution once results are analysed.

One leader who is constantly talking about disruption in various areas of her business is Amelia Beattie, chief executive at Liberty Two Degrees. "As a leader, I strive to create space and time in my own day to be open to engage around the disruptions in our environment; and to embrace them by being bold and courageous. Opportunity often knocks softly, and we need to be ready to open the door, let it in and make it part of the fibre of an organisation."

### 2. Assess their ability to lead others

Today's leaders need to be talent developers, with the capacity to inspire and develop talent. They should also have the capacity to forge influential relationships and have an ambassadorial impact that creates value for the organisation. True people's people who inspire loyalty, innovation and excellence.

Mteto Nyati, group chief executive at Altron, believes in creating a learning organisation and driving innovation as an integral part of the culture. "The ability to learn faster than competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage in the future. The trick though is to translate the learning into actionable insights. In this new world of work, execution is strategic."

### 3. Assess their leadership agility

An organisation needs to appoint a leader who can think dexterously, with the ability to absorb and process data, draw conclusions and develop sustainable solutions. They need the capacity to influence and collaborate with others, and to reach for higher goals even in challenging circumstances. Additionally, these leaders need to be capable of learning and personal growth – in a non-static world, a static leader can be a disaster for an organisation.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chania Stempowski is the joint managing director at Odgers Berndtson Sub-Saharan Africa.