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We're hiring: Cos place over 200 top execs in last 3 months

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Mumbai: The last three months have been tumultuous for businesses, but leadership hiring has remained relatively unaffected. Industry estimates reveal that more than 200 executives have been placed in the last three months, a period which witnessed industries virtually shutting factories in the early part, with demand coming down to zero.

Given the anecdotal evidence of large companies announcing appointments of CXOs/CEOs, substantiated with what executive search firms have told TOI, leadership hiring hasn't stopped at all.

Several senior executives and leaders have been hired by leading groups like RPG Enterprises and Wipro.

Stanton Chase managing partner Amit Agarwal said, "We track leadership hiring across sectors and what we understand is that more than 200 senior joinings have taken place in the last few months. Some of these search mandates had started in December-January and offers were made by March this year. The best part is neither the candidates backed out nor have the companies gone back on those offers due to the Covid-19-led business uncertainty."

The demand for top talent continues. One of our senior appointees was made a counter-offer by his current employer. He, however, decided to move on."

Every year around May/June, enquiries from clients on possible hires start to accelerate. "This year, too, action has started pretty much on the same timelines. Of course, the numbers may not be the same as last year—they would be 30% down on a comparative basis. Sectors like hospitality & travel are badly impacted, while some managed to move on with minimal impact. Some are actually doing better, for example, tech infra, insurance, agri & e-commerce," Stanton Chase managing partner Mala Chawla said.

RPG Enterprises president (group HR) S Venkatesh said, "In Ceat, we have hired a global head of sales and built a different set of competencies within the organisation. The position did not exist earlier and we felt we needed someone who will consolidate all domestic and global sales and report directly to the COO. When you get the right candidate, it's best to hire him/her. Six months down the line, you may not find the right candidate. So when the situation improves in the second half, we would be in a good position to make progress. This is talent investment at its best."

Hiring firms said there has been no change in the manner in which negotiations take place with regard to compensation and other matters. Structuring of compensation packages have, however, undergone a change, said Executive Access India MD Ronesh Puri.

"Organisations are keen on increasing the variable pay limits of leadership candidates to nearly 50% as against 30-40% in the pre-Covid era. We are telling companies it's a good time to hire now because even candidate expectations are slightly muted and much more realistic. Earlier, people would even look for doubling of their pay packets if there was no push factor and they expected a huge premium before considering a plum post. We are in discussion with a number of organisations on new leadership hires as companies are reassessing their current talent and are getting good new mandates as well. But is the market on fire? The answer would be no," said Puri.

"We're hiring at pre-Covid salaries," said Venkatesh, adding, "Although Covid-19 is a black swan event, even pre-Covid we were looking at the world becoming increasingly chaotic. We wanted to hire people with a certain set of capabilities. We want our leaders to have a huge amount of resilience, an ability to put up with long periods of uncertainty. We want people who are able to bounce back fast, people who have been through crisis situations and bounced back. We are also building these capabilities into our competency model internally."

For both company and candidate, Agarwal said it's mostly the capability and career growth that matters the most. "In any case, those days where CEO-level candidates received massive hikes and huge joining bonuses are over since the last couple of years. At least 2-3 CEOs agreed to be placed because the role was meatier than the compensation," said Agarwal.

The only change now in the entire hiring process is the role of digital interaction. “Earlier, a video call with a CXO candidate used to be the first step in a leadership hire. Today, the entire process is done through video meetings, including the offer negotiations. In cross-border hires, travel has been completely eliminated, resulting in serious money saved on costs of business class travel as well,” said Chawla.