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CHROs Become a Resource to be Reckoned With

To handle digital transformation and shape organisational culture, cos stepping up hiring of HR heads since June

Sreeradha D Basu & Brinda Sarkar

Bengaluru: Chief human resources officers (CHROs) have become hot property on the talent market as companies — from diversified conglomerates and tech players to startups and mid-sized Indian firms looking to professionalise operations — seek out seasoned HR hands to shape organisational culture, attract and retain talent and drive the transition to a new, more agile world of work, post pandemic.

Since June, at least 25 CHRO appointments have taken place across India Inc. Wipro Enterprises, Mphasis, Dabur, Welspun, Sterlite Power,

Edelweiss Tokio Life Insurance, Lenskart, ITC Infotech, Godrej Agrovet, Godfrey Phillips India and Insurance-Dekho are among those who've hired CHROs in the last six months. There is a rush among companies to hire more.

Experts said while the bulk of the hiring has been for replacement, a host of companies are

also opening up CHRO roles — instead of the more unstructured HR roles they had earlier — to take on bigger responsibilities. Shiv Agrawal, MD of ABC Consultants, said there is big demand coming in even from ₹250-1,000 crore revenue firms.

'No Longer a Purely Functional Position' >> 10



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» From Page 1

These companies never had a formal CHRO role earlier but are now giving what was once perceived as a support function, a seat at the table, he said.

Executive search firm Korn Ferry said it has seen a 25% increase in CHRO mandates compared to a couple of quarters earlier, while for Antal, it's a 40-50% jump. At Michael Page India, nearly half (45%) of the total mandates are now for CHROs and HR heads, compared with 27-28% a year ago.

"In today's hybrid-first workplace, culture and camaraderie are crucial for a company's success. It is the CHRO's role to shape this culture, ensuring it aligns with the organisation's goals while also empowering employees to learn, grow, and demonstrate leadership qualities," said Nitin Rakesh, chief executive of Mphasis, which got Ayaskant Sarangi as its global CHRO last month.

"As the guardian of organisational culture, the CHRO's role extends beyond immediate concerns, position-

ing HR as a key driver of sustained excellence in the evolving business environment," added Rakesh.

Nupur Mehta, director, Michael Page India, said the role of the people head has transitioned from a purely functional position to one that collaborates closely with CEOs.



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"The work landscape is evolving, necessitating CHROs to be more agile and technologically adept. As business needs evolve, so do workforce requirements, which is where the CHRO's role becomes critical," said Mehta, adding that most of these mandates are coming in from technology and financial services companies.

Top Dollar

As demand soars, salaries are booming. ABC's Agrawal said even at the low end, Indian companies

which were earlier paying around Rs 35 lakh to handle the HR head's responsibilities are now ready to pay up to Rs 75-80 lakh, even a crore for a CHRO, to professionalise operations.

"Quite a few of these companies never had a proper CHRO. Now they've realised that talent is the main differentiator. This is a big step up in the thought process," said Agarwal.

Navnit Singh, managing director-India at Korn Ferry, said there is a wide range of compensation for CHRO hires. "At the top end, it can go up to Rs 4-6 crore plus stock."

The focus has now shifted to embracing digital transformation and being able to adapt to the new world of work, and CHROs play a key role in this responsibility, said Singh.

Joseph Devasia, MD at Antal India, said CHRO mandates are coming in across diverse industries: tech-first, consumer, manufacturing, pharma and medical devices among others. "At any point, we are seeing 5-6 active mandates across Antal," said Devasia.