State of the C-Suites and Executives – Singapore

Key Insights

- Leadership roles are increasingly requiring diverse experiences across industries, functions, and companies.
- Soft skills like communication, strategic thinking, and resilience have become essential for effective leadership.
- Modern leaders are building expansive networks and engaging actively on social media, often sharing updates, gratitude, and recognition.
- Women make up only 37% of senior leadership roles in large companies in Singapore.

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Introduction

LinkedIn is the world's largest professional networking platform, and offers unparalleled insights into emerging trends in the world of work. The Singapore Institute of Management is Singapore's leading private education institution, with 60 years of experience in providing diverse and accessible pathways for lifelong learning, to enable learners and organisations to learn for life and thrive for life.

This joint report delves into the latest leadership trends in Singapore, leveraging LinkedIn's Economic Graph and SIM's deep expertise in Singapore's learning landscape. Together, LinkedIn and SIM provide data-driven insights into how leadership is evolving in a rapidly changing world of work and offer strategies to develop the next generation of business leaders.

As the nature of work continues to transform, so too must the pathway to effective leadership. By combining global workforce intelligence with local educational expertise, this report aims to empower individuals and organisations to adapt, lead, and succeed in an ever-evolving world.

For this analysis, we focused on senior leaders (VP or C-Suite) at large companies (more than 1,000 employees). Our research shows that the traditional linear career progressions are being reshaped by demand for broader, more versatile experiences - over the past five years, senior leaders are more likely to have worked across diverse industries, functions, and companies compared to their predecessors. This report also explores emerging trends in leadership behaviour, such as building a strong digital presence, emphasising soft skills, and fostering expansive networks, to thrive in an increasingly complex work environment.

Using these insights, we are able to not only understand the career pathways and trends of current leaders, but also provide data-driven recommendations for aspiring leaders of the next generation.

The evolving pathway into leadership

In this section, we aim to understand the shifting requirements for achieving leadership roles in today's dynamic work environment. As organisations adapt to new challenges, the traditional pathway to senior positions is evolving, with a growing emphasis on diverse experiences, internal mobility, and the importance of soft skills.

The path to leadership requires increasingly diverse experiences.

The path to senior leadership is moving away from a traditional, linear career progression toward a more dynamic journey that values a wide range of experiences across industries, functions, and organisations. Our research reveals that it is now over twice as common for leaders to have worked in at least two different industries, functions, or companies, signalling a strong preference for versatile, cross-functional expertise.

Year	At least 2 industries	At least 2 functions	At least 2 companies
2019	15.9%	19.8%	17.8%
2020	19.2%	23.6%	21.8%
2021	24.0%	28.7%	27.3%
2022	29.7%	33.7%	33.7%
2023	33.6%	37.7%	37.8%
2024*	36.0%	39.8%	40.3%

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph
Notes: Percent of senior leaders with prior experience in at least 2 industries, functions, or companies. *Note that 2024 data is up to 31 October 2024.

Over 40% of senior leaders are promoted internally into the role.

Despite the demand for diverse experiences, over 40% of senior leadership roles are filled through internal promotions. This number has remained relatively constant since 2018. This trend underscores the value organisations place on deep institutional knowledge and loyalty, highlighting the ongoing importance of internal mobility and succession planning.

Promoting from within allows companies to build leaders who are deeply aligned with organisational culture and long-term goals, strengthening internal growth efforts. Internal promotions also tend to be less risky, as these individuals are already familiar with company values, processes, and relationships, which enables smoother transitions and quicker, more effective contributions.

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Soft skills are increasingly essential for senior leaders

In the ever-changing landscape of work, soft skills have emerged as a critical component of effective leadership. Looking at the growth rates of skills for senior leaders across the past 5 years, we see a shift towards soft skills, especially in the past year.

Rank	5-year growth	4-year growth	3-year growth	2-year growth	1-year growth
1	Interpersonal Skills	Strategic Thinking	Banking	Auditing	Strategic Thinking
2	Presentation Skills	New Business Development	Project Delivery	People Management	Interpersonal Skills
3	Executive Management	Manufacturing Process Improvement	Program Management	Leadership Development	Communication
4	Cybersecurity	Auditing	Business Process Improvement	New Business Development	Negotiation
5	Problem Solving	Communication	Sustainability	Sustainability	Executive Management
6	Data Analytics	Analytical Skills	Finance	Budgeting	Stakeholder Management
7	Digital Transformation	Team Leadership	Business Analysis	Manufacturing Process Improvement	Presentation Skills
8	Strategic Thinking	Executive Management	SQL	Recruiting	Problem Solving
9	Sustainability	Amazon Web Services (AWS)	Risk Management	Stakeholder Management	Business Planning
10	Manufacturing Process Improvement	Business Relationship Management	Manufacturing Process Improvement	Project Delivery	Coaching

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph
Top 10 fastest growing soft skills over the past 5 years. Soft skills are highlighted in yellow.

> *"Talent within the organisation are the most likely candidates to lead the organisation into the future. As the world pivots into an AI era, human skills come into focus. Talents with these skills such as the ability to sense make in volatile environment, creative thinking that generates out-of-the-box solutions and the ability to connect or collaborate with others, augmented by AI, are going to be the pillars of the organisations in a world that is brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible (BANI)." – Ho Seong Kim, CEO, SIM Academy*

What are today's leaders doing differently, right now?

In this section, we explore how senior business leaders are distinguishing themselves in the workplace and beyond. By analysing trends in behaviour and communication, we gain valuable insights into their evolving strategies for influence and leadership.

Building presence on social media through relationships.

One interesting trend we observed in the data relates to the type of content senior business leaders are posting. Compared to employees at other levels, senior leaders are significantly more likely to share posts about company updates, events, and messages of gratitude or congratulations. While it's expected that leaders would focus more on company updates and events - posting company updates 2.5 times more frequently than the average worker - it's noteworthy that they also express thanks and congratulations 1.9 times more often.

This emphasis on messages of gratitude and recognition highlights how senior leaders are building their presence on social media through relationships. By publicly acknowledging achievements and expressing appreciation, they're fostering a supportive, connected community around their work. This relational approach to social media presence not only strengthens internal culture but also demonstrates engaged, accessible leadership to external audiences, enhancing both trust and influence.

> *"Authentic relationships are the cornerstone of impactful leadership. They go beyond transactional interactions, focusing on fostering trust, empathy, and mutual respect. Leaders who invest in genuine connections create environments where people feel valued, understood, and empowered. Through building trust and mutual respect, leaders inspire collaboration, boost morale, and cultivate loyalty, driving both individual and organisational success."* — Grace Kerrison, APAC Head of Sales Solutions, LinkedIn

Cultivating and growing networks.

Senior leaders have networks nearly twice the size of those of employees at other levels. When we examine gender differences, male leaders tend to have larger networks than female leaders, with an average size that is approximately 1.7 times greater.

This gap in network size highlights the potential disparities in access to connections and opportunities, which can play a critical role in career advancement. Expanding network diversity and accessibility for all leaders could be a key step in fostering more equitable pathways to leadership.

Females make up only 37% of senior leadership level at large companies.

We've long recognised the existence of gender gaps in leadership. Our [previous research](#) on gender trends in leadership highlights that this disparity often begins at the earliest stages of career advancement, with fewer women moving from individual contributor roles into managerial positions—a phenomenon often referred to as the "broken rung" in the ladder.

In Singapore, female representation in leadership is notable, with 42% of leadership roles (Director and above) and 37% of senior leadership positions (VP and above) held by women. This is one of the highest rates globally, yet it still falls short of parity. Additionally, our prior studies have shown that the gender leadership gap is consistently observed across all sectors.

In this report, we examine gender representation among senior leaders in large companies in Singapore, where women make up only 37% of these roles. Although this figure has increased from 35% over the past five years, the pace of progress remains slow and well below equality. This slow growth underscores the need for continued efforts to address gender imbalances in leadership.

Takeaways: Data-driven strategies for the next generation of leaders

As the demands on today's leaders evolve, so must our approach to developing the leaders of tomorrow. One notable shift is the growing importance of diverse experiences across industries, functions, and organisations. Programmes that provide rotations and exposure to varied roles play a crucial role in preparing future leaders with a broad skill set and a range of insights. Gaining experience across different environments and tackling unique challenges fosters cross-functional knowledge, adaptability, and a valuable perspective that empowers leaders to make informed decisions and drive impactful innovation.

Modern leadership development also benefits from a balanced mix of breadth and depth. Early-career breadth, gained through roles across sectors and organisations, brings exposure to diverse viewpoints and challenges. Later in their careers, leaders often develop depth by staying longer within a single organisation, gaining a profound understanding of its culture and strategic goals. This approach builds leaders who combine diverse perspectives with deep institutional knowledge, equipping them to navigate complexity and lead with both adaptability and commitment.

> *"The traditional linear career path is giving way to a more dynamic, lateral journey, where diverse experiences across industries, functions, and organisations are increasingly valued. LinkedIn's research shows that skills are evolving rapidly, highlighting the need for leaders to bring a broad range of capabilities and perspectives to adapt and innovate in a fast-changing world. As career progression moves beyond rigid hierarchies, it creates opportunities for personal growth, organisational flexibility, and more inclusive leadership, fostering a versatile and resilient workforce." – Pei Ying Chua, APAC Head Economist, LinkedIn*

> *"At SIM Global Education, we recognise that the leaders of tomorrow must be shaped by experiences that span industries, functions, and organisational contexts. Our academic programmes are designed to provide learners with diverse, real-world learning opportunities that cultivate cross-functional knowledge, adaptability, and a strategic mindset. By fostering both breadth and depth in their leadership journeys, we prepare our graduates to navigate complexity, drive innovation, and lead with purpose in an ever-evolving world." – Professor Wei Kwok Kee, President, SIM Global Education*

Equally important are the soft skills required for today's complex work environments. As AI and technology reshape tasks, qualities like communication, empathy, and resilience become essential. These skills require time to develop but are invaluable in balancing technology-driven efficiency with a human-centred approach. Leaders with strong soft skills will be uniquely positioned to bridge this gap, fostering collaboration and navigating change effectively. Upskilling programmes focused on these interpersonal skills will be essential to equipping the next generation of leaders for success.

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In the digital era, building a presence on social media has become an important dimension of leadership. This goes beyond personal branding - it is a way to cultivate connections and deepen relationships. By publicly recognising achievements and sharing messages of gratitude and appreciation, leaders foster a culture of recognition and positivity. Such expressions boost team morale, build trust, and reflect a people-centred leadership style. Celebrating team accomplishments shows that leaders value their teams, reinforcing a supportive culture both within the organisation and to a wider audience.

Networking is more than a professional skill; it's a vital component of effective leadership. Expanding networks creates pathways to collaboration, learning, and support, offering aspiring leaders access to new perspectives and growth opportunities. Building connections beyond immediate roles can open doors to fresh ideas and lasting partnerships, enhancing the impact of leadership development.

> *"As the marketplace becomes increasingly complex, dynamic and unpredictable, businesses need to constantly reinvent and transform to stay ahead. Successful leaders are those with a growth mindset, breadth of experiences and the 'human' skills to align stakeholders, capture opportunities and execute against their vision. These insights are also very valuable to guide our talent development and leadership succession strategies to nurture talent from within the organisation, provide diverse work experiences, develop soft skills and encourage diversity and networking." – Sara Yik, Chief Human Capital Officer, Singapore Institute of Management*

Finally, to close gender gaps in leadership, organisations must improve women's access to leadership opportunities and support them across all development initiatives. Gender diversity at the leadership level brings a wider range of viewpoints and enables more balanced decision-making. By addressing systemic barriers that limit women's advancement, organisations can cultivate a leadership pipeline grounded in inclusivity and equity, fostering a more balanced, resilient leadership landscape.

> *While progress has been made on female representation in leadership, there is more work to be done by organisations to improve gender diversity at the leadership level by improving women's access to leadership opportunities, fostering an inclusive culture and addressing systemic barriers that limit women's advancement." – Sara Yik, Chief Human Capital Officer, Singapore Institute of Management*

> *"Gender representation at leadership levels is not just a matter of fairness. It is crucial for driving innovation and organisational success; diverse leadership teams bring varied perspectives that lead to better decision-making, stronger collaboration, and a more inclusive workplace culture." – Pei Ying Chua, APAC Head Economist, LinkedIn*

Methodology

Data and Privacy. This body of work represents the world seen through LinkedIn data, drawn from the anonymized and aggregated profile information of LinkedIn's 1+ billion members around the world. As such, it is influenced by how members choose to use the platform, which can vary based on professional, social, and regional culture, as well as overall site availability and accessibility. In publishing these insights from LinkedIn's Economic Graph, we want to provide accurate statistics while ensuring our members' privacy. As a result, all data show aggregated information for the corresponding period following strict data quality thresholds that prevent disclosing any information about specific individuals.

Executives / Senior Leaders. In this report, executives / senior leaders are defined as LinkedIn members who have direct reports and leadership responsibilities for one business function or unit or for the entire business function. They are in C-Suite level or VP-level type roles. This report only analyses executives / senior leaders from large companies.

Large Companies. A company's size is determined by the 12-month average number of LinkedIn members who listed an active position in the listed company for the 12-month period of October 2023 to October 2024. We limit this analysis to large companies (1,000 or more global employees).

Gender Classification. Gender identity isn't binary and we recognise that some LinkedIn members identify beyond the traditional gender constructs of "man" and "woman." If not explicitly self-identified, we have inferred the gender of members included in this analysis either by the pronouns used on their LinkedIn profiles, or inferred on the basis of first name. Members whose gender could not be inferred as either man or woman were excluded from any gender-centered analysis.