

A Guide to Fashion's New C-Suite

The executive ranks at big brands increasingly include once-unknown job titles, reflecting an industry-wide shift in focus to improve its record in areas such as diversity, sustainability and logistics.

By Sheena Butler-Young

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When Deloitte appointed its first “well-being officer” in 2019, fascination with the unconventional title was so intense that publications from *Forbes* to *Adweek* wrote articles breaking down its meaning.

The job, which Deloitte describes as driving “the strategy and innovation around work-life, health and wellness” for the firm’s employees, was part of a wave of new executive positions sweeping through the business world. From chief metaverse officers to happiness chiefs, companies are increasingly willing to stray from the standard list of C-suite roles.

Fashion is no exception. Brands and retailers are shaking up the executive ranks, making space on the top floor for leaders in areas like diversity, sustainability and logistics. Often, these new and evolving roles come in response to cultural shifts, whether it’s 2020’s racial reckoning, climate change or the pandemic.

But whether big brands are tapping [diversity chiefs](#), virtual reality heroes or climate change rockstars, the stream of new C-suite posts signal a recognition among companies that their upper ranks must adapt to meet the demands of increasingly outspoken consumers and employees.

“There’s all this power that sits within the consumers and there’s a whole load of power that sits within the employees of an organisation right now — more than they’ve ever had,” said Paula Reid, president of the executive search firm Reid & Co.

BoF identified six C-suite titles that are gaining traction in the fashion industry.



Chief Growth Officer

Where they work: Asos, Gap Inc., Target have added this position in the last two years.

Why they're hired: The appointment of a CGO can signal one of two things: a company is worried about stagnating sales, or it's on a hot streak and looking to extend its run. It's no coincidence that before reaching fashion, the CGO was most popular in media and tech.

Also known as: Chief revenue officer, chief commercial officer

What they do: CGOs identify, pursue and maintain revenue streams. That can mean finding new sources of sales or finding ways to squeeze more out of existing channels. They may directly oversee broad swaths of the company but are just as likely to collaborate across far-flung teams, from merchandising and product design to sourcing and customer experience.

Challenges: It's critical that this role serves to bridge departments rather than create more segmentation, said Reid.

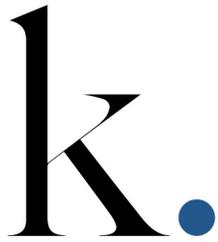
Reporting structure: A CGO often serves as a translator, synthesising data and analysis from multiple teams in a way that's digestible to the CEO, said Caroline Pill, London-based partner at executive placement firm Kirk Palmer Associates. They may hold sway over merchandising, marketing, sourcing and product procurement and customer experience, among other departments.

Chief Diversity Officer

Where they work: Macy's, Nike, Kering, Prada, Target

Why they're hired: The title has its roots in higher education but began to pop up at tech and consumer goods companies in recent years. The post was rare in fashion until the summer of 2020 when international outrage over the police killing of George Floyd touched off a broader racial reckoning across the industry. Postings on Glassdoor for executive roles such as "chief diversity officer," "head of diversity and inclusion," and "vice president of diversity and inclusion" more than doubled practically overnight.

Also known as: Chief talent and culture officer, chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer or chief diversity, inclusion and talent officer. At many companies, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) matters continue to be handled by human resources departments.



What they do: CDOs are responsible for crafting and implementing a company's strategy for a diverse and fair workplace. This includes creating and overseeing policies that address and prevent workplace discrimination, increasing the representation of minority groups across all levels, launching initiatives that shape a company's culture and stemming attrition among underrepresented groups.

Challenges: "The risk with this role comes when it's viewed as, 'oh, we have to have this role" and there's not a really thoughtful approach to what its goals are and how it really integrates across the organisation," Reid said.

Reporting structure: Experts say the most effective CDOs have a direct line to the CEO, giving them more power to change the corporate culture than if they sit within the HR department.

Chief Supply Chain Officer

Where they work: Nordstrom, Revlon, Tory Burch, Macy's

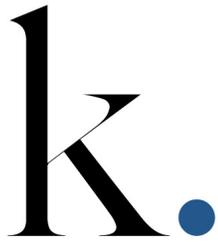
Why they're hired: Even before the pandemic snarled global supply chains, the CSCO was becoming a more common sight in the C-suite. The growth of online shopping and evolving consumer expectations around corporate social responsibility has pushed fashion firms to create more comprehensive strategies that connect their merchandising, product design and human resources departments with product procurement.

Also known as: Chief operating officer

What they do: A CSCO serves as a centralised command for departments such as manufacturing, procurement and sales, operations and planning. This executive — who ideally has a mix of technical and strategic leadership skills — can help a company coordinate quickly to respond to production crises. The best CSCOs also recruit top logistics talent to optimise supply chains and nimbly respond to crises.

Challenges: CSCOs are constantly fighting fires these days, said Craig Rowley, a senior client partner at business consulting firm Korn Ferry. That leaves less time to identify supply chain innovations and recruit talent.

Reporting structure: Reports to the CEO, and may sit alongside a chief operating officer (if they haven't replaced that role entirely).



Chief Brand Officer

Where they work: Moncler, Valentino, Versace, Theory

Why they're hired: Consumers are increasingly conscious of whether a [brand's internal culture](#) matches the image it's projecting in marketing. Enter the CBO, who serves as the architect for a company's image, crafting a vision that applies equally to advertising campaigns, internal communications and even HR policies, and ensuring that this vision is in sync with the target customer.

Also known as: Chief marketing officer

What they do: The CBO is a chameleon who works across the company connecting departments ranging from PR and corporate communications to human resources and customer service to ensure consistency. The job is typically broader than a CMO, who tends to be more focused on product, design and marketing, with performance more closely tethered to the bottom line.

Challenges: Since this role is relatively new and has significant overlap with the duties of a CMO, a CBO may struggle to define their mandate and measure success. The role can be short-lived if a company is averse to change beyond its external marketing.

Reporting structure: Most CBOs report directly to the chief executive officer. If the company has a CMO, that person may report to the CBO or work alongside them. Often, the marketing department falls under the CBO's purview.

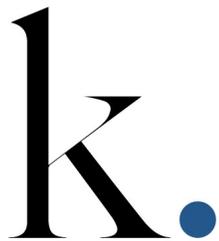
Chief Sustainability Officer

Where they work: L'Oréal USA, Chloé, PVH Corp.

Why they're hired: As pressure mounts for the industry to address its environmental impact, companies are testing new strategies to operate more sustainably — and make sure consumers know they're trying.

Also known as: A chief supply chain officer or chief operating officer are often given the sustainability mandate in the absence of a CSO.

What they do: A CSO helps ensure a company is compliant with internal and external sustainability guidelines. They create and implement a strategy to curb an organisation's carbon footprint, and address issues ranging from waste to water usage to labour rights.



The challenge: Experts disagree on whether it's better to have a single person overseeing sustainability, or to make sustainability a goal for all departments, with resources to support their efforts.

"It's great to have new titles like this but then we need to be clear about what sits under them, what success looks like, and how that role will evolve once the basic problems are resolved," Pill said.

Reporting structure: A CSO is most effective when they have the CEO's ear, typically as a direct report. Procurement, design, supply chain and operations departments tend to fall under a CSO's purview, though rarely reporting directly to them.

Chief People Officer

Where they work: Rag & Bone, Burberry, Under Armour, Stitch Fix, Fashion Nova

Why they're hired: CPOs are a rebrand of the human resources chief, signalling an expanded role beyond hiring and firing and that a company intends to invest more in its people and culture. The CPO typically champions values, ethics and building a company's culture.

Also known as: Chief human resources officer.

What they do: Like CHROs, CPOs have leadership oversight of areas such as succession planning, employee benefits and compensation but their core duties are more closely linked to the employee experience and engagement. A CPO steers the development of culture, values, ethics and a firm's mission. This may range from helping to onboard new hires to launching employee development programs and crafting messaging around culture.

The challenge: "As we're working from home and our work life has become so complicated that's where this role becomes really important but also challenging," said Pill. "This person has to make sure the culture is on point and that there's a sense of community, even when people are not sitting together in an office — they have to ensure that's there's some caring organism within."

Reporting structure: CPOs report directly to the chief executive and oversee all HR functions.