



## Why top companies are slimming their c-suites

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Across industries, corporate hierarchies are flattening — and the C-suite is part of this shift. After decades of expansion, many large companies now show a gradual reduction in the number of senior executives reporting directly to the CEO (N-1).

### **A global trend with regional contrast**

Using data from The Official Board, Harvard Business School researchers observed that across the Fortune Global 500, the average number of N-1 executives declined 9% between 2022 and 2025 (from 12.0 to 10.9). The trend is most visible in finance and strongest in EMEA (-17%) and North America (-13%), while Asia-Pacific and Latin America saw slight increases. Among the ten largest global companies, the contraction is even more pronounced, with C-suites down 15% on average.

### **Agility, alignment, and execution**

This shift reflects broader efforts to reduce complexity, speed up decisions, and improve organizational agility. Companies such as Amazon, Dell, Target, Bayer, and HSBC have simplified management layers to strengthen accountability and responsiveness

### **Evolving roles**

Some executive roles are changing shape. The Chief Marketing Officer position has become less common (down 13% since 2022), often absorbed into wider commercial or strategy functions. Meanwhile, technology-oriented roles such as Chief Data, Chief Digital, and Chief AI continue to expand.

### **Not for all**

Not every leader supports smaller teams. Nvidia's Jensen Huang favors larger spans of control to reduce layers and increase transparency. Meta's Mark Zuckerberg works with a strategic group of 25–30 executives to maintain alignment. Still, many organizations —

including HSBC, Southwest Airlines, and Microsoft — are consolidating responsibilities under COOs or multifunctional leaders.

### **Cross-functional leaders**

A broader leadership profile is emerging: executives able to operate across functions, integrating operations, technology, and strategy. As CEOs such as Sam Altman note, focusing on direction and execution often requires fewer layers and clearer lines of responsibility.

### **Takeaways**

1. **C-Suites are contracting:** N-1 roles down 9% globally; top 10 companies down 15%.
2. **Regional contrast:** Strongest declines in EMEA and North America; slight increases in APAC and LATAM.
3. **Functional reshuffle:** Fewer CMOs; more Chief Data, Digital, and AI roles.
4. **Broader mandates:** Executives expected to span multiple domains, reversing years of specialization.
5. **Strategic focus at the top:** CEOs streamline leadership to gain speed, alignment, and execution capacity.

*Special thanks to the authors — Boris Groysberg, Professor of Business Administration, and Sarah Abbott, Research Associate at Harvard Business School — for their thoughtful research and analysis on this important leadership evolution.*

*Here is their [complete original article](#) from which the above synthesis was extracted.*