

# The Emerging COO

## A MENA perspective

### The COO Network



Whilst transformation and innovation have been a strategic priority for many Chief Operating Officers (COOs) prior to the pandemic, leaders have been compelled to swiftly activate implementation plans in order to facilitate remote working for its employees, whilst remaining connected and engaged with clients.

Culturally, the notion of virtual working has not been a widely endorsed or accepted working model, particularly given the MENA region operates on a relationship driven and people first approach. However, it has been pivotal for COOs to adapt and realign their operational models in order to manage continuity. The rapid evolution to virtual working has provided both new transformation opportunities, along with challenges for MENA based COOs, which include:

### Growth beyond borders

Rapid digital evolution has enabled COOs to consider new areas of growth, which include borderless markets through embracing virtual collaboration and connections, therefore the notion of local versus global growth will remain front-of-mind during the current period. This will require a new directional strategy which will support organisational growth in new markets with new services/products. To achieve success the COO must think and act differently in order to adapt to geographic and consumer needs.

### Changing consumer and employee preferences

Consumer preferences and confidence have been impacted during the pandemic; therefore COOs are considering service/product diversification, whilst ensuring they remain connected and adapt their communication style to keep customers engaged, particularly as the share of consumer spend continues to remain challenged globally. Likewise, we are experiencing an increase in conscious citizenship, where employees are concerned of future challenges which may arise and are therefore contributing to wider societal issues such as food and water security and climate change. Such challenges will need to be considered in the wider context of sustainable growth across organisations to both keep employees engaged and committed, whilst gearing up to attract future workforces, whilst taking a leading position on building a business with a purpose which goes beyond profits alone.

“ COVID-19 presented challenges for many businesses, which required us all to think fast and act differently. Clients of Omnia wanted us to be more specific and to offer bespoke services which would support organic growth for our clients. This led to our firm expanding its service solutions into new markets through the introduction of consulting, which complemented our brand creation and marketing technology solutions. This has ultimately led to Omnia repositioning itself and extending our service solution, entering new markets, and engaging in an innovative way beyond our traditional offering.”



STEVE HAYSOM  
CEO of Omnia

“ We are delighted to share our MENA views with the Armstrong Wolfe COO Community through the dedicated COO magazine ” (The COO Network)

## A new set of skills and EQ required to lead

The COO is contending with the ever-connected employee who requires emotionally connected leadership and constant clear communication in order to remain engaged and reassured.

“Several organisations have empowered its people to work from their home countries, which has led to COOs needing to elevate the leadership skills and styles of its management team in order to ensure employees remain engaged and connected to the firms culture. Communication has become an increasingly important aspect of a COOs role, ensuring internal communication is as authentic and engaging as possible in remote and partial workforce scenarios. Whilst ensuring PR and media strategies are adapted to appeal to a more conscious consumer.”



**MANDIP DULAY**  
Founder of the COO Network

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## Evolution and transformation becoming a strategic priority

“Before the Pandemic, both the COO and the CIO roles were slowly evolving into their future, digital-leaning versions. For the CIO, the evolution was leading from a typical “Systems Provider” to a “Modernizer”. For the COO, similarly, the evolution was taking the “Business Service Provider” profile towards that of a “Productizer” in the modern world. The pace and path of this metamorphosis has now been disrupted by the Pandemic and both these leaders are finding themselves under the spotlight with the



**SAAD CHAUDRY**  
Executive Partner of Gartner MENA

same goal: how to grow the business and revenues digitally.

While the CIO might have a leg-up in the digital realm, the COO has a history with business operations that they can lean on heavily for what will be required of the role in this new age. For one thing, business operations would need to become agile, working at a rapid pace via digital platforms, to produce results in smaller chunks more frequently. This would of course also impact the operational models of the business; with widespread remote work a reality, the organization’s technologies, and tools, along with policies and procedures, would need to be strengthened immensely to support the human capital. Lastly, the focus will be shifting from investing in physical corporate structure and assets towards their digital counterparts, with a heavy emphasis on digital products and commerce specifically. And this will only be possible when all other factors mentioned above have been aligned under a leader who understands both, the digital and the business worlds.”

“As the last six months have clearly shown, it is critical that companies embrace and develop digital strategies if they want to survive and thrive in the current market. How companies operate internally and externally and interact with their customers and suppliers has undergone a significant change over the pandemic and those that have adapted have proven very successful. It is important that the digital evolution undertaken to date is developed further and becomes the new operating philosophy to allow them to grow in their local territory and overseas.”



**PETER TAVENER**  
CFO & COO of Beehive Fintech and Board Member of COO Network

## The shifting boardroom

The boardroom composition will continue to shift to embrace the emerging business trends, with Chief Technology and Innovation Officers (CTO) taking the lead on driving digital-enabled growth, whilst considering other agile elements which increase organisational revenue. Furthermore, the Chief Finance Officer (CFO), is now challenged to look beyond finance into business operations, with a view to identifying cost saving strategies which will enable agile operations. Such roles were previously under the remit of the COO; and will now drive additional challenge for the COO to continue remaining the second-in-command.



The COO Network is a global not-for-profit institute, with our core purpose built around creating a vibrant eco-system for aspiring COOs to shape their profession further. We support the most ambitious COOs to access professional development in the form of receiving insights, mentoring and growth initiatives, whilst providing a platform which stimulates innovative thinking and collaborative connections amongst global professionals.

For further details visit: [www.coonetwork.me](http://www.coonetwork.me)