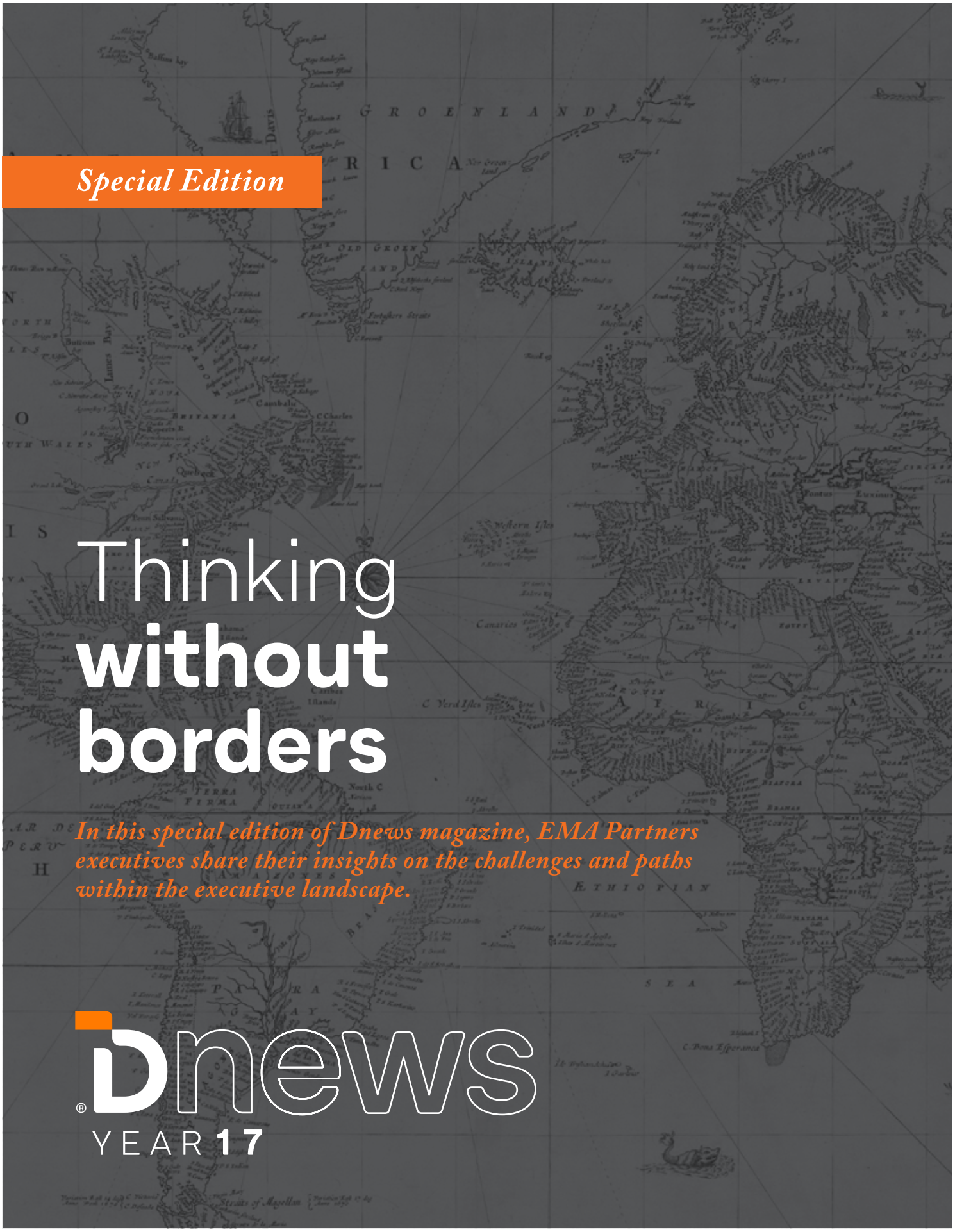


Special Edition

Thinking **without borders**

In this special edition of Dnews magazine, EMA Partners executives share their insights on the challenges and paths within the executive landscape.

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.04 What lies behind the negotiation

.06 The distinguishing features of executive search firms

.10 A real and emblematic case in Latin America

.14 The future of diversity

.18 Succession: what lies behind effective planning?

.20 The power of international cooperation

.22 Compensation as a strategic tool in executive search

.26 The role of recruitment in CEO succession

.30 Leading with confidence



DNEWS SPECIAL EDITION
THINKING WITHOUT BORDERS

“Negotiation is one of the essential skills of a good manager”

Negotiation goes far beyond financial agreements; it is a central skill in the lives of the best leaders around the world. Knowing how to negotiate is essential for managing conflicts, interests, and expectations, and for turning differences into something that strengthens the team and the company. To discuss the subject, we invited Alberto Miranda, global president of EMA Partners, a negotiation specialist and professor.

Just as organizational disciplines evolve, negotiation skills also change over time. Considering today's challenges, how important is it for leaders to invest in negotiation skills?

Negotiation skills are among the most important competencies a manager should possess and develop. Negotiating involves listening, planning, managing time, and seeking mutually beneficial agreements with the aim of building something together. A manager negotiates with their teams, suppliers, and competitors. They seek solutions to conflicts. In my opinion, negotiation is one of the most essential skills for a good manager.

> “In a negotiation, a defeatist or arrogant attitude will lead to failure.”

The most important thing in a negotiation is to be prepared and to know about the subject of the negotiation and the other party. What, exactly, do you need to know about these two aspects?

Of the different stages of a negotiation, preparation is usually the most neglected, even though it is fundamental to the success of any negotiation. Preparing means truly unders-

tanding who the other party is, carefully developing our proposal, analyzing the different options that may arise, being ready to make certain concessions, choosing an appropriate setting for the negotiation, and deciding what our attitude will be when we begin. All of this requires extensive prior study, a process that must precede the start of the negotiation.

What is the most frequent mistake in negotiations between leaders that needs to be avoided?

One of them, as we have already mentioned, is a lack of preparation. Equally important is the attitude we adopt in a negotiation. Attitude is the most frequent source of error. A defeatist or arrogant attitude will lead us to failure. A defeatist attitude means that our position is too fragile and, therefore, we will not achieve our objectives. Wrong approach.

Overconfidence will have the same result. It is essential to prepare thoroughly, present a clear approach, and convey confidence and assurance in what we say. And always with a winning mindset, which is simply about seeking an agreement in which both parties feel satisfied.



***Alberto Miranda** is the global president of EMA Partners, a negotiation specialist and professor.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy



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“We never give up on face-to-face conversation”

The CEO of EMA Partners Italy, Clara Vitalini, discusses the differentiators of executive search



Photo: Resune Genius / Unsplash.

In the midst of the AI era, companies are increasingly using technology tools to recruit not only new employees but also their managers and talent. However undeniable the benefits of automation tools may be, they do not provide something valuable: the advisory role of executive search firms. In this interview with Clara Vitalini, CEO of EMA Partners Italy and a reference in European executive recruitment, we show the value of the in-depth methods used by consultancies affiliated with the international group.

In the executive recruitment conducted by EMA Partners members, every interview is unique and involves the recruiter's human expertise in exploring the candidate's story in depth. Tell us more about this approach.

At EMA Partners, we guarantee a deeply human approach, both with clients (companies) and candidates. That is what differentiates us, even though we benefit from digital tools that can be useful in our work and in the sector in general.

How do we do this? We never give up on face-to-face conversation. We have an efficient system for finding and connecting with candidates, but we always like to meet them first in a video interview and then have an in-person meeting at our offices or wherever is most convenient for the candidate. We are very flexible and travel when necessary. Many of our business interactions are in northern Italy, where we operate, so traveling is very feasible.

In-person interactions should also be interesting for candidates. We generally conduct a classic career interview, a personality test, and a "consulting" session in which we explore motivations, dreams, and competencies in depth to help the candidate focus on what their ideal next step might be.

> "It is essential that we 'breathe' the client's environment. We like to see and get to know both HR and the business lines."

This process flows much better when done in person and can be supported by AI tools, but it cannot be replaced by them. In addition, we maintain lasting relationships with our candidates, whether they are senior executives or junior professionals—we accompany them with this advisory approach throughout their professional experiences.

As for clients (companies), of course we study their history and background online and interact with AI tools to deepen our knowledge of the sector and the Critical Success Factors (CSFs), but it is essential that we "breathe" their environment. Therefore, we hold several in-person sessions to meet management, understand their organizations



Photo: Campaign Creators / Unsplash.

and key strategic moves. We rarely rely on a single briefing with management; we like to see and get to know both HR and the business lines involved and, if possible, visit the company's facilities.

> We do not rely on a single briefing with management.

What are the risks to a company of delegating executive searches to AI-based methods?

The risk we see is that the relationship with both clients and candidates becomes excessively transactional. The project may be faster but also more superficial, leaving aside the solid advisory relationship that we value so highly. Ideally, AI tools should be integrated into the process, but they should not govern it.

A second risk of delegating to AI is the presence of internal biases in the process that we are unaware of and find difficult to identify.

On the other hand, there is no way to ignore the benefits of automation: the ideal is to

find a balance, right? What do you see as the greatest added value of automation in executive selection?

It would be foolish to ignore automation; it would be like avoiding the positive contribution that a competent industry expert could bring to a project team, since it genuinely improves efficiency in terms of time and energy.

We can easily delegate high-volume or repetitive tasks, using it in particular as a specialist on the team across a broad range of topics. We are experts in executive search because we have years of experience selecting executives, and the "AI team member" can facilitate our tasks and broadly integrate our knowledge.

As we continue to evolve in our use of automation, we are learning that hybrid teams are being formed—that is, teams that include human and AI agents. This is also what we foresee in our sector: integrating automation where it serves the purpose, for example, in searches and high-volume resume screening, semantic resume reading, or first-level market mapping.

For me, the motto for 2026 should be "hybrid work," in the sense of bringing together the best of humans and the best of automation, with both mind and heart at ease.



***Clara Vitalini** is the CEO of EMA Partners Italy and a reference in European executive recruitment.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy



DNEWS SPECIAL EDITION

THINKING WITHOUT BORDERS

A real case shows executive selection in one of Latin America's most complex markets



Photo: Focal Insight / Unsplash.

Recently, our colleagues at EMA Partners Argentina, led by their president Lucrecia Airaldi, conducted one of the most successful global cases in the Latin American luxury market—considered one of the most complex areas of retail. The client faced a challenge: it needed an executive who could navigate different Latin American countries, understand the nuances of each market, and also understand the company's global strategy. Learn more about the case in this interview with Airaldi.

The case "A success story of international hiring in the Latin American luxury market" shows the complexities and challenges of executive search in competitive and diverse markets. One of the key strategies of EMA Partners Argentina, which led the hiring, was collaboration with EMA Partners in Chile, Peru, and Mexico. What were the main challenges?

Collaboration with EMA offices in the region brought challenges. The first was assessing the differences: each country is a different world, with unequal levels of retail maturity and consumers who behave very differently. Retail maturity in Chile is not the same as in Peru, and Mexican consumers do not behave in the same way as Argentine consumers. This forced us to find a balance between global and local, learning from markets with greater excellence in customer experience and retail and then applying those practices elsewhere.

The second step was operational: coordinating schedules, interviews, and processes in four countries at the same time is not easy. Therefore, before the client process began, we brought together the best practices of each office and the company's specific needs and, based on this synthesis, designed a consistent process for the entire region. This ensured consistency in the brand message and value proposition, avoiding contradictions and strengthening the candidate experience.

"Retail maturity in Chile is not the same as in Peru, and Mexican consumers do not behave in the same way as Argentine consumers."

Finally, once the candidate had been selected, we faced the delicate challenge of closing the negotiations and managing cultural adaptation, which required close collaboration with Argentina and Mexico to ensure that everything went smoothly.

Tell us about the main lessons learned from this collaboration.

Several lessons emerged from this collaborative effort. We confirmed the power of EMA and understood that the true value of a regional search lies in combining two dimensions: local depth, which gives us an accurate view of the talent, salaries, and culture of each coun-

try; and an integrated perspective, which enables comparison, detection of common patterns, and recognition of critical specificities.

In this way, benchmarking compensation and practices in such a heterogeneous region ceases to be a collection of isolated data and becomes a strategic map, making it easier to assess expectations, make consistent decisions, and attract the best talent in a complex context.

> “Collaboration through EMA Partners is the differentiator that encourages the best talent to join our processes and clients to choose us.”

Regarding the results generated, what were the main highlights and advantages that this collaborative process provided to the client?

When the client approached us, it faced a huge challenge: it needed an executive who could navigate different Latin American countries with ease, understand the nuances of each market, and at the same time remain consistent with the company's global strategy. It was not an easy task: we are talking about a highly competitive sector with very distinct consumer groups.

At EMA Partners Argentina, we proposed something different: not to work alone, but to be transparent and integrate our colleagues from Mexico, Chile, and Peru. This was a fundamental change, because it allowed us to map talent across the entire region simultaneously and show the client a complete picture, with candidates who might never have appeared if we had limited ourselves to a single country.

The result was quick: in just three months, we found the ideal profile in Mexico. But the most interesting point was that it was not merely about filling a vacancy—the client gained much more, including speed. In a traditional process, this type of search can take twice as long. Another benefit was quality. The new executive was integrated quickly, improved sales performance, and helped strengthen the customer experience across the region. In addition, the strategic information that emerged from the process was an advantage in its own right: the client learned how competitors were hiring, what trends were shaping the luxury market, and what talent was available in each country.

Thinking of other companies operating in similar markets, how can collaboration through EMA Partners be a differentiator?

Compared with other companies operating in this type of market, collaboration through EMA Partners is the differentiator that encourages the best talent to join our processes and clients to choose us. This collaboration takes several forms:

We reach places others cannot (authentic regional mapping). We do not go “country by

country"; we cover the entire region simultaneously. In this way, we find candidates who might never appear in an independent local search, and we do so with local specialists working in coordination. This accelerates and raises the quality of the pipeline. We deliver a single message that attracts the right candidate. The candidate hears a consistent story about the brand and role, adapted to each market but without contradictions. This coherence between regional strategy and local interpretation improves the "yes" from senior talent (less friction, greater clarity of impact).

We work with a structured yet flexible process: competency-based interviews, a clear shortlist, and evidence-based decisions. The result: shorter delivery times without lowering the bar; in this case, the hiring was completed in three months. We also provide the client (and the candidate) with market intelligence—luxury trends in the region, how competitors hire, and the actual availability of talent by country. This increases the credibility of the process and helps the strongest profiles engage genuinely.

We coordinate negotiation and cultural adaptation among the offices to ensure a smooth transition: compensation, regional integration, and integration with the team. This curated experience also attracts the best people. And finally, we return to trust. When the client sees that the network works, it broadens its perspective: it stops thinking about a single office and begins to trust the entire region. This keeps the flow of opportunities active and attracts the best talent.



Lucrecia Airaldi *has extensive experience in executive recruitment and leads EMA Partners Argentina.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy



DNEWS SPECIAL EDITION

THINKING WITHOUT BORDERS

The future of diversity

How AESC Opportunity and Inclusion Councils have supported companies amid uncertainty



Photo: Vladislav Klapin / Unsplash.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies are facing challenges and strategic reassessment in various parts of the world. Although their benefits have been scientifically proven, this situation raises questions about their practices and future: how should companies think about diversity in 2026?

To support leaders amid uncertainty, AESC—the organization that sets international quality standards for the executive sector—established Regional Opportunity and Inclusion Councils, of which Dasein EMA Partners Brazil is a member. With collegiate bodies in North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, the councils are made up of experienced members committed to advancing equal opportunity.

"The councils emphasize that leadership teams with diverse backgrounds and experiences provide measurable competitive advantages," says Lynne Murphy-Rivera, AESC's managing director for the Americas. "Greater innovation, improved decision-making, and organizational resilience are among the benefits."

A network of experience

According to Lynne Murphy-Rivera, AESC's councils provide practical networks for exchanging experience. "With members from companies in different countries, they share what really works in different cultural and legal contexts, going beyond theory and adopting practical approaches that respect regional differences while maintaining fundamental principles."

Rivera emphasizes that AESC members have a unique influence. "They directly shape who leads organizations, placing more than 100,000 executives each year in senior leadership positions and on boards. Through their commitment to opportunity and inclusion, council members advocate evidence-based practices with clients, develop lists of qualified candidates, and help clients create cultures where all talent can contribute."

> "Leadership teams with diverse backgrounds and experiences provide measurable competitive advantages."

The reconfiguration of DEI

For Cecília Besa, CEO of Testa Nova EMA Partners Chile and a member of the Diversity Council for Latin America, the global uncertainty surrounding DEI—with many companies reducing their targets or dedicated teams—is partly due to political and legal pressures. "This does not mean DEI is over; it is being reconfigured: fewer slogans, more strategic and legal justifications."

Even under external pressure, the executive emphasizes that maintaining inclusion offers clear benefits such as better performance and innovation, thanks to diverse perspectives and psychologically safe teams. "Attracting and retaining talent, especially from younger

generations and key profiles; reducing reputational and legal risk, which is crucial in volatile markets; and strengthening commercial connections with different markets: clients and communities are increasingly less similar to companies' historical average."

> AESC members have a unique influence: they directly shape who leads organizations.

According to her, rather than imposing quotas, it is more effective to create merit-based diversity policies with more favorable conditions. "It is important to reposition diversity and inclusion as a competitive advantage, not a moral imperative. There is consistent evidence that diversity and inclusion improve performance, innovation, decision-making, and risk management. This translates into productivity, lower turnover, talent attraction, reputational resilience, and closer relationships with clients."

A look at Latin America

Cecília Besa explains that Latin America has a unique characteristic: structural gaps are more visible, including gender, social class, ethnicity, disability, and informal employment. "If inclusion regresses, the impact is quickly felt in social cohesion, talent availability, and corporate legitimacy."

A multinational may have a global narrative, but in Latin America it needs to adapt to socioeconomic inequality, rurality, and Indigenous or Afro-descendant communities. It is not about copying the American or European model; it is about finding the solution for itself.

"Regarding the setbacks around DEI, the best antidote is not quotas but well-executed meritocracy, with clear job descriptions, objective criteria, diverse committees, bias training, and documented feedback. This ensures that inclusion is self-sustaining, because talent naturally emerges."

Equal opportunity

Besa advocates equal opportunity. "It is not about hiring women simply because they are women. It is about ensuring transparent and impartial selection and promotion processes, with access to the entire talent pool. I believe in promoting sound corporate governance standards, such as broad candidate lists, clear criteria, comparable assessments, and diverse teams without mandatory quotas."

The executive also mentioned promoting voluntary, measurable targets linked to the business. "One lesson learned in 2025 is that many companies are removing public 'DEI numbers,' but those that support it most effectively integrate it into defensible talent and business goals. The idea is to suggest internal indicators linked to promotion disparities, turnover by group, accessibility, and organizational climate."

Besa emphasizes that it is valuable to ensure bias-free environments and implement actions for people with disabilities, internship programs, scholarships, partnerships with regional universities, professional reintegration programs after maternity leave, and reskilling for employees over 45. "In this sense, we can act as a bridge so that this becomes a company standard, rather than an ideological agenda."



***Cecília Besa** is CEO of EMA Partners Chile and a member of the Diversity Council for Latin America.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy



***Lynne Murphy-Rivera** is AESC's managing director for the Americas.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy



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Succession: what lies behind effective planning?

Having an effective succession plan is an important step toward building future solidity and present organizational performance. However, succession is not part of most companies' guidelines in Brazil. According to a study by the Evermonte Institute, conducted with 161 organizations, only 8.1% say they have ongoing strategies for replacing leaders. To shed light on the subject, we invited Chris Hardy, a specialist and leader of EMA Partners UK and South Africa.

Research indicates that an effective succession plan not only affects the company's future but is also linked to organizational performance. What are the main advantages of implementing a succession plan, and what characterizes effective succession?

The main advantage is leadership continuity: critical leadership positions and specialized functions need to be filled quickly. Other important advantages include business continuity, retention of high-potential employees, development of future leaders, and preservation of investor confidence.

To be effective, a succession plan must have the support of senior management and the board; be aligned with organizational strategy; include a robust and consistent leadership development plan; ensure knowledge transfer; and undergo periodic reviews and updates. This last aspect should reflect changes in business strategy, organizational structure, and employee development.

Only 8.1% of Brazilian companies have an ongoing succession plan. Why is it important for the succession strategy to be continuous rather than a reaction to a crisis?

The main reason companies need to implement a succession strategy is to ensure business continuity. Having experienced and qualified successors ready to take over when necessary reduces interruptions to operations and maintains high levels of productivity.

Ongoing succession planning allows potential successors to gain experience, receive mentoring, and take on professional challenges that prepare them for leadership positions.

Ambitious, high-potential employees can see clear career paths, resulting in greater motivation, engagement, loyalty, and retention.

A continuous succession strategy helps preserve organizational knowledge, as experienced em-

ployees pass on their knowledge, relationships, and expertise before leaving the organization.

On LinkedIn, you stated that effective succession requires going beyond technical competencies to understand the person behind the role. Regarding this human dimension, what should be taken into account to ensure a successful succession?

It is well known that when senior leadership appointments do not work out, the reason usually lies in the candidate's human dimension, rather than in a lack of experience or technical knowledge. This phenomenon occurs in both internal appointments and external hires.

In both cases, crucial human aspects may not have been properly identified or understood. Cultural alignment and values are examples. Normally, good cultural alignment and shared values are ensured in internal appointments but are difficult to determine in external hires. However, when an organization fails to implement an effective succession strategy, these critical dimensions may be overlooked. A senior leader with poor cultural alignment and divergent values may struggle to build trust.

Another aspect relates to career motivations and aspirations. Not all high-performing professionals want to take on leadership roles. Even when they express that desire, it is necessary to assess their underlying motivations and drivers to discover what truly motivates or demotivates them. Both the organization and the employee or candidate need to understand the individual's ambitions, interests, and long-term career goals to ensure that they are willing and committed to taking on new responsibilities.

Other important human aspects to consider include leadership potential and capability, learning agility and adaptability, decision-making and judgment, ability to influence and collaborate, and personal circumstances. In short, successful succession planning must identify the right person, not merely the most technically competent one. By assessing leadership potential, motivation, adaptability, and cultural alignment alongside technical competence, organizations can better understand the individual as a whole and are more likely to make successful, lasting leadership appointments.



***Chris Hardy** is a leading expert in succession planning and a leader at EMA Partners UK and South Africa.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy



DNEWS SPECIAL EDITION
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The power of international cooperation in finding the right leader

For volatile, uncertain, and dispersed markets, trust is one of the main characteristics of cooperation among EMA Partners offices, a global network of which Dasein is a member. The trust that comes from solid partnerships in all four corners of the world results in highly precise executive search processes praised across the most diverse sectors of the economy. We spoke with María Isabel Luna, leader of EMA Partners Peru, about the advantages of international collaboration for clients, such as anticipating risks, identifying talent opportunities in different countries, and delivering increasingly robust solutions.

In a fragmented and competitive world, how does an international network such as EMA Partners make a difference in the executive search process?

We live in an increasingly globalized yet fragmented world, transitioning from the VUCA environment (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) to BANI (brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible). In this setting, where markets evolve rapidly and challenges become more complex, belonging to a network such as EMA Partners represents a fundamental strategic advantage. Our international partnership allows us to offer a broader perspective and an accurate understanding of global talent, which increases our real ability to act with knowledge of the opportunities and threats in the sectors where our clients operate.

Our effective collaboration brings a real differentiator to the client: we design strategies, share methodologies, best practices, and values, while also adapting our solutions to the specific needs of each country and each client, becoming their strategic partners. This combination enables us to offer a rigorous and agile executive search service aligned with the specific needs of organizations operating in different markets.

How does the combination of different market and cultural perspectives take shape in recruiting the right leader? Thinking of the client, what are the main benefits of hiring EMA Partners offices?

The cultural and methodological diversity among EMA Partners members becomes a source of value for our clients. Each office brings a unique understanding of its environment, but we all share the same commitment to excellence, professional ethics, and a deep understanding of leadership.

For the client, this translates into a coherent and synergistic experience: they can interact with a single point of contact, backed by the strength of a global network. This is especially valuable in regional or international search processes, where we seek not only technical skills but also cultural compatibility and the dimensions that make up the leadership style our client requires.

Our collaborative approach allows us to anticipate risks, identify talent opportunities in different countries, and build more robust solutions over the medium and long term.

Thinking about consultants, can the exchange of knowledge and experience between different cultures benefit the professionals involved, for example through innovation? Tell us about the alliance between EMA Peru and Brazil.

Definitely. Working with consultants from different countries not only enriches client service but also our own professional development. The opportunity to exchange perspectives, lessons learned, tools, cultures, and ways of approaching a search strengthens our capacity for innovation and adaptation. It also allows us to learn and evolve continuously.

The alliance between Peru and Brazil is especially enriching. The two countries face different contexts and we speak different languages, but we also share similar dynamics in terms of business development—each partner's past experiences, the same mix of professionals and business lines, similar professional histories among the partners, knowledge of the same sectors in which our clients are located, leadership challenges, and market evolution. Working with the Brazilian office has allowed us to share cases, methodologies, joint learning, and knowledge that help us refine our value proposition as strategic partners. Most importantly, we have built a relationship of trust and personal appreciation while maintaining professionalism, which translates into greater efficiency and better results for our clients.



María Isabel Luna *is a leading expert in executive recruitment and heads EMA Partners Peru.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy



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Compensation as a strategic tool when hiring senior executives



Photo: Sasun Bughdaryan / Unsplash.

Hiring a senior executive involves a complex process that includes cultural connection, business vision, leadership, and, of course, compensation—which goes far beyond numbers. To discuss this subject, especially the world of senior executive compensation, we invited Reet Bhambhani, an expert on the subject and Chief Operating Officer of EMA Partners India.

Could you explain why compensation is becoming an increasingly strategic tool for companies?

Compensation has always been an exchange. What has changed is what is being exchanged. Before, it was time and specialized knowledge in exchange for money. Now, it is risk in exchange for potential gain. This change is what makes compensation a strategic tool.

> “Compensation has always been an exchange. What has changed is what is being exchanged.”

Today's leaders are navigating transformation mandates, digital disruption, regulatory pressure, and geopolitical uncertainty. If you are asking an executive to take on this kind of risk, the compensation structure needs to reflect it. When you introduce employee stock options (ESOPs), restricted stock units (RSUs), exit-linked incentives, and co-investment rights, you are no longer making a compensation offer; you are literally structuring a deal. You are asking the executive to share in the company's success, just like an investor.

Another thing that has changed is that standardized structures based on hierarchical levels no longer work. Every situation is different. Compensation needs to follow the strategy, not the organizational chart.

As a result, it ends up doing four things at once: attracting, retaining, aligning, and governing. The sophistication lies in designing something that keeps all four elements in productive tension, specific to the company's stage, its sector, and where it intends to go.

In an article published on your LinkedIn profile, you state that senior executive compensation should be carefully structured to reward the present while also promoting accountability for the future. Could you explain this idea in more detail?

In simple terms: if you reward only short-term execution, you will get short-term thinking. Leaders will optimize for the year in which they are evaluated, full stop. We have seen this happen when executives who achieved their annual targets excellently left the company structurally weaker.

The modern compensation model is a deliberate response to this. Short-term incentives (STIs) and performance bonuses address the present: revenue, EBITDA, and important milestones. But that is only half the equa-

tion, and the future is anchored in employee stock option plans (ESOPs), restricted stock units (RSUs) with three- to five-year vesting, and long-term incentives (LTIs) tied to multi-year metrics such as total shareholder return (TSR) or return on capital employed (ROCE). The message is: we want you to invest in the future, not only the present.

> If you reward only short-term execution, you will get short-term thinking.

In addition, there are clawbacks, which reduce the gap between reward and consequence. If decisions made today cause damage two years from now, the executive will not be immune to it. This is relatively new, but it is important.

In my article, I drew an analogy with a meal, comparing the appetizer with the digestif, and nothing about it is accidental. That is how it works when done well. Each element performs a specific function and, together, they create a structure that rewards the present while holding the executive accountable for the future.

In addition to linking compensation to financial results, companies are tying other incentives and bonuses to social and environmental impact targets and equity tar-



Photo: Vitaly Gariev / Unsplash.

gets. What benefits does this strategy generate for the senior executive and for the company?

I want to be honest, not idealistic. A few years ago, compensation tied to ESG criteria was largely symbolic: a small percentage linked to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) metrics or sustainability targets, marked as achieved in a presentation to the board. In some companies, that is still the reality.

But when it is done intentionally, it proves quite powerful for both sides.

For the executive, it legitimizes a broader definition of their role. It says: your job is not only to hit profit-and-loss targets; you are responsible for shaping how this organization presents itself to the world. Leadership at the highest level has always carried 360-degree responsibility: to shareholders, yes, but also to employees, customers, communities, and increasingly, the planet. Compensation tied to ESG criteria makes this responsibility explicit and personal. For leaders who think about legacy, that matters. It also attracts a certain kind of leader—one who thinks in systems, not only in quarterly results.

For the company, the benefit is more structural. Building a responsible organization needs to be integrated into the culture, and that must be driven from the top down.



***Reet Bhambhani** is an expert on the subject and Chief Operating Officer of EMA Partners India.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy



DNEWS SPECIAL EDITION
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CEO succession: the role of executive search in ensuring the right choice



Photo: Sasun Bughdaryan / Unsplash.

Choosing a new CEO is a decisive moment for companies. It has a positive or negative impact on organizational culture, employee productivity, reputation, and trust in the market and society, emphasizes Rui Guedes de Quinhones, a highly regarded international headhunter and leader of EMA Partners Portugal. In an interview with Dnews, he discusses the crucial role of executive search in avoiding risks in what is one of the most strategic processes for a company.

There are many particularities involved in hiring a new CEO, such as the company's current situation and future vision, but one dilemma is nearly universal among companies: choosing between internal talent and looking outside the company. What are the positive and negative aspects of each—internal or external talent?

Indeed, this is a recurring issue in companies around the world, not just in Portugal or Brazil. The choice between promoting internal talent and bringing in an external profile depends on the organization's strategic context. Promoting internal talent has the advantage of ensuring cultural and operational continuity. This executive knows the company's structure, processes, and culture well, allowing them to be more agile in decision-making and implementing changes. It also reinforces a positive message for the team, encouraging internal development and talent retention. However, there may be a risk of limited vision, because the professional is too immersed in the company's current culture and less able to lead disruptive transformations.

On the other hand, external recruitment brings new perspectives and experiences, accelerating change and implementing a fresh vision. An external CEO can challenge the status quo and lead a deeper transformation. However, integration may be more challenging, and the risk of misalignment with the organizational culture is real.

> “An external CEO can challenge the status quo and lead a deeper transformation.”

In short, there is no single answer: it depends on the organization's strategy, timing, and the maturity of its internal talent.

Regardless of the choice between an internal or external executive, what skills beyond traditional soft and hard skills are essential for a CEO to maintain the company's growth, sustainability, and longevity?

Today, the CEO's role goes beyond traditional technical or interpersonal competencies. I believe there are three critical areas:

Ability to adapt to change. It is essential for the CEO to anticipate trends, respond to crises, and adapt to new economic, technological, and social contexts.

Systems awareness. A leader must have an integrated view of the business, the value chain,



Photo: Vitaly Gariev / Unsplash.

and the social and environmental impacts of their decisions, promoting sustainability and corporate responsibility.

> Hiring a CEO is not merely a matter of filling a key position; it is about defining the company's direction

Inspirational leadership. More than managing, the CEO needs to mobilize teams, align purposes, and build trust among all stakeholders, fostering a resilient organizational culture oriented toward long-term results.

Hiring the wrong executive comes at a high cost, especially when it is a CEO. In this sense, how can executive search consultancies avoid this loss, and what benefits do they generate for the company?

Hiring a CEO is not merely a matter of filling a key position; it is about defining the company's direction for the coming years. The impact of a wrong choice goes far beyond the direct financial cost: it affects organizational culture, investor confidence, business performance, and, in many cases, the company's own sustainability in the market.

The true value of an executive search consultancy lies in its ability to act as a strategic partner. More than simply identifying candidates, an experienced consultancy firm helps bring clarity to what matters most in a leadership transition. Our role begins by align-

ing the desired profile (an aspect we often "fine-tune" by rebuilding suitable role specifications) with the company's specific challenges: digital transformation, international expansion, restructuring, or sustainable organic growth.

The executive search methodology goes far beyond analyzing technical skills or a candidate's previous experience. We conduct a deep reading of the culture, the dynamics of the executive team, and the organization's strategic objectives, ensuring complete alignment between the CEO profile and the company's specific context.

In addition, executive search makes it possible to map the market more broadly and impartially, ensuring access to high-performing talent that is often unavailable or invisible through traditional channels. The confidentiality of the process also protects the organization during sensitive phases of change.

The final benefit for the company is reduced strategic risk: we exponentially increase the probability of finding the right leader, who not only has the necessary skills but also possesses the vision, resilience, and ability to influence and mobilize stakeholders in support of the organization's long-term objectives.



Rui Guedes de Quinhones *is a highly regarded international headhunter and leader of EMA Partners Portugal.*

EMA Partners / Courtesy



DNEWS SPECIAL EDITION
THINKING WITHOUT BORDERS

Leading with Confidence

In this conversation with headhunter Niklas Gustafsson, leader of EMA Partners Finland, we discuss the growing value of trust in the digital age.

There are no borders in the digital world. Language, cultural, and time barriers are easily dissolved. Professionals start conversations, make hires, and close deals. Teams work in harmony despite the thousands of miles separating them. At the foundation of these relationships is an invisible but highly valuable asset: trust. To give us a global perspective on the importance of trust in companies, we invited Niklas Gustafsson, spokesperson for EMA Partners Finland.

In the digital age, trust has emerged as one of the main values in relationships between people and companies. Trust ensures credibility, directly influences consumer decisions, market and investor decisions, and talent attraction. And trust starts from within, with organizational culture. How can leaders ensure or build a culture based on trust?

I believe trust is built over time through consistent actions, respect, and care for people, which involves open, honest, and consistent communication. Understanding stakeholders' needs and expectations while aligning them with business objectives is another fundamental point. It is through strong relationships that organizations can gain employee support, consolidate their reputation, and drive long-term success.

So how can leaders create trust within the organization? I believe one of the most powerful tools is leading by example. When leaders practice the values they preach, employees are more likely to believe and respect them. Trust increases when leaders are transparent about challenges and decisions, openly share positive and negative information, and avoid hidden agendas; when they genuinely care about people, invest in their well-being, and provide opportunities for growth and development. Although leading by example is, in my opinion, one of the most powerful tools, it works best when combined with consistent integrity, transparency, and empathy.

Turning now to the external perception of the business: trust has less to do with what a company says about itself and more to do

with how people and the market perceive it. In this regard, what is the role of ESG? Is investing in responsible practices the best way to generate public trust?

I would say that environmental and social responsibility is one path, but not the only one. The foundation for building trust is ethical behavior, transparency, and engagement. Transparency in business operations and clear communication are also crucial for building public trust. In addition, consistently providing high-quality products and services and demonstrating accountability when problems arise further strengthens trust. ESG is undoubtedly one of the most important tools in this relationship and works even better when combined with corporate responsibility and ethical leadership.

According to the Global Leadership Forecast report, only 46% of leaders trust that their direct managers will do the right thing. And only one in three employees trusts senior leaders. For companies facing this problem, how can the situation be reversed?

Low trust in leadership affects morale, team involvement, and business performance. Rebuilding trust at management and senior leadership levels is crucial to reversing this situation. There are many perspectives on how this problem can be solved, but as a starting point I recommend that the company focus on a few key points:

First, leaders must communicate openly and frequently about the company's objectives, decisions, and challenges. Second, there must always be honesty in their actions: doing the right thing, even in difficult times. Last but not least, I reinforce what I said in the first question of this interview: people trust leaders who do what they say, so leaders must demonstrate the behaviors they expect. These approaches have the potential to make a major impact on many of the organization's challenges and operations.

It is important to remember that problems are rarely generic, so it is up to each company to identify how to solve them in its specific environment.



Niklas Gustafsson *is a leading marketing and sales professional and is a senior partner at EMA Partners Finland.*

Photo: EMA Partners / Courtesy

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