

Clear pathway to leadership



GOING FOR MORE: ScopeGlobal chief executive Christine Molitor.

Picture: SUPPLIED

MELANIE BURGESS

A BACKGROUND in finance, a postgraduate degree and a stint overseas are among the magic ingredients that make a successful chief executive in Australia.

Analysis of ASX200-listed companies by recruiter Robert Half revealed almost half (47 per cent) of their chief executives had worked in a finance, accounting or financial services role before landing the top job.

More than four in five (82 per cent) held a bachelor degree or diploma, and 56 per cent also had a post-graduate degree, such as an MBA (Master of Business Administration) or CA (Chartered Accountant).

International experience was common too as 59 per cent had worked overseas, with

most doing a stint in the Asia-Pacific region (33 per cent) or Europe (30 per cent).

Robert Half, Asia Pacific senior managing director of David Jones, said business leaders could differentiate themselves by demonstrating success in global assignments.

"The ASX200 chief executives operate in a highly globalised business environment where it is not only expected of senior leaders to have operated in an international capacity but, more importantly, be able to utilise that experience to deliver on company goals," he said. "Having worked overseas in an executive function implies having encountered diverse audiences with different cultural backgrounds, which in turn results in them having highly developed listening, solution-processing, and risk-mitigation skills, and making

them perfectly equipped to balance different viewpoints from various divisions and business units they oversee."

Mr Jones said the profiles of ASX 200 chief executives were relatively unchanged since the last analysis 12 months earlier, despite 17 new companies and 40 new chief executives joining the list.

Randstad public sector talent solutions director Jacque Moreau said soft skills were sometimes more important than hard skills when appointing for the top job. She said technical knowledge and specific industry experience were not always necessary.

"What really matters is the unique skills you bring to the role and indeed organisation," she said.

"What is the level of 'entrepreneurial spirit' you can demonstrate? (Are you) a good

cultural fit? How commercially savvy are you?"

She said successful chief executives had self awareness, emotional intelligence, communication skills, empathy and strong leadership qualities.

Early-career professionals with their sights set on the corner office should take risks then learn from their mistakes and quickly bounce back.

"Be selective in where you put your energies and target the right industry for you," she said. "Demand respect, but always be respectful of others."

Christine Molitor started her career in banking before moving into consulting and recruitment. Time spent in leadership consulting and strategy led her to her current employer, education consultancy ScopeGlobal, where she is now chief executive.

"I became an executive,

more on the strategy and people side, but realised I needed hands-on operations experience so I kept sticking my hand up for more," she said.

"I wanted a chance and they were willing to back me and I was able to oversee international projects."

Three years ago, she was promoted to chief executive although she says that was "not part of the plan".

Her advice to aspiring chief executives was to continually learn and build relationships, and be open to all opportunities.

"(Your career won't be) a straight line on a graph going diagonally up the page, your path is going to be a bit jagged," she said.

"Be open and attuned to opportunities that take you in the general direction you want to go, but may be left of field."