

Why It's Not Far-Fetched for HR Pros to Dream of Being COO

HR Brew | Paige McGlaufflin | April 18, 2025



Credit: Anna Kim

Chief operating officers (COOs) are a big deal in the business world. They oversee the day-to-day operations of a company, are typically second-in-command to the CEO, and often next in line for the top role.

Unfortunately for HR pros, the career path from the people function to head of operations isn't so common. Most COOs tend to come up through operations or finance before landing their role.

Making the jump, however, isn't impossible. Angel Franklin, COO of the dating app Hinge, stepped into her role last August after serving as CPO since June 2022.

An evolution. Franklin still oversees Hinge's HR function, and there are no existing plans for another person to take over CPO responsibilities. However, her promotion isn't simply a title change, she said, but a reflection of how her work and its scope were already evolving.

While Franklin's previous role focused on talent acquisition or management, her new position also involves strategic planning, and ensuring that the projects each function works on are aligned with Hinge's business goals.

"I'm thinking about what's happening in product, and what's happening in marketing, and how we just all make sure we're going in the same direction," she said. "I would have worked with all those same stakeholders and partners before, in terms of helping to manage their talent strategy...now I'm doing all of that and making sure that we're all rowing in the same direction."

Diversify. Two aspects of Franklin's career best prepared her to take on operations, she said. First, despite spending her whole career in HR, she had worked in several sub-functions, including talent management and development, as well as total rewards. Second, she had worked in HR at several companies in various industries, including at EY, Tesla, and Cummins, which helped her understand how different businesses operate.

"Obviously, what's been consistent in the thread is that my job is to help enable people to be successful. But being able to understand how to do that, you've got to understand the business that you're operating in," she said.

For example, she'd led a company's total rewards program during Covid-19 lockdowns. While her job was to design and administer compensation programs and benefits packages, Franklin also had to factor in challenges her employer and its workers were facing at the time, like the fact that the company was an essential business and many employees were working in-person.

"That had lots of operational components: How do we take care of employees? How do we make sure they have the right tools and resources?" she said. "If you're thinking about caring for people, you have to be thinking about all the ways that they're enabled through the systems and structures and processes around them. So it just felt like a natural evolution, in a way that I've always thought about the work."

Hidden gems. Franklin's "real-time coach" capabilities that landed her in operations aren't rare for HR leaders, she said. People leaders already have experience working with executives in other functions, giving them insight into other parts of the business, and allowing them to get involved in developing strategies for other areas.

"One of the things that happens about being a people leader is... you understand a bit more about the business than people might in another department, where maybe they're a bit more focused in their execution, their delivery," she said. "My job, by nature, is to help the whole entire ecosystem succeed. So I do think that this is a place that people could find really strong COO candidates."

Since becoming Hinge's COO, Franklin has heard from other HR pros who are interested in taking on operations leadership. For those who are interested in pursuing this path, she recommends that they be open to taking on new responsibilities that could help advance their career or expand their expertise. She also advised that they view HR responsibilities as a job that's particularly well-suited for helping their workforce deliver on business objectives.

"I would just encourage people to continue to realize that, ultimately, your job is to help your company achieve its vision and mission, and the work that they do in the world," she said. "And

[whether] you're doing that as an HR practitioner, you're doing that as a COO, it's all about just enabling them."