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TRADEFLOCK

Spotlight

Preparing For Workforce That Hates Routine

Decoding Winning Operations Strategy

STORY OF THE MONTH

Unseen Unheard Unstoppable: Minerva FC

MOST INNOVATIVE GLOBAL COOs 2025

Duong Viet Tung

Chief Operations Officer, Akabot

Editor Note

THE NEW FACE OF OPERATIONAL BRILLIANCE

In the symphony of leadership, the CEO may be the conductor in the spotlight—but the COO is the orchestrator making sure the music never misses a beat. Once seen as the guardian of execution, today's COO wears a far more dynamic mantle. From supply chains to sustainability, from digital transformation to culture building, COOs are no longer just keeping the machine running. They're reimagining how it's built, scaled, and evolved. They are the quiet architects behind a company's agility, resilience, and reinvention.

This edition spotlights Most Innovative Global COOs 2025, leaders who are not just operational wizards but strategic visionaries. What sets them apart is not just what they manage, but how they think. They are driven by data but deeply attuned to people. They are fluent in efficiency, but never at the cost of ethics or empathy. And more than ever, they are central to shaping the future of work, customer experience, and global growth.

The role of the COO is shifting from backstage to front row. As the world becomes more volatile and interconnected, organisations are leaning on COOs for more than execution. They're looking to them for foresight. Because in times of complexity, innovation is not just about what you build, but how you operate, adapt, and scale it.

In these pages, you'll meet COOs who've transformed logistics into a competitive advantage, turned crises into catalysts, and brought precision to chaos. Their stories remind us that true innovation often lies not in the idea itself but in the discipline, courage, and creativity it takes to bring it to life.

Here's to the new era of operational leadership—visionary, resilient, and deeply human.

Happy reading!!!

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TRADEFLOCK'S

UPCOMING EDITIONS

Most Visionary Global CEOs in 2025

10 Best COOs in India 2025

Best Business Leaders from Singapore

Women Leaders in India 2025

Most Visionary Tech Leaders 2025

TRADEFLOCK
JOURNEY OF LEADERS

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TRADEFLOCK
JOURNEY OF LEADERS

MOST INNOVATIVE GLOBAL COOs 2025

NAME	DESIGNATION	COMPANY
Andreu Marco	COO	Chalhoub Group
Baran Yurdagul	COO	Vodafone Qatar
David Oruya	COO	Access Shipping Agency
Deron Brown	President and COO (US Operations)	PCL Construction
Duong Viet Tung	Chief Operations Officer	Akabot
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Sheila Antrum	Senior Vice President & COO	UCSF Health
Zainudeen P.B.	Group COO & Co-founder	Hotpack Global

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Most Innovative
GLOBAL COOs
2025

Turning Transforms Innovation into Global Impact

DUONG VIET TUNG

Chief Operations Officer, **Akabot**

This is the world where Duong Viet Tung thrives. As Chief Operations Officer at Akabot, he leads teams across more than 20 countries, turning complexity into opportunity. Whether it's integrating AI, streamlining automation, or guiding people through rapid transformation, Duong's strength lies in making momentum out of uncertainty. His approach is deeply human, focusing not just on systems and processes but on building trust and adaptability in every team he leads.

His rise is built on experience at the frontier of Vietnam's technology sector—engineering agile teams at NashTech, nurturing collaboration at One Mount Group, and evolving from hands-on product builder to strategic operations leader. Today, his leadership at Akabot has delivered a 200% revenue surge, industry accolades, and a culture defined by trust and innovation. Under his direction, Akabot was named a 'Major Contender' by Everest Group's RPA PEAK Matrix® in both 2023 and 2024—a recognition earned thanks to strong APAC market growth, robust investments in RPA capabilities, and exceptional client feedback praising the product's ease of use and rapid, localised support.

In this exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, Duong Viet Tung distils years of lessons into actionable insights, sharing how he navigates complexity, champions innovation, and sets the pace for the future of intelligent operations.

How has your view of innovation and execution changed as you've grown from product manager to global COO?

"Innovation and execution are two sides of the same coin—one without the other is just potential, not progress."

Early on, I saw innovation as building solutions for specific needs and execution as delivering on those ideas, often against the odds. With each step—from product management to program leadership and now as COO—I've learned true impact comes from balancing creativity with disciplined delivery, always keeping the customer at the heart. Today, I see innovation as a strategic force, and execution as the bridge that turns vision into measurable value.

How did your experience in program and product management shape your approach to leading operations at Akabot?

I've always believed real progress comes from bridging vision with action. My journey managing projects and products taught me the importance of balancing innovation with disciplined execution. Orchestrating teams at NashTech and One Mount Group helped me *"align strategy with customer value and agility"*—a mindset I now apply at Akabot. These lessons fuel my focus on building collaborative teams that adapt quickly and deliver real impact.

> "I've always believed real progress comes from bridging vision with action."

What are the biggest operational challenges in agentic automation, and how do you navigate them?

Agentic automation is game-changing, but it brings its own set of hurdles, notably integrating with legacy systems, ensuring trust in AI-driven decisions, and scaling efficiently. I see these challenges as opportunities to innovate responsibly. I always remind my team that bold innovation means nothing without transparency and adaptability. We tackle integration with modular designs and APIs for seamless connectivity, embed transparency and compliance through audit trails and human oversight, and leverage cloud-based infrastructure for effortless scalability. Just as importantly, we invest in upskilling people, empowering our clients and teams to embrace new ways of working and fully unlock automation's value.

How do you align business strategy with the rapid pace of AI and automation?

It's easy to get swept up in the excitement of emerging technologies, but I believe strategy starts with people—understanding their challenges and ambitions. I see AI, IDP, and machine learning as catalysts for reimagining how we create value, but I always embed innovation into our roadmap, never losing sight of customer needs. By fostering agility, encouraging collaboration across teams, and building a culture of continuous learning, we make sure every advancement genuinely serves our clients. That's how Akabot stays relevant, resilient, and ready for what's next.

What's your approach to deciding if a new technology belongs in Akabot's ecosystem?

Whenever a new technology comes across my desk, I think first about the people it will affect—our customers and our teams. My guiding question is always, *"Will this actually make a positive difference for them?"* If it fits our mission, brings real value, and integrates seamlessly, it's worth exploring. But trust matters just as much, so compliance and team readiness are always part of my checklist. Purposeful innovation, for me, means choosing what truly helps, not just what's shiny and new.

What's your biggest operational lesson, and what advice would you share with aspiring leaders?

If there's one truth I've found in operations, it's this: *"Rigid plans rarely survive, but agile teams thrive."* The most lasting impact comes from balancing bold innovation with disciplined execution, and above all, keeping the customer at the heart of every decision. Adaptability isn't just an advantage in a fast-moving landscape—it's essential. My advice to future leaders? Stay curious and open to new ideas, invest in learning, and build real team connections. Challenges will come, but those who lead with empathy, vision, and resilience will always find ways to turn complexity into opportunity—and shape operations that truly make a difference.

WHAT ECONOMIC FREEDOM MEANS TO INDIANS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Padma V, Multipreneur & Direct Selling Entrepreneur with QNET

As India charts its path in a rapidly changing global economy, the idea of economic freedom has taken on new significance. No longer limited to the ability to earn a living, it now encompasses independence of choice, flexibility of work, and the power to design one's own future. This shift is especially visible beyond metropolitan cities, where evolving work models are opening new doors for aspiring entrepreneurs.

One such model, direct selling, is redefining how individuals approach work. Rooted in the principles of community, collaboration, and self-reliance, it allows people to build careers without the barriers of high capital, formal qualifications, or rigid work hours. For many, especially women and youth in tier-2 and tier-3 towns, it offers a pathway to financial independence while staying connected to their communities.

From Dependence to Empowerment: Unlike traditional employment where individual growth is often siloed, direct selling thrives on collective progress. Entrepreneurs build strong networks, mentor others, and grow alongside their teams. Recognition events, training sessions, and regular goal-setting meetings create a sense of belonging rarely found in conventional workplaces. The outcome is not just financial gain but also the confidence and leadership skills that come from empowering others.

Accessible and Inclusive by Nature: Direct selling's minimal entry barriers make it accessible to a wide demographic—graduates seeking a start, homemakers looking to contribute to household income, and retirees staying active. In India, the sector is powered by over 88 lakh entrepreneurs, with women at the forefront. Wellness products dominate the market, aligning with the country's increasing focus on healthier living. For regions where formal job opportunities remain limited, this model provides a vital alternative for upward mobility.

Freedom with Structure: What makes direct selling unique is the balance it offers entrepreneurial freedom backed by the systems, training, and product lines of established companies. Income is performance-based, encouraging self-discipline and sustained effort. Success comes not from mere sales but from cultivating trust, building relationships, and demonstrating long-term vision.

As India marks another year of independence, economic freedom is emerging as a powerful driver of its growth story. Direct selling reflects this spirit, helping individuals take charge of their financial journeys, shaping careers on their own terms, and contributing meaningfully to the nation's progress. In a world where work is being redefined, it stands as a reminder that true independence begins with the freedom to choose your path.

Editor's Pick

THE PLANT THAT SEES AHEAD

AI and the Rise of Autonomous Industry

Enabled by predictive AI and self-learning systems, factories are transforming from static assets into dynamic, intelligent networks. Your plant isn't just responding, it's foreseeing, evolving, and at times, operating beyond human speed and insight.

As factories begin to "think" quicker and more precisely than their human overseers, a pressing question arises: What if your plant anticipates what lies ahead before you?

Traditionally, industrial plants functioned reactively, equipment malfunctioned and quality problems emerged before technicians responded, leading to expensive downtime. Predictive AI alters this by examining sensor data and real-time measurements to identify early indicators like vibrations or temperature variations, allowing the facility to "anticipate" issues, predict faults, and autonomously initiate preventive measures, transitioning from human led interventions to AI driven foresight that averts disruptions.

Building on predictive AI, self-optimising factories independently modify operations instantly, adjusting speed, temperature, and processes. For example, production lines fine tune for raw material variations, and logistics redirect to prevent obstructions. Utilizing machine learning, edge computing, and IoT, these systems constantly evolve, minimizing downtime, improving quality, reducing waste, and increasing flexibility.

Some real world examples are leading the way. Sectors such as automotive, pharmaceuticals, and semiconductors are already reaping the benefits of predictive AI and self-optimising technologies. Automakers like BMW and Tesla employ predictive maintenance to minimize disruptions, with robots adapting to material variations to enhance output and lower defect rates. In the pharmaceutical industry, AI predicts equipment degradation and optimises processes to uphold rigorous quality and compliance standards while reducing waste. Semiconductor facilities rely on AI to constantly fine-tune conditions in real time, ensuring maximum efficiency in highly sensitive operations.

For instance, impacts of predictive AI and self-optimising factories across multiple industries is commendable. As unplanned downtime costs the top 500 global companies around $1.4 trillion annually, making predictive AI essential for reducing losses. In automotive, GM cut downtime by 20%, Siemens lowered maintenance costs by 30%, Toyota reduced downtime by 40%, and Harley-Davidson boosted efficiency by 25% while halving maintenance delays. A European plant using Scops AI cut downtime by 40%, saving €1.5 million and avoiding over €100,000 in losses. Another manufacturer using Azure AI reduced downtime by 70%, cut maintenance costs by 45%, and achieved ROI within 9 months.

So, Predictive AI and self-optimising factories transform industries from reactive to anticipatory operations, allowing machines to predict problems and autonomously modify processes. This enhances productivity, quality, and robustness while enabling employees to concentrate on creativity instead of repetitive duties. As plants "anticipate ahead," companies secure a competitive advantage by responding swiftly and minimizing waste. However, effective implementation demands fostering AI confidence, strengthening cybersecurity, and equipping the workforce for evolving, data-centric roles.

SPOTLIGHT

LEADING A NO-ROUTINE WORKFORCE

Adapting to Gen Z's Need for Speed and Flexibility

The traditional 9-to-5 job is considered the ideal of work, but it is losing appeal. The new generation of workers, raised in a world of hyper-connectivity, the gig economy, and rapid digital change, is increasingly rejecting the monotony of established routines. Instead, they seek dynamic jobs, flexible schedules, and work environments that mirror the fluidity of their personal lives. The key question for today's employers is: are we ready to handle a workforce that hates routine?

A Change in Generation Work Philosophy

This change is being spearheaded by Gen Z and millennials, who currently constitute the greatest portion of the global workforce. The 2023 Global Gen Z and Millennial Survey by Deloitte reveals that flexibility of work location and time is among the most important priorities of young professionals. More than 75% indicated that they would quit a job that lacks sufficient flexibility.

The rationale for this change lies in the culture that these generations grew up in, which is characterised by continuous change, real-time updates, and digital multitasking. Fast innovation, distant access, and an on-demand lifestyle are the features of their world. To them, the routine may even translate to stagnation, uncreativity, and even mental fatigue.

The Emergence of Dynamic Work Models

Progressive companies now adopt fluid, long-term operating models like hybrid and remote work, emphasising asynchronous communication and outcome-based performance. Companies such as Atlassian, GitLab, and Spotify offer flexible schedules, allowing employees to choose their hours. Talent can transfer across departments and geographies based on need and interest, thanks to project-based staffing models.

Technology as a Means to Flexibility

This paradigm shift has been made possible by the adoption of digital tools. AI-based productivity tools, real-time messaging apps, and cloud collaboration platforms have never made decentralisation and personalisation of work so easy. Planners such as Notion, Slack, and Monday.com are no longer only task management tools but also the means to develop a specific workflow that meets personal needs.

In addition, repetitive, time-consuming tasks are being replaced by automation and AI, leaving workers with the ability to engage in strategic, creative, or high-value work. McKinsey predicts that 30% of work activities in 60% of occupations are possible for automation, a chance to get rid of routine and reinvent jobs.

The Mental Health Imperative

The fixation on fluidity is about lifestyle and well-being. The report of the American Psychological Association released in 2022 emphasised that the lack of autonomy and monotony are the major causes of burnout. To digital natives, who live on novelty and self-direction, fixed routines are emotionally demanding.

Employers that adjust, enhance productivity, mental health and involvement. Businesses such as Google and HubSpot have adopted flex weeks and no-meeting days as a way of fighting against routine fatigue. Some are even trying four-day weeks and personalised leave.

Issues and Problems

But this change has issues. Organisations must balance flexibility with accountability, culture with personalisation, and innovation with consistency. Managers face the dilemma of guiding performance versus micromanaging.

Fragmentation and inequity also pose risks. Employees with less access to technology or working from home may be left behind. Not all positions can be flexible, frontline, manufacturing, and logistics roles often need structure.

Leaders should address these inequities by ensuring inclusive operations and expanding flexible work beyond a small group.

Operations to HR: A Systemic Transformation

Change should be systematic in order to prepare a routine-averse workforce. HR policies should move out of the rule-book style to a more flexible model. The redefinition of job roles to comprise skill clusters and project cycles rather than fixed job responsibilities should be adopted. Performance reviews should focus on punctuality, completion of tasks, results, creativity, and teamwork.

Operationally, firms require faster processes. It entails dynamic teaming, cross-functional teamwork, and lifelong learning environments. The leadership development programs also need to change and provide managers with such skills as coaching, emotional intelligence, and digital fluency.

Education and Upskilling: Readiness in Fluid Careers

Even schools are changing. Colleges and educational institutions are shifting towards interdisciplinary and modular study programs. The categories of credentials are becoming more fluid, with micro-certifications, boot camps, and self-paced learning becoming more popular.

This change indicates the fact that the current employees are not willing to merely perform work, but create their careers, which would develop along with them. Lifelong learning, flexibility, and innovative independence are becoming the new employment currency.

Embracing the Nonlinear Workforce

The shift from clock-in/out productivity to a nonlinear, individualised work culture reflects a workforce that is ambitious, creative, and futuristic rather than lazy or disloyal. Employers viewing this change as an opportunity will foster more innovation, loyalty, and growth. Adapting requires a mindset shift, redefining productivity, leadership, and success. Prosperous businesses will engineer flexibility, not impose structure, as the future is fluid for a routine-averse workforce.

Most Innovative GLOBAL COOs 2025

Leading Innovative and Sustainable Operations in Luxury Retail

ANDREU MARCO

COO, **Chalhoub Group**

Andreu Marco has become a catalyst for change in the rapidly evolving luxury retail industry, which is experiencing a digital revolution and a push toward sustainability, leading to changes in business models. So, what is his response to the major challenges facing the industry? The perfect combination of a streamlined business process, advanced digital connectivity, and eco-friendly initiatives. By restructuring the operations of Chalhoub Group, Marco has created an experience that enables the company to succeed in a demanding, tech-savvy, and ethical consumer marketplace.

Addressing Industry Problems in a Headfirst Fashion

The luxury sector in the Middle East had traditionally relied on conventional paradigms-touchy-feely customer service, retailing, and diffuse logistics. However, with the rise of digital tools and increased demand for transparency and sustainability, consumer behaviors have changed dramatically. Additional pressure came from supply chain disruptions and the need for hyper-personalization. At this point, Andreu Marco stepped in to address these challenges by designing an agile and scalable operational blueprint.

An Operational Excellence Career

With over 20 years of experience in the international fashion, beauty, and luxury brands sector, Andreu Marco has worked in countries such as Spain, the UK, Brazil, Mexico, Poland, and Russia. He served as the Global SVP of Supply Chain at Burberry in London before joining Chalhoub Group, where he spent more than 16 years helping transform the company's supply chain. He also held top positions at Inditex-leading operations under Massimo Dutti, and at the Swiss-based fragrance and perfumery company Firmenich.

His international background gives him a unique mix of retail expertise, supply chain skills, and innovation-driven thinking, which proved crucial in his upcoming role.

Entrance into Chalhoub Group

There was a digital and strategic transformation in the firm when Marco joined as Chief Operating Officer under Chalhoub Group. Chalhoub, known as the biggest partner of luxury brands in the Middle East, had to future-proof its operations due to the rising demand for regional services and changes in consumer expectations.

Marco was tasked with managing end-to-end supply chain operations, logistics, retail stores, and administrative tasks. As a member of the executive committee, he helped develop the transformation roadmap for Chalhoub, ensuring that operational excellence became a core part of its business strategy.

Inventions Which Changed the Way of Things

Digital transformation in the Chalhoub Group under Marco led to significant development through data-driven logistics, omni-channel integration, and advanced inventory systems, notably with the Connect clienteling app that offers personalized, real-time customer service. This shift fostered a more customer-focused, connected ecosystem, elevating Chalhoub in a competitive market. Marco also promoted cultural change by training teams, improving decision-making, and encouraging innovation.

Embedding Sustainability into the Core

Marco has been key in integrating sustainability into Chalhoub Group's supply chain, setting environmental goals like energy efficiency, waste reduction, and eco-friendly packaging. He engaged with regional groups and a spectrum of initiatives, like minimizing Scope 3 emissions, aligned with ESG principles on sourcing and logistics. The company's sustainability report highlighted increased renewable energy, ethical audits, reduced emissions, and efforts on gender equality, reflecting Marco's view that environmental responsibility complements operational excellence.

Approaching Crises Confidently

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, other luxury retailers worldwide had to pause their operations. However, under Marco's leadership, Chalhoub gained momentum. Agile operations and cross-functional teamwork were evident as the company quickly deployed numerous e-commerce platforms in 15 days, a task that would normally take about 15 months per platform.

This response showcased both planning foresight and organizational skills that large groups like Chalhoub possess, especially in times of crisis, thanks to Marco's guidance. Flexible systems, real-time analytics, and distributed decision-making, which he had helped establish before the crisis, allowed Chalhoub to adapt quickly without losing customer loyalty, maintaining its ability to serve its global luxury partners.

Awards and Recognition

Although the focus on a low profile highlights Marco, his efforts have helped Chalhoub Group earn various industry awards for innovation, customer experiences, and sustainability. Other honors include the MENA Retail Award and Stevie Awards for retail technology innovation and operational excellence, as well as international recognition for developing a customer-centric culture. This recognition shows the success of the significant changes he has brought to the organization in terms of strategies and frameworks, ensuring that the operational improvements are not only implemented but also maintained and expanded.

Redefining Operational Leadership

The management of Chalhoub Group, led by Andreu Marco, can be seen as a masterclass in reinventing operations within the luxury sector. By using a carefully balanced mix of digital integration, sustainability, and agile thinking, he has transformed challenges into opportunities, redefining how a regional giant in the luxury world operates in the modern era.

Through his journey, he demonstrates a deep appreciation for the evolving potential of operations as a true competitive advantage, rather than just a back-end function. Operations now serve as a dynamic driver of growth and a pillar of resilience to enhance the customer experience. In today's luxury retail environment, Andreu Marco can be regarded as a visionary, not only adapting to change but also leading it.

TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

Leadership Lessons

SHANTANU NARAYEN

CEO of Adobe

Leading a top tech company demands vision and strategic execution. Few leaders have transformed Adobe as seamlessly as Shantanu Narayayen. In nearly twenty years, he has shifted Adobe from traditional software to a cloud-based, AI-driven design powerhouse, starting with products like Photoshop and Acrobat.

Appointed CEO in 2007, during a decline in print media, high piracy, and waning relevance of desktop software, Narayen led Adobe through a radical shift to a subscription SaaS model, adopting cloud, AI, and immersive tools. Today, Adobe is a leading tech brand, with Narayen regarded as an efficient, unobtrusive Silicon Valley leader.

Innovate Before You Have To

Adobe was a giant but vulnerable when Narayen became CEO. Software was sold in stores, upgrades were costly, and piracy was common. Instead of reacting defensively, Narayen shifted Adobe's model to the cloud with Creative Cloud.

This risky move initially hurt revenue and was met with scepticism. However, he persisted, and today, Adobe's recurring revenue model is highly profitable and industry standard.

LESSON TO LEARN

> Great leaders innovate on themselves before the market can do it. Reinvention is not a response- it is a game plan.

Empathy-Driven Innovation

Empathy is vital for Narayen's leadership, fostering innovation by understanding designers, marketers, and content creators' needs. Adobe's shift to customer experience management via Adobe Experience Cloud bridged content creation and data-driven marketing, broadening its reach to creatives and enterprises.

LESSON TO LEARN

> User listening is a competitive advantage. Insight becomes innovation in the hands of empathy.

Global Thinking, Local Knowledge

Narayen grew up in Hyderabad, India, and his experiences of a global upbringing influenced his inclusive leadership style. He combines the culture of innovation in Silicon Valley and the Indian culture of perseverance, humility, and patience. Adobe has become a highly collaborative and non-hierarchical culture.

He has also led the way to global expansion, not only selling its goods around the world, but creating R&D, talent, and impact across the continents.

LESSON TO LEARN

> The best global thinkers are local leaders. Thought diversity brings business strength.

Be a Calm, Convincing Leader

Narayen is not a blowhard CEO. He is characterised by sober, reflective, and cool leadership, particularly in times of crisis. He is calm and clear whether it is an economic recession or a technological revolution.

Narayen remained focused on long-term objectives during the 2008 recession. Adobe was one of the first companies to transition fully to remote work during the pandemic, continuing to innovate its products and support its customers.

LESSON TO LEARN

> During turbulent times, calm leaders can drive others. Still, fingers make enduring monuments.

Champion Culture and Inclusion

Adobe has consistently been on the top list of best places to work under Narayen. He puts a lot of stress on diversity, equity, and inclusion, not only as a corporate tick-the-box, but also as a key to innovation and culture.

He also subscribes to values-based leadership- incorporating ethics, sustainability and social responsibility as part of Adobe's mission. This entails the Adobe initiative regarding digital literacy, climate action, and access to education using such tools as Adobe Express.

LESSON TO LEARN

> Culture is not an HR program- it is a leadership requirement. Performance is driven by purpose.

Combine Creativity and Data

Among the most distinctive qualities that Narayen has to offer is the ability to combine creativity and analytics. He spearheaded Adobe's entry into marketing automation, artificial intelligence (Sensei), and enterprise software, creating a cohesive ecosystem where design and data interact.

This has enabled Adobe to remain the market leader in an era when firms desire to generate content in bulk, personalise encounters, and monitor performance, all without undermining creativity.

LESSON TO LEARN

> Today's leaders must incorporate both left-brain and right-brain thinking. Data can drive the strategy, but the connection is driven by creativity.

Inheritance by Planning, not by Feeling

Narayen is not ready to step down, but he has already started to groom the second generation of Adobe leadership. He has a strategic, rather than sentimental, approach to succession planning: he creates leaders who know and believe in the values of the company but are able to bring it to a new level.

He encourages people to be promoted internally, to have rotational leadership experiences, and have a long-term perspective so that Adobe will be adaptable and future-ready.

LESSON TO LEARN

> Legacy is not what you leave behind but what you put up in front.

Product Cycle Defying Leadership

Under his leadership, Shantanu Narayen has transformed Adobe into a cloud-first creative company. His true legacy, however, lies in how he achieved this —with grace, vision, and integrity.

Through this, he provides a new leadership paradigm for the digital era: one that emphasises evolutionary, inclusive, and sustainable impact, as opposed to the intense, ego-driven, and short-term recognition.

And to leaders who want to create something sustainable, the quiet revolution of Narayen is a lesson in vision, values, and velocity.

Most Innovative GLOBAL COOs 2025

Changing the Face of Telecommunications in the Middle East

BARAN YUGDUGAL

COO,
Vodafone Qatar

Ever since the start of the 21st century, the telecommunications industry has risen from a relatively small industry to one of the biggest industries in the world. To navigate such an industry, which demands constant changes and mind-storming, a strong and determined leader is a must. One such leader is Baran Yugdugal, who, through his work in some of the biggest telecom providers in the Middle East, has revolutionized the industry in the region. Currently, as Chief Operating Officer (COO) at Vodafone Qatar, he is steering the company through a transformative era, leveraging his extensive expertise to drive strategic growth and redefine customer experiences in the Middle East's dynamic telecom market.

Early Life and Education

Baran Yurdagül's journey began with a solid academic foundation at Selcuk University in Turkey, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science in 1999. This technical grounding equipped him with a deep understanding of the systems that underpin modern telecommunications. Recognizing the importance of strategic leadership, he pursued a Master's in Management at Selcuk University, completing it in 2007. This blend of technical prowess and business acumen has been a cornerstone of his career, enabling him to bridge the gap between complex technologies and market-driven strategies.

Building a Foundation at Turkcell

Yurdagül's professional career took off at Turkcell, Turkey's leading mobile operator, where he served as Product Manager for Internet and Community - Mobile Applications around the early 2000s. During his tenure, he played a pivotal role in developing innovative mobile services that enhanced user engagement and drove revenue growth. His work focused on mobile applications and digital content, laying the groundwork for Turkcell's dominance in Turkey's competitive telecom market. Yurdagül's contributions included launching services that capitalized on the growing demand for mobile internet, setting the stage for his future leadership in network advancements.

Transforming Connectivity at Turk Telekom

By the mid-2010s, Yurdagül joined Turk Telekom as Group Marketing Director, leading large-scale, tech-driven projects. He spearheaded the 2016 digital transformation of Fenerbahçe Ülker Stadium, Turkey's first connected stadium. Partnering with Ericsson and Tripleplay, he oversaw the installation of a digital signage and IPTV system that delivered full HD content to 150 screens without network impact.

Yurdagül noted, "Tripleplay's solution allows us to deliver full HD content to all 150 screens without network issues". This improved fan experience and positioned Turk Telekom as a pioneer in telecom and sports infrastructure. His tenure also included leading the TTR to Phonebackup migration and developing the product. Colleagues praised his analytical skills, with one recommending him as a project analyst. His result-oriented approach and teamwork earned him a reputation for delivering complex projects with precision.

Revolutionizing Oman's Telecom Landscape at Omantel

In 2022, Yurdagül joined Omantel, Oman's leading telecommunications provider, as General Manager of Consumer Marketing, before being appointed Vice President of the Consumer Business Unit in August 2023. His most significant achievement was leading the launch of Oman's first 5G services, a milestone that transformed the country's telecommunications landscape.

This initiative enabled faster internet speeds, lower latency, and greater connectivity, paving the way for innovations in smart cities and IoT applications. Yurdagül's strategic vision was evident in his focus on customer-centric solutions, as he noted in a partnership with The ENTERTAINER business:

> "Keeping services at our customers' fingertips is a top priority for us as we continue to emerge as a lifestyle brand that takes solutions beyond the traditional telecom offerings"

> Colleagues praised his analytical skills, with one recommending him as a project analyst. His result-oriented approach and teamwork earned him a reputation for delivering complex projects with precision

Leading Vodafone Qatar into a New Era

In early 2025, Yurdagül became COO of Vodafone Qatar, using his experience to drive operational excellence and strategic growth. He oversees customer operations, HR, legal, regulatory, and external affairs, aligning with Qatar's National Vision 2030 for digital transformation. Under his leadership, Vodafone Qatar launched customer-centric initiatives like the iPoints loyalty program, which rewards subscribers with benefits such as bill payments and partner offers. Yurdagül highlighted its value, stating, "We aim to empower customers with great deals and offers for the best value, providing a simple, transparent, and rewarding experience."

Another key initiative is the partnership with OSNtv, integrating premium entertainment with Vodafone Qatar's Home Fibre services, offering up to 170 channels and an Android-based set-top box to improve in-home entertainment. Yurdagül said, "Our partnership with OSN enhances our Home Fibre services," and his support for startups through collaborations like SAWAA Technology at Web Summit 2025 shows his commitment to Qatar's digital economy.

Leadership Style and Industry Impact

A result-oriented approach and a collaborative spirit characterize Yurdagül's leadership. Colleagues have lauded his ability to drive projects to successful completion, with one noting, "Baran is a very good product manager. He is result-oriented and does his best to bring projects to successful completion. The Team that has Baran starts with a strong plus." His thought leadership extends to industry forums, where he shares insights on emerging technologies and their impact on customer experiences. His strategic acumen and ability to anticipate market needs have consistently positioned his organizations at the forefront of innovation.

THE NEW ECONOMICS OF LOW BUDGET CINEMA

Vishal Srivastava, CEO, Bawara Manjhi Production

Conscious, evolving efficiency has always been a signature of human beings. And indie filmmakers have always tapped into that part of their soul to survive in India. To put it mildly, it has always been winter in filmmaking. And as an independent filmmaker and a survivor of Season 8 of Game of Thrones, I do claim some authority on winters.

"New ways replacing old ways" is an old adage. The newest one of our times is AI. You can almost do anything with it and that too without putting in Herculean efforts, without sacrificing years, without facing traumatising failures or dodging their psychological ramifications. It's almost magic: black for the skepticals, white for the believers of change. You can make songs, paintings, videos, remix them, even write this article using AI. And maybe I have.

For those unaware, all films go through certain phases. Even indie films go through them just a little differently. Let's look at these phases in the context of AI.

Writing and Development: Writing is the safe space in the indie world, and AI will certainly help with research. But development has always been a nightmare, because of the F word: financing. Even AI is obsolete in front of the F word.

Pre-Production: The phase where we prepare for the shoot. For indie filmmakers, AI might be a game changer. It can help with budgeting, scheduling, storyboarding, etc. offering some peace amid the chaos.

Production: This is the famous Lights, Camera and Action phase. AI won't do much, at least not for some time, and certainly not the cheap ones.

Post-Production: This is the phase where we truly make the film, using the footage we shot and adding everything else. AI will certainly help here, especially with music and sound. But this might be a double-edged sword, as it could hamper the human-to-human interaction and magical collaborations.

Marketing & Publicity: We all know what this is. AI might help with campaign ideas, posters, and trailers, but you still need funding to do these things well. There will be outliers who use AI to their advantage now and then, but they'll remain rare exceptions.

Distribution & Sales: Again, you know what this is. This is certainly an exposed nerve for indie filmmakers. Unfortunately, AI won't do much here, since sales & distribution remain relationship- and network-driven.

I think indie filmmaking will do just fine with AI. Dare I say, it may even grow, at least for some time, until the corporations uneven the field. But like I said, indie filmmaking has always been an uphill battle. And though the audience may not care, Indie filmmaking will survive. The warriors always do.

SPOTLIGHT

RETHINKING OPERATIONS IN DISRUPTION

Global Lessons from Manufacturing, Retail, E-Commerce & Pharma

Amidst supply chain disruptions, shifting consumer preferences, geopolitical tensions, and technological upheavals, COOs and operations leaders face an increasingly complex question: What is the most effective strategy for achieving operational resilience and growth in a fragmented global marketplace?

To address this, we need to learn how industries such as manufacturing, retailing, e-commerce, and pharma are re-engineering the DNA of their operations to remain nimble, low-cost, and customer-driven.

Manufacturing: From Just-in-Case to Just-in-Time

Lean manufacturing and JIT-optimised operational excellence for decades. However, pandemic impacts, raw material shortages, and geopolitical concerns exposed risks in highly optimised supply chains.

Toyota, the originator of JIT, was among the first to adopt a hybrid model. By maintaining safety inventories and supplier diversity, it avoided production halts during the 2021 semiconductor shortages. This new blend of Just–in-Time and Just-in-Case preserves efficiency while increasing flexibility.

Another trend is nearshoring or reshoring. For instance, General Motors shifted major battery manufacturing to North America to reduce dependence on Asian suppliers and manage geopolitical risks.

Retail: Omnichannel is not Optional

Brick-and-mortar models, which were most impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns, were most resilient, and retailers that had already invested in omnichannel capabilities were better off. The current retail operations strategy that ensures a victory is an online and offline experience of seamless integration, real-time visibility of inventory, and supply chain.

Zara, a Spanish clothing company, pioneered fast fashion by aligning customer data with supply chain responsiveness. Zara has gone digital-first during the pandemic, including online fulfillment by leveraging store inventory. The stores were converted into mini-warehouses, which made the deliveries faster and allowed the management of orders locally.

Target was also able to reap the benefits of operations in the U.S. as it improved curbside pickup, extended same-day delivery, and engaged stores as fulfillment centers. Their investments in last-mile logistics were essential to sustain customer loyalty and profitability.

E-commerce: Pace, Elasticity, and Sustainability

Speed is king in the e-commerce world. However, a growing need to be more sustainable and have their privacy respected has equalised consumer expectations. The winning operations strategies are based on automation, AI, and green logistics.

The operations model of Amazon is based on its extensive fulfillment network, data analytics in real-time, and AI-based forecasting. However, even Amazon has been forced to change its ways, as the company has started to concentrate on regionalising its fulfillment network within the U.S., shortening delivery times and lowering its carbon footprint.

New entrants such as Indian Flipkart are spending big on electric delivery networks and sustainable packaging to make their speed of operations match their ESG ambitions. In the same way, Shopify merchants are taking advantage of AI to handle inventories, forecast demand, and optimise deliveries without having to develop infrastructure on the scale of Amazon.

Pharma: Domestic Strength and Regulatory Agility

The pharmaceutical sector was taught a bitter lesson during the pandemic that it was too dependent on the manufacturing operations in one country, particularly the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). The new winning formula is localized manufacturing, high-tech digital equipment, and responsive compliance systems.

The production and worldwide shipment of the COVID-19 vaccine demonstrated the power of agility and cooperation to transform the pharma business. The collaboration between Pfizer and BioNTech relied on modular manufacturing, rapid regulatory coordination, and digital traceability to generate and distribute billions of doses to most countries in the world.

Serum Institute of India, the largest vaccine manufacturer in the world, rapidly increased its manufacturing capacity through distributed manufacturing in geographies. This was not only a continuity but also tackled the regional access and storage issues.

Common Denominators of Winning Strategies across Sectors

Digital Transformation: Supply chains incorporate digital twins, IoT, and AI analytics to model disruptions, optimize inventory, and predict failures. In manufacturing, predictive maintenance; in retail, real-time demand sensing; data is the key operational asset.

Agility and Modularity: Successful operations are modular, allowing scaling or quick pivoting. This includes modular production, multi-sourcing, and agile cross-functional teams.

Local-Global Balance: Companies balance globalization and localization by maintaining global sourcing and creating local buffers to counteract regional turbulence.

Sustainability Integration: Regulatory and consumer demands drive operational sustainability through green logistics, energy-efficient warehousing, and circular manufacturing.

Resilience in Workforce Models: Flexible workforce strategies like remote work, gig partnerships, and reskilling help companies adjust to demand fluctuations without overstretching.

Operation Strategy as a Competitive Arsenal

The volatile environment does not have a single operational strategy that fits all. Nevertheless, the winning formula is represented by a combination of agility, digital maturity, local responsiveness, and sustainability. It does not matter whether it is the agile logistics of Zara or the predictive infrastructure of Amazon, or even the rapid global rollout of Pfizer; every case demonstrates the strength of re-imagining operations as a source of competitive advantage rather than a cost element.

The global market that is disrupted is not a phase one should expect to end; it is the new normal. Those leaders who constantly change their operations to this changing environment will not only survive but also dictate future industry trends.

Most Innovative GLOBAL COOs 2025

Blending Data, Discipline, and Empathy

DAVID ORUYA

Chief Operating Officer,
Access Shipping Agency

As global commerce surges ahead, the maritime freight sector is its vital lifeline, projected to reach nearly $492 billion by 2028. In this world where disruption is constant and precision is everything, the Chief Operating Officer is no longer just an executor, but a strategic anchor amid uncertainty.

Dr. David Oruya, COO of Access Shipping Agency, exemplifies leadership at this intersection of complexity and transformation. A Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers (FICS), Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (FCILT), Member of the Institute of Directors (MIoD), and Certified Professional Mediator (CPM) accredited by the Judiciary of Kenya, he also serves on the executive committee of ICS East Africa, chairing several key committees. He has quietly shaped East Africa's shipping corridors for over twenty years, translating frontline grit into strategic clarity and building systems where innovation and human values coexist.

Known for his disciplined calm and unshakable clarity, he leads with equal parts courage and empathy. He is recognised not just for operational excellence but also for redefining resilience and leadership under pressure. For him, operational brilliance starts in the mind, rooted in humility, learning, and the courage to make bold decisions even when the way forward is unclear.

In this exclusive TradeFlock feature, Dr. David Oruya unpacks the turning points, philosophies, and innovations that shape his leadership, offering a rare inside look at the mindset required to thrive in today's most demanding operational roles.

What part of your journey shaped you most?

The turning point was when my work stopped being a profession and became a calling. Those early days in Mombasa, solving real problems with my hands, taught me grit, humility, and how to listen truly. But the real transformation came when I stepped into leadership. The shift from execution to strategy stretched me in every way, requiring more clarity, courage, and vision than I'd ever imagined.

"Every challenge demanded deeper thinking and a broader perspective, and that's what shaped the leader I've become."

Along the way, I was sharpened by my team, guided by mentors, and fueled by a mindset of lifelong learning. My faith anchored me in uncertain moments, reminding me that growth isn't just about outcomes and who you become.

What's your first mental check in a high-stakes operational crisis?

The first thing I do is pause. In high-pressure moments, I've learned that rushing rarely leads to wisdom. I take a breath and ask myself: What's true? What's urgent? What's strategic?

That pause helps me center not just myself, but my team. I call it disciplined calm, balancing urgency with clear judgment. Then we verify the facts, focus on the real disruption, and move forward with intent.

Faith also plays a big part. I remind myself I'm not alone in the process, and there's always a way to go. As a leader, I believe my mindset shapes the room, so I try to lead with calm, clarity, and purpose, even in the storm.

Can you share a maritime challenge and the bold decision you took to resolve it?

There was a moment when everything was at stake—a vessel delayed in Dar es Salaam, over ten ships ahead of us, and pressure building by the hour. Waiting was the safe route, but I knew we had to act.

We made a tough call: diverted to Mombasa, carefully managed draft limits, discharged cargo in phases, and restowed Dar cargo before returning. It was high-risk, but it worked.

> **It taught me that boldness in operations isn't bravado but clarity, courage, and the willingness to bet on better outcomes.**

That day reminded me that strategy doesn't always come from the plan but from presence, teamwork, and knowing when to move.

What's your process after an operational failure?

When a plan fails, I don't jump to fix it; I start by listening. Failure, to me, is a mirror, not a verdict. I begin with the system: Were our assumptions flawed, data incomplete, or signals missed? Then I focus on people, such as whether the communication is clear. Were responsibilities understood? Lastly, I check the mindset—did we walk in with fear, complacency, or distraction?

I never approach it with blame. I aim to extract the lesson without damaging trust because real improvement comes from honest reflection, not reaction.

Which maritime innovation excites you, and which concerns you?

What excites me most is that we can almost predict the future. Digital twins and predictive logistics are changing the game. Simulating supply chain responses in real time opens a new level of resilience and agility in operations.

But what gives me pause is over-automation without accountability. Technology should support human judgment, not replace it. When we lean too heavily on algorithms, we risk losing the very instincts and ethics that keep leadership grounded.

What's your core philosophy in operations?

I've always seen operations as more than execution and believe it's the discipline of turning potential into progress. My approach is rooted in two principles: **continuous improvement and structured preparation.**

I believe there's always room to refine a system, a process, or a team dynamic, not for perfection's sake, but to respect what's possible. At the same time, I'm deeply intentional about planning. Without clarity and foresight, even great teams can lose direction. That blend of curiosity, structure, and people-centred thinking shapes how I lead operations with purpose, precision, and a long view in mind.

Startup OF THE MONTH

Swap

Reinventing the E-Commerce Engine with a Unified Operating System

A silent battle is unfolding in the busy world of direct-to-consumer (DTC) e-commerce, not in branding or advertising, but in operations. Fragmented logistics networks, unpredictable shipping costs, international tax complications, and rigid inventory systems often trap brands within their own frameworks.

Enter Swap, a startup co-founded in 2022 by Sam Atkinson and Zach Bailet, which aims to do to e-commerce operations what Stripe did to payments, namely consolidate, simplify, and scale.

The Friction to Flow

The original vision of Swap is as ambitious as it is relevant: the majority of contemporary brands spend their time and resources on uncoordinated tools to control shipping, returns, taxes, and inventory. This inefficiency has not been sustainable in the face of increased consumer expectations and global market competition.

Swap provides an AI-driven operating system for e-commerce. All of this is united on one platform: cross-border logistics, duties and tax compliance, returns management, inventory intelligence, and more.

We want to eliminate the drag on the operation that slows great brands, explains Atkinson, a former corporate lawyer who became a fintech operator. We would like operations to be invisible, just like electricity or the internet.

Global Merchant All-in-One

The platform of Swap is designed to handle the back-end of e-commerce. The important functions are:

- Cross-Border Shipping & Duties: Swap handles customs paperwork, shipment tracking, and guarantees delivery duty paid (DDP) at checkout, so there are no nasty surprises, and conversion rates improve.
- Returns Management: The platform automates returns labels, logistics, and even manages duty drawback, an often-overlooked opportunity to recover lost tax on returns.
- Inventory Intelligence: Using generative AI, the company recently launched Swap Inventory, a new product that predicts demand, optimises prices, and prevents overstocking or running out of stock.

They are all combined in one dashboard, which makes operations more manageable, measurable, and strategic.

The Funding Flywheel

Investors have not ignored the promise of Swap. It closed a $9 million Series A in 2024 with QED Investors and a $40 million Series B in early 2025, led by ICONIQ Growth. Other investors are Cherry Ventures, Portfolio Ventures and Klaviyo co-founder Ed Hallen.

The new investment adds up to a total of $49 million, and along with it, the firepower to expand globally. They are providing the brands with the means to act across the world with the assurance and ease of Amazon.

At a Glance
Founded: **2022**
Founders: **Sam Atkinson and Zach Bailet**
Headquarters: **London, with offices in Tel Aviv and the Netherlands**
Funding: **$49 million**
Key Investors: **ICONIQ Growth, QED Investors, Cherry Ventures, Klaviyo's Ed Hallen**

Operational DNA Founders

Atkinson, who previously worked at Juni (an e-commerce financial platform) and in corporate law, informed Swap in terms of regulation, and co-founder Bailet, who had operational experience at Deloitte and in manufacturing companies, contributed pragmatic supply chain expertise.

They have developed a lean team that is fast-paced and together. They have their current base in offices in London, Tel Aviv and the Netherlands. The next point on the roadmap is a New York office, with the company aiming to expand to North America, Europe, Canada, and Australia.

Not Just Software-A New Layer of Infrastructure

Swap is not only a software-based vision. It is creating what Atkinson terms the connective tissue of contemporary commerce, a common spine that joins warehouses, storefronts, customs systems, and tax authorities in real-time.

They not only handle shipments or returns with their platform, but they also collect structured data throughout the entire commerce journey. This will enable AI models to identify trends, provide pricing advice, and predict problems before they occur.

It is a big transition from tools to infrastructure, and that is where the actual market potential is.

Competition and Differentiation

While companies like Global-E address the cross-border e-commerce business, others, such as Autone or Syrup, manage inventory. Swap, however, is its own superpower, addressing all aspects of the business. Swap is not a point solution and does not suffer the same integration bottlenecks that most point solutions do by virtue of owning the entire operating stack.


Zach Bailet


Sam Atkinson

It also implies that brands that employ Swap do not need to sign contracts with five vendors. Rather, they receive a single, streamlined, AI-enabled, and globally scalable system.

It is not only constructed for billion-dollar brands. Swap is bringing Series A to D startups on board and assisting them in growing quicker without stumbling over logistics.

Next Moves: OS to Ecosystem

The team is developing AI, integrating modules for beauty, home goods, and electronics, and refining Swap Inventory as a central demand planning system.

Swap invests in its brand with a humorous campaign featuring a carrier pigeon as its logo, positioning itself as a modern courier that makes sense of international business chaos.

This is part of a broader effort to humanise logistics and stand out among SaaS providers.

Swap simplifies the complex, a rare move among startups, becoming essential digital infrastructure for future brands. It has a strong product, proven leadership, and investor backing, making it a fast-growing company shaping the future of e-commerce.

When your global order arrives smoothly, chances are, Swap made it happen.

TRADEFLOCK
journey of leaders

Most Innovative GLOBAL COOs 2025

Building Trust, Innovation, and Excellence in U.S. Construction

DERON BROWN

President and COO, US Operations, **PCL Construction**

At a time when cost overruns, safety hazards, and delays have been common in the industry, Deron Brown has developed solutions that incorporate cutting-edge technology with a leader-focused approach. Now, as the President and COO of U.S. Operations at PCL Construction, he has introduced innovative ideas like advanced project control systems, sustainable construction methods, and proactive safety strategies, among others, making large-scale projects more standard, cost-effective, and preventative.

Addressing the Challenges of the Industry

The American construction industry faces serious challenges, including a staff shortage, fluctuating material prices, and the need to build a more environmentally conscious infrastructure. Deron knew these issues required a combination of operational excellence and workforce development. His approach is to empower teams by providing them with the tools, training, and technology to excel in their fields. To keep pace with the ever-changing environment, PCL Construction aims to stay ahead rather than fall behind.

Early Life and Career

Deron has an outstanding career background that began with a strong foundation in civil engineering and project management, leading to his rise as one of the top leaders in the U.S. construction industry. Early in his career, he worked on a variety of infrastructure and commercial projects, sharpening his understanding of how to handle complex operations. His hands-on experience gave him deep knowledge of the real-world issues faced on construction sites, which shaped his practical yet visionary leadership style.

Career and Advancement at PCL Construction

Deron has helped PCL Construction since 1997 and has grown to be one of the company's leaders from the start, thanks to his leadership skills and a performance-oriented culture. He has advanced through key roles over the years, from project manager to district manager, before being promoted to President and COO of U.S. Operations. During his leadership, there has been continuous improvement in revenue, expansion into new markets, and the enhancement of the company's reputation as a leader in client service and workplace culture.

Past Roles and leadership experience

Before rising to the executive level, Deron gained solid experience in operational training, risk management, and strategic planning. His outsider perspective, involving various aspects of the business from ground-level construction supervision to top executive corporate planning, has given him a well-rounded understanding of the industry. This background has made him adaptable in his decision-making, allowing for both mid- to long-term perspectives and short-term operational needs.

Influence on the PCL construction

Deron has led PCL's U.S. operations to new heights in digital transformation. Initiatives like Building Information Modeling (BIM), the use of drone technology for site inspections, and predictive models in project planning have made projects more accurate, efficient, and collaborative. Beyond technology, he has fostered a culture of safety and inclusiveness where every employee feels valued and empowered to contribute.

In another aspect, Deron has also strongly advocated for sustainable building solutions as he aligned the PCL projects with environmental best practices and LEED certification standards. His focus on innovation has not only increased client satisfaction but also helped make PCL a leading and progressive company in the construction industry.

Major Problems to be Addressed

Ensuring high productivity in the construction sector whilst delivering safe and quality construction is one of the greatest challenges in the current construction industry. This has been one of the problems that Deron has taken on to counter the problem of incorporating data-driven decisions throughout the entire implementation of a project. His proactive approach to risk management has resulted in fewer costly delays and accidents. Moreover, he has ensured the development of the workforce, which enables PCL to attract and retain the best professionals even in the face of widespread labor shortage in the country.

The strategic flexibility enjoyed by Deron has been significant during such times of economic uncertainty. He has spearheaded the drive to diversify the project base of PCL, such that the corporation has flourished in line-ups that include healthcare, education, renewable energy projects, and transportation infrastructure.

Prizes and Awards

PCL has gained personal and industry rewards through the leadership of Deron. The company has attained awards under his direction in terms of safety, innovation, and sustainability. Such awards highlight the fact that he could lead his organization with integrity, vision, and the drive to better things.

An Operational Leadership Model

The ability of Deron Brown to become the President and COO of U.S. Operations at PCL Construction, since project manager, is just another evidence of how well operational affairs can be combined with visionary style in leadership. Through the adoption of technology, the promotion of safety and inclusive culture, and a high concentration on customer satisfaction, he has made PCL a reference point for excellence in the construction sector. His leadership not only addresses current operational issues but also lays the groundwork for a sustainable, innovative, and resilient future in U.S. construction.

A NEW ERA OF JUSTICE

14th August 1862

The city of Bombay breathed softly with suspense on the morning of 14th August 1862. Heavy monsoon clouds draped the colonial skyline as carriages echoed through the lanes of Fort. Under the shadow of the newly inaugurated Bombay High Court, British officials, Indian advocates, and spectators assembled to mark a historic moment. More than just a ceremony under colonial rule, it represented the emergence of a judicial heritage destination to revolutionize India's legal order and extend its influence far beyond imperial frontiers.

More than a mere opening of a court, it marked the official establishment of legal order, born from colonial origins but crucial to India's democratic evolution. Beginning on a rain soaked morning it emerged a judicial journey unfolded that would guide revolutions, freedom, social transformation, and the rise of constitutional law. The Bombay High Court's inception on 14 August 1862 marked the commencement of modern judicial governance in colonial India.

Historical Overview: Legal Framework Before 1862

The significance of the Bombay High Court becomes clear when viewed against the backdrop of prior legal disorder. Before the mid-19th century, India's judiciary was a confusing mix of Mughal-era regulations, Company courts, personal laws, and inconsistent colonial rules. The British East India Company's provincial courts, staffed by largely untrained civil servants, delivered uneven justice.

The Supreme Court of Judicature, established in Bombay in 1823, was the forerunner of the High Court but had restricted jurisdiction and often conflicted with indigenous courts and Company laws. This issue caused inconsistent judgments, inefficiency, and discontent among both Indians and Europeans, underscoring the pressing need for judicial reform.

The Indian High Courts Act of 1861, enacted by the British Parliament, was a pivotal statute that instituted High Courts in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. Superseding the former Supreme Courts and Sadar Adalats, it sought to consolidate and rationalize the judicial framework by merging British and indigenous legal principles across the presidencies.

Bodies And People Behind This Event

The Bombay High Court was officially established on 14 August 1862 through a royal charter issued by Queen Victoria. Originally situated in Admiralty House, it was relocated in 1878 to its renowned Gothic-style structure designed by James Augustus Fuller, reflecting the British aim to assert imperial dominance and durability.

The initial bench of the Bombay High Court included Chief Justice Matthew Richard Sausse, previously a judge of the Supreme Court of Bombay, and Justice Sir Joseph Arnould, acclaimed for his role in the Maharaja Libel Case and the Bahadur Shah Zafar trial. Other distinguished judges were Justice L.C. Jackson and Justice Robert P. Collier.

From its inception, the Bombay High Court stood out by combining British legal systems with Indian customs. Including both English and Indian judges, it gradually embraced the importance of regional languages in proceedings. Over time, leading Indian legal figures like Justice M.G. Ranade, Badruddin Tyabji, and Justice M.C. Chagla guided its jurisprudence toward a more inclusive and culturally grounded path.

Unveiling the Justice

Prior to the High Court's formation, justice was uneven and partial. The Bombay High Court established a consistent system, supplanting arbitrary colonial decisions with enacted laws, offering citizens at least theoretically, a more reliable and clear legal framework. This was essential in a society fragmented by caste, religion, and social status.

Over time, the court empowered Indians, especially Bombay's urban middle class, by providing a venue to challenge colonial rule, assert civil rights, and protect property. The growing influence of Indian lawyers advanced legal awareness and public discourse. Institutions like Government Law College, Mumbai (established 1855), trained generations of lawyers, many of whom emerged as national leaders.

As Bombay developed into a major commercial and industrial hub, the court was vital in settling business conflicts, upholding contracts, and protecting commercial interests. Its jurisdiction over maritime law, insolvency, and intellectual property drew Indian and European traders, fueling the economic advancement of western India.

It also created new professional groups like lawyers, clerks, interpreters, and judges, facilitating upward economic mobility for educated Indians. For many, a career in law offered a route to social and financial progress.

> The High Court emerged as a center for nationalist thought, where numerous future freedom fighters such as Tilak, Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Jinnah launched their political journeys. It served as one of the rare platforms for Indians to openly oppose British authority through legal means. Pivotal cases involving sedition and press freedom frequently ignited public activism and opposition.

Conclusion: A Persistent Influence

As the Bombay High Court celebrates its 163rd anniversary in 2025, it symbolizes India's journey in law and democracy. Despite persistent challenges, it continues to be a cornerstone of justice, fostering legal reform, economic growth, and civic consciousness.

Beyond its iconic architecture, the Court represents the lasting essence of the rule of law and the quest for justice in a pluralistic society.

TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

Most Innovative
GLOBAL
COOs
2025

The COO Rewriting Wall Street's Playbook

JOHN WALDRON

COO,
Goldman Sachs

When the heartbeat of Wall Street slows, global markets shift beneath the waves, and a giant like Goldman Sachs steers through uncharted waters. In moments like these, what matters isn't the strength of the ship, it's the captain's skill and the navigator's steadiness. At Goldman Sachs, that navigator is John Waldron, whose rise from English major to President and COO has charted a course of transformation, resilience, and renewal.

A Foundation Built on Curiosity and Connection

Born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, Waldron was surrounded by the rhythms of finance early on—his father worked at Smith Barney. However, John's ambitions initially veered away from spreadsheets and earnings calls. He enrolled at Middlebury College in Vermont, pursuing an English degree and dreaming of becoming a writer. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1992, a testament to his intellect and drive.

But Wall Street soon came calling. His early career began at Bear Stearns, a firm known for its aggressive, high-octane culture. There, Waldron met David Solomon, a relationship that would evolve into one of the most significant professional partnerships in his life. Even in those early days, Waldron stood out—not just for his analytical sharpness, but for his ability to communicate, build trust, and navigate interpersonal dynamics with nuance.

From Banker to Builder at Goldman Sachs

In 2000, Solomon recruited Waldron to join Goldman Sachs. Just a year later, Waldron was named partner, an extraordinary rise by any measure. His trajectory from that point was marked by strategic leadership roles across the firm's core investment banking functions. He led Goldman's Media & Entertainment Group during a pivotal time for that sector, before transitioning to co-head the Leveraged Finance division, where he played a vital role in some of the most complex deals of the mid-2000s.

As Waldron's experience deepened, he moved to London to serve as Global Co-Head of the Financial Sponsors Group from 2007 to 2009. These roles exposed him to U.S. and international markets, sharpening his global outlook. He later returned to New York to lead Goldman's Investment Banking Services and Client Coverage team, positioning him at the heart of the firm's client strategy. His ability to nurture relationships—from private equity giants to media moguls—earned him a reputation as a "peacemaking banker," someone who could connect dots, calm tensions, and move teams forward.

Redefining Investment Banking Leadership

In 2014, Waldron was elevated to co-heading Goldman's Investment Banking Division alongside Solomon and Richard Gnodde. At the time, the division faced mounting pressure to innovate and evolve. Under their leadership, the team improved internal collaboration, aligned its focus with long-term client interests, and secured more global mandates. His leadership style—calm, clear-headed, and consistently respectful—helped re-anchor a part of the business that had become fragmented by competition.

Peers recall his ability to create consensus in tough situations, push forward through bureaucratic inertia, and, most importantly, listen. Waldron remains remarkably grounded for someone operating at the highest levels of high finance. His quiet authority and no-nonsense diplomacy became critical assets, especially as the firm was gearing up for broader transformation.

Becoming the COO: A New Era for Goldman

In October 2018, Goldman Sachs underwent a major leadership transition. David Solomon was CEO, and Waldron was named President and Chief Operating Officer. His responsibilities expanded dramatically, spanning everything from enterprise risk to day-to-day operations, global talent, and cultural transformation. He became chair of the Reputational Risk Committee and co-chair of the Enterprise Risk Committee, signalling his central role in ensuring the firm's long-term stability and strategic integrity.

When banks were grappling with how to retain top talent, especially among younger employees, Waldron pushed for smarter workflows and healthier cultures. He advocated for automation that reduced grunt work and championed flexible, respectful work arrangements. His goal wasn't just to make Goldman efficient but to make it sustainable for the people inside it.

Facing Industry Headwinds and Resetting the Compass

Waldron's tenure hasn't been without turbulence. Goldman's push into consumer banking through Marcus ultimately faltered, losing billions and prompting a major retreat. Meanwhile, the fallout from the 1MDB scandal led to record fines and a reputational hit for the firm. In addition to internal cultural shifts, scrutiny over executive compensation, and the broader pressures of a volatile global economy, Waldron was clearly navigating stormy waters.

But Waldron played a central role in the bank's strategic realignment. He helped refocus Goldman on its historical strengths: investment banking, markets, and asset management.

The firm saw a remarkable rebound in profitability in 2024, with operating income jumping by nearly 70% and its stock gaining over 30% in value. Investors took note—and so did the board.

The Quiet Power of Steady Leadership

John Waldron has carved a different path in an industry that often rewards noise and speed. His journey from a book-loving student to one of the most influential figures in global finance is a story of patience, pragmatism, and purpose. He is helping Goldman Sachs navigate the tides and quietly shaping what leadership in the financial world looks like in the 21st century.

As Wall Street evolves, it's not just the boldest vision that matters, but the steadiest hands that can bring that vision to life. Goldman Sachs has both in John Waldron.

SPOTLIGHT

BLAZING NEW TRAILS IN OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

SPEED AND CONTROL THROUGH INTEGRATION AND INNOVATION

At a time of volatility, speed, and hyper-competition, Tesla, Amazon, and Uniqlo have become experts at helping agility and control in operations. The secret behind this is an exclusive combination of vertical integration, digital innovation, and customer-centric design. Although each of the companies is in a vastly different industry, namely, automotive, e-commerce, and apparel, they are united by one common characteristic: the capacity to exert greater control over their value chain than their peers, which allows them to grow at a much higher scale and respond to the shocks much quicker and better, and provide an unparalleled customer value.

Tesla: Vertical Integration to Speed

The radical approach to vertical integration has contributed much to the operational speed and control of Tesla. Compared to legacy automakers that use hundreds of suppliers and complicated outsourcing systems, Tesla has brought most of the important processes in-house, including battery manufacturing and software development.

Among the most outstanding works that Tesla could have produced, the Gigafactory model stands out. These are huge plants that combine the entire process of manufacturing cells with vehicle assembly in the same facility, thereby decreasing lead time, enhancing quality management, and reducing expenses. Panasonic, in which Tesla has vertically integrated battery production, has enabled Tesla to tailor energy storage to the individual performance characteristics of the vehicles.

Tesla also develops its self-driving chips and releases software updates to cars themselves through over-the-air updates, something that used to be unprecedented in the car industry. This combination of software and hardware is what allows Tesla to be unrivalled in terms of innovation cycles and customer experience improvement.

Amazon: End-To-End Logistics Supremacy

The key to Amazon is its customer experience obsession, which it achieves via an end-to-end logistics and data ecosystem. It has developed the most sophisticated fulfilment infrastructure in the world, including thousands of warehouses, last-mile delivery networks, and AI-driven

inventory management, in a systematic manner.

The Fulfilment by Amazon program is one of the keys to the operational advantage of Amazon. It enables third-party vendors to utilise the logistics infrastructure of Amazon and provides Amazon with the power to control how and where inventory is located, how fast it is shipped, and the quality control of the product. Amazon Prime goes one step further, and in some areas it can deliver within two hours, which is possible due to demand prediction based on data and inventory location based on closeness.

Amazon Web Services (AWS) is also an important stakeholder in operational control. It does not only offers scalable infrastructure to outside customers but also supports the Amazon tech stack, allowing fast innovation and experimentation across business units.

Uniqlo: Retail Discipline and Operational Excellence

The parent company of Uniqlo, Fast Retailing, has created an operational powerhouse that has achieved a balance between speed, quality and cost control. The distinctive supply chain structure at Uniqlo marries the speed of fast fashion and the rigour of conventional retail planning.

Uniqlo, unlike other brands such as Zara that pursue rapidly changing trends, emphasises classic functional basics and spends time in advance developing products. It has vertical integration that starts with fabric innovation with Japanese textile manufacturers and goes to in-house designing, centralised warehousing and even direct communication with factories.

The difference between Uniqlo and other companies is the data use. The brand gathers customer feedback in real-time via stores and online and directs it to product development teams. Advanced analytics enable it to optimise its inventory control, minimising markdowns and overproduction, which are significant issues in fashion retail.

Comparative Strategies and Sectoral Realities

Each company's strategy reflects its sector. Tesla emphasises integration for fast hardware-software updates; Amazon excels in global logistics; Uniqlo integrates data with disciplined retail practices.

Integration differentiates them: Tesla's vertical control of batteries, chips, software; Amazon's of warehousing, logistics, cloud; Uniqlo's of fabric, design, production.

They use technology uniquely: Tesla with AI chips and updates, Amazon with AI for inventory and AWS, and Uniqlo with analytics for inventory and feedback. These tech systems enhance customer experience and allow for quick disruption response.

The Agile Owns the Future

To sum up, operational speed and control are not only enablers in the age of volatility but also strategic differentiators. Tesla, Amazon, and Uniqlo have reinvented the rulebook and integrated vertical integration with innovation. Their experience provides a guidebook to any organisation that wants to future-proof its work: invest in the right things, digitise smartly, and always keep the end user in mind. With disruption in the industries, those that will emerge successful are the ones that are not just reactive but have been designed to be adaptive seamlessly, quickly, and strategically.

Most Innovative

GLOBAL COOs 2025

The Calm, Calculated Force Behind Highmark Health's Big Leap

KAREN L. HANLON

Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer,
Highmark Health

In the loud, fast-moving world of healthcare, where headlines often scream of breakthroughs, billion-dollar mergers, or political fallout, it's easy to overlook the steady engines that keep it all running. These are not always the disruptors in Silicon Valley or the figureheads in Washington. Sometimes, the most powerful force is someone who prefers to stay behind the scenes, head down, building brick by brick. Karen Hanlon is one such figure.

She doesn't speak in sweeping declarations. She doesn't chase attention. But over the last two decades, she has quietly reshaped the business of health and care, fusing operational excellence with financial grit to reimagine what a health organization can look like. Today, as the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Highmark Health, Hanlon is not just running an enterprise; she's actively redesigning how healthcare functions for millions.

Grounded Beginnings, Lasting Impact

Hanlon didn't begin her career with grand healthcare ambitions. She started where many strong leaders do, in numbers. After earning her degree from Grove City College, she began her professional life at KPMG Peat Marwick. Public accounting isn't known for glamour, but for Hanlon, it was an early masterclass in structure, discipline, and precision.

In 1997, she joined Highmark Inc., then a traditional health insurance organization, with little hint that it would evolve into the multi-entity ecosystem it is today. At the time, healthcare was still siloed—payers paid, providers treated, and patients navigated a confusing maze. Over the next two decades, Hanlon would become part of the small leadership circle responsible for changing that script.

The Financial Turnaround Few Saw Coming

For years, Hanlon climbed the financial ladder at Highmark. But it was in 2013 that her leadership was tested. Highmark Health had just acquired Allegheny Health Network (AHN), a hospital system teetering on financial collapse. Many questioned the move. The risks were obvious: a failing provider arm and an insurer navigating post-Affordable Care Act uncertainties. However, Highmark saw a different future where payer and provider were not separate but unified.

Hanlon, by then CFO, rolled up her sleeves. Over five years, she steered AHN through one of the most complex financial recoveries in the industry. Under her guidance, the network went from the brink of bankruptcy to executing a public, tax-exempt $1 billion bond offering in 2018. It allowed the system to expand into 13 hospitals across Western Pennsylvania and New York, build multi-speciality medical pavilions, and, most importantly, stabilize its service model.

Becoming the COO: Steering the Machine

In 2018, Hanlon was appointed Chief Operating Officer of Highmark Health, an enterprise with nearly $27 billion in revenue that serves more than 6 million health plan members and thousands of patients across hospital systems.

She took the reins when healthcare delivery needed a fresh blueprint. Instead of layering new solutions onto an outdated system, Hanlon helped architect what would become the "Living Health" model, a unified system that integrates coverage, care, and technology.

> "What's distinct about Hanlon is that she never romanticizes leadership. She doesn't chase buzzwords. She builds frameworks."

This model, under Hanlon's operational leadership, has transformed how Highmark engages with individuals. From mobile apps that simplify plan navigation to community partnerships that address health disparities, Hanlon has led from the middle, where logistics, coordination, and accountability reside.

Operations in the Edge of Chaos

If the pandemic taught healthcare anything, operations aren't background noise, they're the main stage. Supply chain disruption, workforce burnout, and digital fragmentation, all demanded new solutions. Hanlon didn't blink.

Under her leadership, Highmark Health not only adapted but strengthened its position. She orchestrated collaboration across entities like enGen (a tech subsidiary), Highmark Wholecare, and the Highmark-Penn State Health partnership to ensure care continuity and service innovation during one of the most unstable times in modern healthcare.

What's distinct about Hanlon is that she never romanticizes leadership. She doesn't chase buzzwords. She builds frameworks. When speaking publicly, whether about payor-provider alignment or scalable health economics, she's often unflashy, but always crystal clear.

A Voice for Women, Without Applause-Seeking

Hanlon may be reserved, but she's never silent when it comes to equity. As executive sponsor of Highmark's supplier diversity and women's initiatives, she's made it her mission to ensure more women, and women of color, rise through operational and financial tracks, not just soft-skill functions. She knows healthcare's workforce is majority female, yet its C-suites still aren't. She's pushing to change that, one promotion, one hiring pipeline at a time.

Board Seats, But No Complacency

Alongside her COO role, Hanlon holds positions on the boards of Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Penn State Health, Federated Hermes Inc., and more. She chairs the boards of both enGen and Highmark Wholecare. Her influence touches strategy and governance, guiding how major institutions spend, scale, and evolve.

And yet, those who work with her describe her not as domineering but as deeply collaborative. She is a listener first, a decision-maker when needed, and a steady hand, not a celebrity executive.

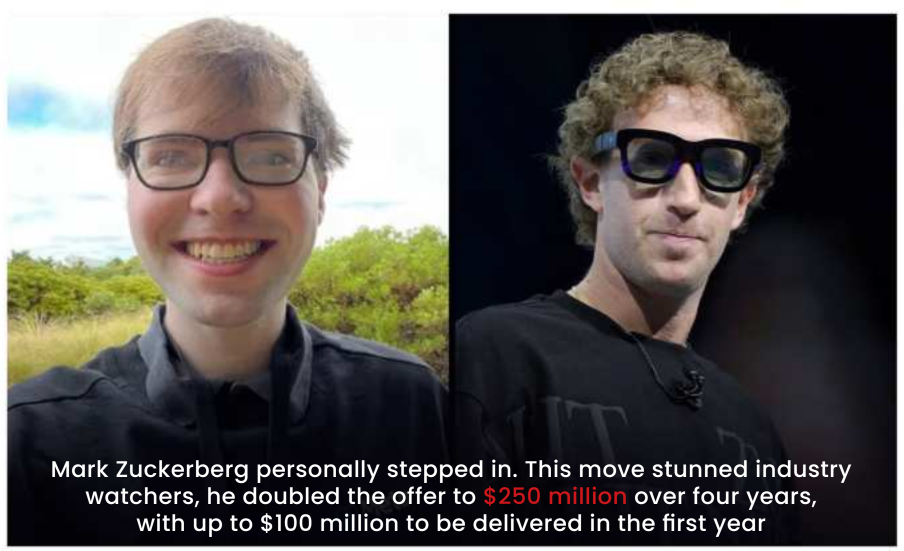
Quiet Power, Loud Results

Her story isn't one of viral success or dramatic turning points. It's the story of long-haul leadership. Of showing up year after year, idea after idea, problem after problem, with consistency, clarity, and calm. And in a field as turbulent as healthcare, that might just be the most radical kind of leadership there is.

THE OFFER HE REFUSED

How a 24-Year-Old Outsmarted Meta

At just 24 years old, Matt Deitke, a PhD dropout turned AI innovator, pulled off a rare feat. He turned down Meta's eye-watering offer of $125 million over four years. Meta had spotted him while he was making waves at the Allen Institute for AI, after he led development of Molmo, a multimodal AI chatbot capable of parsing images, audio and text. That work even earned him the coveted Outstanding Paper Award at NeurIPS in 2022. Undeterred by his prestige, Deitke opted to focus on his own venture instead.



Mark Zuckerberg personally stepped in. This move stunned industry watchers, he doubled the offer to $250 million over four years, with up to $100 million to be delivered in the first year

The Rise of Vercept

Rather than accept the paycheck, Deitke launched Vercept in late 2023, a nimble startup focused on AI agents that don't simply respond, but act autonomously across the internet. With just around ten team members, Vercept raised $16.5 million from heavyweight backers such as former Google CEO Eric Schmidt. It was bold. It was unconventional. And it captured the attention of Big Tech.

Zuckerberg Takes It Personally

Meta doesn't take "no" lightly, especially in the supercharged AI arms race. After Deitke declined the initial offer, Mark Zuckerberg personally stepped in. In a move that stunned industry watchers, he doubled the offer to $250 million over four years, with up to $100 million to be delivered in the first year. How rare is this level of executive involvement? Extremely, but this moment signalled how much AI talent means in 2025.

The Numbers That Stopped Conversations

Let's put those figures in perspective. A $250 million package for a young researcher might actually surpass the earnings of NBA stars such as Steph Curry. Analysts liken this to sports contracts, high-stakes, public, and free of a salary cap. Indeed, coverage from Axios confirms that such immense packages are becoming Meta's new norm as it builds out its AI leadership team.

Deitke Joins the Superintelligence Vanguard

After consulting friends and colleagues, Deitke accepted the revised offer and joined Meta's Superintelligence Lab. His title? AI Researcher. His role? Leading edge. In Seattle-born but now relocated to Menlo Park, Deitke contributes his expertise in embodied AI, 3D computer vision, and autonomous agents.

What This Means for AI's Talent Wars

Deitke's recruitment is emblematic of a wider phenomenon: the transformation of AI careers. Today, star researchers increasingly move between academia, startups, and Big Tech, wielding influence and compensation that redefine industry norms. Tech giants are now offering billion-dollar payrolls to secure the minds shaping tomorrow's intelligence.

Meta's aggressive campaign extends far beyond Matt Deitke. The company has also courted heavyweights like Ruoming Pang from Apple, offering enormous sums, and aggressively pursued researchers from OpenAI and beyond.

A Golden Age or a Cautionary Tale?

This deal isn't without debate. UCLA professor Ramesh Srinivasan warns that these mega-compensations risk amplifying economic inequality, rewarding a rare elite, while many lower-level workers face disruption from AI automation. The question now is: do such investments spur innovation or deepen disparities?

The Man Behind the Headlines

Deitke's trajectory is compelling. From PhD student to award-winning AI developer, to co-founder of a bold startup, to front-page recruitment by Meta, all by age 24. Sources describe him as a prodigy who values autonomy, entrepreneurial drive, and problem-solving freedom. Meta's willingness to invest heavily, combined with Deitke's patience, created a rare meeting of vision and value.

A Sign of the Times

The Matt Deitke saga is beyond a headline-grabbing contract, it's a signal of how radically AI and its talent economy is evolving. Today's researchers are startup founders, high-stakes negotiators, and strategic assets. As Meta and rivals continue recruiting with unprecedented fervour backed by billion-dollar infrastructures, massive GPU farms, and executive-backed talent hunts, AI research is fast becoming one of the most lucrative and politically charged fields in tech.

One thing is clear: with minds like Deitke's in high demand and high price, the future of AI is being shaped by those who demand both freedom to innovate and the resources to do it at scale.

Most Innovative GLOBAL COOs 2025

Navigating the Challenges in Hospitality with Strategic Thinking

NIKKIE RANDHAWA-SINGH

Executive Vice President- Global Operations, **Shiji Group**

Hotels across Asia and the Middle East still bear the consequences of half-finished technology projects: property management systems treated like fixtures, point-of-sale terminals locked to single vendors, payments and tax rules that change from city to city, and franchise agreements that make one-size-fits-all change impossible. These frictions turn every cloud migration into a people problem. Front-desk teams are learning new workflows as guests arrive, kitchen staff are adapting to different ordering systems, and IT teams are maintaining nightly reports while retrofitting integrations to work. Those human frictions are the problem Nikkie Randhawa-Singh has spent her career trying to reduce.

Nikkie Randhawa-Singh is the Senior Vice President, Asia Pacific and Middle East at Shiji Group, based in Singapore. Throughout her illustrious career, Nikkie worked in various companies like Micros-Fidelio and Oracle. She drew on her experience in both companies to inform her leadership approach. The theme of her leadership? Efficiency and empathy! Her belief that simplicity and functionality are key to a well-functioning industry is reflected in her leadership styles and how she navigated the problems faced during her tenures in all the companies she has worked with.

Learning the Hotel Floor at Micros-Fidelio

Ms Randhawa-Singh's hospitality-technology career began at Micros-Fidelio in the Asia-Pacific region, where she held operational, training, and major accounts responsibilities and progressed through roles such as Regional Manager for Operations & Training and Director of Major Accounts for the region. Those early, hands-on years put her in front of the everyday problems that derail rollouts, i.e., mismatched hardware, local payment quirks, and bespoke integrations, and this taught her that vendor credibility is judged most harshly in the first months after go-live.

Broadening the Enterprise Lens at Oracle

After Micros-Fidelio, Ms Randhawa-Singh moved into senior account leadership at Oracle, where the scope broadened from installations to enterprise sales, multi-brand deployments, and governance across regions. The role required mastery of procurement cycles, compliance expectations, and the layered stakeholder management that determines whether a project proceeds from concept to contract. Those experiences hardened her commercial instincts and deepened her appreciation for roadmaps that survive legal and operational scrutiny.

Joining Shiji — Building Regional Muscle

Ms Randhawa-Singh joined Shiji Group in 2016, and in 2019, she was appointed Senior Vice-President for Asia-Pacific. Based in Singapore, she has driven initiatives to localize product offerings, develop regional partnerships, and boost cloud adoption across markets that are both technically and culturally diverse.

> Her belief that simplicity and functionality are key to a well-functioning industry is reflected in her leadership styles and how she navigated the problems faced during her tenures in all the companies she has worked with.

Her regional strategy is pragmatic, focusing on modular product options, local teams for training and support, and partnership models that streamline the path from purchase to reliable operation.

Practical Product Advocacy

A constant element of Ms Randhawa-Singh's public commentary is that technology programmes must begin with people and workflows, not with feature lists. She advocates specialised property-management systems where luxury operations demand detailed guest profiling, and hardware-agnostic, API-first point-of-sale systems where flexibility reduces vendor lock-in and eases migration. In her HospitalityNet piece, she summarised her remit and perspective: "In my role as Senior Vice President at Shiji Group, I lead our efforts across the vibrant markets of Asia Pacific & Middle East, drawing extensively on my previous experiences at Oracle and Micros Fidelio." Those words neatly capture her combination of operational experience and regional

Market entry, localisation and the human touch

When Shiji established its Singapore office, Ms. Randhawa-Singh stated, "The opening of our Singapore office marks the start of Shiji expansion in the overseas market." This comment reflects her belief that establishing a local presence is more than just a PR move; it's a genuine business commitment. Her public remarks consistently emphasize a practical perspective: technology only succeeds when users are guided, supported, and trusted to customize the tools to fit their specific needs. This human-centered approach forms the foundation of the regional expansions and partnership efforts she has helped lead.

Voice, Influence, and Why it Matters

Ms Randhawa-Singh writes practitioner-facing articles and appears at industry forums, translating abstract platform debates into step-by-step adoption plans that reduce disruption and protect service standards. For Tradeflock readers who care about leadership that connects the hotel floor to the boardroom, her work offers a verified, practical playbook for how vendors and hoteliers can migrate without placing front-line staff under intolerable strain.

A career of thoughtful reduction

Imagine the hospitality-technology scene as a complex maze of outdated code and contractual obstacles. Nikkie Randhawa-Singh's career exemplifies careful simplification: converting intricate systems into clear, actionable plans while prioritizing human workflows. This allows the industry to move towards efficiency and create an environment that supports empathy.

Her progression from on-site implementer to regional leader reflects the industry's move from traditional on-premises systems to cloud solutions, APIs, and platform-centric approaches. Her leadership, rooted in effective execution, illustrates how technical change can be perceived as achievable rather than daunting.

PLAYING FOR A NATION

The Politics Behind the Jersey

In stadiums steeped in flags and national anthems, global sports have long been a stage for patriotism and unity. But behind the spectacle, a rising number of athletes are competing under new flags, a shift that stirs debate over allegiance, identity, and equity. Each change carries a layered narrative that extends far beyond the surface.

At first glance, changing nationalities in sports might appear as a personal decision or career strategy, yet it reveals underlying complexities related to identity, geopolitical dynamics, and the commodification of athletic talent.

The Global Flow of Athletic Talent

Athlete migration is growing, fueled by global opportunity and uneven resources. Countries with advanced sports systems and greater wealth draw talent from less developed nations, offering access to coaching, facilities, and the international spotlight that may be out of reach back home.

Think of Kenyan or Ethiopian runners now racing for Qatar or Bahrain, or immigrants competing for countries they grew up in. These transitions are often born out of need, not ease, and can transform lives.

These situations often draw backlash, with athletes branded as "traitors" and countries blamed for "poaching" talent. The notion of switching national ties clashes with conventional ideals of patriotism and national honor.

The Emotional Weight of National Belonging

Sports go beyond mere competition, they serve as dynamic platforms where national pride, identity, and cultural stories come alive. Athletes are more than participants; they embody the character, ideals, and hopes of the countries they represent. Consequently, when an athlete changes their national affiliation, it often triggers strong emotional reactions and political debate, questioning shared ideas of loyalty, belonging, and the true meaning of national representation on the world stage.

This tension exists because national identity transcends legal citizenship. it's anchored in common language, culture, and community. Therefore, changing nationality is not just administrative; it represents shifting from one national narrative to another.

The truth is more intricate as numerous athletes possess multicultural heritage, dual nationality, or immigrant histories, resulting in flexible identities. For these individuals, the decision of which nation to represent often stems from personal journeys rather than external expectations.

Political Dynamics in Sports

National identity in sports extends beyond individual or cultural connections. It serves as an instrument of geopolitics and soft power. Nations leverage events such as the Olympics and World Cup to display their prestige, solidarity, and cultural influence worldwide.

When athletes move from less affluent to richer countries, it's seen as a prestige loss for the former and a soft power gain for the latter. Affluent nations frequently naturalize elite competitors to enhance their medal tally and global influence, sparking debates about fairness and whether international sports remain contests of nations or have become talent markets.

From the Athlete's Lens

Debates on nationality changes frequently miss the athlete's viewpoint. Each decision reflects a journey of migration, sacrifice, and aspiration, where switching allegiance is not betrayal but a means of survival or a step toward achieving their goals.

Certain athletes form deep connections with their new homelands. Mo Farah, born in Somalia and raised in the UK, frequently acknowledges how the UK influenced his identity and success. For athletes like him, competing for their adopted country is sincere, not opportunistic.

Numerous athletes confront unequal access to training, resources, and basic rights. Judging their decisions without recognizing these disparities overlooks the broader global challenges they face.

Conflicts and Questions of Integrity

Changing nationalities in sports prompts challenging ethical debates: Should nations enlist foreign athletes solely to boost rankings? Is this exploitation or a valuable chance for athletes? And how can governing bodies oversee these moves without restricting athlete autonomy?

Recent disputes, such as Qatar's recruitment of Kenyan and Ethiopian runners and Bahrain's naturalisation of African athletes, have drawn backlash over "passport swapping." Consequently, the IOC implements waiting periods and demands evidence of genuine connections to balance fairness with athletes' rights.

The Governance of International Athletics

International sports bodies like the IOC, FIFA, and World Athletics must balance fair competition with athletes' rights. To prevent abuse, they've set rules like waiting periods and limits on representing multiple nations.

These rules often fail to keep up with the complexities of global migration and evolving identities. Excessive restrictions may hinder athletes' chances, while too much flexibility can lead to misuse and weaken the integrity of international sport.

Looking Beyond the Surface

Ultimately, the politics of national identity in global sports calls for a more sophisticated view beyond basic notions of loyalty or patriotism. Changing nationality involves a complex blend of economic inequality, political strategy, individual ambition, and evolving identities.Fans and commentators should respond with empathy, seeing athletes as individuals navigating a globalized world, not just symbols of national pride but enabling deeper discussions on identity, belonging, and fairness.

Final Reflection

Athletes changing nationalities underscore the tension between tradition and globalization in sports. Their experiences push us to reconsider what national representation means in a connected world. More than mere convenience or opportunism, these decisions reflect intricate layers of identity, politics, and influence shaping contemporary sports. To fully grasp the significance of nationality changes, we need to move beyond the headlines and appreciate this complexity.

TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

Most Innovative GLOBAL COOs 2025

Designing Tomorrow's Healthcare, Today

SHEILA ANTRUM

Senior Vice President & COO,
UCSF Health

In 2020, as hospitals worldwide faced a once-in-a-century pandemic, the stakes for healthcare operations rose overnight. At UCSF Health, one of America's top academic medical centers, Sheila Antrum was steering through unprecedented logistical and operational challenges—managing surge capacities, ensuring staff safety, stabilizing patient throughput, and safeguarding quality amid chaos.

At a time when healthcare systems buckled under pressure, Antrum led UCSF's Capacity Management Center to deliver agile, coordinated care across the system's hospitals. Her leadership was critical in managing beds or ventilators and ensuring the health system's soul, its people and patients, remained prioritized even in crisis.

Today, as Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of UCSF Health, Sheila Antrum is redefining what modern healthcare operations should look like: strategic, deeply human, and built for resilience.

From Nursing to Health Systems Leadership

Antrum's career began at the bedside, where she practiced as a registered nurse after earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Hampton University. She credits her nursing background with grounding her decisions in empathy and practical understanding, which still informs her executive work today.

Her desire to influence systems led her to pursue a Master's in Health Services Administration at the University of Michigan's School of Public Health, one of the most respected programs in the country. This blend of clinical empathy and administrative acumen positioned her to lead not just individuals, but entire organizations.

Strengthening Ambulatory Services at UC San Diego

In 2003, Antrum joined UC San Diego Medical Center as Chief of Ambulatory Operations, where she oversaw outpatient services and helped expand the reach and efficiency of ambulatory care. Her leadership was instrumental in optimizing clinical workflows and strengthening patient access, laying the groundwork for what would later become core pillars of her operational strategy.

Nursing, Strategy, and System Alignment

In 2007, Antrum joined UCSF Health as Chief Nursing and Patient Care Services Officer for UCSF Medical Center and UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital San Francisco. Over the next eight years, she modernized nursing practices, introduced standardized care protocols, and helped integrate pediatric and adult patient services under a unified care framework.

After a brief return to this role from 2019 to 2020, she transitioned to broader executive leadership in 2015 as President of Adult Services, overseeing clinical integration, inpatient capacity, and operational streamlining across UCSF's adult hospitals.

Building Systems That Serve People

As Chief Operating Officer, Antrum oversees nearly every non-physician aspect of the UCSF Health system, including adult inpatient and outpatient services, perioperative care, pharmaceutical services, nursing and patient care, facilities, supply chain, and major capital projects and women's and speciality services.

One of her most impactful initiatives has been leading UCSF's Capacity Management Center, which allows real-time, data-driven decision-making to ensure patients are routed to the right care at the right time. During COVID-19, this infrastructure became central to UCSF's crisis response, enabling scalable care delivery during case surges while maintaining continuity for non-COVID patients.

Tackling Challenges Head-On

Antrum has addressed key systemic challenges with foresight and agility, from nationwide workforce shortages to escalating patient acuity and complex hospital finances. Through operational redesign and investment in workforce resilience, she has helped mitigate the effects of clinical burnout. By establishing safety protocols, optimizing resources, and maintaining team morale, Antrum helped UCSF remain operationally strong during the pandemic's worst phases. Her commitment to culturally competent care and community-based solutions has helped bridge gaps between UCSF's academic strengths and real-world healthcare needs.

Listening First, Leading Forward

What sets Antrum apart is her deep-rooted belief that the best systems are those built from the ground up—with input from the nurses, technicians, patients, and frontline workers who use them daily. Her approach is relational, not just operational, emphasizing collaboration, humility, and inclusive problem-solving.

She sees operations not as a back-end function, but as a catalyst for mission delivery. Whether overseeing billion-dollar budgets or implementing a new patient transport system, her focus remains: "How do we serve better, and more equitably?"

Building Sustainable, Human-Centered Health Systems

Sheila Antrum is already there as healthcare shifts toward value-based care, digital transformation, and integrated delivery models. She is fortifying UCSF's infrastructure for the future, investing in AI-enabled decision tools, improving interoperability, and ensuring every new initiative is designed with equity and sustainability in mind.

In a world where healthcare systems are increasingly judged by efficiency and equity, Antrum's leadership offers a bold blueprint: operational excellence grounded in compassion and community.

QUANTUM MEETS OPERATIONS

Revolutionising Logistics and Complex Decisions

Companies constantly look for ways to improve their operations, cut inefficiencies, and stay ahead of competitors. Although traditional computational tools are effective, they often struggle with the overwhelming complexity of modern logistics, manufacturing, and supply chains. This is where quantum computing plays a crucial role. By applying quantum mechanics, quantum computing is set to transform how businesses manage and optimise processes across many sectors.

Quantum Computing from a Business Perspective

Quantum computing utilises quantum bits, which can exist in multiple states simultaneously, unlike classical bits, which are either a zero or a one. This enables quantum systems to process and analyse a vast number of possibilities simultaneously; thus, they are especially good at solving optimisation problems, simulating molecular interactions, or modelling complex situations that classical systems cannot solve.

Quantum computing is in its infancy, and firms such as IBM, Google, D-Wave and startups such as Rigetti and IonQ are actively developing it. The present value of quantum optimisation, i.e. the capability to find the optimal combination of variables within specified constraints in real-time, is what is truly promising to operations leaders and supply chain managers.

Quantum Encountering Global Logistics

Quantum disruption can occur in global logistics, where multinational supply chains face countless nodes, decision variables, and unpredictable constraints like weather, port delays, regulations, and demand changes. Optimising these systems requires immense computing power and often yields suboptimal results.

Quantum computers can significantly cut down time for routing, scheduling, and inventory decisions. For example, Volkswagen, with D-Wave, tested quantum optimisation for real-time traffic in Barcelona, showing how it could reroute taxis to avoid jams, saving time and fuel.

Quantum algorithms may also improve warehousing and distribution by reducing last-mile delivery time, optimising storage locations, and dynamically adjusting inventory based on demand with greater precision.

Improving Manufacturing Processes

Quantum computing benefits manufacturing by improving production scheduling, quality control, and predictive maintenance. It solves complex problems like optimal production sequencing under constraints such as machine availability, maintenance, and energy use, often faster than classical supercomputers.

BMW and Mercedes-Benz are working with quantum firms to optimise production and reduce waste.

Quantum simulations also aid in designing new materials, enabling quicker, cheaper innovation. This accelerates prototyping and shortens development times in aerospace and pharmaceuticals.

Resilient Supply Chain in the Era of Disruption

Global supply chains have proven to be weak due to the COVID-19 pandemic and recent geopolitical tensions. Quantum computing provides an effective scenario modelling and risk analysis tool. Quantum systems can be used to simulate thousands of scenarios of supply chain disruptions, such as supplier outages, port blockages, or policy changes, to enable decision-makers to develop strong contingency plans and real-time adaptive responses.

Furthermore, quantum algorithms can evaluate multiple trade-offs simultaneously (e.g., cost, speed, and sustainability) and enable companies to make more informed decisions in line with their strategic objectives.

The Barriers to Mainstream Acceptance

Although promising, quantum computing is not enterprise-ready to be deployed broadly. The existing quantum computers, so-called Noisy Intermediate-Scale Quantum (NISQ) computers, remain error-prone and are limited in the number of qubits. The obstacles of scalability, stability and programming friendliness are still considerable.

With that said, hybrid solutions, i.e., the combination of classical computing with quantum algorithms, are already proving to be effective. As an example, companies may apply classical pre-processing to reduce problem sets and then feed them to quantum solvers to get them optimised. These tools are also being made more accessible to enterprises by quantum-as-a-service offerings like those provided by IBM, AWS Braket, and Microsoft Azure Quantum.

Business Strategic Implications to Leaders

It is time for CIOs, COOs, and supply chain heads to begin planning for the quantum future. Although mass implementation may remain 5-10 years in the future, investing early in talent, partnerships, and pilots will be worthwhile. Other companies such as Airbus, Goldman Sachs, and ExxonMobil are already performing quantum experiments to acquire first-mover advantages.

The other way leaders can ensure that they are up to date and can influence emerging standards is by creating strategic partnerships with quantum startups or joining consortia such as the Quantum Economic Development Consortium (QED-C). Quantum literacy of operations and IT teams will also be important.

Disruptive Promise of Quantum

The intersection of quantum computing and global operations may transform the way business conceives of complexity. Quantum tools provide unprecedented speed, accuracy, and flexibility in everything ,including logistics and manufacturing, strategic planning, and crisis management. Although the barriers to mainstream application still exist, the trend is evident: quantum computing is not a sci-fi term anymore; it is an inevitable operation transformation. Firms, which begin preparing now, will be the ones that will head tomorrow with optimised, agile and disruption-resistant businesses.

Most Innovative GLOBAL COOs 2025

Reinventing Packaging for a Sustainable Tomorrow

ZAINUDEEN P.B.

Group COO & Co-founder,
Hotpack Global

Zainudeen P.B., an engineer and Co-Founder and Group Chief Operating Officer at Hotpack Global, has provided a potent answer to the packaging industry, which is often accused of negative environmental impact and inefficiencies in the supply chain. He has transformed the approach to manufacturing disposable food packaging into a sustainable operation, achieving operational efficiency and scalability across the globe, all while creating one of the fastest-growing packaging businesses globally.

Market Gap to Opportunity

Zainudeen P.B. identified a huge market need in the packaging industry, that of an environmentally sustainable and high-quality disposable food packaging system within the GCC region. Rather than importing any generic solutions, he believed that it was possible to create a world-class manufacturing and distribution ecosystem within the UAE. In the current times, Hotpack Global not only leads in the market in the Middle East and Africa, but it is also a leading exporter to more than 100 different countries.

Family and Early Life and Creation of Enterprise

Zainudeen was born in Chamakkala, Thrissur district, in the southwestern part of Kerala, India. He attended GMHS, Chamakkala, for his school education and completed pre-degree studies at MES Asmabi College. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from SN College, Nattika. His career began after he moved to Dubai in 1996, where he started working with his brother at a small packaging trading company, Majed Plastics.

Since then, Zainudeen has focused on sales and business development, gradually building a client base in the region. His enthusiasm and dedication to operations laid the foundation for transforming the business from a trading house into a manufacturing powerhouse.

Construction of Hotpack Global

Formally established in 1995 and headquartered in Dubai, Hotpack Global is a highly successful company, shipping to every corner of the world. Zainudeen and his brother Abdul Jebbar expanded their first trading company to become a vertically integrated manufacturing company. Under his management, the company has blossomed to become a household name in food packaging, considering that it had started as a local food supplier.

Hotpack currently occupies state-of-the-art production systems in the UAE, UK, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. It has 29 facilities across the globe, and it exports to over 100 countries. Much of this rise was spearheaded by Zainudeen, who had developed the vision to scale operations of the company, achieve highly efficient production, and drive strategic international expansion.

Invention in Sustainability and Technology.

Zainudeen strongly influenced Hotpack Global's sustainability and innovation efforts. The company adopted recyclable, compostable, and biodegradable products, aligning with global and UAE Green Agenda goals. Under his leadership, Hotpack invested Dh250 million in a fully automated PET packaging line in Dubai Industrial City, promoting recycling and near-zero waste.

They invested in biodegradable packaging plants in Malaysia, utilizing agricultural waste such as rice straw and pineapple leaves, thereby making Hotpack the first to introduce eco-friendly packaging. Zainudeen also implemented smart manufacturing, AI automation, and advanced quality controls to boost efficiency while minimizing environmental impact.

Saving the Major Problems of the Industry

The unavailability of local manufacturing capabilities for environmentally friendly covers was one of the greatest challenges Zainudeen had to address. Dependency on imports was immense, and back-up infrastructure to non-sustainable options was minimal. He changed the game by establishing his own R&D and manufacturing base of Hotpack, maintaining quality control, and delivering faster at cheaper rates.

He was also able to break down bottlenecks in logistics by investing in regional warehouses, local retail stores, and e-commerce operations, which would boost the customer experience and provide a solid supply chain.

Industry and Awards

Much of Hotpack Global's success is credited to Zainudeen, who serves as the company's head. The Soft N Cool 3D Velvet Pouch is renowned for design innovation, having won the prestigious WorldStar Packaging Award, a top global accolade. The company has also received awards at the Prime Awards for Sustainability and Packaging Printer of the Year, along with the EcoVadis Committed Badge, indicating strong ESG practices.

Additionally, Hotpack has been recognized by local and international bodies for its contributions to sustainable packaging and industry development. Zainudeen has earned awards for operational excellence and initiated the Hotpack CEOs Excellence Awards to recognize the talent and dedication of the workforce.

A Visionary in Every Sense

The rise of Zainudeen P.B. from a small-time trader to the COO of the world's leading packaging conglomerate is a compelling story of vision, determination, and strategic ingenuity. In addition to founding a company, he played a key role in reinventing the industry by embedding sustainability and innovation at its core.

This is how he has left a lasting legacy. Not only has his contribution driven much-needed growth in Hotpack, but his example also shows how business success can go hand in hand with environmental responsibility. As the global packaging industry shifts toward more environmentally friendly standards, it should become clear that Zainudeen's leadership will continue to serve as a guiding example for both entrepreneurs and corporate leaders.

Editor's Pick

Excellence vs. Innovation

Can Process Perfection Block Creative Breakthroughs?

In their relentless pursuit of efficiency, most organizations have adopted operational excellence systems, such as Lean, Six Sigma, and Total Quality Management, to eliminate waste, reduce variation, and optimize performance. Such systems have been revolutionary in sectors such as manufacturing and logistics. However, as modern businesses strive to innovate, a question arises: Does pushing operational excellence too far stifle creativity and innovation?

The Over-Optimization Risk

Operational excellence relies on structure, discipline, and small steps toward perfection. Six Sigma, in turn, requires nearly perfect processes with minimal deviations. However, innovation thrives on exploration, experimentation, and failure, things that structured systems are designed to prevent.

When teams are trained to make no mistakes, they are likely to be afraid of trying out risky ideas, as they think they will be punished or they will cause havoc. A study by the Harvard Business School observed that firms that excessively track metrics on the process tend to lag behind in terms of innovation, KPIs like product innovations, and market responsiveness.

Creativity vs. Control Dilemma

The current approach to measuring perfection is through minimizing mistakes and duplication, but this can make creativity seem careless or risky. A McKinsey report cautions that organizations with overly strict cultures may become too inward-looking, prioritizing efficiency over innovation. Excessive approval procedures and a heavy emphasis on KPIs can cause "analysis paralysis," delaying decisions that need creativity and bravery.

Organizations are often great at continuing to do what they have always done, but are poor at making adjustments to what is about to happen.

Operational Agility: Finding the Balance

But it does not need to be an either-or question. The top firms are being taught to be both disciplined and flexible. Amazon, to take one example, is praised for its operational rigor, but also develops innovation, utilizing tools such as its Working Backwards product development process. This process helps teams take large bets while holding them accountable to the ground of customer need.

Many organizations are currently adopting agile operations, and this approach aligns quality standards with iterative testing and adaptive planning. This mixed method enables experimentation to occur quickly while maintaining accountability.

The Enemy of Progress is Perfection.

Many organizations utilize operational excellence to achieve scale, consistency, and customer satisfaction; however, when perfection is the goal, improvement often suffers. Real innovation needs room to be ambiguous, risky, and even unsuccessful. Modern leaders do not have to renounce excellence, but rather redefine it: not an obstacle to experimentation, but an incentive to do so.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