



As the working world continues to evolve, accommodating remote work, virtual meetings, job-sharing, flexible scheduling and other innovations, a trend has been coming on strong: The use of fractional executives.

Just what is a fractional executive? Karina Mikhli, a fractional COO and Founder of Fractionals United, uses the organization's website to explain. Unlike consultants, whose work is usually discrete and project-based, or interim executives, whose roles are full-time and integrated but temporary, a fractional exec is a fully integrated but part-time leadership role.

While it is possible to view this as evidence of institutional fragmentation – the gigification of the C-Suite – overall it seems a very positive adaptation to companies' and professionals' needs today.

And these fractional roles are growing fast. A recent McKinsey & Company survey cited in Forbes by Jason Leverant of AtWork Group, finds that about one-third of respondents self-identified as independent contractors, and report annual earnings of more than \$150,000.

There are a number of cases in which engaging a fractional exec could be the best solution:

- Power up a startup that can't afford seasoned full-time leaders in every area
- Ensure the right fit with a trial period
- Keep options open by avoiding long-term commitments
- Bulk up the bottom line, with lower salary and benefit costs

Meg Rockman, who works as a fractional Chief of Staff, sees the movement as “a long overdue opportunity for executives to carve their own path a la entrepreneurship...it's perfect for that person who has tired of competing for the right

desk in the sunny corner of the office, and is more interested in doing interesting work.” She concludes, “And always, the organization gets the benefit of a seasoned executive with outside perspectives and experience.”

Fractional CMO Lisa Hiyashi concurs: “I find the ‘try-before-you-buy’ model to be an incredibly valuable approach for both companies and myself...It also offers me the opportunity to work with diverse companies across industries, broadening my experience and enhancing my skills.”

However, there are some potential negatives. Mike Case, who has worked in both part-time and full-time leadership roles in telecommunications and other industries, says, “Once inside and focused, I was exposed to and learned so much more being in the day-to-day operation...I was able to make a much larger impact” on the business.

That viewpoint raises one key consideration: What is the impact of fractional execs on corporate culture, especially since many work remotely? It seems intuitive that stronger bonds are more likely forged in person around the proverbial water cooler. But is that aspect of company culture as important today as in the past?

Does the integration of non-full-time leaders bring a welcome flexibility and diversity of perspectives that benefits both professionals and companies? Or does it introduce still more anxiety into an already uncertain environment?

While the jury is still out, I believe the fractional trend is expanding opportunities and possibilities for both employers and individuals. I would suggest that today’s more flexible roles are contributing to a different kind of culture, a spirit based on shared goals and achievements, more focused on results than on 20th Century style team-building. And in the right situation, an approach that drives greater utilization of seasoned professionals - and allows companies to tap into expert resources that might not otherwise be open to them - is probably going to prove a source of strength for everyone moving forward.

Your thoughts?

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