The fractional C-suite

Business leaders that clock in just a day a week or a month? A trend is sweeping start-up land, and even larger corporations are taking note. Words: **Rebecca Burn-Callander**

The rise of the fractional C-suite — senior professionals, working part-time — has accelerated in recent years, driven by the AI boom, economic volatility and the rise of the 'portfolio' career. "The change stems from the societal and technological shift that has taken place over the past five years," explains Roei Samuel, founder of Connectd, which finds posts for fractional talent. "When companies have a business need, the first question is: can I automate it? The second is: can we go fractional? Full-time hiring is the last resort."

The 'why'

This theory is borne out by data. Searches for 'fractional leadership' are up 250% year-on-year, while searches for 'fractional CFO' are up 350%. Connectd, which was named the 67th fastest-growing company in Europe by the *FT*, now has 8,000 fractional members on its platform. "When we started, companies were looking for fractional support with governance and fundraising, which made sense as these translate easily to a contract-based or part-time role," says Roei. "Now they want fractional support in core functions like sales, marketing and product. The 'doing' has been automated but the strategic thinking is still human — you only need them a day a week to guide the agents."

According to fractional chief marketing officer Jon Norris, who has been working with start-ups across Europe for 20 years, the term 'fractional' is just a new label for an age-old practice. "If you couldn't afford a permanent skilled senior person, you've always been able to access that talent on a part-time basis," he says. "What's changed is the availability of talent, following mass lay-offs. Larger companies are also accessing fractional talent now because budgets are tighter than ever." "A lot of people are coming into this market now," agrees Roei. "Our biggest source in inbound leads recently was from Amazon. There's a correlation between AI and automation-led restructuring and growing interest in fractional work."

Fractional work is also a way of hedging your bets. Many of Connectd's fractional workers have a full-time job; they work a few days a month on a fractional basis because they worry about potential redundancy or because they want to hone their skills. Some bigger companies even encourage their senior leaders to go fractional because it exposes them to innovative, interesting companies. One of Connectd's bigger clients is the NASDAQ-listed energy drinks company Monster. "Its deploying its leaders fractionally into start-ups," reveals Roei. "It's about being around exciting companies and sharing knowledge."

Is the grass greener?

There are benefits and pitfalls to the model, according to Julie Wong, a fractional chief finance officer. "I'm not being pulled into the inner workings of the business, which allows me to remain objective," she says. "My role is strategic and high level. I'm not in the sandpit." However, she warns that some companies overestimate what fractional talent can achieve. "Too often, I read the job description and think, that's a full-time role!" she says.

Jon says fractional working doesn't suit everyone because of the mental load created by 'context switching'. "You might have one client in the morning and another later that day, and you'll have to move between systems and projects efficiently."

"I've heard of some fractional CMOs in San Francisco charging $5,000-$10,000 a day," says Jon. "They've worked at the tech giants and come in like a tornado to execute a specific playbook. That's pretty new and hasn't come to the UK yet."

This trend is accelerating — fast. According to LinkedIn, the number of profiles mentioning fractional roles jumped from 2,000 in 2022 to 110,000 in early 2024. "People are thinking more entrepreneurially about how they build their careers," says Roei. "No one wants to be stuck in a corporate box anymore. They're seeking flexible roles that let them live fuller lives."

FRACTIONAL WORKING/UNSPLASH