



**Building a Winning
Startup C-Suite Team:**

**From Pre-Seed
to Series C and Beyond**



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Tech startups have continued to thrive in recent years with impressive growth and funding. In 2020, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, funding for startups from North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia Pacific reached a total of \$87.8 billion, a 20% increase from the previous year. This trend has continued into 2021, with funding reaching an all-time high of \$147.2 billion, up 68% from the prior year. This growth has been driven by investors' interest surge and the continued expansion of new technologies, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence, fintech, and digital health. Looking ahead, it's also important to note that the startup ecosystem remains highly competitive and uncertain, with many challenges still to be faced. Moreover, the increasing competition and saturation of the market could make it more difficult for startups to secure funding as investors become more selective about which companies they choose to support.

Why is important?

Building a strong leadership team is crucial for navigating the challenges and uncertainties of the booming technology industry and startup funding, particularly during times of heightened uncertainty and risk. Each stage presents its unique set of opportunities and challenges, and having the right leadership team in place can make all the difference. By identifying future shapers who are skilled in their respective areas, including finance, marketing, technology, and operations, you can build a team that will help you achieve short-term goals and position your company for long-term success.

In this guide, you will find the ideal C-Suite structure and objectives for each funding stage of a startup in the technology industry: Pre-Seed, Seed, Series A, Series B, Series C, and Series D.

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Pre-Seed

During the Pre-Seed stage, companies aim to acquire Seed Capital with a sound business plan, revenue forecasts, and growth opportunities. The company's product is still in its alpha or prototype phase, with minimal to no average consumers. The CEO typically takes on multiple roles at this stage, including managing the product function. A Pre-Seed company may outsource certain skills before increasing Seed and bringing in additional C-Suite personnel, depending on whether the startup is more product or technology-focused.



Empower Your Startup with External Expertise: The Ultimate Guide to Outsourcing Critical Skills for Sustainable Growth

Outsource specific skills like working with a freelance CFO with experience working with startups, business coaching from Product & Marketing professionals, etc.

Seed

The Seed stage involves transitioning towards exponential growth by proving that the company is capable of growing sustainably. Investors look for a further iteration of the primary product, durable sales channels, and robust tech partnerships. The CEO should now focus on scaling the team and attracting investors for Series A. The Chief Operations Officer will work alongside them to drive organizational vision, operational strategy, and hiring needs. By this stage, most technology companies onboard their second in command: a COO.



Your Business with Effective Delegation and System Building: Preparing for Successful Leadership Hiring

Hiring a second in command can be and should be challenging. Ensure you conduct the proper research period and invest time in building a relationship and trust with your new operation partner. Founders/CEOs should also learn to delegate and stop micromanaging every little aspect of the business to focus on great good.

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Series A

In Series A, a company has successfully proven its product, but it needs to focus on building sufficient sales coverage to compete with more established market players. With increased funding and a shift in growth, the focus should now be on adding headcount to every department, including finance, and creating a go-to-market strategy. Sales and marketing should have been brought in-house to drive revenue and increase brand awareness, with a Chief Revenue Officer (and/or Chief Sales Officer) and Chief Marketing Officer hired to lead the teams. The CFO should also be hired to manage the company's finances and ensure sustainable growth. However, in tech teams, CTO leads still work closely with data teams. In this stage, tech teams might consider hiring mid-level supervisors and/or principal-level experts to enhance their tech portfolio.

Unlocking Growth: The CEO's Guide to Finding and Empowering a Second in Command for Long-term Success

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Series B

Series B-funded startups are no longer startups; they are mature, established businesses with a dedicated consumer base, often called scale-ups. At this stage, companies focus on research and development, entering new markets, or acquiring other businesses. Sometimes also, private equity firms and investment banks contribute to this round due to a proven business plan and low risk. By Series B, most C-Suite positions have been filled, and industry or function experts like Chief Experience Officer, Chief of People, Chief Medical Officer, and Chief Design Officer are onboarded.

Be Creative: Craft Your New Niche Leadership Roles with Your Board

Sometimes you may find yourself inventing new leadership roles in accordance with your business or industry. It would be best if you don't hesitate to disrupt creativity at this stage; however, make sure you co-craft your new role about their goals and craft their jobs together with your C-suite team. In addition, organizational growth will also take off at this stage, so empowerment of your leadership will also be an essential part of this journey.

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Series C & Beyond

In most cases, Series C is the final funding round for a startup. At this point, the company will be a market leader, earning massive revenue and preparing for an exit, such as an IPO or acquisition, and mostly globally scaling. Almost all departments and C-Suite positions are filled in Series C, as the company has already reached a high valuation. Also, now, you finally have the hiring power to transfer the big talents from your competitors or other market leaders. Since you have the budget and a proven record of sales, established products, and a strong customer base and you are no longer trying to prove your point to significant talents. So, when you need a new leader, now you can screen the global candidate market and negotiate easily with the important name in your mind.

For Series C and beyond (D, E, F), some companies may prepare for an IPO or raise funds for special situations like mergers, and maybe you're a global team with location-based C-Suite leaders. In this stage, companies might start creating a board after the IPO with external experts. Building an executive board team requires a different approach than building a C-suite team. Your initial investors (VC, Angel, etc.) can be part of this journey initially; however, this stage also should be about building a new vision and adding a new perspective. Considering in-and-out industry experts can be an option.

Mastering the Art of Orchestration: How CEOs Can Create a Cohesive C-Suite and Empower Mid-Level Managers to Drive Organizational Success

In this stage, coordinating to ensure the organization adheres to its defined objectives and policies is the most important job of the CEO. To achieve a "symphonic" mode for the C-Suite, the CEO must assess each C-Suite leader's strengths and weaknesses and create a more collaborative environment. Now as a CEO or Founder, you have a strong team with diverse talent.

Additional Action:

After C, D, E, F, and the others rest, now you have a chance to concentrate on building a healthy pyramid; leveraging your mid-level management power is critical. So, you should focus on upskilling your current mid-level managers and/or directors to become the next strategic leaders within the company.

Also, as Melon,

We are aware that this is not a linear conversation. It's not just about which C-Level and which stage but also how to transform your current and/or early C-Level joiners. Sometimes current talent transformation for the future can be a discussion – are they prepared for the next stage? Can upskilling them be an option? And more importantly, how can you hire new bosses above them without alienating your early employees? You can find some answers in our upcoming article series.



We are the talent partner of future shapers

At Melon, we specialize in providing people and culture-oriented services to fast-growing tech startups. We offer three core services to help our clients achieve their strategic goals:

Unlocking High-Performing Company Cultures



We work closely with our clients to transform their company culture and organization, ensuring they unlock high-performing company cultures. Our approach is research-based and science-backed, as we work to discover their values, design performance management systems, and turn their strategies into action by building goal-setting frameworks based on OKRs. Additionally, we provide market research insights to ensure fair compensation and rewards for their people. Through our efforts, we create outcome-impact-focused agile cultures where everyone feels part of the bigger picture and grows together.

Boost Growth with the Right Leaders



We understand that finding the right leaders is crucial for the success and growth of a tech startup. Our approach is different from traditional recruitment agencies. We begin by gaining a deep understanding of your company's culture, values, and strategic objectives. Then, leveraging our expertise in the startup ecosystem and technology landscape, we identify and attract top talent who possess the necessary skills, experience, and mindset to drive success and growth. Our focus is not only on finding leaders who meet your immediate needs but also on identifying individuals who have the potential to grow and evolve with your organization.

Empower Your Company's Leadership Potential



We offer leadership development programs to upskill and empower mid-level managers and executives to become the strategic leaders of tomorrow. We understand that leaders are the enablers of growth and transformation in any company. That's why we design customized leadership development journeys for our clients, ensuring they grow their leaders as their business grows.