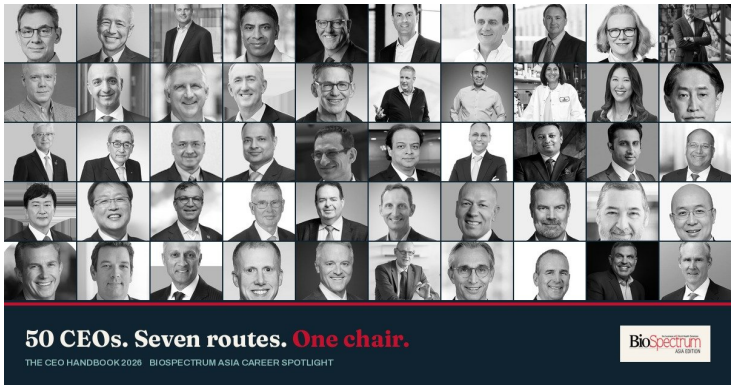
BioSpectrum
the business of Bio & Health Sciences
ASIA EDITION

50 CEOs, Seven Routes to the Top: BioSpectrum Asia Unveils The CEO Handbook 2026

September 10, 2026 | Influencers | By Ankit Kankar | ankit.kankar@mmactiv.com

The Career Spotlight edition traces how 50 leaders across biopharma, life sciences and medtech reached the top job, revealing seven distinct career routes and the defining moves that shaped their journey to the CEO chair.



BioSpectrum Asia has published The CEO Handbook 2026, a seventy two page Career Spotlight edition profiling fifty chief executives across biopharma, life sciences and medical technology. The issue departs from the format of an annual ranking. Rather than ordering leaders by company size or market capitalisation, it examines how each of them actually reached the chair.

The edition is free to read and download at www.biospectrumasia.com/ceohandbook2026.

Seven routes to the chair

The handbook's central finding is that leadership in the sector is reached by a small number of recognisable paths. Sorting fifty careers by how they actually progressed produced seven routes.

The largest is the recruited outsider, accounting for eleven of the fifty, leaders hired in from another organisation for a capability their new employer could not grow internally. Founders account for nine. Long insiders, executives who never left one company but repeatedly changed function within it, account for eight. Border crossers, who took an international posting early in their careers, account for seven. Six reached the chair by volunteering for a failing division, and six through finance or corporate development.

Three of the fifty came to the chair directly from scientific research.

Regional findings

Two patterns in the data carry particular relevance for Asia Pacific.

Eight of the nine founder-led companies among the fifty are headquartered in Asia Pacific. None are in the Americas. The mirror image also holds: five of the six leaders who reached the chair through a finance or corporate development route are American, and none are European.

The handbook argues that the practical consequence is a mismatch between the leadership literature circulating in the region and the governance structures of the companies many readers actually work for.

The edition also documents an unusually high rate of turnover. Twenty nine of the fifty were appointed in 2020 or later, and eleven took their current role in 2025 or 2026.

Comment

"When we started this, I assumed the answer would be obvious. It was not," said Ankit Kankar, Chief Operating Officer, BioSpectrum Asia.

"The single most common accelerant was not a function or a qualification. It was an international posting taken early, often to a market headquarters considered peripheral at the time. Several of the leaders in this issue ran an Asian business before they ran a global one. We tend to treat time in this region as a detour from a serious career. On this evidence it is frequently the thing that made the career possible."

Inside the edition

The handbook carries a cover story, fifty full page profiles, a ten rule playbook drawn from the patterns across all fifty careers, a data room of six figures computed from the dataset, and three indexes organised by name, by company and by route. Each profile follows the same four part structure, allowing careers to be compared rather than read in isolation.

An interactive edition, with filters by sector, region and route, is published alongside the PDF.

The fifty

Leaders are listed in the order they appear in the edition. Titles are given as each company uses them and have not been standardised.

Biopharma and biotechnology

1. Albert Bourla, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Pfizer Inc.
2. Joaquin Duato, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Johnson and Johnson
3. Thomas Schinecker, Chief Executive Officer, Roche Group
4. Vas Narasimhan, Chief Executive Officer, Novartis
5. Robert M. Davis, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Merck and Co., Inc. (MSD outside US and Canada)
6. Robert A. Michael, Chief Executive Officer, AbbVie
7. Pascal Soriot, Chief Executive Officer, AstraZeneca
8. Luke Miels, Chief Executive Officer, GSK plc
9. Belen Garijo, Chief Executive Officer, Sanofi
10. David A. Ricks, Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Eli Lilly and Company
11. Christopher Boerner, Board Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Bristol Myers Squibb
12. Maziar Mike Doustdar, President and Chief Executive Officer, Novo Nordisk
13. Robert A. Bradway, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Amgen
14. Daniel O'Day, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Gilead Sciences
15. Bill Anderson, Chief Executive Officer, Bayer AG
16. Kai Beckmann, Chair of the Executive Board and Chief Executive Officer, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany
17. Ugur Sahin, Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder, BioNTech SE
18. Reshma Kewalramani, Chief Executive Officer and President, Vertex Pharmaceuticals
19. Julie Kim, President and Chief Executive Officer, Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Limited
20. Naoki Okamura, President and Chief Executive Officer, Astellas Pharma Inc.
21. Hiroyuki Okuzawa, Representative Director, President and Chief Executive Officer, Daiichi Sankyo Company, Limited
22. Haruo Naito, Representative Corporate Officer and CEO, Eisai Co., Ltd.

23. Dilip Shanghvi, Founder and Executive Chairman, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.
24. Achin Gupta, Managing Director and Global Chief Executive Officer, Cipla Limited
25. Erez Israeli, Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd.
26. Shreehas Tambe, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Biocon Limited
27. Nilesh Gupta, Managing Director, Lupin Limited
28. Sharvil Patel, Managing Director, Zydus Lifesciences Limited
29. Adar Poonawalla, Chief Executive Officer, Serum Institute of India
30. Glenn Saldanha, Chairman and Managing Director, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
31. John Rim, President and Chief Executive Officer, Samsung Biologics Co., Ltd.
32. Kee Woo-sung, Chief Executive Officer, Celltrion, Inc.
33. John V. Oyler, Co-founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, BeOne Medicines
34. Gordon Naylor, Interim Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, CSL Limited

Life sciences, tools and services

35. Marc N. Casper, Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc.
36. Rainer M. Blair, President and Chief Executive Officer, Danaher Corporation
37. Jacob Thaysen, Chief Executive Officer, Illumina, Inc.
38. Wolfgang Wienand, Chief Executive Officer, Lonza Group AG
39. Ari Bousbib, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, IQVIA Holdings Inc.
40. Ge Li, Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, WuXi AppTec Co., Ltd.

Medical technology

41. Geoff Martha, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Medtronic plc
42. Robert B. Ford, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Abbott Laboratories
43. Kevin A. Lobo, Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Stryker Corporation
44. Thomas E. Polen, Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Becton, Dickinson and Company
45. Michael F. Mahoney, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Boston Scientific Corporation
46. Bernd Montag, Chief Executive Officer, Siemens Healthineers AG
47. Roy Jakobs, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board of Management, Koninklijke Philips N.V.
48. Peter J. Arduini, President and Chief Executive Officer, GE HealthCare Technologies Inc.
49. Dave Rosa, Chief Executive Officer, Intuitive
50. Bob White, Director, Representative Executive Officer, President and Chief Executive Officer, Olympus Corporation

Method and verification

Selection weights company scale, the editorial significance of the 2026 story attached to each leader, and regional balance for an Asia Pacific readership. It is not a market capitalisation ranking. Eighteen of the fifty lead companies headquartered in Asia Pacific.

Leadership positions, titles and company references were verified by the MM Activ editorial team against company statements and primary sources in August 2026. Career narratives are drawn from public record, including company statements, regulatory filings, published interviews and trade reporting. No quotations are reproduced; all accounts are paraphrased.

Nine of the fifty positions changed hands between April 2025 and July 2026. The edition carries a review date of February 2027. One entry, CSL Limited, is an interim appointment at the time of publication.

Selection for the edition was closed and independently verified before any promotional activity commenced. Inclusion is editorial and is not available for purchase.