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The Chemicals Reset: Leadership Decisions for 2027



Byline: Sahar Akhtar, Associate Director and Head of Chemicals & Process Sector at Pacific International Executive Search

Key highlight: Hiring decisions face more scrutiny, and strong candidates are cautious about moving.

Impact for 2027: Getting senior appointments right will matter more than filling them quickly.

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A Selective Market Heading into 2027

Key highlight: Announced European closures from 2022 to 2025 equal around 9% of capacity and 20,000 direct jobs, and EU production fell 2% from January to July 2026. In the US, deal capital is concentrating in specialty businesses with credible plans for creating value. *(Sources: Cefic, PwC)*

Impact for 2027: Plan for continued selectivity. Where acquisitions or restructuring go ahead, the right leaders need identifying alongside the plan, not after it.

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Operations and Supply Chain Lead Demand

Key highlight: Businesses are investing in profitability, resilience and efficiency. Consolidation and newly formed organisations are creating leadership gaps. Commercial, marketing and R&D hiring continues but is more selective.

Impact for 2027: As management layers are removed, leaders will need to combine strategic thinking with hands-on delivery.

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Leaders We've Recently Placed

EHS & Sustainability

- Vice President of EHS (Speciality Chemicals, US)
- BU EHS Director (Industrials, US)
- BU Safety Leader (Building Materials, Europe)
- Enterprise Sustainability & Environment Leader (Building Materials, Europe)

Operations

- Vice President, North America / Business Unit (Chemical Processing, US)
- General Manager (Speciality Chemicals / Plant Operations, Rural US)
- Site Director (Speciality Chemicals / Plant Operations, Rural US)
- Operations Director (Speciality Materials, Rural Germany)

Engineering

- Global Senior Director of Engineering (Industrials, US)

Supply Chain

- Regional Supply Chain Director (Speciality Materials, US)
- Regional Supply Chain Leader (Building Materials, Europe)
- Global Supply Chain Execution Director (Speciality Chemicals, US)

Commercial & Strategy

- Vice President, Product & Strategy (Speciality Chemicals & SaaS, US)
- Market Development Leader (Speciality Materials, Europe)
- BU Marketing Leader (Building Materials, Europe)

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Clear Mandates Attract the Right Leaders

Key highlight: Running a stable operation is different from turning around an underperforming one, and integrating an acquisition is different from building after a carve-out. Candidates want to know the strategy, why the role exists, who they report to and how much authority they will have.

Impact for 2027: Define the situation and the mandate before the profile. Openness about the role, including lessons from a previous appointment, brings stronger shortlists.

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Plan Successors Before You Need Them

Key highlight: Retirements, unexpected departures, and underinvestment in internal talent leave successors missing. External searches too often start only when the need is urgent.

Impact for 2027: Identify vulnerable roles now, develop internal candidates with support from **Leadership Coaching** to get them ready to step up, and build external talent pipelines before a vacancy threatens continuity.

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Pay Starts the Conversation. Purpose Closes It.

Key highlight: Strong candidates move for greater autonomy, broader impact, a shift from turnaround to growth, or real progression. They need confidence in the strategy, leadership team and conditions behind the role. Niche leaders must tell their story as understanding the business helps candidates judge the fit.

Impact for 2027: Lesser-known businesses need to explain their strengths, history and opportunity clearly to compete for talent. Any promise of development or succession must be backed by evidence.

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Advice for hiring managers:

Five Steps to a Stronger Appointment

Key highlight:

1. Agree on the outcomes before searching.
2. Separate essentials from preferences.
3. Assess how results were achieved.
4. Benchmark internal and external talent in one process.
1. Keep the process open and well-paced.

Impact for 2027: Aligning every decision-maker at the start avoids costly course corrections and reduces the risk of losing high-impact talent.

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Advice for executives:

Three Questions Before Your Next Move

Key highlight:

1. What evidence shows your impact?
2. Are the conditions for success in place?
3. Are you staying connected to the market?

Impact for 2027: Executives who can show lasting results, and who check sponsorship, authority and resources before accepting, will make better moves.

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Small Enough to Care, Large Enough to Deliver

📍 **147 senior leaders placed in 2026 (so far)**

🌎 **21 countries | 6 continents**

47% of placements were diverse hires



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