

Beyond the Balance Sheet:

UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN LEADERSHIP TRAITS OF CFOS IN FIBER SERVICES



The role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in fiber services companies has evolved significantly. While financial expertise remains foundational, today's CFOs in the broadband fiber services industry face an expanded set of challenges. Beyond managing budgets, CFOs must navigate complex financial landscapes, drive strategic growth, and foster organizational cultures for long-term success. This white paper explores both the experiential requirements and the often-overlooked leadership traits that define exceptional CFOs in the fiber services sector.

Key Experiential Requirements for CFOs in Fiber Services

To succeed in this capital-intensive industry, CFOs must combine deep industry expertise with financial leadership and operational oversight. The following competencies are essential:

1. Industry Expertise

- Capital-Intensive Business Models: Experience managing capital-heavy operations, crucial for broadband providers. Some CEO's rate capital-intensive industry experience even higher than specific fiber services industry expertise.
- Fiber Infrastructure Knowledge: Familiarity with broadband, telecom, and related sectors is critical.

“A CFO who is a strong partner to the CEO must be deeply operational, collaborating with various functional teams to co-own key metrics (such as unit cost, product cost, and activity metrics by region). By using these metrics as leading indicators, the CFO can drive better forecasting and support informed decision-making.”



- BOB UDELL
CEO,
CONSOLIDATED
COMMUNICATIONS

2. Financial & Operational Leadership

- FP&A Expertise: Proficiency in financial planning, and cash flow management is key for financial health.
- Forecasting: Collaboration with functional teams to develop metrics to use as forward-looking indicators to improve forecast accuracy.
- Accounting & Cost Control: Ability to manage infrastructure costs and balance profitability with growth.
- Strategic Impact: Experience scaling operations while maintaining financial discipline and driving strategic initiatives.
- Capital Allocation: Decision-making skills regarding infrastructure investment, tech upgrades, and market expansion.

3. Regulatory Knowledge, Government Subsidies & Compliance

- Knowledge of telecom regulations and government funding programs is essential, particularly for handling subsidies and tax structures in fiber services.

4. Capital Markets & Financing

- Debt Financing and Equity Markets: Expertise in managing both debt financing and investor relations to support growth.

5. Private Equity Experience (for those companies which are PE owned)

- Many fiber firms are private equity-backed, requiring CFOs to focus on value creation, EBITDA optimization, and financial strategies tailored to PE environments.

6. M&A & Post Merger Integration Experience

- Experience with mergers and acquisitions is vital in a consolidating industry. CFOs should be skilled in due diligence, integration, and capturing synergies.

7. Professional Credentials

- A CPA, CFA, or MBA is often preferred, with 10–20+ years of finance leadership, ideally in telecom or infrastructure industries.

These established experiential requirements lay the foundation for success, ensuring the CFO can navigate the fiber services industry's complexities.

“I’ve seen CFOs adopt a martyr mentality, staying at work until 9 p.m. every night. To me, that signals that something is broken with our processes or leadership. A healthy work-life balance is essential for effectiveness.”

- LEIGH FOX
CEO, ALTA FIBER



The Hidden Leadership Traits, Cultural Values, and Softer Skills

While technical financial skills are paramount, soft skills and leadership qualities are equally critical for a CFO's effectiveness. These qualities shape how CFOs influence teams, handle challenges, and foster success in the company. Key traits include:

1. Leadership & Stakeholder Management

- CEO Partnership: A strong CFO collaborates closely with the CEO, presenting a unified strategy to investors, customers, and the market.
- Engagement with Board and Investors: The CFO must present financial data aligned with company goals, instilling confidence in board members and investors.
- External Relationships: CFOs influence external stakeholders, such as regulators and suppliers, to ensure favorable agreements and policy decisions.

2. Hands-On Attention to Detail

- Active Involvement: Successful CFOs take a direct role in financial operations, working daily with teams to ensure alignment with functional objectives and corporate goals.
- Operational Oversight: Ensuring that financial goals align with the operational execution of network build-outs, ensuring projects stay on schedule and within budget.

3. Executive Presence & Communication Skills

- Confidence & Credibility: A CFO must project confidence and credibility, particularly during complex financial decisions, which builds trust with both internal and external stakeholders.
- Effective Decision-Making Under Pressure: Fiber services face constant changes. A CFO must make decisions under pressure, balancing short-term needs with long-term goals.

“There is massive value when a CFO can understand the details of sales, operations & engineering functions and proactively help them achieve their objectives.”

-CRAIG GUNDERSON
CEO,
CONTERRA
NETWORKS



“While direct involvement in financial operations is crucial, as a company grows, the CFO must increasingly empower their teams such as FP&A, accounting, and capital markets—to be effective and focus on long-term strategic priorities.”

- LEIGH FOX
CEO, ALTA FIBER



4. Adaptability & Change Management

- Comfort with Uncertainty: Given the rapid growth and disruption in the fiber sector, CFOs must be adaptable and lead during periods of transformation.

5. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) & Empathy

- Building Trust: High EQ allows a CFO to foster trust within teams, manage conflicts, and maintain collaboration across departments.
- Empathy in Leadership: Empathetic CFOs connect with employees during stressful times, helping to retain top talent and create a positive workplace culture.

6. Cultural Fit & Ethical Leadership

- Aligning with Company Values:
The CFO must embody the company's core values, whether in driving innovation or maintaining integrity.
- Ethical Decision-Making: Balancing short-term financial performance with long-term ethical considerations is crucial for maintaining the company's reputation.

7. Mentoring & Empowering Teams

- Developing Talent: A hands-on CFO actively mentors their team, ensuring they gain exposure to different business areas and grow as future leaders.
- Fostering a Results-Oriented Culture:
By leading by example, the CFO encourages accountability and performance excellence across teams.

“A CFO needs to develop interim metrics as key leading indicators to track work in process so investors have confidence that the plan is on track. On any given day, only 20% of projects are completed while 80% are still in process. If you are waiting for final metrics, there is no time to course correct.”

-CEO,
Top-tier FTTX
Services Company



Conclusion

In the fast-paced, high-growth fiber services industry, the role of the CFO has expanded beyond financial stewardship. While technical expertise and operational knowledge are essential, the leadership qualities, cultural fit, and softer skills often define the most successful CFOs. These include strategic partnership with the CEO, the ability to navigate complex decisions under pressure, and fostering a positive organizational culture. By recognizing and nurturing these hidden leadership traits, companies can identify CFOs capable of driving sustained success in a competitive and evolving market.

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