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By Joann S. Lublin and Vanessa Fuhrmans

Wanted at Uber: a CEO Who Can Do Pretty Much Everything

Succeeding Travis Kalanick viewed as ‘once-in-a-generation opportunity’ that is also fraught with risk.



Uber's leadership team has been gutted by executive departures and ousters. PHOTO: ANTHONY WALLACE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

The most tantalizing CEO job now open in the tech world also may be the toughest.

Travis Kalanick's abrupt resignation as chief executive of Uber Technologies Inc. has kicked off a search for a leader to run the world's most valuable startup. His successor, though, will have to contend with scandals on numerous fronts, a leadership team gutted by executive departures and ousters, and a workplace culture widely criticized for being permissive of sexual harassment and sexism.

"It's a once-in-a-generation opportunity," said Jeffrey Cohn, managing director of global CEO succession planning for DHR International, an executive-search firm.

Yet any future Uber CEO will have to contend with Mr. Kalanick, who is expected to remain an influential presence at the ride-hailing company: He will keep a seat

on Uber's board of directors and he retains control of a majority of Uber's voting shares. "You don't want to be [his] puppet," Mr. Cohn said.

In launching a search for a new leader, Uber likely will suspend its pending hunt for a chief operating officer, according to people familiar with the matter.

Heidrick & Struggles International Inc., a search firm in charge of Uber's hunt for a COO, probably will now focus instead on the CEO assignment, one of the people said.

A board member could step in to fill Mr. Kalanick's shoes temporarily— particularly Arianna Huffington, who has emerged as the main voice for Uber's board in recent months and has taken a prominent role in Uber's investigation into its workplace practices—said Bart Friedman, a corporate governance expert and senior counsel at law firm Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP.

Given her limited operational experience, though, some executive recruiters say she is unlikely to be a candidate for the chief executive role longer term, and is a long shot even as an interim leader. Mr. Friedman said. Uber co-founder Garrett Camp, also its chairman, is a dark horse as he "may not demonstrate sufficient change for investors, who will really be calling the shots."

The investors are going to be looking for not only someone who is transformative but a big public-relations success," he added. "It is going to have to be a headsnapper."

Ms. Huffington couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

Mr. Cohn said he expects Uber to choose an external candidate to replace Mr. Kalanick "if they are serious about getting the culture in shape." The outside recruit

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also should know how to take them through an initial public offering, he said.

A number of talented executives who didn't want Uber's No. 2 spot would be interested in being CEO, Mr. Cohn said. He cited Tom Staggs, the former No. 2 at Walt Disney Co., as one such possibility. Uber had interviewed Mr. Staggs to be second in command, The Wall Street Journal previously reported. Mr. Staggs couldn't immediately be reached.



Uber board member Arianna Huffington could step in to fill the role temporarily. PHOTO: JAVIER ROJAS/PI/ZUMA PRESS

An ideal pick would be a star player from a technology services industry with operational, global and turnaround experience, said **Dora Vell**, CEO of tech recruiting firm **VELL Executive Search**.

She added that she doesn't see qualified candidates on Uber's board or management team.

Ms. Vell who has placed leaders of several small- and

medium-sized tech companies, suggested several potential prospects for the No. 1 job. Among them is Keith Block, president of Salesforce.com Inc. and a 26-year veteran of Oracle Corp.

"He's very, very strong operationally," **Ms. Vell** said. "I know he's CEO material. He's very ethical, tough. People love him."

Mr. Block didn't return a call for comment. A Salesforce.com spokeswoman declined to comment.

Other possible picks for Uber CEO include Safra Catz, co-CEO of Oracle, and Pat Gelsinger, CEO of VMware, a unit of Dell Inc., according to **Ms. Vell**. An Oracle spokeswoman declined comment about whether Ms. Catz might join Uber. A VMware spokesman said Mr. Gelsinger "is deeply committed to his role as VMware CEO."

A person close to Facebook Inc.'s chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, quashed speculation that she could be a contender for the job, saying that Ms. Sandberg plans to stay put.

Jim Bethmann, head of the high-tech practice at recruiters Caldwell Partners International, said another tech-industry veteran, Hewlett Packard Enterprise chief Meg Whitman, is well-qualified to run a complex global enterprise like Uber but she likely wouldn't do so.

Via a spokesman, Ms. Whitman said she remained "fully committed to HPE" and doesn't plan to leave until the company's turnaround is complete.

Dora Vell is the CEO of VELL Executive Search, a premier retained technology executive search firm in Boston. Ms Vell is an internationally recognized expert in executive search for technology CEOs, COOs, CIOs, Vice Presidents and board members. She works with start-up organizations through Fortune 50 Firms. She can be reached at dora@vell.com.

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