



Olivia White
CEO-Designate

Olivia White is a Senior Partner at McKinsey & Company and Director of the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), combining a first-class academic pedigree in physics and mathematics with advisory and research leadership across financial services, risk, and economic development.

Olivia completed a double major in physics and mathematics at Stanford University, where she also played varsity water polo. Awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, she attended Merton College, Oxford, initially studying deeply numerate subjects including mathematical physics, and analysis. She then began a further degree in philosophy but chose not to complete it, having already secured admission to pursue doctoral studies in physics.

Olivia then worked towards and gained her PhD in Physics from Harvard University in 2005, focusing on disordered systems -such as the viscous properties of glass - and on neural networks and models of learning and memory. A subsequent Pappalardo Fellowship at MIT allowed her to continue work at the intersection of physics and neuroscience.

During this period, however, she began to question whether a purely academic path aligned with her desire for broader societal impact. As she has described it, she came to realize she was more interested in “fighting the world’s fight”.

Olivia joined McKinsey in 2008, just as the global financial crisis was unfolding. Initially undertaking a private equity rotation, she worked on due diligences and on engagements blending asset management strategy with risk management, examining how investment decision-making processes incorporate both financial and behavioral risks.

Shortly thereafter, she relocated to Europe to support a major financial institution navigating post-crisis clean-up, gaining what she describes as a “front-row seat” to the causes and consequences of systemic failure. This shaped her focus on financial services and risk management. She worked extensively with banks and insurers on the intersection of strategy, risk, and regulation, and later broadened into operational transformation - merger integration, procurement, and service operations - developing an appreciation for the practical mechanics of institutional change beyond conceptual frameworks.

A key strand of her career emerged through work with a major foundation examining digital financial inclusion and the economics of payment systems globally. That work combined system-level analysis with social impact, exploring why financial systems fail to serve those who could productively access credit and how regulatory and market design choices shape inclusion. Her research collaboration marked an early move into broader economic and systems thinking, ultimately drawing her into leadership within the McKinsey Global Institute.

As a Partner and later Senior Partner, Olivia’s portfolio has encompassed three principal areas: first, long-term advisory relationships with major financial institutions on operating model and risk and regulatory strategy; second, global work on digital inclusion and rollout of financial products, particularly in emerging markets; and third, leadership within MGI, shaping research on global trade, financial markets, productivity, resilience, and long-term structural trends.

For the past four years she has been a director of MGI, spending approximately half her time on research agenda-setting, authorship, and quality control, and half on client and external engagement - serving as ambassador, speaker, and convenor. She regularly delivers high-profile talks and hosts executive roundtables, translating economic research into board- and CEO-relevant insights. She has become known within and without McKinsey as a systems thinker with a blend of analytical depth and practical framing for senior audiences.