



## - Corporate Title System in Korea -

Hierarchy at the workplace

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## - Corporate Title System in Korea -

### Overview

All Korean relationships are strongly influenced by the Confucian heritage laying a special emphasis on seniors and superiors and putting everyone in a hierarchical structure. People respect those older or higher in rank than themselves via behavior as well as by using a special honorific language and by addressing them according to a specific title system. There are certain titles within family members and ones used for strangers and those titles structure the whole communication in everyday life and help classify the dialogue partner within the hierarchical system. Workplaces have their own specific rules in that regard as well, and they can often be a bit confusing for foreigners who start working in a Korean company. However, it only takes a bit of explanation in order to acquire a better understanding of this unique business etiquette.

Not only do the Korean hierarchical titles exist within the company structure, but they are also actively used by the coworkers when talking to each other. Sometimes you may not even need to remember someone’s name but simply use the corporate title instead – it is a steady factor in the Korean corporate world. When talking to business partners, clients or suppliers, those titles can help streamline the communication and to identify the proper contact person from the same hierarchical level as oneself. Because it can be very difficult for somebody in Korea to talk with a person *above* their own hierarchical level.

The following section will give you a brief overview on the titles used among employers/employees in Korea and in the everyday Korean business world.

### Directive/Executive Management Titles

Larger companies in Korea naturally tend to have a more comprehensive title system than smaller companies. The following gives an overview of those titles, whereby smaller companies may not actively make use of all of those titles.

Korean Title	English Title	Detail
Hwejang (회장)	Chairman	<i>Hwejang</i> is not exclusively used for the Chairman of the board. The title is also often used as an honorific title that refers to the founder or the owner of the company; unlike in the western countries where the CEO holds the most authority, the Chairman is the most powerful figure in Korean companies. The Chairman title entitles him or her to tremendous authority and a high social status.

Bu-hwejang (부회장)	Vice Chairman	Direct subordinate reporting to the <i>Hwejang</i> . At a family-owned Chaebol company such as Samsung, the <i>Bu-hwejang</i> commonly holds the CEO title (i.e., Vice Chairman & CEO).
Sajang (사장)	President	Some companies do not have a <i>Hwejang</i> position. Instead <i>Sajang</i> is the top position that is equally respected and authoritative as <i>Hwejang</i> .
Daepyo-isa (대표이사)	CEO	Literally translated as Representative Director
Bu-sajang (부사장)	Senior Executive Vice President / Deputy President	This title is not commonly used by smaller companies
Jonmu-isa (전무이사)	Executive Vice President / Executive Director	This title is not commonly used by smaller companies
Sangmu-isa (상무이사)	Senior Vice President / Senior Director	This title is not commonly used by smaller companies
Isa (이사, 理事)	Director	First director level after <i>Bujang</i> , the highest non-directive management title (see table below)

### Field/Non-Directive Management Titles

In the Korean corporate world, employees can go through a series of different titles. Once the employee enters the organization, he/she may be promoted within the hierarchical structure and acquire a new corporate title. Starting from the entry level there are a number of levels to go through in order to become a *real* manager. The following table presents the title system of non-directive management titles.

Korean Title	English Title	Detail
Bujang / Team Jang (부장/팀장)	Department Head	Department General Manager
Chajang (차장)	Deputy Senior Manager	Direct subordinate to <i>Bujang</i>
Gwajang (과장)	Manager	This position usually has direct subordinates
Gyejang (계장)	Section Chief	One level above the <i>Daeri</i> ; it depends on the company's internal rules whether this position exists or not
Daeri (대리)	Assistant Manager	This position sometimes has direct subordinates
Juim (주임)	Chief	One level above the <i>Sawon</i> ; it depends on the company internal rules whether this position exists or not
Sawon (사원)	Staff	Entry level

Nowak & Partner can advise you on the hierarchical structure and corporate title use within your organization in Korea and help you avoid mistakes within this essential business etiquette.

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We offer project management support across a wide range of areas, where commercial common sense, Korea expertise, and our reliability are winning factors. For established companies in Korea, we are a reliable ally for succeeding at difficult and unusual tasks. We provide locally adapted solutions and provide you with everything you need to make your business operations and market entry to Korea a remarkable success.

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<i>We provide customized one-stop solutions for our customers, including providing freelancers – qualified professionals – who represent your company in Korea.</i>	<i>We negotiate with Korean business partners for you and deliver professional advice regarding your joint venture or M&amp;A endeavours.</i>	<i>We provide a shortlist of the most suitable candidates for your business objectives, leaving you to choose your preferred match.</i>
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