Chief people officer focus: How CPOs' backgrounds are evolving

Analysis of Fortune 1000 CPOs indicates that both the role and profile of HR leaders are evolving quickly.



Chief people officers (CPOs) are reinventing themselves and their functions in real time in response to pressures we explored at length in our article "Chief people officer of 2030."

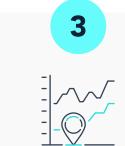
Our discussions with leading CPOs highlighted five key challenges they are seeking to meet:



Building the capabilities and capacity, individually and in the HR function, to take on the new strategic mandate



Developing the perspective and agility to manage the leadership pipeline and workforce in the context of shifting strategic goals



Navigating change, innovation, and stability in a cost-constrained environment



Addressing generational and workforce megatrends



Mastering Al, technology, and data-driven decision making

Who are the CPOs doing this work today? What roles do they play in their organization, and what backgrounds do they bring their current positions? This infographic offers a snapshot.

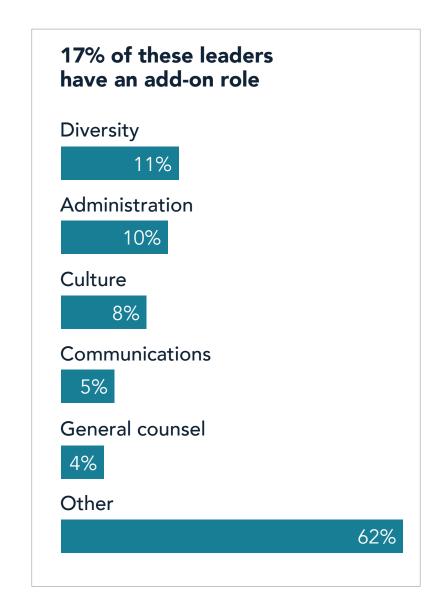
# How is the role defined and what does it involve?

CHRO remains the dominant title for the top HR role, but almost a quarter now hold a CPO title—a 53% increase since 2021.

#### HR role titles (%)

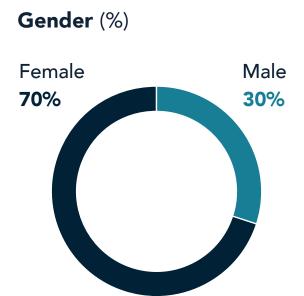
2021 (Total HR heads: 937)
2025 (Total HR heads: 914)

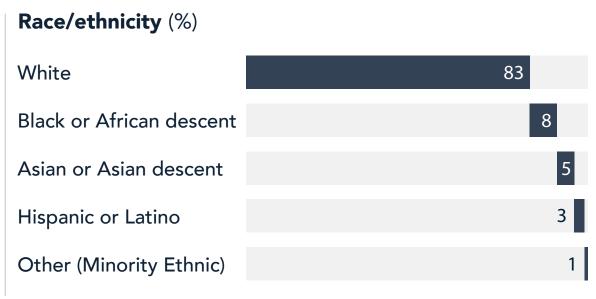


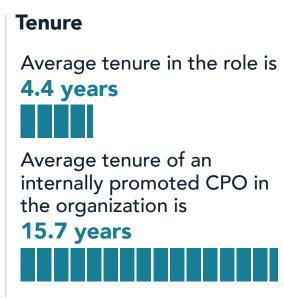


## Who are today's CPOs?

70% are women, the highest share of any C-suite role; 83% are white, in the middle of the C-suite in terms of racial or ethnic diversity.





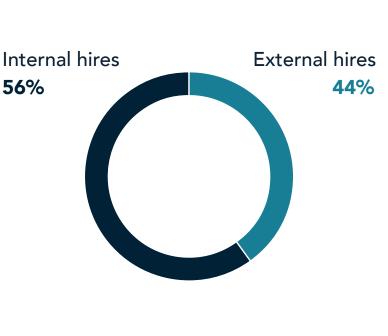


### How did they reach their role?

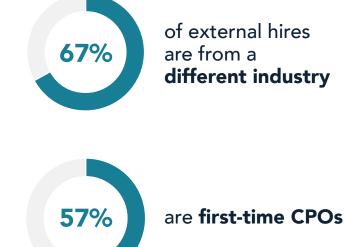
Turnover increased notably in 2024 and is on pace to reach at least the same level this year.

Hiring 150 115 70 2023 2024 2025\*

44% of those hired in 2025 so far were hired externally—so 56% were promoted from within.



Among all sitting CPOs...



Source: Heidrick & Struggles analysis of the sitting HR leaders at Fortune 1000 companies, May 2025

#### **Human Resources Officers Practice**

\*Hires up to May 2025.

We partner with organizations to help them identify strategic human resources leaders who are prepared to lead and create high-performing organizations. We help our clients find HR leaders with the business acumen, strategic and market insight, financial savvy, operational capabilities, and ability to harness data and technology to drive business success. These leaders must be culture shapers with the foresight, resilience, and adaptability to drive transformative change in organizations through strategic talent management.

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