



US
EDITION

CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER TURNOVER STUDY

2026



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



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CASA members have businesses which are structured in different ways and are independent. What brings us together is our commitment to excellence in Corporate Affairs search, and the great outcomes we provide for those we work with.

All CASA member firms are dedicated to the promise of **'Making Corporate Affairs Better'** and as the name suggests, our vision is for CASA to be **'the home of Corporate Affairs'** for leaders of the profession, wherever in the world they are.

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2025 was supposed to feel like resolution. Instead, it felt like recalibration. CCOs navigated a year that started with political transitions, rolled through waves of stakeholder activism, and ended with organizations still figuring out what 'return to normal' actually means. Along the way, they had to make sense of AI adoption that felt both revolutionary and routine, employee expectations that kept evolving, and an economy that refused to follow anyone's script.

Through all of that, strong communications functions proved their worth. Again.

At Patino Associates, we're drawn to the 'why' behind turnover - not just the numbers. Why are companies making changes at the top of their communications function? What kinds of leaders are they bringing in? And what does all of this tell us about where the profession is headed?

This is now our third year examining the CCO role at America's top 666 companies - the S&P 500 and Fortune 500 combined, public and private. We track who's moving, who's staying, and who's getting hired. More importantly, we look at these patterns and partner them with our experience at the front line of recruiting Communications and Corporate Affairs executives to reveal the evolving demands on communications leadership.

The data we've captured tells a story. It's the story of a function that has been on the front line for their respective companies - navigating barrages from seemingly all sides. It is also a story of elevated expectations and of the need to both mature and evolve the function and their team dramatically over the past year. It's also a story about organizations that are still figuring out what they need from their communications leaders, which is largely why hiring patterns keep shifting. But through it all, it is largely a story of success - of manageable turnover, of increasing tenure and with the kind of demographic diversity you don't see in other C-suite positions.

THE BIG PICTURE: KEY FINDINGS

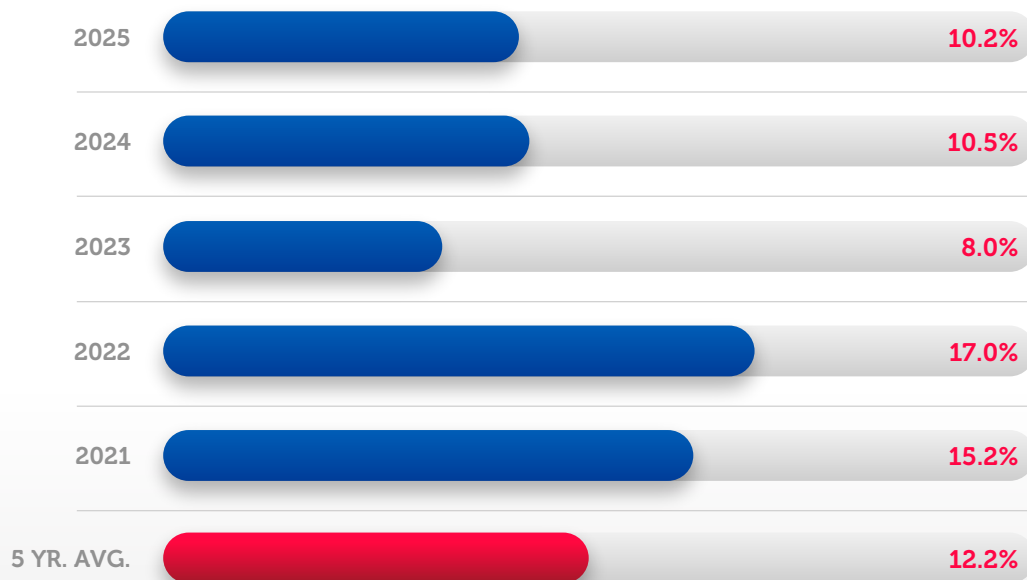
Here are the four results from our 2025 research that best describe the market for communications leadership:

1. CCO TURNOVER STABILIZES, BUT TENURE GROWS

U.S. CCO Turnover was essentially flat at 10.2% in 2025, down ever so slightly from 10.5% in 2024.

That's still higher than the 8% we saw in 2023, but the trend is stabilizing after that post-2023 uptick.

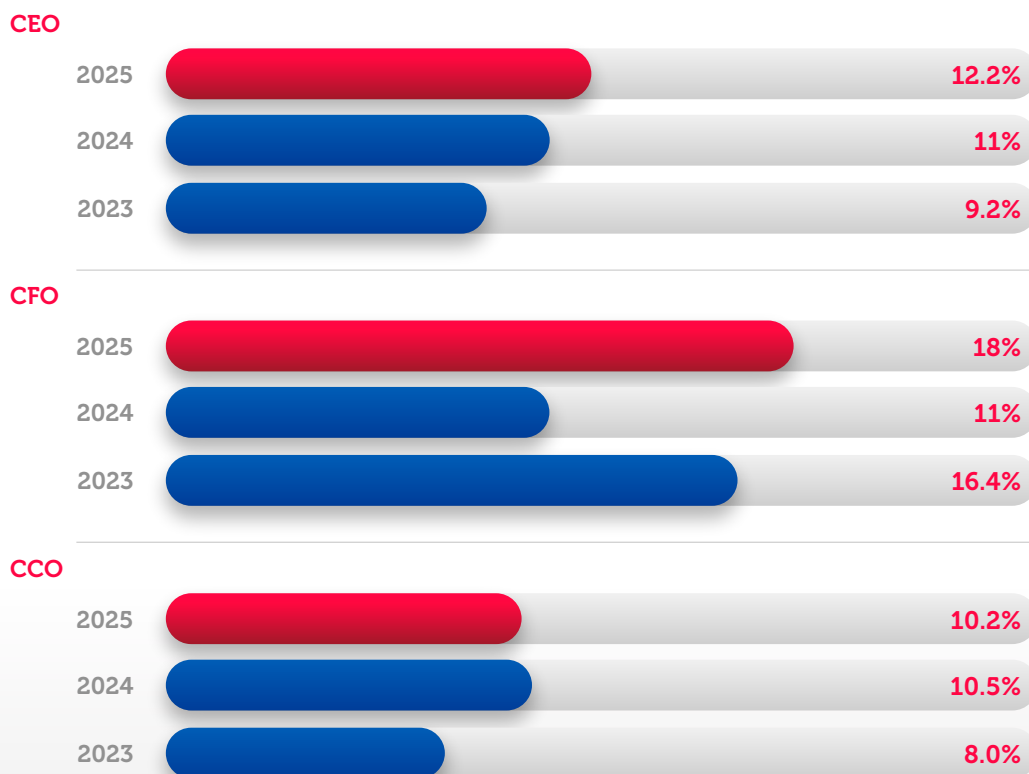
CCO Turnover in U.S.



CCO turnover found its footing in 2025, establishing a level of consistency that returned close to the long-term mean. And yet, the professional lives of CCOs felt more chaotic this past year. It was not just

because of geopolitics and macroeconomic shocks. It was because they had to navigate and communicate through an increasing number of departures amongst their C-Suite colleagues.

C-Suite Turnover in the U.S.



Many more CEOs and CFOs found themselves in transition as their respective turnover rates increased. In particular, CFOs hit a seven-year high with an 18% turnover rate. Based on our conversations with colleagues in the executive search industry, we would offer that more CEOs and CFOs retired in the past year than their CCO peers. Burnout from extensive and unrelenting change was a factor that equally affected all members of the C-Suite choosing to depart. However, CFOs and CEOs were more likely to suffer displacement because of financial and operational performance first whereas CCOs who were asked to depart typically struggled on internal performance factors. In our experience, it came down to three factors:

1. Lack of credibility to properly influence the CEO and other C-Suite members - Throughout 2025, we had CEOs who wanted CCOs to strategize and communicate in the language of business rather than continuing to frame strategy and messaging through the lens of moral, ethical and cultural obligations.
2. Inability to evolve the function team to meet evolving needs of the C-Suite and the business - More CCOs, both established and newly hired, are being asked to reimagine their function, its

structure and its impact. Surprisingly, we found that cost pressure was a smaller driver than the broader market might assume. Leadership teams are seeking improved performance and impact. The two most considered ways to achieve that are to change the structure or change the people.

3. Inability to partner well with peers in the C-Suite (and below) - In a year where everything felt urgent, C-Suite executives in all functions felt constantly under fire. The best CCOs were able to rise above the natural instinct to stay in their own foxhole and truly behave as the glue that knits a C-Suite (and organization) together. They employed a mix of proactive collaboration and servant leadership capable of soothing the frayed nerves of their executive peers and demonstrating that the CCO could be the rock in this stormy environment.

There are admittedly few people (especially after the pressures of the last few years) who can, and have consistently, hit the mark on all three of these factors. CCOs who were capable of achieving two of the three are largely safe. CCOs doing one (or none) of the three are likely at risk for displacement in 2026 as well.

The counterpoint metric to turnover is tenure. The modest turnover of CCOs this year had a positive impact as average CCO tenure rose to 4.9 years

in 2025, up from 4.6 years in 2024. That's a meaningful jump, suggesting the role is becoming more stable.

C-Suite Tenure in the U.S.

CEO



CFO



CCO



(<https://www.cristkolder.com/volatility-report> for CEO and CFO tenure)

This year's data shows two notable things. First, the CCOs average tenure increased more than either CEOs or CFOs. Second, the average CCO now has greater tenure than the CFO position.

Let's put this data in perspective. If there was zero turnover amongst CCOs in 2025, then the average tenure would increase exactly 1 full year because all the CCOs had one additional year under their belt.

Decreases in average tenure are largely driven by two scenarios:

1. the departure of long-tenured individuals who are now replaced by an executive with one year (or less) of tenure in the chair.
2. high rates of turnover where a large number of executives (most with arguably more than one year of experience) are replaced by newer executives.

U.S. CCO Tenure by Industry



Industrial and Consumer companies (followed closely by Energy) showed the greatest increases in CCO

tenure, while Technology remained not only the lowest average tenure, but did not increase at all in 2025.

U.S. CCO Tenure by Gender

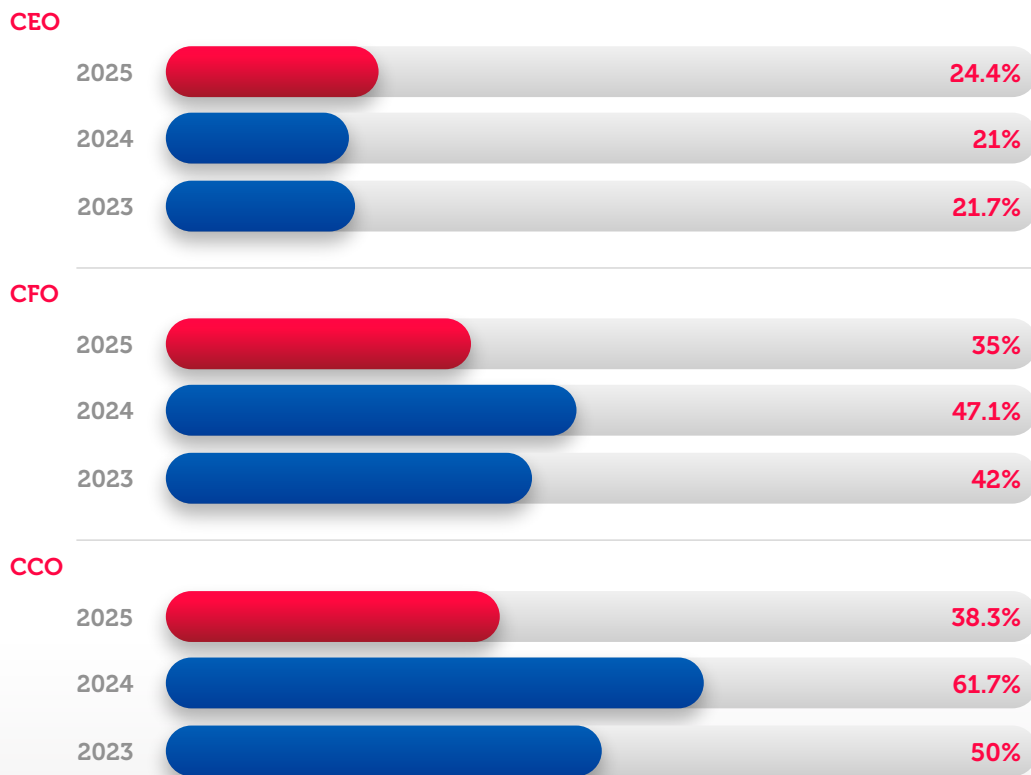


Women's tenure increased from 4.5 to 5.0 years, while men's tenure rose from 4.5 to 4.8 years.

Both genders are staying longer, but women were retained at a higher rate than men.

2. THE EXTERNAL HIRING BOOM FADES

Rate of External Hires Across the C-Suite



(<https://www.cristkolder.com/volatility-report>) for CEO and CFO data

In 2024, companies went outside for new CCOs 61.7% of the time. In 2025, that flipped as nearly 60% of filled positions went to internal candidates.

What changed? Companies seem to be valuing continuity and institutional knowledge more than they did in the past. In previous years of our CCO Turnover Study, we discussed the mitigating structural factors that affected succession planning and the development of qualified leaders. The rise and maturation of development programs from the Page Society and Institute for Public Relations have provided some opportunities, but, as discussed above, the goalposts for the Chief Communication Office continue to reset.

In a largely risk-avoidance move, companies are betting on people who already understand the business and the leadership team. Typically, these people have already proven capable of achieving at least one of our 3 factors above. The CEO is anticipating that this new leader might be capable of delivering on the other factors over time instead of risking an outside hire who naturally comes in having not delivered on any of these factors yet.

But here's what that 60% internal hire statistic doesn't tell you: not all internal hires are promotions. In fact, all 8 role downgrades that we noted in 2025 were internal hires. That means 28% of internal hires were actually people stepping into smaller roles than their predecessors held. We'll explore why this happens below.

3. WAS IT A 'BUILD' YEAR OR A 'RETHINKING' YEAR?

38% of the CCO changes in 2025 were newly created roles. In our methodology, that means that the functional scope of responsibility notably shifted (with either more or less responsibility). That is more than double the 15% we saw in 2024. Before you assume this is all about contraction, let's look at the details.

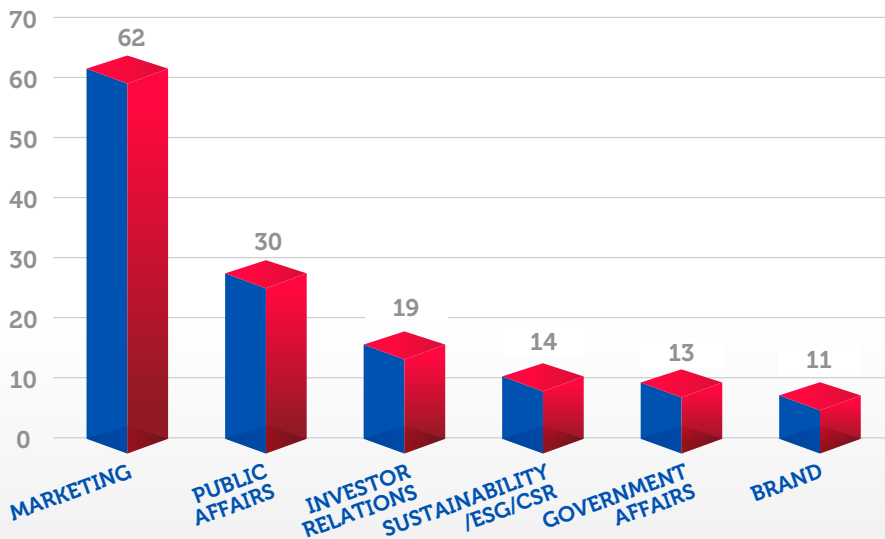
Companies weren't just replacing departing leaders with like-for-like successors. They were consistently re-scoping the communications function; sometimes expanding or elevating it, other times narrowing or downgrading it. Most communicators we talked to spent this past year looking hard for the forest (or the trend in the market). Sometimes you just need to see what's happening in each (or your) tree.

The message here is that CEOs are no longer locked into a limited mindset of the capabilities of a Communications or Corporate Affairs leader.

Our perspective came from talking to CEOs and CHROs who wanted better performance from their leadership, not just out of the communications function, but out of their C-Suite. As such, CEOs are more willing to consider broadening or narrowing the portfolios of their leaders in order to achieve an optimal performance.

With more and more CCOs reporting directly to the CEO, the CEO now views the CCO role as a key leader in the organization. Much in the same way that strong CFOs become Chief Administrative Officers or Chief Operating Officers, CEOs are evaluating the leadership capability of the individual in the CCO role. CEOs are assigning more or less responsibility to the CCO position based on the capability of the person in the chair (or the person who was most recently in the chair). It depends on what the business needs and who's available to do it.

The most common additional functions held by CCOs in 2025



31% of U.S. CCOs occupy roles that combine communications with at least one other function, thus the rise of the “CCO+” moniker.

Compared to 2024, the biggest most frequent functions added to the CCO role were Public Affairs (+8), Brand (+7), and Government Affairs (+6). The functions most frequently removed from the scope of the CCO+ role were DEI (-5), Customer Experience (-3), and Marketing (-3). In today's geopolitical climate, the shifts in Public Affairs, Government Affairs, and DEI were expected from our point of view.

These changes reveal how companies have felt the need to adjust their leadership structure to match business challenges or opportunities created by new and seemingly chaotic regulatory and political environments.

The risk of all this re-thinking and restructuring? The possibility that Corporate Affairs or Communications functions get broken apart with the pieces no longer reporting directly to the CEO. A non-integrated communications function is inherently less impactful in helping a company achieve its business objectives.

4. WOMEN HOLD THE ROLE, BUT MEN HOLD THE TITLE?

In 2025, women held roughly 7 out of 10 CCO positions in the Fortune 500 and S&P 500, up 1% from the prior year. We were surprised by the double-digit gain within the Fortune 500 over the

last year. Also of note is the fact that women hold three-quarters of the CCO positions at private companies in the data set.

Women CCOs In Private vs. Public Companies

OVERALL



FORTUNE 500



PRIVATE COMPANIES



PUBLIC COMPANIES



The overall ratio has increased each of the last three years and is unmatched in other C-suite positions. Compare this to the declines in other key executive

positions such as CEO (9.1% down from 9.7%) and CFO (16.5%, down from 17.6%). (<https://www.cristkolder.com/volatility-report>)

Women Executives in Fortune 500 and S&P 500

CEO



CFO



CCO



But is there a “status gap”? In our evaluation of the titles of executives within our data set, men are proportionally more likely to hold ‘Chief’ titles and specifically ‘CCO’ designations, while women are more often labeled ‘Head of’ or ‘VP.’

When you zero in specifically on the ‘CCO’ title—Chief Communications Officer, either standalone or combined with other responsibilities - the gap is even clearer. While women outnumber men with the title CCO roles 2-to-1 overall (106 vs. 55), men are more likely to hold that specific title: 31% of male communications leaders are CCOs, compared to 26.5% of women.

However, titles are largely based on the overall hierarchy of an organization (which are vastly different from company to company, even in the same sector). Many executives in communications view reporting structure as a sign of the importance and impact of the CCO role, which is also valid.

Reporting structure does not guarantee a leader’s “seat at the table”. What matters more is influence - whether the CEO and board actually listen.



It’s not about the seat. It’s about the voice. The organization design may grant you a seat at the table. But the seat is symbolic. A voice at the table is consequential. And to gain that voice, there’s one thing I’ve been asking my teams to focus on over the last five years or so: be a business leader first and a communicator second.

Joao Belo
CCO, Danaher Corporation

Joao Belo’s recent LinkedIn post

(<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/communicators-dont-need-seat-table-its-something-else-jo%C3%A3o-belo-647ee/>)

CONCLUSION: WHAT IT ALL MEANS

The 2025 data reveals something that feels contradictory at first: the CCO role is both more stable and more scrutinized than ever before.

Turnover held steady at 10.2%. Tenure climbed to 4.9 years, now exceeding CFOs. Companies chose to trust people who already understand their business and the leadership team, hiring internal candidates 60% of the time, a dramatic reversal from 2024's external hiring boom. When you look at the numbers alone, it appears CCOs have found their footing.

And yet the narrative from the market feels vastly different. A closer look beneath the numbers reveals a more nuanced story.

THE BAR KEEPS RISING

While CCO turnover stabilized, CEO and CFO turnover climbed, with CFOs hitting an 18% rate. In addition to political chaos, operational and reputational crises, CCOs spent 2025 navigating constant C-suite transitions, managing through leadership changes while maintaining organizational coherence. The CCOs who thrived weren't just good communicators. They delivered on three critical factors: speaking the language of business, evolving their function to meet changing needs, and serving as the calm and open collaborator that other C-suite members sought out during a year that felt urgent from start to finish.

THE ROLE KEEPS EVOLVING

Nearly 40% of CCO changes in 2025 involved newly created or re-scoped positions, more than double the prior year. CEOs are treating the CCO role like they have historically viewed the CFO role: as a key executive position whose portfolio expands

or contracts based on who's in the chair and what the business needs. Some CCOs are adding Public Affairs, Brand, and Sustainability to their remit. Others are getting a tighter, communications-only mandate. The role isn't standardizing. It's being customized around the needs of the business and, in particular, the strengths and weaknesses of the CEO and their executive team.

THE CHALLENGE REMAINS UNEVEN

Women hold 70% of communications leadership roles, yet men are disproportionately awarded the "Chief" title. The representation is there. The recognition still lags. And while that title gap matters less than influence (whether the CEO and board actually listen), the pattern persists.

Looking ahead to 2026, we're watching several trends closely. Will the internal hiring preference continue, or will the pendulum swing back toward external candidates? And perhaps most importantly: will more companies realize that the best CCOs aren't just communications experts, but qualified business leaders who happen to specialize in reputation, stakeholder engagement, and organizational coherence?

Reviewing the last three years of data, it is clear the CCO role has become essential to how companies navigate complexity. The expectations are higher than ever. The scrutiny is real, but the best practitioners are proving they can meet the moment - and that companies willing to invest in strong communications leadership are better positioned to handle whatever comes next.

METHODOLOGY

The 2026 CCO Turnover Study examines the top 666 U.S. companies by revenue, drawing from the S&P 500 and Fortune 500 lists and including both public and private companies.

We tracked personnel and organizational changes within Communications and Corporate Affairs roles throughout 2025, using Patino Associates' proprietary database combined with publicly available information.

Specifically, we sought to determine:

- Whether a company changed its CCO during 2025 (defined as a new person in the seniormost role)
- Whether the incoming CCO was promoted internally or hired externally
- Whether the role was newly created or substantively different from its predecessor
- Whether the incoming CCO had previous experience as a CCO at another organization
- Whether the incoming CCO had prior experience in the same industry
- Demographic data and tenure information for all filled roles

This data was discussed with Patino Associates principals, clients, and communications executives to inform the qualitative analysis throughout this study. All data reflects the state of these organizations as of December 31, 2025.



CCO TURNOVER STUDY 2026

Reports that build on last year's research, with richer insight due to over 1,000 companies analyzed across France, Ireland, Netherlands, the UK and the US, and the DACH region of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

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