



# COLLABORATORS FOR CHANGE

Research on the Relationship between  
Communications and Diversity Executives



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# INTRODUCTION

The "Chief Diversity Officer (CDO)" traces its origins to the 1970s when some higher education institutions created a vice president for minority affairs position when a large number of African-American students were enrolling at predominantly white institutions.[1] In non-academic workplaces, the position can be traced to 1920 when the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) established the Women's Bureau to focus on the welfare of women in industry. Subsequent decades witnessed numerous [milestones](#), including legislation on equal pay, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Key amendments, such as [2014's pay transparency Executive Order 13665](#), making gender pay disparities easier to identify for federal contractors, and the 2020 Supreme Court ruling to safeguard the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals, collectively underscored the need for a dedicated professional responsible for setting goals and guiding efforts to not only ensure legal compliance but also to champion diverse talent, promote equitable resource access, and foster inclusive work environments.

In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, a notable shift occurred within Fortune 500 companies as 53% appointed a CDO or equivalent role by 2022, according to a report by [McKinsey & Company](#). This surge in demand marked a significant departure from the hiring trends of the 16 months before 2021, nearly tripling the rate of new CDO hires.

In 2023, Vice Media Chief People Officer Daisy Auger-Dominguez was interviewed in [Harvard Business Review](#) about overcoming diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) challenges, which included mounting economic uncertainty and a gradual erosion of support and sentiment for DEI initiatives. Difficulties have been exacerbated by legislative actions in states such as [Florida](#) and [Texas](#), which have defunded DEI initiatives in higher education, with other states soon to follow. Additionally, the Supreme Court issued rulings related to [affirmative action](#) and the legal standing of the [LGBTQIA+ community](#). While in certain states, attorney generals sent [letters in support of DEI initiatives](#), in other states attorney generals forewarned Fortune 100 companies of [potential future lawsuits](#) concerning their DEI initiatives.

Meanwhile, post-pandemic shifts for CCOs included growth in team size and budget, according to a study by [Korn Ferry](#). Richard Marshall, Global Managing Director, Corporate Affairs & Investor Relations Center of Expertise said, "CEOs are under more pressure than ever, and they are relying more and more on CCOs to help with strategy, storytelling, and relationships."

However, both CCOs and CDOs faced challenges in reporting structures and succession planning. [CDOs saw several high-profile departures](#) from Disney, Netflix, and Warner Bros. Discovery. [High-profile CCO departures](#) included Google, GM, and Walgreens and their replacements do not report directly to the CEO, which is a similar experience to some CDOs.

[1] Williams, D., & Wade-Golden, K. (2013). *The Chief Diversity Officer: Strategy, Structure, and Change Management*. Routledge.

To effectively implement and communicate organizational DEI goals both internally and externally, the roles of the CCO and the CDO are pivotal. In Page Society’s [CCO Views Into 2023](#), DEI was noted as being both a top concern and an opportunity for CCOs. Twenty-five percent of CCOs identified trust and division, including racism and DEI, as top business risks while 32% viewed employees and culture, which encompasses employee engagement, retention, and DE&I, as a prime opportunity. In the Page Society report, one CCO advised CEOs, “Do not lose or abandon the focus that has been placed in recent years on employee engagement, ESG, and DEI.”

How organizations communicate about overall DEI initiatives is critically important and given the roles of CDOs and CCOs, understanding their functions and the dynamics of their relationship is paramount.

To explore this relationship, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) examined the relationship between CDOs and CCOs and their DEI remit with the organization. Additionally, this research clarifies and exemplifies best practices for establishing and sustaining effective collaboration between CDOs and CCOs in an ever-changing social, political, and economic environment. Through interviews and focus groups, this study provides valuable insights and guidance for organizations navigating the complex landscape of DEI in contemporary times.

## METHODOLOGY

Between March and August 2023, IPR conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews of 20 CCOs (or individuals in roles closely aligned with such responsibilities) and 20 CDOs (or their functional equivalents, in alignment with [NADOHE’s](#) definition of the CDO as a role and not a title) from different types of organizations including corporations, government entities, public relations and communications agencies, and nonprofits, including higher education. All participants filled out a preliminary survey.



# STUDY ENVIRONMENT

Some significant events occurred during the research collection phase. Notably, the decisions handed down by the Supreme Court concerning [affirmative action](#) and the legal treatment of the [LGBTQIA+ community](#) shaped participants' perspectives. Furthermore, noteworthy occurrences included reports of budgetary reductions targeting positions and departments dedicated to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, and [departures of Chief Diversity Officers](#) from prominent corporate entities. These developments prompted concerns about CDOs' and CCOs' willingness to participate in focus group discussions, so the primary collection method switched to interviews.

# DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

Of the 20 CCOs interviewed, eight are white, four are African American/Black, two are Asian, two are Hispanic, and four are Middle Eastern. Ten are female, and 10 are male. Three were from agencies-- two of which are CEOs, three from nonprofits, and 14 from corporations.

Of the 20 CDOs interviewed, 14 are African American/Black, two are Asian, two are Hispanic, and two are white. Fourteen are female, and six are male. One owned a DEI consultancy, four were from agencies, seven from nonprofits, and eight from corporations.

Of the 20 CDOs interviewed, 16 have five years or less experience in their current role; four have six or more years in their current role. Fourteen have 20 years or less of overall work experience and six have 21 or more years of overall work experience. Most interviewees (n=16) have five or fewer years of experience in a formalized role dedicated to DEI while four interviewees have six or more years of experience. All reported having prior DEI-related experience outside a dedicated role.

This study encompasses 35 different organizations, with interviews conducted with both the CCO and CDO in five organizations.

# LETTER TO THE READER

## Dear Reader,

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has been catapult into the spotlight amid growing critique on what is required to ensure its efficacy and evolution. Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs), the executive stewards of DEI, have long been a part of institutions, and yet, as DEI debates mount, subsequently their roles have also been scrutinized. Amid the seismic societal shifts prompting the discourse about DEI, resulting analysis about the CDO's role, especially during times of distress and unrest, examines how CDOs are expected to navigate unprecedented crisis and unrealistic expectations.

[Mallick \(2020\) in Harvard Business Review](#), wrote that CDOs are not miracle workers who could work without resources or power nor are they able to “wave a magic wand” and reshuffle the inner workings of the organization to have an anti-racist culture. Yet when supported with the right C-level support, adequate resources and strategic prioritization, the role can catalyze meaningful cultural change internally and externally.

Along with the rise of the CDO, the past few years have changed the shape, role, and influence of the Chief Communications Officer (CCO). The VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) 2.0 world tilted on its axis with a global pandemic, calls for social justice, labor strikes and strife, and a spike in domestic and international fascism and political violence. As the organization tried to figure out what to say and how to say it, the communications expert played a bigger role and had the ear of the CEO.

The evolution of these two essential C-level roles reflects the rapid sea changes of society over the past few years, one where alliances and partnership is required to make impact in challenging environments and provide direction, clarity and hope when the path forward isn't immediately clear. What exactly is the relationship between these two roles that have emerged into prominence since 2020? What should it be?

# LETTER TO THE READER

One may assert peers, colleagues or collaborators, but forging a relationship centered on trust and communication takes a mutual understanding and respect that comes from an honest assessment of role expectations and areas of vulnerability. The research on the linkages between and differences among these roles is sparse, and the paucity of research led to this endeavor.

The hallmark for the [Institute for Public Relations](#) is research on all things related to the communications industry, and as Center leaders of this project, we are pleased to continue the center's legacy of research within its newest group, the Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and first-of-its kind research on the multifaceted relationship of the CDO and CCO.

Some key findings of this work include:

- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as a professional role and function
- The factors that lead to the maturing of the CDO role in organizations
- How CCOs and CDOs interact and advocate
- The tangible effects of diversity fatigue

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# KEY TAKEAWAYS

Based on the interviews and survey results with 20 CCOs and 20 CDOs, the following takeaways were identified:

## 1 The Chief Diversity Officer Role

All CDOs had prior DEI-related experience pre-dating the increased formalization of the CDO position. Many received formalized titles following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 as more organizations focused on DEI initiatives.

## 2 DEI Prioritization

The murder of George Floyd facilitated the rise in the CDO role as more organizations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Some noted, though, that organizations also focused more holistically on DEI within their organizations. Nearly all respondents said DEI was one of the top priorities in their organizations. A few discussed how their employee resource groups have evolved since 2020.

## 3 CDO Reporting Structure

Most CDOs and CCOs agreed that the CDO role should be a stand-alone, executive position (rather than a position that has multiple responsibilities) reporting to the CEO. The second most common reporting structure was the CDO reporting to the Chief Human Resources Officer, which generated mixed reviews.

## 4 Progress in Gender Parity vs. Challenges in Race and Ethnicity Goals

Gender parity in representation and pay has been easier to achieve compared to goals related to race and ethnicity. Organizations continue to struggle with meeting these objectives. Disability and LGBTQIA+ progress is often overlooked and unmeasured.

## 5 Measuring DEI

Interviewees discussed various ways their organizations measure DEI. The most used metrics include representation in numbers across various DEI markers and examining culture through the use of employee surveys. Retention and advancement numbers were noted as well.

## 6 Rewarding Work

Both CDOs and CCOs noted the wins in DEI in their organizations helped motivate them. They noted how they can see how DEI work positively impacts and changes people's lives.



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## 7 Relationship between CCOs and CDOs

All participants said they had a relationship with their counterparts and described that relationship in positive terms such as “symbiotic” or “embedded.” Both functions noted their counterparts were critically important to their function’s effectiveness.

## 8 CCOs as Advocates and Allies

CCOs play a pivotal role in championing and amplifying the narratives of the CDOs' work, contributing to the strength of their collaborative relationship. Most said the alignment between the roles was focused on strategy, rather than tactics.

## 9 Tension in the CDO/CCO Relationship

Some CDOs want better governance, risk, and transparency while balancing storytelling responsibilities. Some CCOs said they had to balance DEI communications with other organizational initiatives.

## 10 Challenges of DEI Fatigue

CDOs report being overworked, overwhelmed, and under-resourced in managing DEI efforts, which takes an emotional toll on those inhabiting the role. Most said it was hard to unplug from their work because they were personally affected as well. Some also noted the employees within their organization were also experiencing DEI fatigue.

## 11 Need for Resources

Both CDOs and CCOs stressed the challenges of not having enough resources, especially in terms of staffing. Both said this has hindered their ability to be effective.

## 12 Looking Ahead

Both CCOs and CDOs were "cautiously optimistic" about the future of DEI and their working relationship with counterparts. The most optimistic tout confidence in their counterpart and their team’s ability to persevere through difficult times. On the other hand, some of the future societal and political challenges weigh heavily on both CDOs and CCOs.

## 13 Succession Planning and Professional Development

Most CDOs did not have a strong successor identified within their organization as there appeared to be gaps from executive level to mid-level. Professional development programs were important to CDOs for their own development.

# INSIGHTS-BASED BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research, the following best practices emerged:

- 1 Embed Staff within Respective Teams:** Teams that included employees representing their counterpart functions exhibited improved synergy and collaboration, optimizing overall team performance.
- 2 Conduct Communication Assessments:** A communication audit measuring the effectiveness of DEI-related communications can help determine optimal timing, content, and channel strategies.
- 3 Elevate the Chief Diversity Officer:** To drive DEI initiatives effectively, the CDO should hold a substantive and influential role within the organization, reporting to a senior executive.
- 4 Define, Measure, and Report DEI Goals:** Organizations must establish, measure, and report outcomes, including shortcomings, of the organization's DEI goals to track progress and determine where to allocate resources.
- 5 Cultivate Open Communication and Regular Collaboration:** CDOs and CCOs should establish a cadence of contact in a psychologically safe environment that encourages both parties to speak openly, fostering empathy and respect while aligning on key organizational values.
- 6 Invest in DEI Infrastructure and Resources:** Organizations should develop a DEI strategic plan supported with resources and infrastructure of research, professional development opportunities, and succession planning.
- 7 Clarify Organizational Perspectives on DEI:** Organizations should define diversity, equity, and inclusion for the organization and communicate DEI priorities and strategies to internal stakeholders.
- 8 Understand DEI Fatigue:** Organizations should note the impact that DEI work has on the Chief Diversity Officer and ensure CDOs have support. Additionally, organizations should understand how DEI fatigue affects message retention and adoption among employees.
- 9 Engage in Succession Planning:** Organizations should ensure they have created a succession plan for the CDO role to prepare for future leadership development and growth.

These best practices serve as valuable guidelines for organizations seeking to optimize the partnership between CCOs and CDOs in pursuit of their DEI objectives.



# THE CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROLE

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE CDO

The role of CDO has undergone significant shifts since 2019, marked by notable fluctuations in demand. A [LinkedIn](#) study reveals a remarkable 168.9% surge in CDO hires between 2019 and 2021. However, the same study unveils a distinctive trend as the CDO role stands alone with a negative growth rate of -4.5% from 2021 to 2022—a stark departure from the positive trajectory observed across other executive positions.

There are multifaceted factors contributing to this decline in demand. Some of the external factors include economic uncertainties, legal considerations, and the increasing politicization of DEI. Some of the internal factors include program maturity, preparedness of current and future DEI leaders, and reporting structure. A global study by [McKinsey & Company](#) (2022) underscores the trend of a majority of CDOs globally report to the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) rather than directly to the CEO. However, in U.S.-based organizations, a higher proportion of CDOs report directly to the CEO.

Another internal factor is shifting organizational priorities. Of the organizations interviewed, half of the CDO positions originated prior to 2020, while the other half emerged subsequently, following the murder of George Floyd. Both CCOs and CDOs consistently highlighted DEI as one of the top five organizational priorities, particularly when it serves as a cornerstone of their organization's strategic initiatives and when senior leadership is personally committed to DEI.

The VP of communications at a global technology company said:

“It’s [DEI] always been a priority. We had a new CEO start and one of (the) top three priorities was reinvigorating the culture. And part of that was an emphasis and focus on DEI. I’d say it has been a top priority for the company, and that has become even more so over the past couple [of] years. Diversity and inclusion were built into the culture far before it was a mainstream topic. It was definitely core to the culture and we had employee resource groups [dedicated to DEI] decades ago.”

Most of the CDOs discussed their long-term experience in DEI-related leadership roles, which predated the formal establishment of the position within their respective organizations. Some CCOs were unsure about when the DEI role was formalized within their organizations. One CDO at a global integrated marketing agency talked about her journey in DEI:

“Technically, I had been doing this work long before I had the title...I’ve been representing (the organization) and building our diversity program and platform for many years. However, it was in 2020 when the tragedy of George Floyd occurred, and Breonna [Taylor] and so many others, I sat down (with the founder) and we talked about our level of commitment to DEI. We decided we needed to make this an all-agency, all-hands-on-deck emergency SOS and I was asked to lead our efforts. We created a global committee of over 100 employees around the world that got together and said, ‘This is not just a Black and White issue, this is an issue of humanity, and we need to all take a stand and make a difference.’”

The increased societal focus on DEI also resonated with the CCO of a global insurance company who said the increased focus on race helped his company have a more holistic view of DEI within the organization:

“We launched the DEI program [some] years ago. Before that, it was a bunch of scattered tactical initiatives. The plan was developed in partnership between HR and marcomm (marketing communications), and then legal became part of it too. I think having strategic alignment from the get-go was key.”

For some organizations, though, DEI is not as high of a priority compared to other organizational initiatives or there is more ambiguity surrounding it. The CDO of a global retail company shared how organizational transformation impacts the prioritization of DEI initiatives.

“It’s top 10, and it’s probably right on the cusp, creeping into the top five. I would like to see it prioritized a bit more in the context of where we are as a business and as an organization. We’re going through a bit of a transformation right now. And so, oftentimes, when organizations are going through that, DEI gets deprioritized a little bit. I don’t feel like it’s been completely deprioritized, but I do feel that we’re continuing to try to remind leaders that you don’t only focus on DEI when things are going well. If the business is challenged, it’s actually when you really need to have a strategic and intentional focus on DEI because it’s a lever and a driver for your business.”

One CEO from a technology PR agency talked about how DEI is not a priority for the parent company, even though he prioritizes it. “They don’t get in my way, but I guarantee you I could feel the eye rolls from them digitally. For them, it’s not a priority. For me it’s a number one priority.”

The CDO of a public university shared how, given the current political climate in her state, the sentiment around prioritization shifts within the organization, which causes confusion for both internal and external stakeholders. In her experience, there is comradery sometimes and other times, the efforts feel non-existent, leading to confusion.

## REPORTING STRUCTURE OF THE CDO

Of the diversity officers interviewed, 10 report directly to the CEO or the highest-ranking executive within the organization. Six report to the human resources department, while the remaining four have reporting relationships into other organizational functions. Three interviewees occupy hybrid roles, such as Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) or the Head of Development.

CDOs and CCOs discussed their perspectives and experiences on the optimal reporting structure for the CDO role. One CDO said that reporting to human resources was challenging because of conflicting responsibilities:

“I report directly to [Human Resources][2], and I would prefer to report directly to the chief executive officer, because a lot of the diversity and inclusion things that we do are internal. They are meant to increase inclusivity in how we work and in our culture. I definitely don’t feel like I fit. I see a lot of conflict, me being [focused on] diversity and inclusion, while being within HR. I realized the goal of HR is to protect the organization, and that is a huge conflict when we are behaving badly.”

[2] Name of office removed to protect confidentiality.

On the other hand, one CDO of a global technology corporation who reports to the CHRO said it's more about the particular person you report to:

“Having done this work for a long time, there's lots of schools of thought as to what's the best reporting structure. It really comes down to who you report to. Do you feel that you can make an impact on the organization? Do you have a voice at the table? Are you a respected leader? Are you partnering with the key decision-makers? So, it's really a function of that. From where I sit, and the particular person I report to, I don't see it as an issue.”

Several CCOs said the optimal reporting structure would be the CDO reporting to the CEO. One CCO at a private university said:

“The way it works here I think is really powerful. Our CDO reports directly to the president of the university and sits as a member of the senior most executive leadership team. I think that's the ideal place. If we could make it a more high-profile reporting relationship, I'd say we should, but you don't get much more high-profile than reporting to the chief executive of the institution.”

Similarly, the CCO of a nonprofit healthcare organization said, “I'm a firm believer the CDO should report to the CEO. If I were making the decision and if I were the CEO, I would make that decision with a dotted line to people/ human resources.”

Overall, CDOs are supported by their CCO colleagues, affirming the necessity of the CDO role and the prioritization of DEI within their organizations. CCOs advocate for their CDO counterparts to have a significant presence at the decision-making table.

Navigating the shifts in priority within certain organizations coupled with the difficulties accompanying the growth of DEI initiatives is challenging for both CDOs and CCOs.



# THE STATE OF DEI IN ORGANIZATIONS

## DEI OUTCOMES IN ORGANIZATIONS

The McKinsey & Company report (2022) underscores the business case for DEI and emphasizes the pivotal role of a CDO in shaping, measuring, and implementing strategies for sustained organizational growth. However, CDOs are often tasked with "driving change through influence" rather than leveraging data directly. Only 35% of the CDOs report having the employee demographic data needed to make informed decisions, highlighting a gap between the recognized importance of DEI and the practical approaches and tools required to move initiatives forward.

In this IPR report, the most successful DEI outcomes are related to the areas of gender parity and equitable compensation, as noted by several interviewees. While organizations have established objectives aimed at increasing racial diversity, these outcomes have been more challenging to attain. None of the respondents discussed goals related to other DEI markers, such as individuals with disabilities or people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

One CCO at a multinational insurance company said, "We report up to the board level, which is great. It's something that our executive committee decided to do a few years ago. We have goals that we've spoken about publicly, and one is that we want to have gender parity."

Some concerns shared by the respondents related to communications surrounding DEI. One CCO of a multinational professional services corporation discussed concerns when their organization decided to publicly share the progress of their organization's DEI goals. She said her organization has almost achieved its goal, increasing the number of women by double percentage points:

"It started when we set our goal for diversity. At the time, it was gender. It was like, are you really going to say that you're going to be 50/50 by (an exact year)? There was lots of pushback at the time. And not pushback, like animosity, but more like fear...are we really going to make this goal? The second was that shortly after George Floyd was murdered, we set goals in the markets we could with an all-people goal for hiring Black and Hispanic talents. Again, that was new ground. And the progress was not fast."

Discussions of DEI also centered around the hiring process. The CCO of a transportation company discussed their hiring strategy for increasing gender and racial diversity that other organizations have implemented:

“We must have a diverse slate of applicants before you move to the interview phase and that is both for race and gender. The interview panel must also be diverse—you must have chosen leaders and peers around the company that represent a diverse slate of people who would then do the interviewing. We said that we would increase our gender and ethnic diversity among our board of directors, and then we would increase our senior leadership gender and racial diversity by (a certain year).”

The same company, which tracks and publishes an annual DEI report, achieved double-digit gains with gender; however, progress in other areas was more difficult to attain. “The Black and Hispanic progress, both at the leadership level and at the all-people level, has been (in) single digits. It is not significant.”

## MEASURING DEI

According to Lily Zheng (2023) in a [Harvard Business Review](#) article, determining the key performance indicators (KPIs) for DEI success can be a difficult task, as knowing what to measure outside of demographic data is challenging. Respondents discussed the various ways that their organizations and functions measure the success or failure of their DEI efforts. These key indicators included the following: [3]

### 1 *Representation (n=15)*

The measurement of diversity in hiring practices, particularly focusing on gender, race, and ethnicity as a primary indicator.

### 2 *Evaluation of Organizational Culture (n=12)*

Employee engagement surveys that evaluate the organizational culture, especially in terms of its inclusivity and equity.

### 3 *Retention (n=7)*

Retention rate of employees from underrepresented groups.

### 4 *Advancement (n=5)*

Number of promotions within the organizational hierarchy.

### 5 *Consumer Acquisition (n=5)*

The diversification of their customer base.

### 6 *Training Completion (n=2)*

Completion of diversity and inclusion training programs.

[3] n = sample size so if n = 15, then 15 respondents reported this.



Not all respondents reported having established mechanisms for measuring DEI success within their organizations. Two participants said their organizations lack a formalized approach to measuring DEI outcomes, while two others highlighted the use of proprietary scorecards for assessing progress. These are not the only metrics used to measure success. Additional indicators including candidate demographics (in addition to employee demographics/representation), pay equity, and ERG (employee resource group) participation, among others are recommended by [HR \(van Vulpen\)](#) and [DEI \(Zheng, 2023\)](#) thought leaders. The diversity of measurement approaches underscores the complexity and evolving nature of DEI evaluation within organizations, however, CDOs and CCOs agree that measurement impacts success.

## DEI INITIATIVES IN ORGANIZATIONS

Overall, most respondents said DEI initiatives within their organizations are steadily continuing, albeit with some apprehensions. Some are integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into their DEI efforts and vice versa, and some are expanding their employee resource groups (ERGs). A vice president of DEI for a large PR agency said:

“I do see (in) this moment, a lot of people are redefining their focus on DEI for areas or place(s) they feel they may have more impact down the line, you're seeing this rise of ESG being blended into the conversation of DEI as well. And not just the social part, but how does the environmental piece play? How does the governance piece play? All of that being folded in and DEI shifting under that realm. Companies and organizations alike are trying to figure out how to stop being paralyzed, because three years later, statistically, companies still don't have the best way to communicate, authenticate, and talk about what's going on.”

The head of development at a national financial services company discussed how they are continuing DEI and leveraging their employee resource groups:

I think we are at a steady state. Nothing has changed in terms of our thinking. We continue to use our resource groups [4] (RGs), and we don't call them ERGs (employee resource groups) or affinity groups on purpose because they are a strategic lever to help advance the agenda of the business, whether it's technology, whether it's consumer or customer needs, colleague needs, the market, the community. We organize our RGs around stakeholders, and they are invested in quite heavily with resources. We have continued membership across the organization, and we use them as a vehicle to drive change in the organization. And as the company is transforming either digitally or from an agile point of view, we're trying to be a much more adaptive organization, we use the RGs to be the guiding light to some of that change, and to enlist its membership in helping to shape what those agendas are, and they become quite the influencers in the organization.”

[4] Name of program changed for confidentiality.

Some agencies said that while they are still focused on DEI work, some of their clients are not prioritizing it as much as they used to, and there is a loss of momentum. One CEO of a global midsize communications agency said:

“Right now, I feel it's steady. I think probably not surprisingly, we are starting to see some clients step back a little bit, feeling a little bit less of a sense of urgency. So, that impacts how we're counseling on the opportunities that we have to do DEI-specific work as it's somewhat dependent on our clients' need and appetite for it. Obviously, we've both seen the headlines where DEI titles are being removed, or people are leaving, they're not being replaced, they're reporting to different people. I think as an agency, internally, it's steady to dialing up, but from our client perspective, it doesn't feel as critical as it did two years ago.”

Similarly, the executive vice president of a global large communications agency said, “I would say it's both a steady pace, but also losing momentum. Maybe it's not lost much momentum, but there's not a sense of urgency...there's so much going on right now. I don't know if there's the same sense of urgency or of ‘elevated urgency’ as there was previously.”

Overall, many CDOs and CCOs report achieving success in their DEI initiatives for gender parity and equitable pay faster than those related to race and/or ethnicity. Those organizations used their established criteria to measure both the successes and shortcomings of their DEI endeavors and reported the outcomes to their key stakeholders. However, most interviewees agree their current DEI measurement has room for improvement. Respondents suggest an expansion of measurement methods is needed to continue the success achieved in some DEI initiatives and to make the necessary adjustments to the goals where progress has stagnated.





# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CDO AND THE CCO: ALIGNMENT, ACCOMPLISHMENT, AND ALLYSHIP

In a [recent study by BetterUp on belonging \(2020\)](#), research experiments found the presence of an ally in a team setting helped buffer the negative effects of exclusion in the workplace. The same study showed that organizations with a culture of inclusivity and allyship had lower employee turnover, improved performance from their employees, and are more likely to recommend their employers as great places to work.

All study participants conveyed that at the very least, they have a decent rapport with their counterparts in the CDO or CCO role. Terms such as “symbiotic,” “embedded,” and “close” were commonly used to describe the relationship between the two. Respondents discussed the details of their relationships, the initiatives they work on, and the points of occasional tension and friction. Most said the most enjoyable aspects of their role were seeing the impact they make.

All study participants also said they have formal meetings with their counterparts at least once a month. Most interactions though were on an as-needed basis, which typically occurred more often. Both CCOs and CDOs noted how important each of their counterparts were to their function’s effectiveness. Allyship was also an important aspect of the relationship and CDOs noted how important CCOs were for advancing the organization’s initiatives. A DEI Executive at a global technology corporation said,

“We need better storytelling and that's something I'm an advocate for as a DEI professional. That's why we need that strong partnership with communication teams because I can share with you what we're doing, how we're doing it, but I need your help storytelling. Help me tell this story where people are influenced, and they believe the work we're doing is really making an impact. I don't think I thought much about what the communications DEI partnership looked like until now. I think that it's essential. You could have a subject matter expert, but if they can't communicate the why, the how, the what, tell the story, and [if] you don't have a DEI professional that can do that, then you're missing the mark.”

CDOs also shared their insights on the ways in which their CCO counterparts can actively contribute to advancing the DEI agenda and emphasized the importance of allies.

## CCO AND CDO ALIGNMENT

CCOs and CDOs discussed where they saw the most alignment between the two functions. The executive vice president of a national financial services institution said, “I would say the alignment goes through everything, starting at the top with the strategy, all the way through all the pieces, and then to some of the most tactical things in terms of word choice or approach.”

How DEI fits holistically into the overall enterprise was also discussed by several respondents. One senior communications executive of a global biotech company said, “We are so close [so] it's immediately a very strategic discussion of approach and not a surface discussion on tactics. It's where we are going from just an overall mindset enterprise standpoint. We are so aligned and embedded.”

Similarly, the director of DEI of a national philanthropy nonprofit said, “I think that alignment (at) the values level helps to embed it in everything that we do and everything that communications does. I think that's probably most important because they help to craft the narrative and the brand of the organization based on those values. “

Others noted the specific communications and tactics created are where the alignment happens most. A CDO of a global retail company said, “The greatest alignment is generally messaging and the tactical. For example, the editorial calendar [is one area] and how we story tell around some of our efforts both internally and externally.”

While some CDOs and CCOs saw alignment between their two functions, some also noted there are opportunities to improve.

## PAIN POINTS OF THE CDO AND CCO RELATIONSHIP

Though CDOs mostly have a close working relationship and view their CCO counterparts as allies, points of tension still exist. Some CCOs said they must balance the quantity and quality of DEI communications with communicating other organizational initiatives, while the CDOs wanted more communication. CDOs also wanted the CCOs to be better storytellers. The former CCO of a multinational healthcare corporation said, “I think our DEI team wants something communicated 30 times a day, and we have to balance [it]...You can't put everything out all the time - there are lots of different communication priorities. I think sometimes there's a lot of energy from the DEI team to communicate.”

Similarly, the CCO of a multinational financial technology company said,

“I think all companies need to be mindful of burnout, of DEI burnout. I think everybody pressed so hard on everything, every message, everything's DEI, so sometimes it can get overwhelming. Not that it's not important, but we also have to remember it's part of the equation. We did a study of all the communications we put out. And if you bucket it into products, thought leadership from executives, change management, DEI, client wins, what we're doing externally (with) partnerships, there was a disproportionate volume of DEI comms. We just had to do a check-in and say, ‘Alright, how do we balance it out more?’ That doesn't mean we're de-emphasizing it; it just means how do you find a balance of the number of communications that are going out so they're effective?”

Others said they differed from their counterpart on the timing and balance of communications. The CCO of a multinational financial services corporation said:

“When the Supreme Court ruling came out first on the affirmative action case, our DEI team wanted to go out with the message immediately. The comms team was counseling, we know that there's the gay rights issue coming 12 hours later, please hold, please let us do something that's more encompassing. The DEI team did not hold, they went out. And then we had LGBTQ employees saying, ‘Yeah, I get it, this wasn't an employment law issue, but I'm feeling disenfranchised. I'm feeling like my rights are at risk in some way, and you didn't say anything to me.’ We weren't going to send out a message every single time. So, there is definitely a balance and attention tension.”

CDOs experience tension within the relationship differently. While some CCOs perceive the requests for communications as too numerous, redundant, or overwhelming, CDOs have a different perspective on their CCO counterpart's resistance. The CDO of a multinational retail corporation said:

“The biggest areas of friction tend to be oversight and risk. When it comes to DE&I, so much of it is about culture work and we think about comms related to that. There's a lot of external storytelling we want to do and part of the external storytelling is the ability for our own people to get out there and help tell the story. Whether it's speaking on panels, or speaking at conferences or events, we want to empower our own people to go out there and tell the story. That's way more effective than us posting on LinkedIn once a month. The friction comes in where comms feels it's a little bit too risky. And so, processes to allow team members to get out there and speak tend to be quite burdensome. There's too much of a level of review, control, and so, that becomes the friction points because it feels rooted in risk mitigation and risk aversion versus reputational risk versus reputational enhancement.”

The owner of a DEI consulting firm discussed how tension points exist when transparency is required about not meeting DEI goals or team departures.

“(Tension exists) when there's a scorecard being published-- when there's been some kind of an exit, or a departure. Nobody wants to talk about the departure of an executive who may be one of a few that exists in a company that's diverse. Also, I would say when there is a scorecard that doesn't reflect numbers, maybe the company's gone backward on some of its metrics.

Those are usually temporary, but nobody's excited to talk about (how) we were making great progress, and then we've taken a step back. People want to somehow sugarcoat that or not talk about that. And that's just being able to make sure that you are informing your workforce, ‘This is what we're doing great, but this is what we could be doing better.’ There's sometimes an apprehension around this is what we could be doing better.”

In summary, CCOs and CDOs emerge as valuable allies for each other, especially during times of crises related to DEI. This collaborative alliance hinges on the crucial elements of transparency and psychological safety, creating a foundation for mutual trust to flourish. Opportunities for improvement exist for CDOs regarding the quantity and timing of requests., Opportunities exist for CCOs to share storytelling responsibilities and lean into the importance of transparency, particularly when reporting about departures or decreases in progress. Collaborating in governance and risk policies along with strategic initiatives, tactical approaches, and shaping the narrative underscore the symbiotic relationship that contributes to the overall effectiveness and resilience of DEI efforts.



# DEI FATIGUE: OVERWHELMED, OVERWORKED, AND UNDER-RESOURCED

According to research from [Korn Ferry](#), the CDO role has one of the shortest tenures among executives with an average span of less than two years. Some of the identified causes were a lack of right skills sets as organizations hurried to fill the role after the murder of George Floyd and a lack of resources. Additional causes can include experiencing microaggressions while inhabiting a role that is a symbol of progress for some and a threat for others. While many organizations are moving forward with their commitments in DEI, there are those organizations who are not, citing difficulty in finding talent or other reasons (Reuters, 2020). This can lead to CDOs, including “very successful ones,” to switch career paths to do something entirely different.

While some of the issues identified in the research were addressed in these interviews, another issue noted was “DEI fatigue,” which refers to the emotional and psychological exhaustion experienced when engaged in DEI-related activities. (Henry, Institute for Public Relations, 2023). The CDOs in this study categorized their DEI fatigue into three primary dimensions:

1. Feeling overwhelmed
2. Excessive workloads
3. Inadequate resources

On the other hand, CCOs describe DEI fatigue as their stakeholders, primarily internal ones, being overwhelmed by the quantity of DEI messaging. Both CDOs and CCOs shared their insights on how they are actively addressing DEI fatigue both on a personal and organizational level.

Both CCOs and CDOs said that DEI is under-resourced, especially in terms of staffing, leading to excessive workloads.

The CDO of a nonprofit healthcare organization said, “We are under-resourced as a department in terms of human and financial resources. Our support is sometimes predicated on our own ability to be engaging/disarming (making D&I fun) rather than it being a value or necessity worthy of support based on its own merit.”

Similarly, the head of diversity at a small PR agency said,

“Staffing is not great for me; I ideally would have a team. I'm trying to remain super positive knowing that we've met and exceeded what we pledged to do. We continue to attract people to our (programs) week by week, we have more people who want to join. I love that our activities, around Pride, Juneteenth, we're able to use all those moments as opportunities to leverage people into leadership.”

One CCO of a philanthropy nonprofit organization said she doesn't even have anyone to work with in the DEI function, which has affected her ability to tell the “powerful story” of the organization's success in achieving its DEI goals.

CDOs also discussed feeling overwhelmed, with DEI societal issues exacerbating that feeling and how they never feel like they can take a break from the work. Being a minority in this role can create fatigue as well. The director of DEI at a philanthropy nonprofit organization said, “The hardest part of my role is having to respond to issues that impact our society, including racial violence, gun violence and egregious cases of police brutality. I often spend my weekends helping to craft internal statements for the President of the foundation. Those are times when I am unable to unplug from conversations about racism.”

CDOs talked about burnout. One CDO from a multinational technology company said:

“I'm saying this as someone with two decades of doing it and having burnt out on it– that when you do this work, you have to make sure that you prioritize your wellbeing and your self-care because this is really hard work. When I first got into this space, (several) years ago, the conventional wisdom was you should only do this role for two-year clips of time because it is so taxing and draining that if you go beyond two years, you'll burn out. That was kind of an anecdote.”



Both CDOs and CCOs noted that combatting DEI fatigue ties back to reminding people about the importance of DEI to the organizational mission. A CCO of a multinational professional services company said:

“For those who are fatigued about hearing about DEI, to me, it means there's more work to be done in regard to communicating about the importance of it strategically. Yes, as a value of the business, that's where it starts, but also really helping them understand strategically what it means to do business in the world we live in.”

Similarly, a CDO of a multinational technology company said,

“You have to bring people back to what is the mission of the organization and explain how DEI is not about these people or those people, but it's about how DEI becomes an individual, a team, and an organizational competency that accelerates the mission of that organization... That's where people get DEI fatigue because either they forgot that they're there to three-dimensionalize the mission and or they don't understand how DEI supports the mission.”

A DEI executive at a technology company said while higher education has a history with DEI, the quick rise in corporations has created DEI fatigue for employees. She said:

“You hear more about DEI fatigue because the rise happened so quickly. But people are tired of it. At the corporate level, you see it even with engagement. When we first started employee resource groups it was really big, people were super engaged, our employee resource groups had a lot of money to spend on DEI programming. And then over the last few years with the COVID pandemic, people working from home, they're not going into the office as much to engage in these activities, you have seen some fatigue and a little less engagement.”

But one CDO at a global marketing agency said DEI work needs to continue in order to make change and terminology makes a difference.

“...We can't afford to be tired. And for those who are fatigued and tired, they need to get off the bus and go someplace else. This is work that will never end. This is an industry. Every day, there's these different terms and terminologies that come out. First it was diversity, equity, inclusion, then it was something else, then the hot word became belonging, and now the whole thing is diversity, and now we have diversity boredom or diversity fatigue. This cannot be a trend. It's a dangerous term because that's something that people can act on and then everything that we've all been working towards can be lost. You know what's a good cure for diversity boredom? It's business! People say it's a moral imperative, it's also a business imperative.”

One DEI executive at a global technology company said she also sees pressure on the DEI function because the change can sometimes be slower than employees would like. “I think people don’t know how much time and energy goes into changing the institutionalized systems that can’t be realized overnight. Even me working in it– I’m tired that I can’t help my brother and sister get faster promotions because of the color of their skin.”

While working on DEI can be challenging, respondents said the demonstrated impact of their work motivated and inspired them to continue. One CDO of a healthcare nonprofit organization said, “The potential impact of this work will literally improve people’s quality of life and their mortality, in addition to increasing our bottom line. I’m an impact-oriented leader and that drives me to do this work.”

Similarly, the vice president of communications of a global technology corporation said, “The most enjoyable aspect is seeing the impact that authentic and meaningful DEI initiatives can have on culture.”

In summary, DEI fatigue is detrimental to the emotional well-being of those engaged in the work and is a significant cause of abbreviated CDO tenures. While both CDOs and CCOs are driven by the positive impact DEI successes have on key stakeholders, both agree that CDOs are underfunded and/or understaffed.





## LOOKING AHEAD: THE FUTURE OF THE CCO – CDO RELATIONSHIP

In the *Fast Company* article, [“What’s Next for Chief Diversity Officers?”](#), Mallick (2023) examines the recent history of the CDO role and the outcomes for certain organizations when they deploy strategies to address their commitment (or lack thereof) to DEI. Some organizations saw employees leave when they dismantled DEI efforts while others chose to stay the course, either doubling-down on their commitments, or exploring options such as combining DEI efforts with other C-suite roles or renaming the role. Another tactic, which Mallick calls “burying DEI efforts,” creates further separation from the top executives, by removing the CDO and assigning DEI responsibilities to more junior staff.

Though aware of these shifts, CDOs and CCOs alike remain “cautiously optimistic” about the future of DEI and are optimistic around the future of their working relationship. However, CDOs express their concerns about a lack of professional development opportunities and succession planning for their role.

In terms of the ideal relationship between the two roles, both CCOs and CDOs wanted synergy and alignment. One former CCO of a multinational healthcare company said this should be a collaborative relationship without siloes.

CDOs also talked about how important resources are for advancing a strong DEI agenda. The head of development for a national financial services corporation discussed how investing in technology can improve relationships:

“I think we're forming an ideal relationship here [with the communications function] because they're a part of the team, they're an ongoing part of the strategy, and we depend on them to help us see what's happening in the market relative to this topic, but also how we shape the internal market. Continuing to invest and strengthen the relationship is the right way to go. I think that the future is around all these technological tools and how we use them to create that steady drumbeat.”

Both roles noted how important it is for both functions and their teams to work together to accomplish organizational goals and objectives. The head of development for a national financial services corporation said:

“You need a network of communicators who are fully invested in telling the narrative around this topic, and to understand how it shows up in the business, even when it's not being called DEI. If you think about the segmentation of your customers and the demographics of your company, the diversity of your products, and your innovations, and the reasons why those innovations either unfolded or took hold, the basis of it was about the diversity of thought and creativity.”

## THE DEI FORECAST

How optimistic both CDOs and CCOs were about the future of DEI fell on a continuum with some expressing optimism (including cautious optimism), some adopting a more neutral stance, and others being pessimistic. Those who were optimistic emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships and the connections fostered with their teams, colleagues, and organizational leaders. On the other hand, individuals who were more neutral or pessimistic voiced apprehensions especially with external socio-political issues that could play a role in overall DEI strategy.

Some CDOs and CCOs were optimistic about the continued momentum of DEI in organizations, but noted they were cautiously optimistic. One CDO from a nonprofit in healthcare organization said:

“(I'm) cautiously optimistic. We don't have any current conversations about how to move our relationship forward... We have the right person [CCO] in place. I think we have good people in the department. I think we've had the distraction of financing. And so, I'm optimistic.”

Similarly, a CDO from a private university said:

“Right now, I'm optimistic because I'm in a privileged place where things are working well. But then, at the same time, pessimism does creep in when we see what's happening nationally, and you're waiting for the shoe to drop in your backyard. So, there's mostly optimism here. And that the environment I'm in is reaffirming that this work is important and that our (communications) people are all on board and are always looking for ways to support our work. But that's just me. In the back of my head, there's this pessimistic voice questioning how long is this going to persist?”

One vice provost of DEI from a public university shared a global view of how DEI work can play a role in shaping a future, but noted she was also cautiously optimistic:

“I'm really hoping that we can find a language that unites people in talking about the need of equalizing the grounds of opportunities for all the people, not just in higher ed, but in our country. That needs to happen. Access to food, access to education, access to clean air. And I'm hopeful that this forces us to dismantle what we know, then we can mourn, and we can get over it and really find something that works for everybody. Because we cannot pretend like these things are not here. You can call it whatever you want. I want the recognition and the proactiveness to do something to change this for our next generations. We cannot ignore these things as if they don't exist.”

Some CCOs were likely to be more neutral due to potential impact of socio-political issues. One CCO of an international financial services organization said:

“I am neutral because I am not comfortable with the current political, legal attacks that would prevent us from actually achieving our tactical goals. Perhaps I'm over-indexing on it because of the Supreme Court rulings but, will the jobs of chief diversity officers, chief inclusion officers, and chief communications officers, change? Or how will they need to adapt in light of what's going on in the U.S.? It's a legitimate question, whether companies will stop publishing their diversity goals because of the lawsuits (and) legislative attacks. That's a real communication challenge. You try and tell your employee base, yes, we're committed to diversity, you try and tell your customer base, your prospective employees, this is a great place to work, yet you have nothing to prove that you're doing it. Or, if it's not tied to a compensation program, what teeth are you really putting into it? It begins to go down a very strange path.”

One CCO of a philanthropy nonprofit said DEI fatigue may affect the work so she has a neutral outlook as well:

“I’m neutral because I think there's a little bit of fatigue. There's those of us who've been at it for a while. And there are others who've been at it for much longer, and they're kind of stepping back, going, ‘where are we going? It's not going anywhere.’ So, there's a little bit of fatigue that we must get over for me to get more into the optimistic bucket.”

One CCO of a global retail corporation was more pessimistic for the short term but optimistic over the long term. He said:

“It will endure and when the company is through its transformation and general sort of bumpiness, then our priorities will shift again. But I think having a hardcore group internally that's committed to it day in day out [is important]. If you've got a really committed and connected CEO, then they'll hang on and just continue to make progress.”

## CDO SUCCESSION PLANNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Across all types of organizations, CDOs had different experiences regarding professional development and role succession. Many large organizations with an established DEI program prior to 2020 have existing formal succession plans along with professional development opportunities. While some had established programs, others did not, noting some of the challenges of DEI succession planning. One CDO of a national fintech company said:

“Here's what's hard about succession planning. We have the kinds of jobs where everybody thinks it's glamorous and that it's easy. It looks so easy. I sit and talk about the business case for DEI all the time. Then I've had team members who come on the DEI team say, “Holy cow, I didn't realize I had to do all of this.” So, the question is, how do we (do all of it)? I don't have an answer. How do we develop the succession plans where the people who we have in our pipeline truly understand the mental, the physical, because I travel all the time, and the toll and the actual work. It's not like every other job.”

Some discussed not having a potential successor because of the lack of senior leaders on their team. The head of diversity of a small PR agency shared her experience with not having succession planning:

“I don't have anyone who's vying for (my role) and that's problematic. I hold a lot of the gems here, so I try to make it operationalized as much as possible, but it's not perfect by any means. Succession planning has not been in the mix, nor do I feel like I have the team that I would want and need, and that's a problem. That goes back to the under-resourced piece.”

The CDO of a national fintech company also discussed her succession planning challenges:

“The next in line is junior or mid-level. By the time you're ready to leave, they're still not ready, so you're pulling somebody else from a senior executive. I think for us, succession planning is hard because there's some tactical skills that people need, and it's hard to get them doing it when they're just on a DEI committee.”

Overall, diversity leaders discussed the benefits of professional development for their career growth and how it improves the overall organization. Some CDOs talked about how professional development opportunities help the organization holistically. One CDO of an international technology company talked about how professional development makes her better understand the business side of the organization, making her a stronger voice and partner for leadership. Another CDO of a global PR agency outlined the ways professional development helped her grow in her role:

“I've been part of leadership development groups, which has been a great way to understand context and systemic equity in healthcare, in politics, in education, and in all of these different ways. I did a coaching certification program, but specifically diversity coaching certification. I've been to a ton of conferences and that's been so helpful in understanding different groups but also topics and issues. I think the other part of professional development is also through knowing every Twitter trend that's out there and I have the news on pretty much all day, all night, all the evening shows. I'm constantly connected and that is a whole professional development that helps you understand context nuance.”

In summary, organizations must do a better job planning for the future of DEI, including if and how they continue DEI initiatives. Succession planning and professional development opportunities are important indicators, signaling priority shifts for the organization and its leadership, and the level of optimism CCOs and CDOs share for the future of DEI and their relationship.



## CONCLUSION

Since the events of 2020, organizations have ramped up their DEI efforts and goals into organizational frameworks making a significant impact. Many organizations experienced gains in their goals to achieve gender parity. However, many struggle to recruit, retain, and promote talent when using racial or ethnic markers. The impact, successes, and struggles underscore the need to solidify the profession, practice, influence, and significance of the CDO within the organizational hierarchy. CDOs and CCOs alike agree the preferred reporting structure includes the opportunity to report directly to the most senior leader in the organization and may include a dotted line to other chiefs, like the CHRO.

The CDO faces unique challenges, such as the politicization of DEI, DEI fatigue, and threats of litigation. Internally, many CDOs lack a succession plan or solid professional development investments while competing for a significant place on the organization's and most senior leader's top priority list. Opportunities for improvement also exist regarding measurement. While many report having tools and metrics to track successes, some reported they had no methods for measurement. CDOs also report experiencing DEI fatigue. They are overworked, overwhelmed, and under-resourced, taking a toll on their mental health and contributing to abbreviated tenures.



CCOs are widely regarded as an ally to CDOs, as both report having a good relationship highlighted by decent rapport, formal and informal meeting cadences, and opportunities to collaborate on both strategic and tactical elements. However, tensions exist regarding the frequency, quality, and quantity of DEI communications requested. Some resolved the tension by conducting communications audits, others embed a team member within the opposite function. Overall, CCOs and CDOs alike share inspiration and optimism for the future of DEI and their relationships when the impact of their work is realized in the organization. While many have made commendable strides in DEI, there remains an unfinished agenda. Gender and racial markers remain the hallmark of measurement while disability and LGBTQIA progress remain unmeasured. In the face of increasing political and legal pressures, organizations are deciding if and how to move forward with the knowledge that 72% of employees, ([Glassdoor](#), 2022) view DEI programs positively. Senior leadership must determine the priority level and solidify the reporting structure for DEI and its leadership.

Progress has been notable in achieving gender parity and equal pay, but goals related to racial and ethnic diversity often face sluggish progress or even regression ([LinkedIn](#), 2023). Some organizations have CDOs but lack an organizational definition of DEI and the metrics they will use to determine success. A lack of professional development opportunities and succession planning for the future of the role also contribute to DEI fatigue and turnover. However, the momentum is viewed as steady or increasing despite these uncertainties for CDOs. Their CCO colleagues contribute to the progress by providing allyship—largely experienced through a symbiotic working relationship for strategies and tactics, while also amplifying DEI accomplishments.

Despite potential shifts in sentiment regarding the priority of DEI in the workplace, the necessity of a dedicated role like the CDO remains unequivocal. Organizations are reaping the benefits of diverse talent recruitment and retention, along with the creation of inclusive work environments that result in increased profits and elevated employee engagement scores. While economic cycles may impact organizational dynamics, the imperative to appropriately position and resource the CDO role is not only a sound business decision but also a moral obligation, underlined by the support and advocacy of the CCO.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## **Chief Diversity Officer (CDO)** [5]

A senior leadership role responsible for developing and implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within an organization. They aim to ensure equal opportunity for employees and candidates across dimensions such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and disability.

## **Chief Communications Officer (CCO)** [6]

A senior executive who is responsible for developing and implementing an organization's overall communications strategy. This may include overseeing all communication channels, including public relations, marketing, internal communications, and crisis management.

## **Diversity** [7]

The presence of differences that include demographics (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, language, education, socioeconomic status, religion, or political affiliation) and psychographics (e.g., thoughts/cognitions, values, attitudes, experiences, and personal background). Diversity is fluid and can encompass identities and the intersection of those identities, as well as differences in thoughts/cognitions, culture, experiences, neurodiversity, special needs, (dis)abilities, physical attributes, and other characteristics.

## **Equity** [7]

Elevates equality by recognizing that people start from different places, acknowledging and correcting imbalances of power, both present and historical, for both individuals and groups to which they may belong. Equity is rooted within the procedures and processes, and how resources are distributed by institutions or systems.

## **Inclusion** [7]

An outcome to ensure all individuals feel heard, welcomed, accepted, and respected in an organization. In an inclusive environment, individuals feel they have value, they contribute, they feel empowered, and they have a sense of belonging within that environment.

## **DEI Fatigue** [8]

The emotional and psychological exhaustion individuals experience when engaging in DEI-related activities or initiatives.

[5] As defined by the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education

[6] As defined by Quora.com

[7] As defined in *The Language of Diversity* (IPR, Wakeman, V.2021)

[8] As defined in *The Impact of Diversity Fatigue and How to Combat It* (Henry, 2023)

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### ABOUT IPR'S CENTER FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (CDEI)

The mission of the IPR Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CDEI) is to support, conduct, and promote research and insights relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace focused on six core areas: BIPOC, LGBTQ+, women, intersectionality, disabilities, and mental health. Along with recommendations for improving the industry, the IPR CDEI supports the change-focused efforts of the [Diversity Action Alliance](#).