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Research on the Relationship between Communications and Diversity Executives

By Anetra Henry, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives, Institute for Public Relations

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Many Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) had prior diversity-related experience predating the formalization of the CDO position, with an increase in involvement following George Floyd's murder.

"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.'"

-Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), Global Marketing Agency

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George Floyd's murder catalyzed a focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, making DEI in the top 10 priorities for nearly all organizations that participated in this study.

"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....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."

-Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), Global Retail Company

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Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) face several challenges including overwork, limited resources, and DEI fatigue, yet both CDOs and CCOs express cautious optimism about the future of DEI efforts and their working relationships.

"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."

-Vice Provost, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at a Public University

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Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) and CCOs view each other as allies in communicating the results and impact DEI initiatives have on the organization.

"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."

-Head of Development, National Financial Services Institution

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