ICONIQ | Growth

Marketing Leadership: A Hiring Blueprint

What to prioritize when hiring a Marketing executive from $0 to $50M ARR

June 2023

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Introduction

ICONIQ Growth Leadership Analytics

Executive hiring is the final frontier within the modern organization that is yet to benefit from the proliferation of data. Despite having data to guide nearly every other business decision – and despite the criticality of executive hiring decisions – CEOs and Founders have heretofore been forced to rely on anecdotal guidance.

ICONIQ Growth set out to change that.

Determined to help de-risk hiring decisions by empowering CEOs and Founders with data, we are studying every leadership hire between Founding and IPO at dozens of high-caliber SaaS companies. We segment each hiring decision by growth stage in order to deliver hyper-relevant insights. To date, we have collected over **36,000 datapoints on over 1,000 leaders**.

The result is a series of **first-of-their-kind playbooks** that help guide decision-making across the entire private company lifecycle – whether you are making your first leadership hire or evaluating the skillsets needed to adeptly enter the public markets.

We hope this analysis, which examines **the backgrounds of Marketing executives at companies from $0M to $50M ARR**, serves as a north star as you build and scale your go-to-market organization.

The Dataset

We studied every Head of Marketing* hired at these 63 B2B SaaS companies from the day they were founded to the day they went public, capturing the entire private company lifecycle[1]:

ICONIQ Growth Portfolio Companies[2,3]

alteryx, Bill.com, BLACKLINE, braze, coupa, CROWDSTRIKE, DATADOG, DocuSign, enfusion, fastly, GitLab, HashiCorp, MARQETA, PLURALSIGHT, PROCORE, snowflake, sprinklr, zoom

Other Companies[3]

Amplitude, Anaplan, APPTIO, asana, Avalara, BIGCOMMERCE, blend, C3.ai, Carbon Black., CLOUDERA, CLOUDFLARE, CONFLUENT, DigitalOcean, DOMO, Dropbox, elastic, FORESCOUT, freshworks, JFrog, Livongo, Medallia, mongoDB., MuleSoft, ncino, NUTANIX, okta, PagerDuty, samsara, SendGrid, SentinelOne, slack, smartsheet, sproutsocial, SQUARESPACE, sumo logic, talend, tenable, toast, twilio, UiPath, unity, UserTesting, yext, zscaler, zuora

*We defined "Head of Marketing" as the senior-most executive responsible for the entire marketing organization and strategy of the company. Throughout this analysis, we use "Head of Marketing" as a catchall term.

Company Inclusion Criteria:

- SaaS business model
- Went public after 2016 via IPO or Direct Listing
- Raised venture capital prior to going public

(1) Data sources for this analysis included LinkedIn profiles, company websites, press releases, articles, and others.
(2) Includes fully realized investments.
(3) Includes companies that have been de-listed. Please see full list of ICONIQ Growth Portfolio companies at the end of the presentation.

Early Stage: $0M-$20M ARR
Early Growth Stage: $20M-$50M ARR

Executive Summary

1 Introduction

Hiring a successful Head of Marketing can be challenging for early and maturing SaaS companies. Frequent turnover occurs within the same growth stage, with **nearly a third of Heads of Marketing leaving within 1.5 years of hire**[1].

This is an **updated version of our 2021 analysis. We've included 18 additional companies and 56 leaders** in our Heads of Marketing dataset. This has revealed new trends in leaders' prior marketing focus and go-to-market motion expertise. **<$50M ARR companies are now seeing success with both product and revenue marketers**, whereas previously, companies hired primarily product marketers. Early and Early Growth Stage companies are increasingly pivoting away from corporate marketers. We've also **observed an increase in the presence of Product Led Growth (PLG) marketing leaders**. Additionally, our enriched dataset enabled us to explore new hypotheses, including how key operational traits impact a leader's success across growth stages.

2 Leadership

Why do some Heads of Marketing stay for only 5 months, while others endure for 8 years? Having **prior Head of Marketing experience was critical to a hire's success and longevity**. Early Stage hires with prior leadership experience at scaled companies (>$50M ARR) were 5x more likely to reach $50M ARR relative to hires without this experience. Similarly, Early Growth Stage hires with leadership experience scaled across multiple stages of growth and were 3-6x more likely to reach IPO.

3 Marketer Type

In addition to having leadership experience, a hire's primary marketing focus can also help mitigate against early departures. For this study, we categorized marketers into three types: **product, revenue, and corporate**. Early and Early Growth Stage **companies primarily hired for product and revenue marketing** and tended to skew toward these backgrounds as they scaled. **For Early Stage companies, product and revenue marketing trended similarly, with nearly 60% reaching $20M+ ARR**. For **Early Growth Stage companies**, product and revenue marketers reached $100M+ ARR at nearly the same rate, though **product marketers were 1.8x more likely to reach IPO**. Corporate marketers had the highest rate of same stage departures and were most likely to depart within 1.5 years of hire.

4 Go-To-Market Motion & Sector

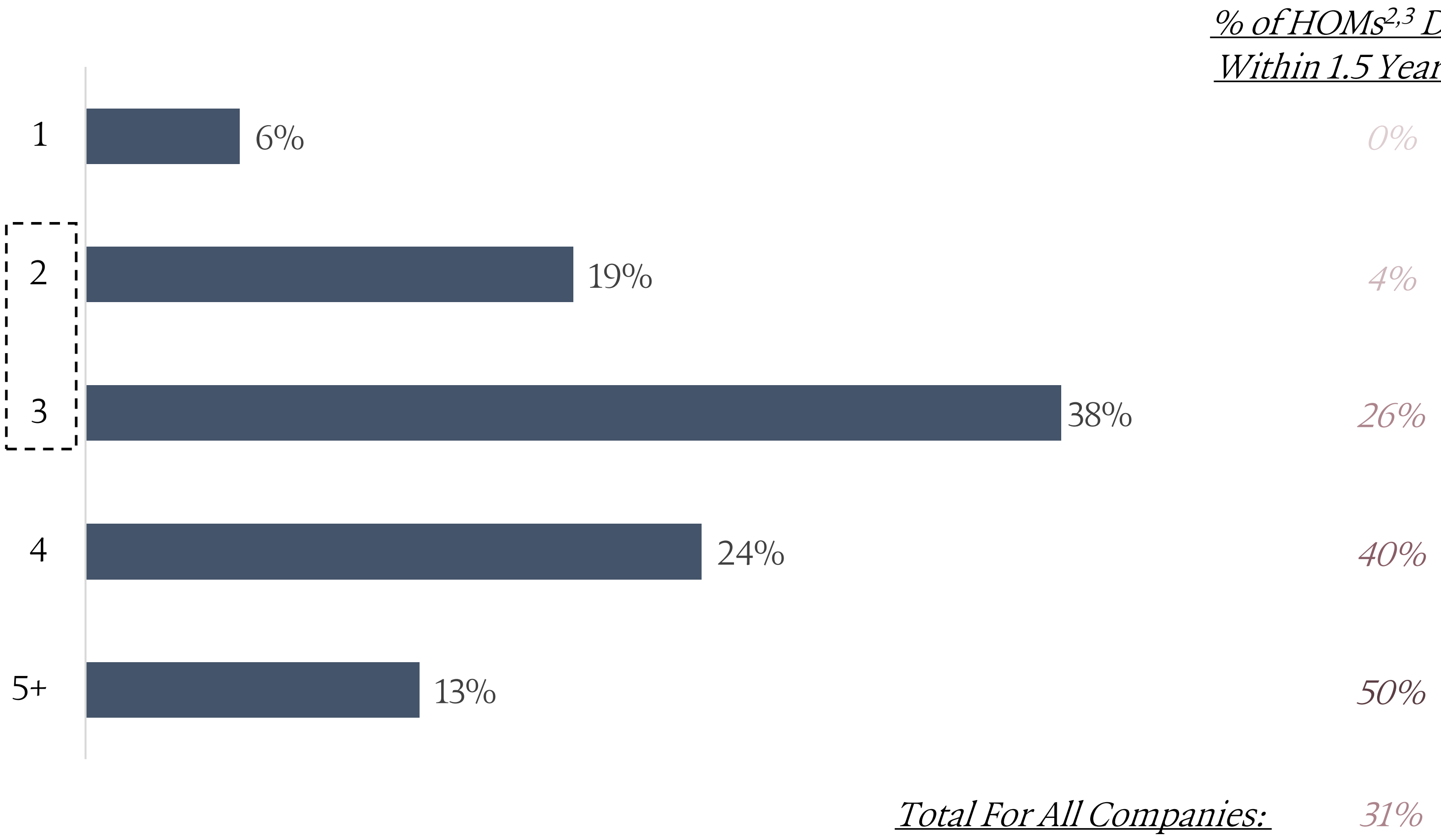
An **executive's prior go-to-market motion has historically been less relevant to their success**, although Sales Led Growth (SLG) marketing leaders tend to stay slightly longer than Product Led Growth (PLG) leaders. Their **sector background had moderate significance**, as individuals with sector affinity stayed slightly longer on average.

(1) We acknowledge individuals depart from their roles for various reasons, though we generally believe longevity and growth stage velocity are key indicators of a successful leader.

Heads of Marketing are difficult to hire well, with 1 in 3 Heads of Marketing leaving within 1.5 years of hire. Depending on hire quality and longevity, companies can expect to hire 2-3 Heads of Marketing over time.

Number of Heads of Marketing from Founding to IPO[1]

n = 63 companies



(1) *The average time to IPO for companies in this dataset was 11 years.*
(2) *Includes only external hires.*
(3) *"HOM" is abbreviated for Head of Marketing.*

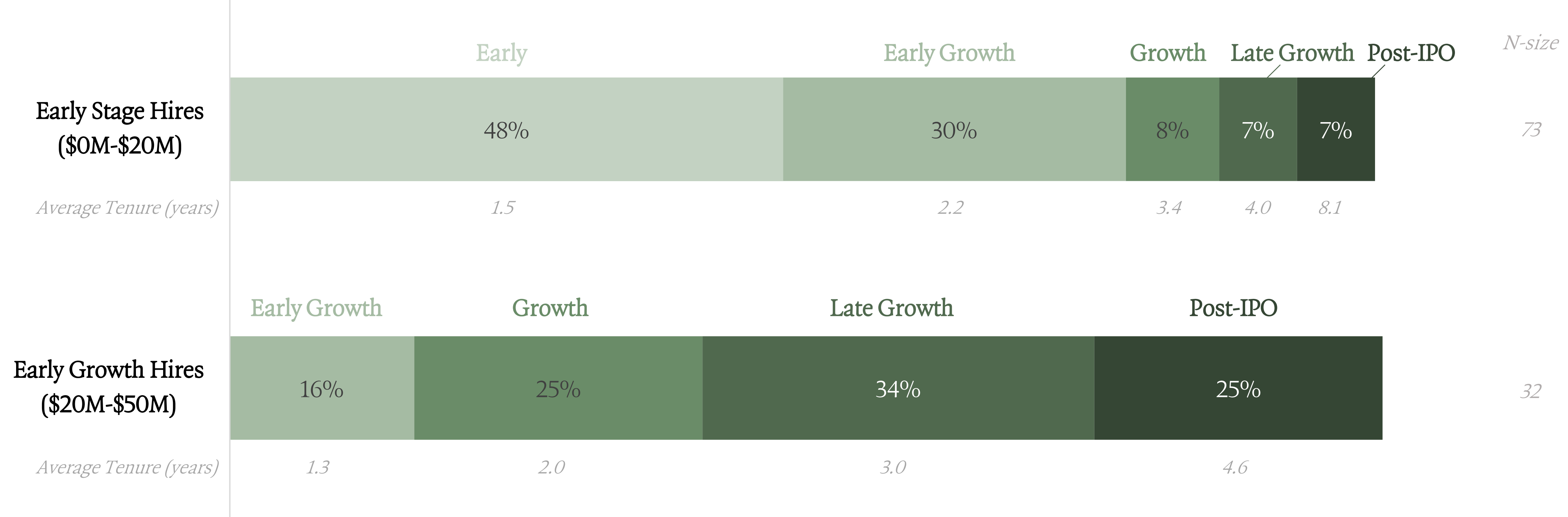
Tenure Outcomes (Stages)

Hiring a Head of Marketing between $0M-$20M ARR can be challenging, with 48% of the hires made during the Early Stage leaving during this same stage. However, 59% of Early Growth Stage hires scaled to $100M+ ARR.

ICONIQ SaaS Growth Stages:
Early Stage: $0M-$20M ARR
Early Growth Stage: $20M-$50M ARR
Growth Stage: $50M-$100M ARR
Late Growth Stage: $100M ARR - IPO

Stage of Hire vs. Stage of Departure

n = 105 hires[1]



(1) Note: Pages 7-25 includes only those who were hired directly into the Head of Marketing role and excludes co-founders and promoted individuals.

Why do some Heads of Marketing stay for only 5 months, while others endure for 8 years? We analyzed the major traits in marketing executive backgrounds to understand how these impacted a leader's success and longevity within the company.

Leadership

Does having prior Head of Marketing experience have an impact on a leader's success? We analyzed the senior-most roles a hire had at public and private companies to understand whether first-time Heads of Marketing can be successful.

p. 9-10

Marketer Type

How do different types of marketers compare to one another? We investigated whether Product Marketers, Corporate Marketers, or Revenue Marketers are the most prevalent and successful.

p. 11-16

GTM Motion

What is the relationship between a leader's prior GTM motion to the company GTM motion? We analyzed each person's GTM background and how this impacted a leader's tenure.

p. 17

Sector

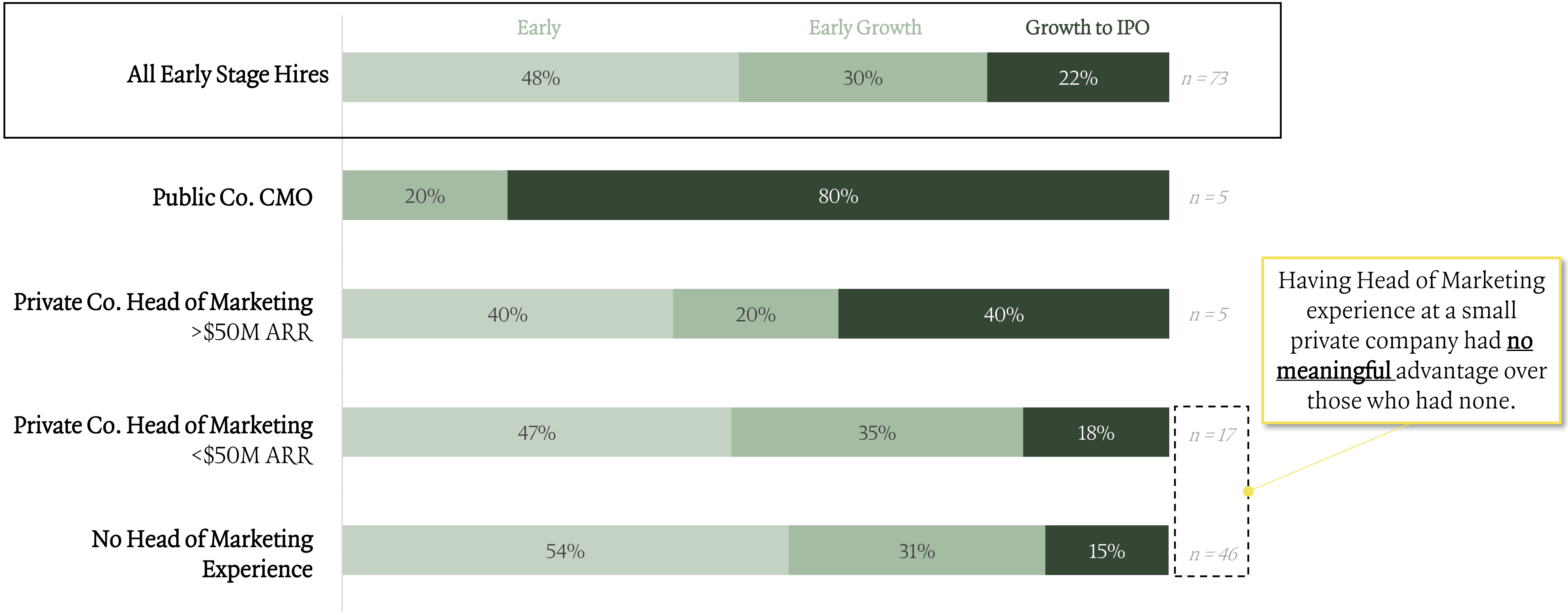
Do leaders need to have experience marketing to customers within the same sector? We analyzed each hire's sector and sub-sector background and how this impacted a leader's tenure.

p. 18-19

For companies between $0-$20M ARR, hiring for prior leadership experience helps mitigate against early departures. Prior Heads of Marketing at scaled companies were 2.5-5x more likely to reach $50M+ ARR relative to hires with no leadership experience.

Stage of Departure by Marketing Leadership Experience

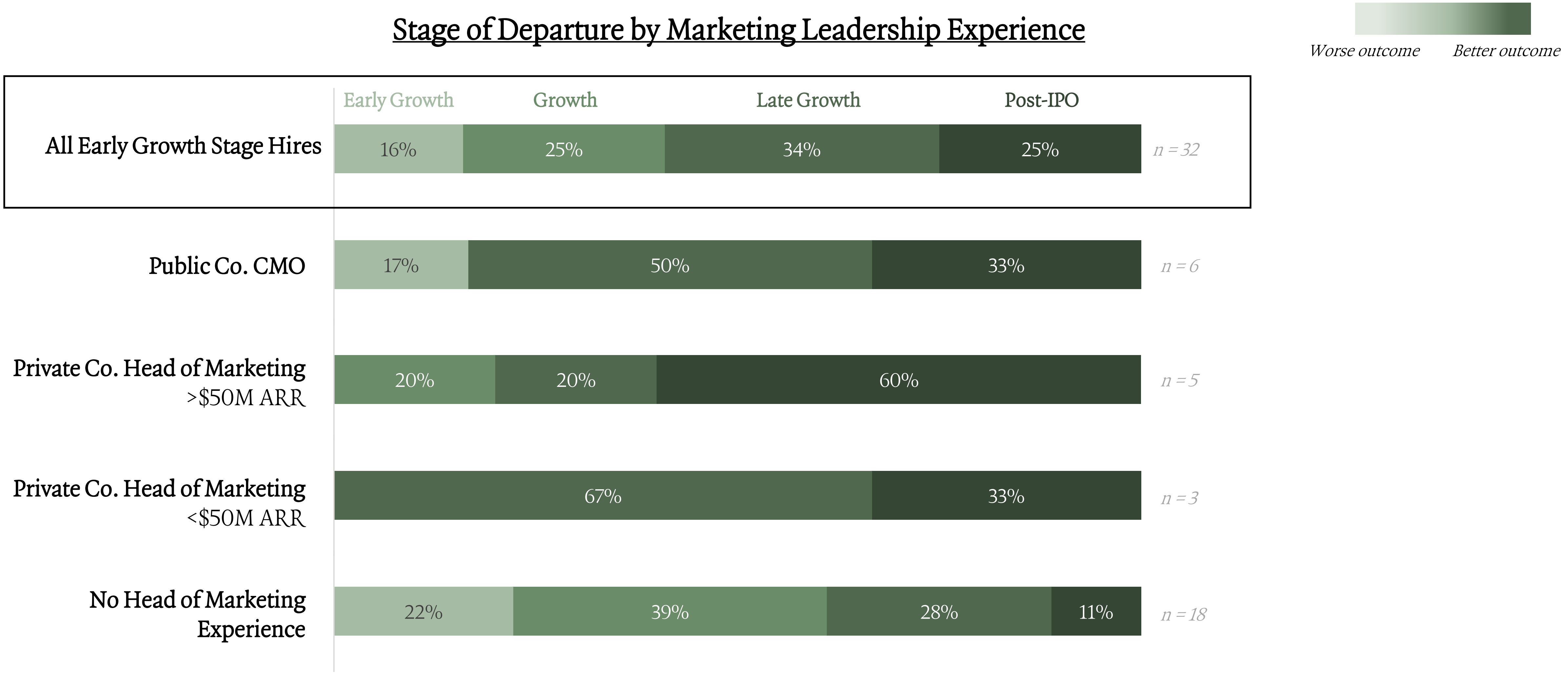
Worse outcome *Better outcome*



Note: Prior company ARR data estimated using proxy metrics (e.g., per headcount, PIC) if actual figures unavailable.

As with Early Stage peers, Early Growth Stage companies should also optimize for prior leadership experience. Prior Heads of Marketing were 3-6x more likely to reach IPO relative to hires with no leadership experience.

Stage of Departure by Marketing Leadership Experience

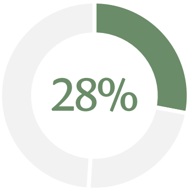


Note: Prior company ARR data estimated using proxy metrics (e.g., per headcount, PIC) if actual figures unavailable.

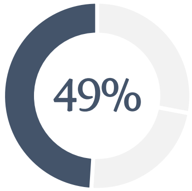
Marketer Type Primer

There are three marketing backgrounds[1] we will use to categorize leaders in this study: revenue, product, and corporate.

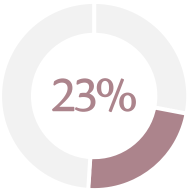
Marketer Type Composition[2]



Revenue Marketing: Identifies, converts, and nurtures prospects and existing customers through data-driven strategies that generate revenue for the business. This includes demand generation, growth marketing, partner marketing, and field marketing.



Product Marketing: Refines competitive positioning and messaging, and plays an integral role in bringing products to market. Responsible for product launches and driving usage by ensuring customers understand product benefits.

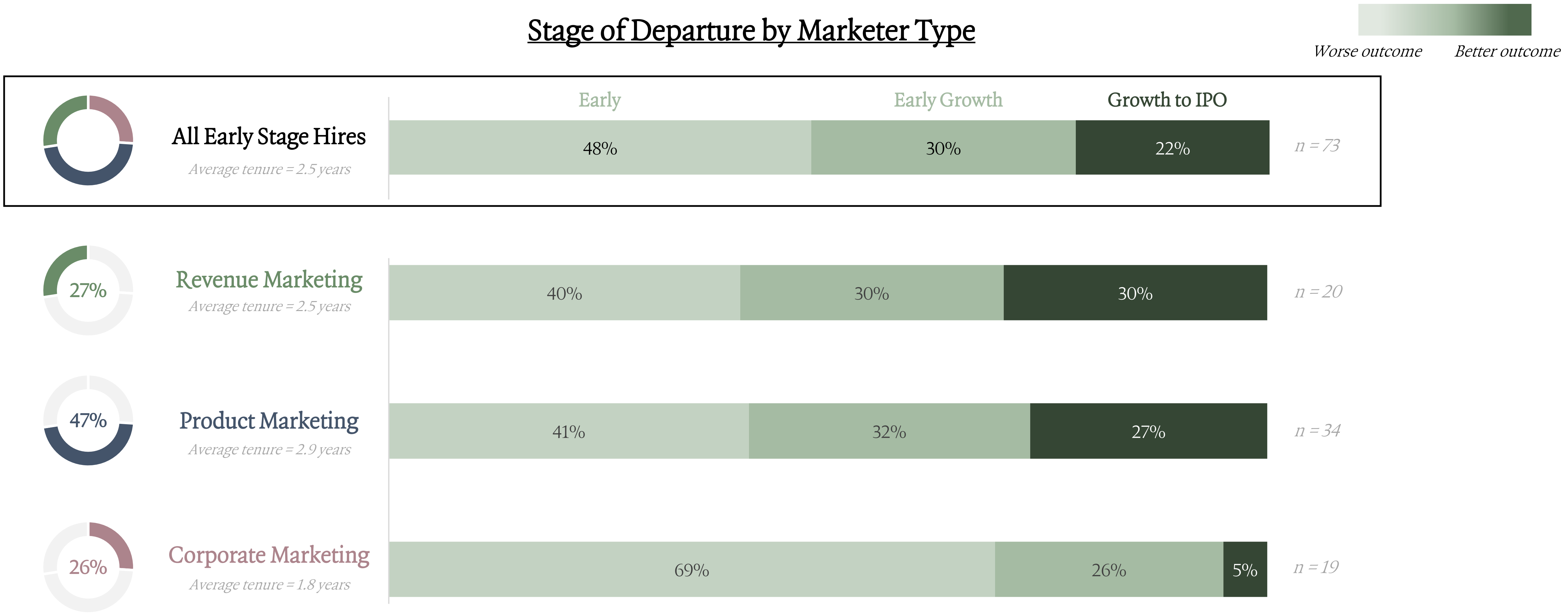


Corporate Marketing: Builds brand awareness and constructs the company narrative. Communications, PR, content marketing, advertising, and brand strategy fall under this purview.

(1) *We believe the core SaaS marketing skill sets can be captured within one of these three groups. Several leaders in this analysis had experience in multiple marketing sub functions; each person is categorized according to their dominant/primary background.*

(2) *Charts reflect both Early and Early Growth Stage hires.*

For companies between $0-$20M ARR, product and revenue marketers were 5-6x more likely to reach $50M+ ARR relative to corporate marketers. 69% of corporate marketers left before reaching $20M ARR.

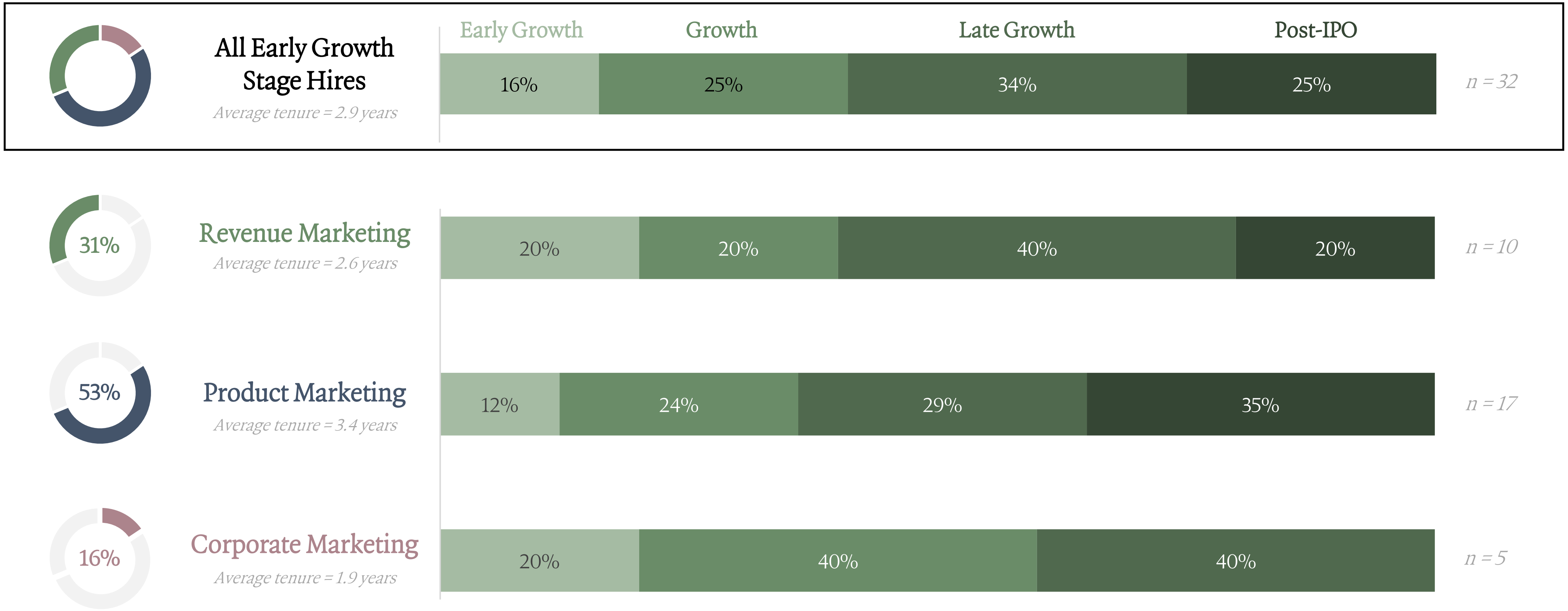


Note: For further detail on Marketer Type, please see pages 22-25 for a breakdown of this view by company GTM Motion and Leadership.

For Early Growth Stage companies, product and revenue marketers reached $100M+ ARR at nearly the same rate, with 1.8x more product marketers reaching IPO relative to revenue marketers. Corporate marketers were less common in this stage, with none reaching IPO.

Stage of Departure by Marketer Type

Worse outcome *Better outcome*



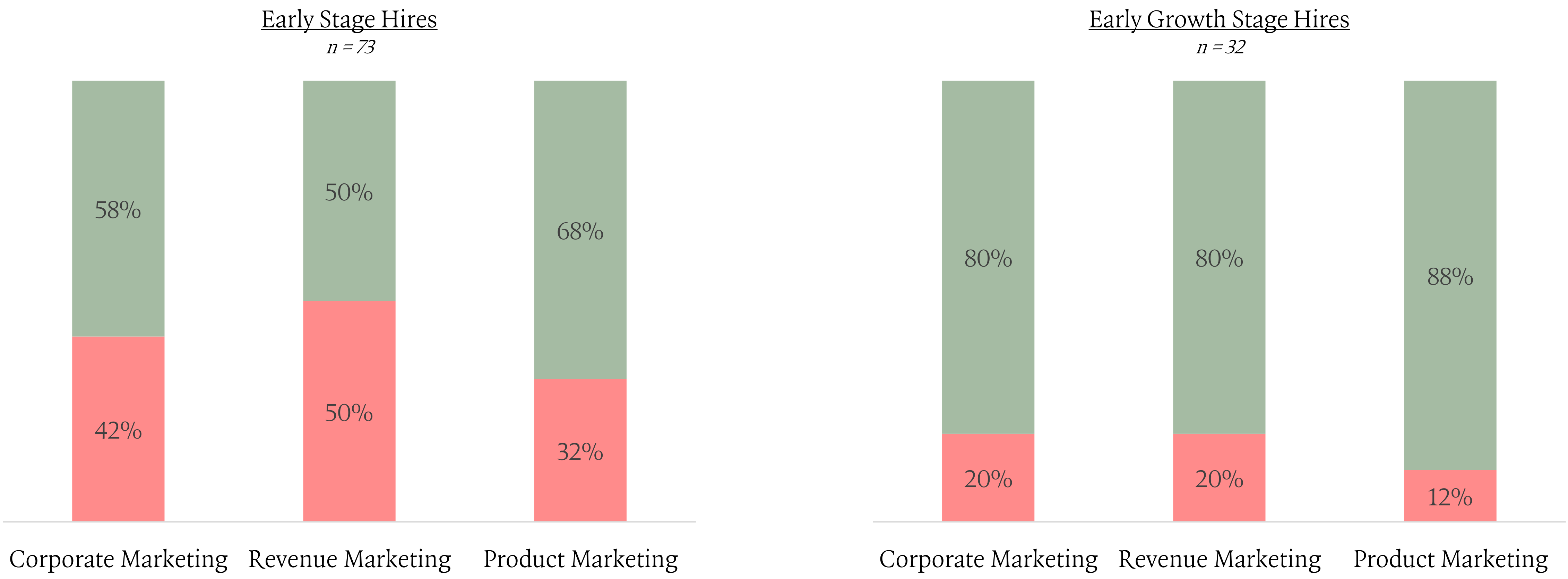
Note: For further detail on Marketer Type, please see pages 22-25 for a breakdown of this view by company GTM Motion and Leadership.

Tenure by Marketer Type

For companies in the Early and Early Growth Stage, product marketers were least likely to depart within 1.5 years of hire compared to revenue and corporate marketers. At Early Growth Stage companies, there are fewer early leavers across all types of marketers.

Heads of Marketing Tenure:

>1.5 years vs ≤ 1.5 years



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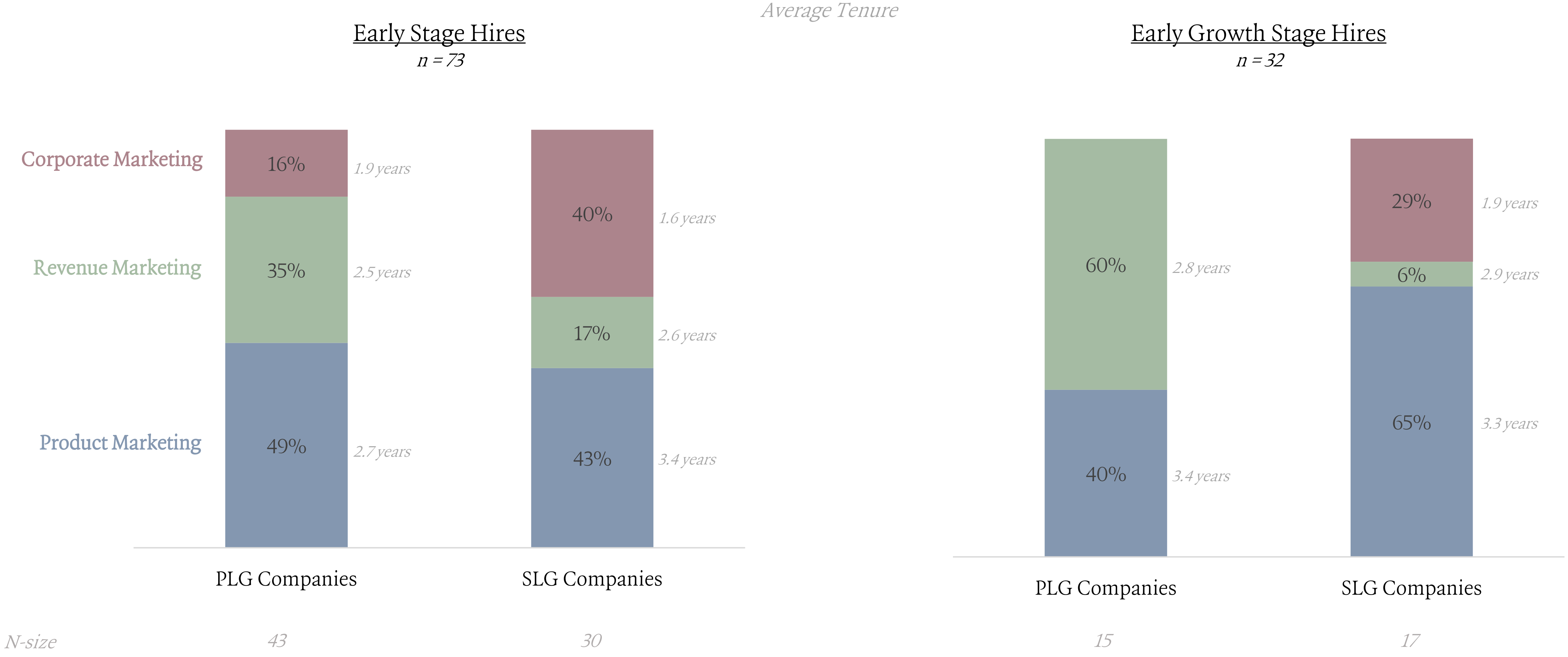
Marketer Type by Company GTM Motion

PLG companies were most likely to hire product and revenue marketers, with revenue becoming increasingly dominant as companies scaled. SLG companies were most likely to hire product and corporate marketers, with product becoming more common after $20M ARR.

Marketer Type by Company GTM Motion[1]



(1) See page 26 for list of PLG and SLG companies.

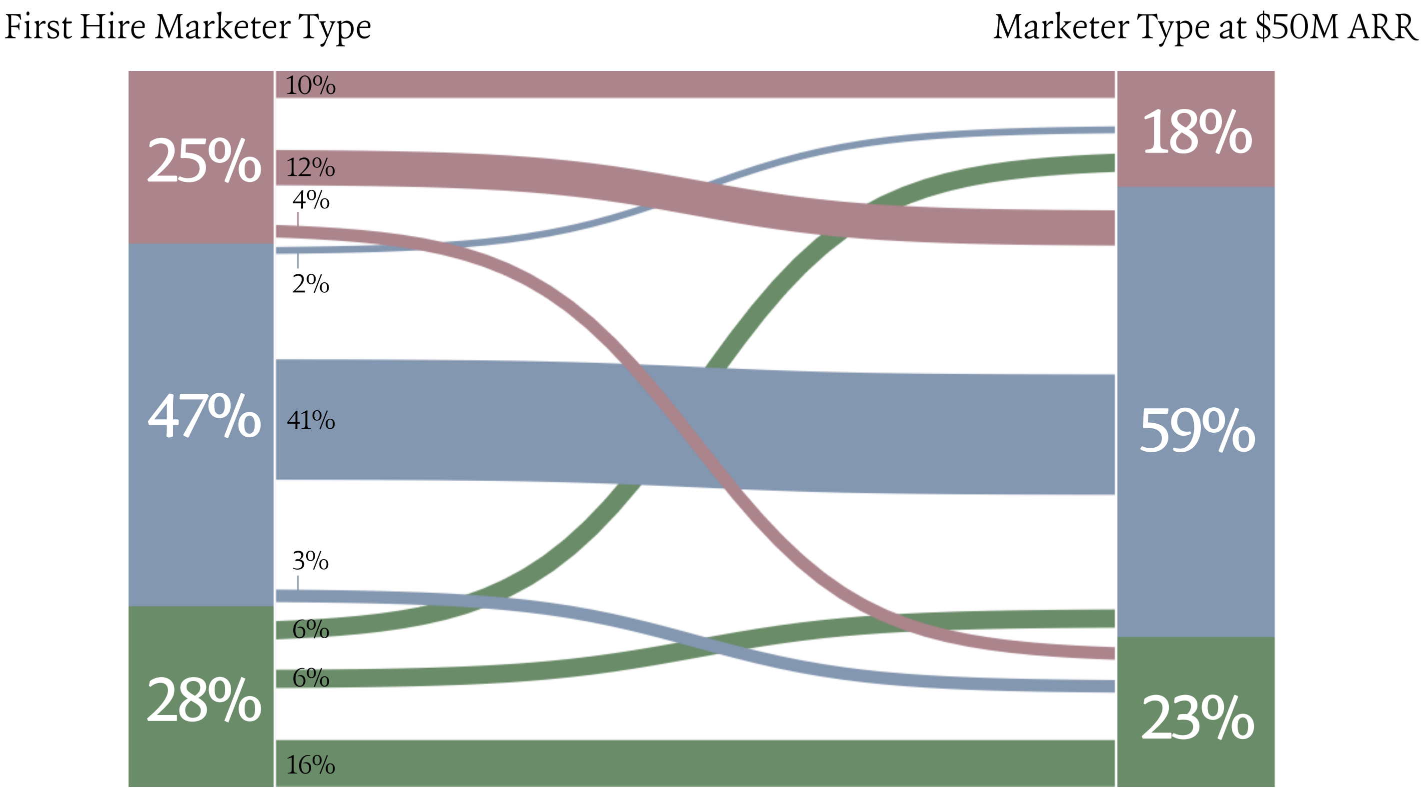
Marketer Type Across Stages

Companies that initially hired product or revenue marketers tend to have that same marketer type at $50M ARR, suggesting a strong inclination to reinforce that strategy. Two thirds of companies that initially hired corporate marketers pivoted to a different marketer type.

Key
Corporate Marketing
Product Marketing
Revenue Marketing

First Hire Marketer Type vs Marketer Type at $50M ARR

n = 51 companies[1]



Colors matching up on the right indicate companies had the same marketer type at time of first hire and at $50M ARR

(1) *Only includes companies that had hires with marketing operating backgrounds.*

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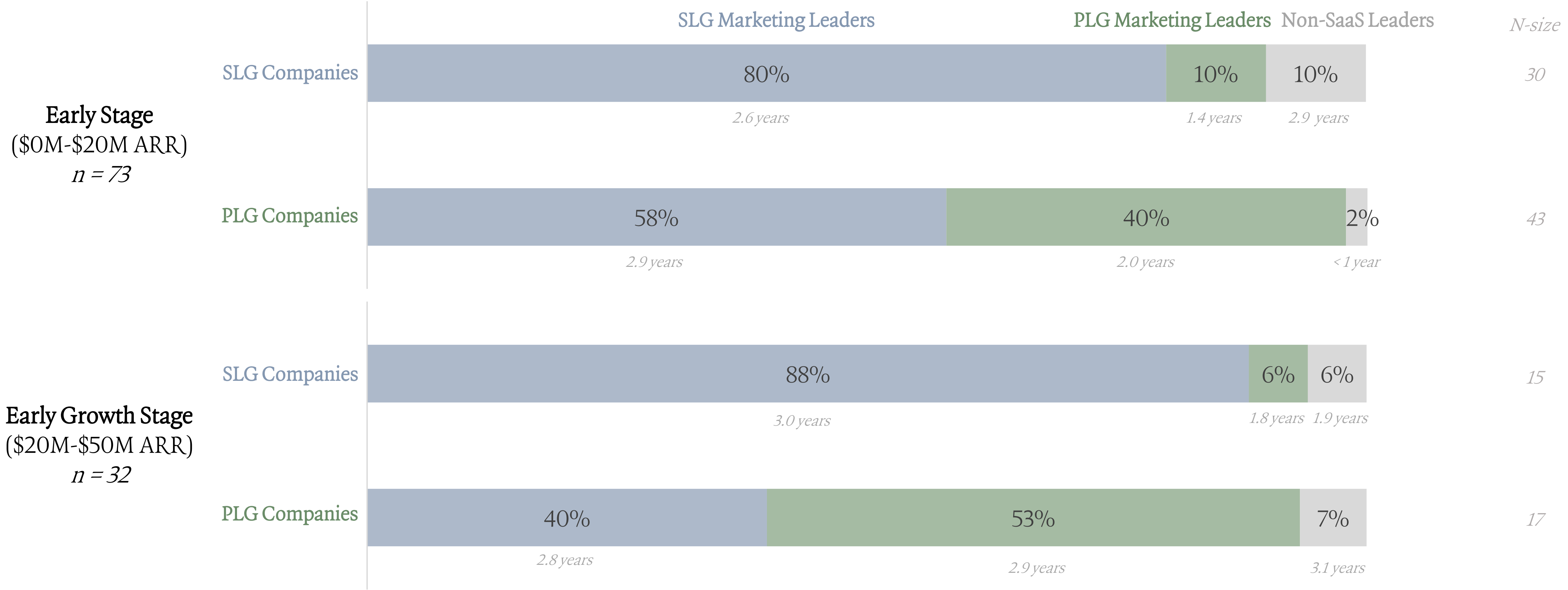
Sales Led Growth companies across both stages predominantly hired Heads of Marketing with SLG experience while Product Led companies hired more evenly for SLG and PLG experience.

Marketing Leader's GTM Background vs. Company's GTM Motion[1]

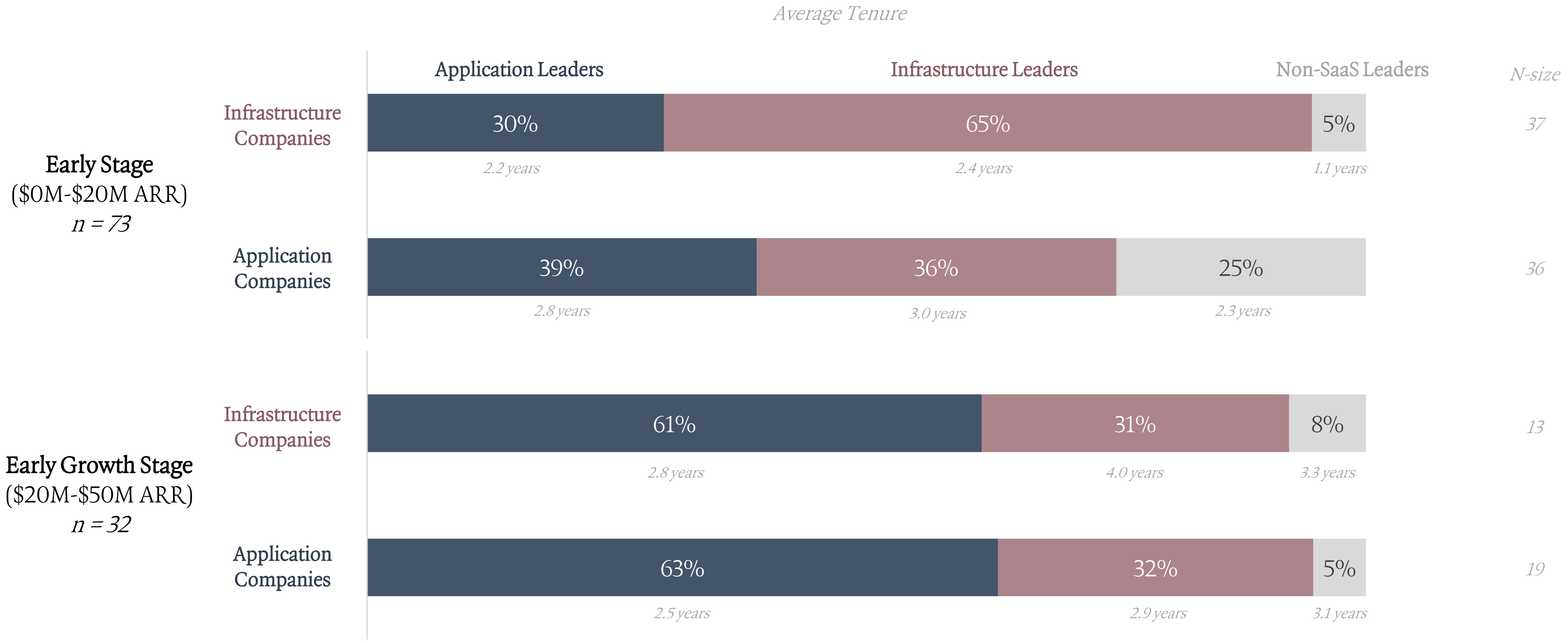
Average Tenure



(1) *See page 26 for list of PLG and SLG companies.*

Although Infrastructure companies prioritized leaders with sector affinity in the Early Stage, they shifted to hiring more Application leaders in the next stage. Early Stage Application companies had nearly an even background mix and then pivoted to hiring mostly Application leaders.

Marketing Leader's Sector Background vs. Company's Sector[1]



(1) See page 26 for list of Application and Infrastructure companies.

Most Application hires were new to the sector while Infrastructure hires had varying degrees of sector exposure – except those within Security, 64% of whom had primarily spent time in the same sector. Overall, leaders with stronger sector affinity stayed slightly longer on average.

Less sector affinity — *More sector affinity*

Heads of Marketing by Prior Sub-Sector Exposure

Early + Early Growth Hires | n = 105

Sub-Sector[1]	Example Company	Dominant in Sector	Some Exposure in Sector	Totally New to Sector	N-size[2]
Security	CROWDSTRIKE	64%	7%	29%	14
Collaboration & Workflow	slack	38%	25%	37%	8
Dev Ops	GitLab	38%	37%	25%	8
Cloud Infrastructure	DATADOG	25%	33%	42%	12
Go-to-Market Stack	UserTesting	22%	22%	56%	9
Vertical SaaS	samsara	10%	60%	30%	10
Back Office	coupa	5%	42%	53%	19
Data & Analytics	Amplitude	5%	28%	67%	21
All Application Companies		13%	33%	54%	*55*
All Infrastructure Companies		32%	30%	38%	*50*

Average Tenure by Sector Affinity Background (Years)

3.1
Dominant in sector

2.5
Some exposure in sector

2.5
New to sector

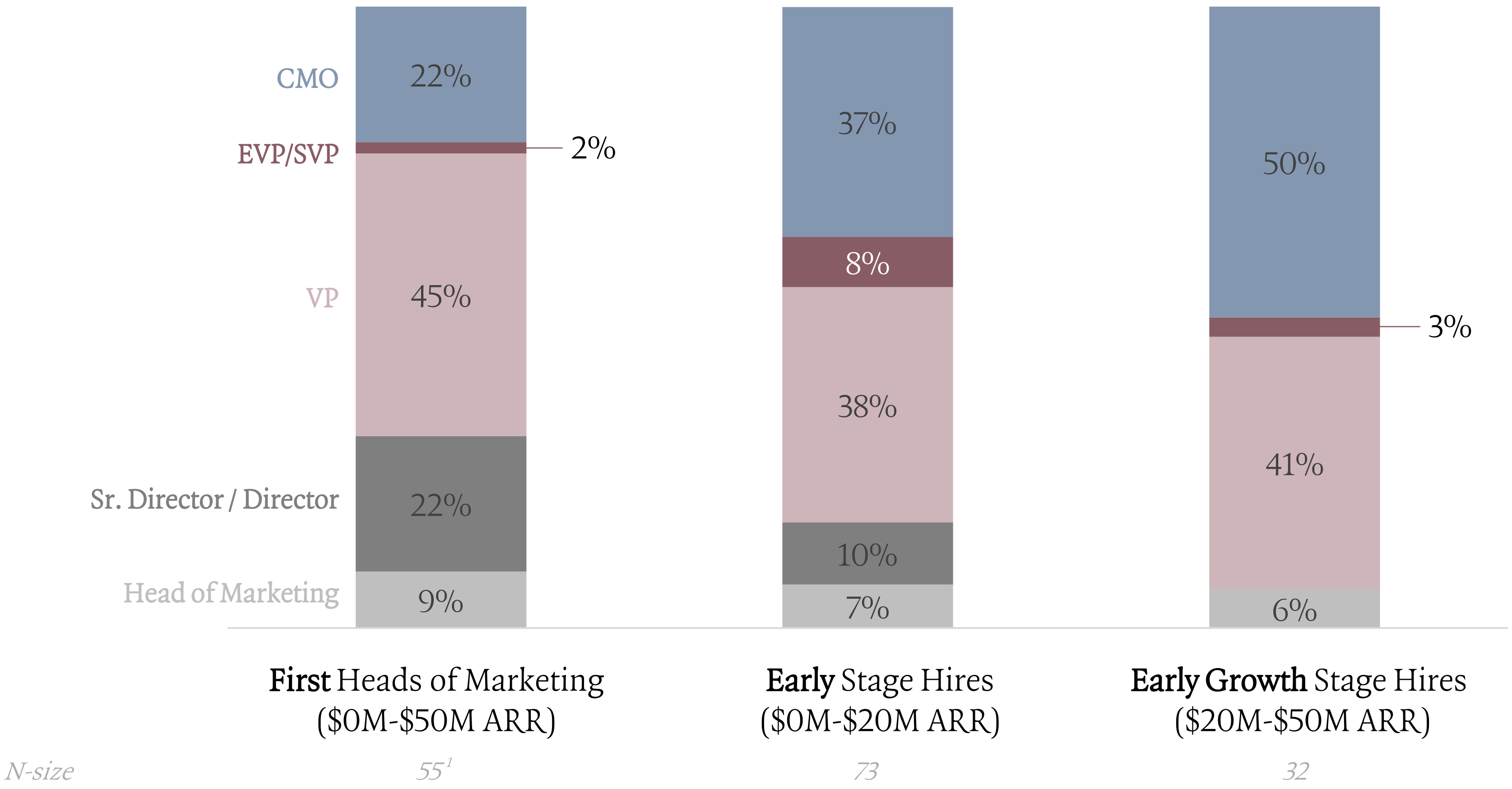
(1) *To understand which Sub-Sectors match to Application and Infrastructure, please see appendix p. 26.*
(2) *Fintech and Education companies are included in "All Application Companies" and "All Infrastructure Companies" but not broken out separately due to small n-size.*

Titling

Ready to hire a Head of Marketing? Companies hiring their first Head of Marketing primarily use the title "VP". As a company scales, "CMO" becomes the most common title.

Titles by Stage and Leadership Order

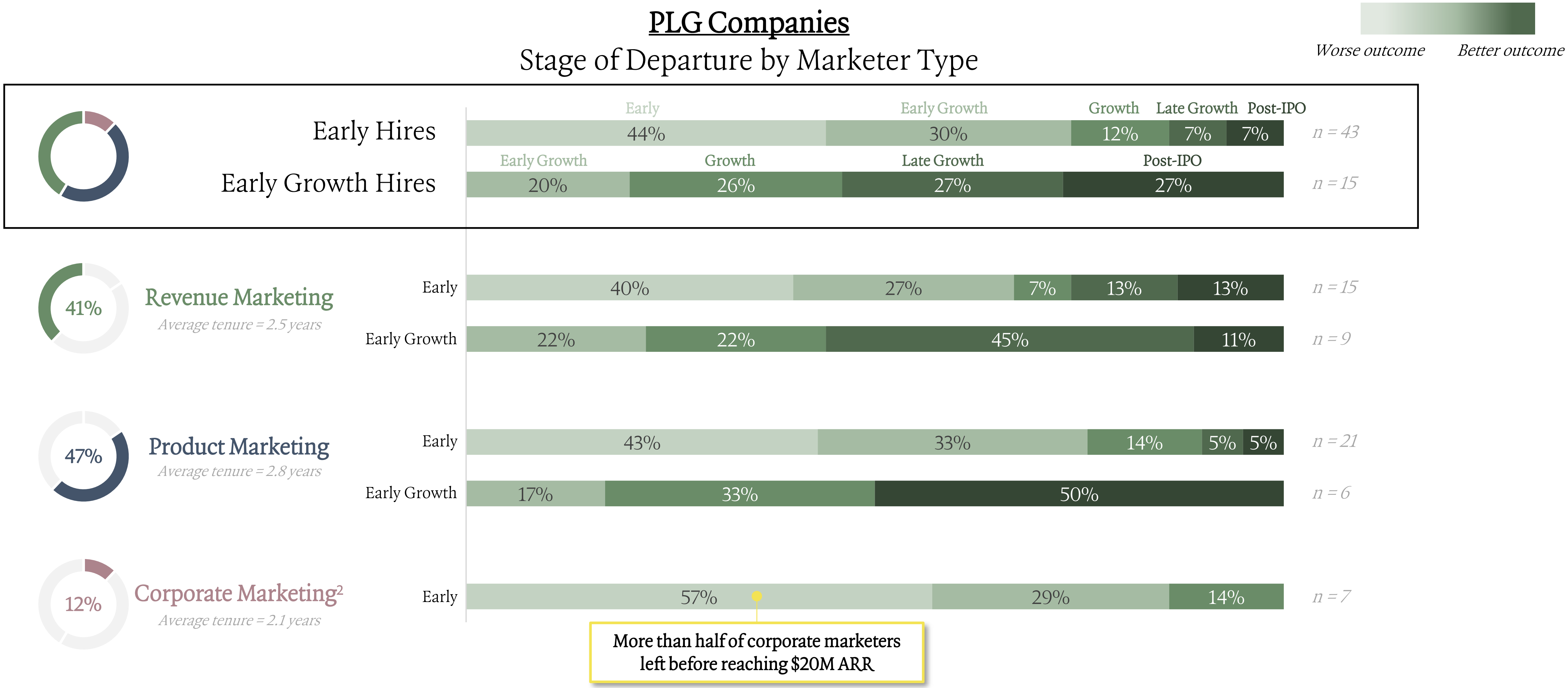
External hires only



(1) Includes only first Heads of Marketing hired before $50M ARR and first Heads of Marketing that were externally hired.

Appendix

For Early Stage PLG companies[1], product and revenue marketers had a similar scale trajectory, though revenue marketers were 1.4x more likely to reach $50M+ ARR. At Early Growth Stage companies, product and revenue marketers reached $100M+ ARR at nearly the same rate.

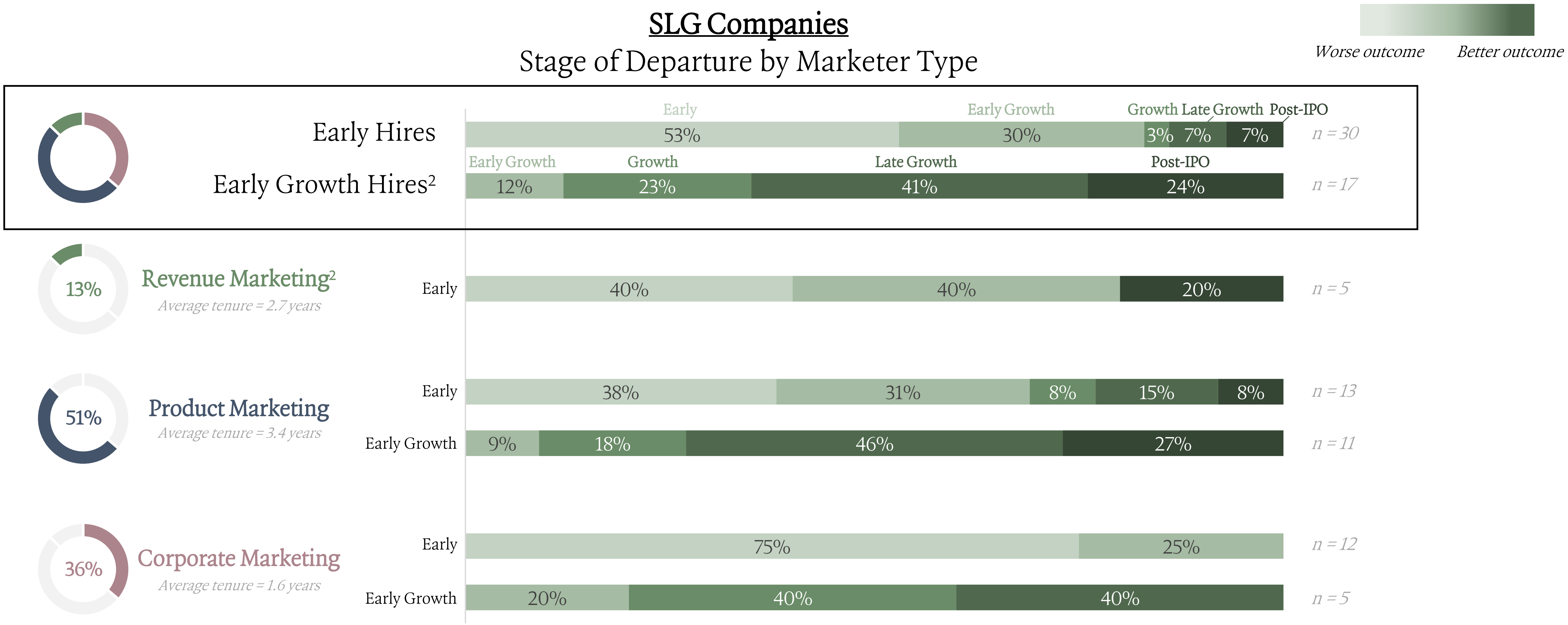


(1) See page 26 for list of PLG companies.
(2) There were no corporate marketers hired during the Early Growth Stage.

For Early Stage SLG companies[1], product marketers were the most common and were 1.5x more likely to reach $50M+ ARR relative to revenue marketers. At Early Growth Stage companies, 73% of product marketers reached $100M+ ARR.

SLG Companies

Stage of Departure by Marketer Type



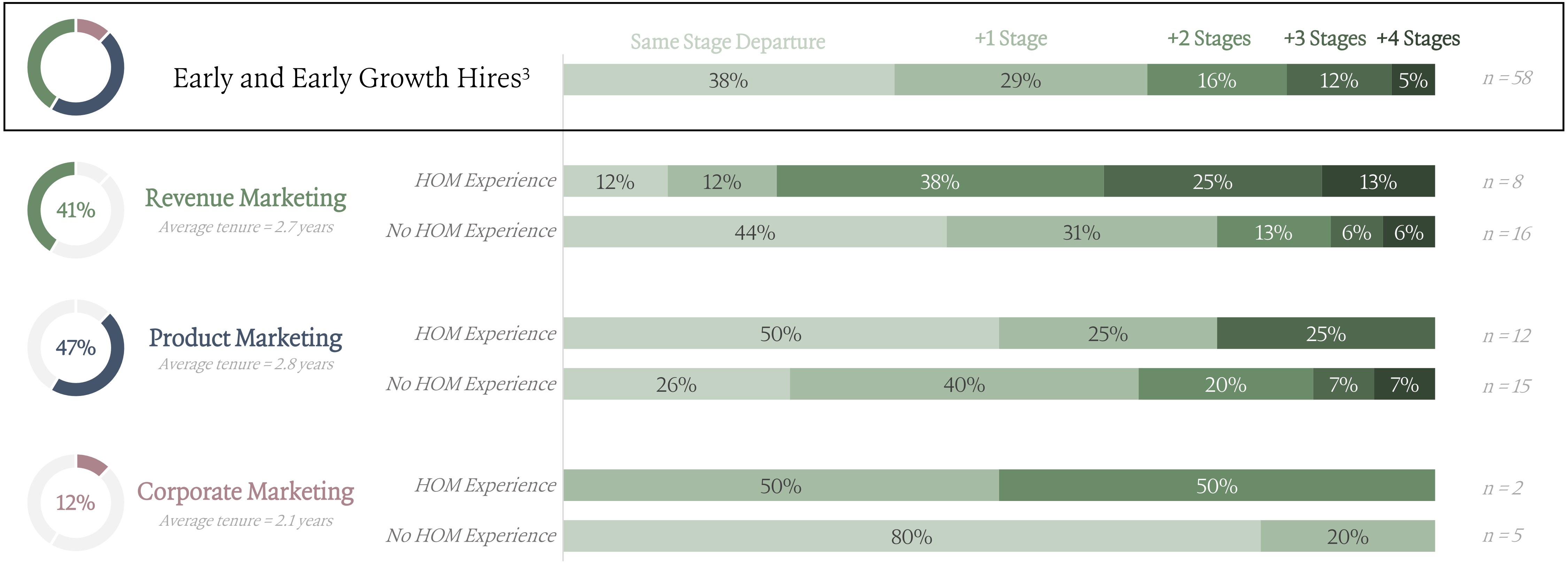
(1) See page 26 for list of SLG companies.
(2) Early Growth revenue marketing is included in the aggregated bar chart, but not broken out separately due to small n-size.

When looking at leadership and marketer type together for PLG companies[1], having Head of Marketing[2] experience had a positive impact on a revenue marketer's ability to scale across multiple stages.

PLG Companies

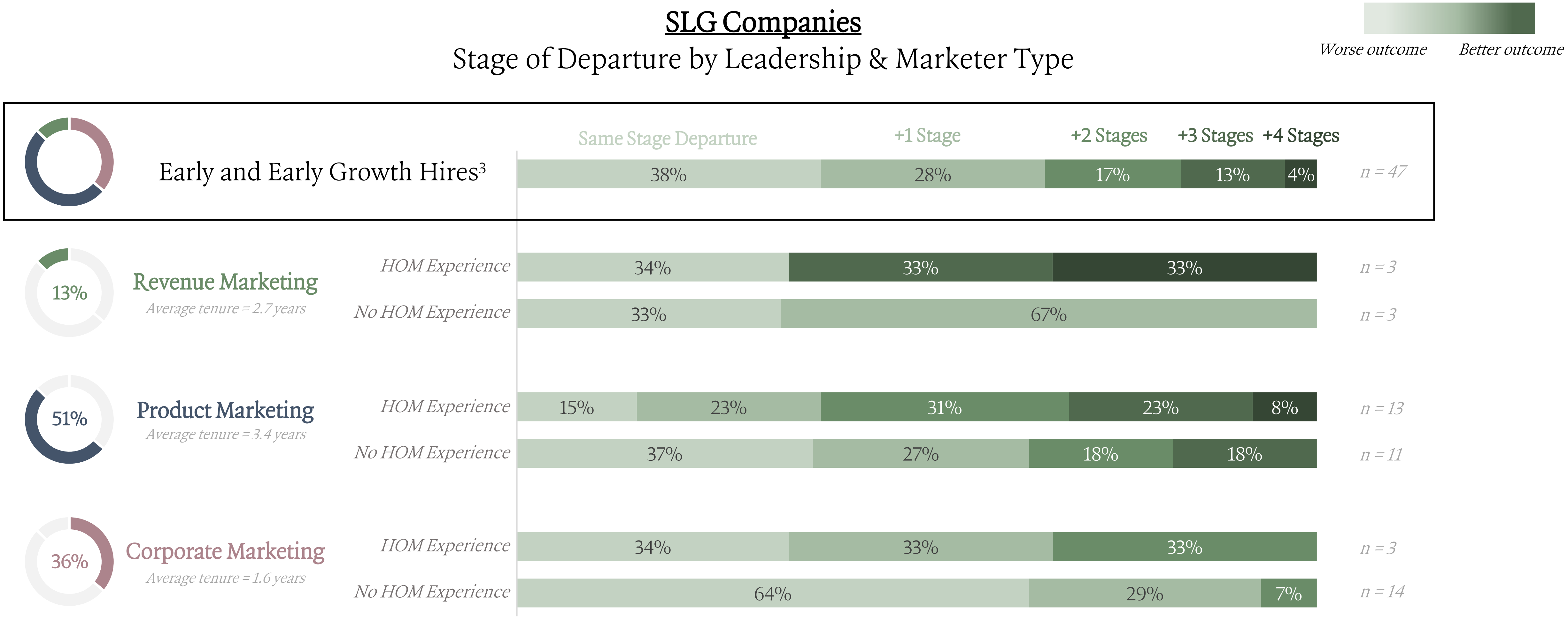
Stage of Departure by Leadership & Marketer Type

Worse outcome *Better outcome*



(1) *See page 26 for list of PLG companies.*
(2) *"HOM" is abbreviated for Head of Marketing*
(3) *Combining Early and Early Growth hires required stage normalization. For example, Early to Early Growth and Early Growth to Growth would mean "+1 Stage".*

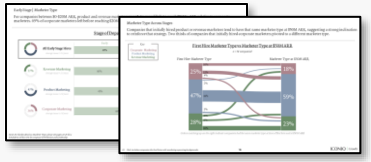
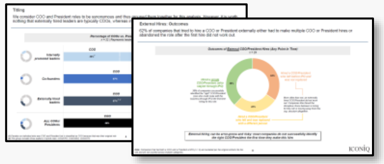
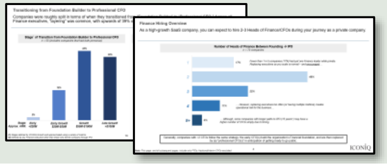
Product marketers with Head of Marketing experience had a greater chance of scaling across multiple stages at SLG companies[1], whereas a third of revenue and corporate marketers left during the same stage of hire. Having no HOM[2] experience resulted in more early departures.



(1) See page 26 for list of SLG companies.
(2) "HOM" is abbreviated for Head of Marketing.
(3) Combining Early and Early Growth hires required stage normalization. For example, Early to Early Growth and Early Growth to Growth would mean "+1 Stage".

GTM Motion	**PLG Companies**	Alteryx, Amplitude, Asana, BigCommerce, Bill.com, CloudFlare, Confluent, Datadog, DigitalOcean, DocuSign, Domo, Dropbox, Elastic, Fastly, Freshworks, Gitlab, HashiCorp, Jfrog, MongoDB, PagerDuty, Pluralsight, Sendgrid, Slack, Smartsheet, Snowflake, Sprout Social, Squarespace, Sumo Logic, Tenable, Toast, Twilio, Unity, UserTesting, Yext, Zoom
	SLG Companies	Anaplan, Apptio, Avalara, Blackline, Blend, Braze, C3.ai, Carbon Black, Cloudera, Coupa, Crowdstrike, Enfusion, ForeScout, Livongo, Marqeta, Medallia, Mulesoft, nCino, Nutanix, Okta, Procore, Samsara, SentinelOne, Sprinklr, Talend, UiPath, Zscaler, Zuora
Sector & Sub-Sector	**Application Companies** Data & analytics Back Office Collaboration & Workflow Education Go-to-Market Stack Vertical SaaS	Alteryx, Amplitude, Anaplan, Apptio, Asana, Avalara, BigCommerce, Bill.com, Blackline, Braze, C3.ai, Coupa, DocuSign, Domo, Dropbox, Enfusion, Freshworks, Livongo, Medallia, nCino, Pluralsight, Procore, Samsara, Slack, Smartsheet, Sprinklr, Sprout Social, Squarespace, Talend, Toast, UiPath, UserTesting, Yext, Zoom, Zuora
	Infrastructure Companies Data & analytics Fintech Cloud Infrastructure Dev Ops Security Vertical SaaS	Blend, Carbon Black, Cloudera, CloudFlare, Confluent, Crowdstrike, Datadog, DigitalOcean, Elastic, Fastly, ForeScout, Gitlab, HashiCorp, Jfrog, Marqeta, MongoDB, Mulesoft, Nutanix, Okta, PagerDuty, Sendgrid, SentinelOne, Snowflake, Sumo Logic, Tenable, Twilio, Unity, Zscaler

Other Reports from ICONIQ Growth

Report	Description	
Leadership Advisory Overview	• Overview of our core motions and ways that we can support your organization	
Chief Marketing Officer Study (Two-Part Series)	• Quantitative analysis of the most prevalent – and most successful – operational backgrounds and qualifications for Heads of Marketing at private SaaS companies, segmented by Growth Stage • *Data source: Proprietary dataset of >200 marketing leaders at 63 SaaS companies*	
Chief People Officer Study	• Quantitative analysis of the most prevalent – and most successful – operational backgrounds and qualifications for Heads of People at private SaaS companies, segmented by Growth Stage • *Data source: Proprietary datasets of >100 People leaders at 59 companies; 2021 Cloud 100 People leaders*	
President & Chief Operating Officer Study	• Examination of the advantages and challenges of having a COO and/or President role • *Data source: Proprietary dataset of every past and current COO/President at 61 SaaS companies*	
Chief Financial Officer Study	• Quantitative analysis of the most prevalent – and most successful – operational backgrounds and qualifications for Heads of Finance at private SaaS companies, segmented by Growth Stage • *Data source: Proprietary dataset of >170 finance leaders at 72 companies*	
Chief Revenue Officer Study (Two-Part Series)	• Quantitative analysis of the most prevalent – and most successful – operational backgrounds and qualifications for Heads of Sales/CROs at private SaaS companies, segmented by Growth Stage • *Data source: Proprietary dataset of >180 sales leaders at 72 companies*	

Please reach out to LeadershipAdvisory@iconiqcapital.com with any questions

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Co-founder and CEO

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WRITER

May Habib
Co-founder and CEO

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