



# Executive Compensation & Hiring Benchmarks Q1 2026 Report

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CHAPTER 1

# Q1 Overview

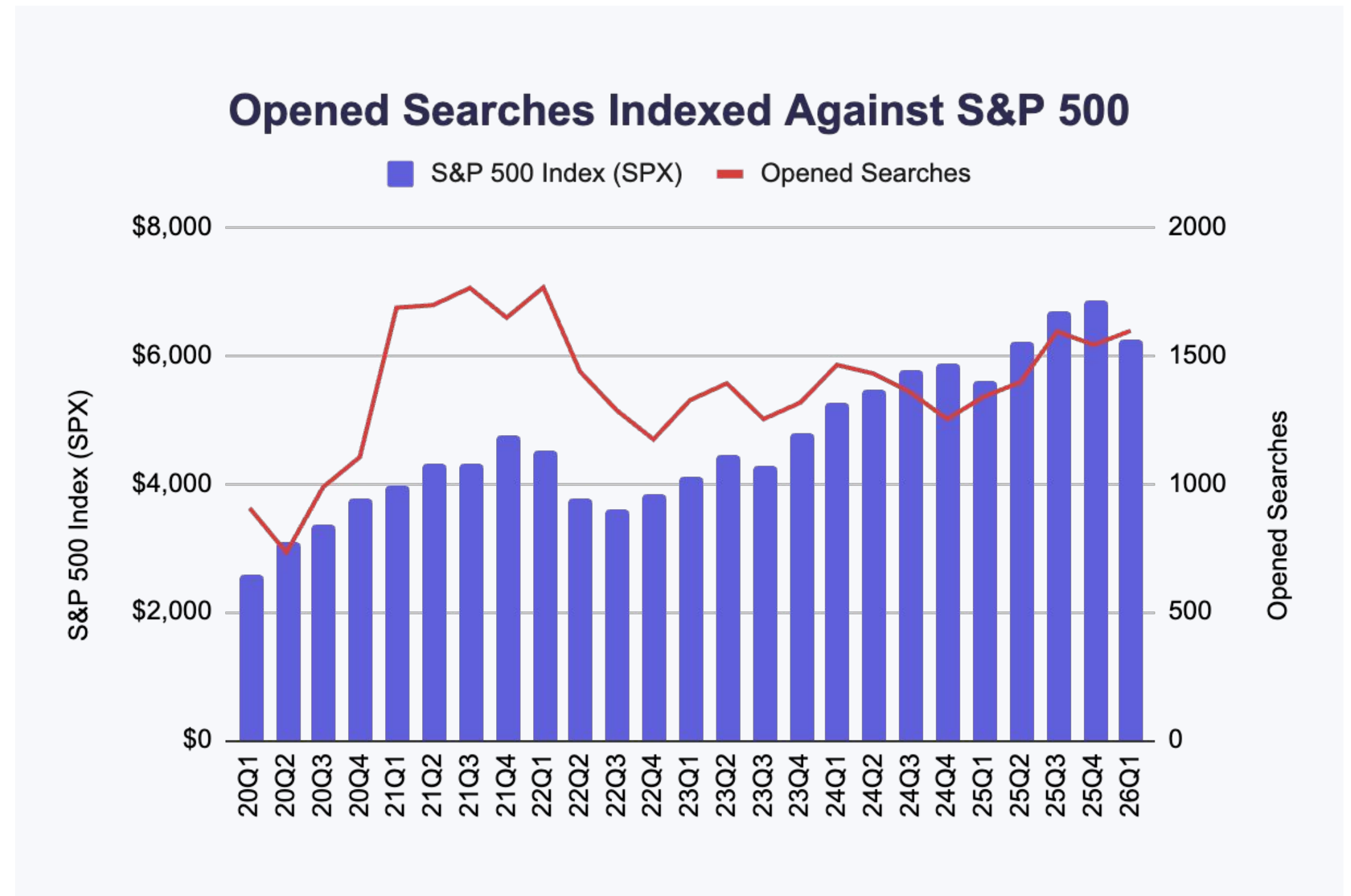
## The executive search market opened 2026 the way it has closed each of the last two quarters: quietly defying the narrative that AI could thin the demand for senior talent.

Opened searches rose 6% quarter-over-quarter and 19% year-over-year in Q1—marking the third straight quarter of double-digit YoY growth.

Private Equity and Venture Capital are leading the way, especially early-stage VC. Seed/Series A demand jumped nearly 50% QoQ while PE posted a more traditional 2% QoQ growth rate.

And if there was a sector of the market that seems to be listening to the “AI narrative,” it is the public company market. Searches fell 12% QoQ and remained relatively flat (3%) on a YoY basis.

Zooming out, Q1 did less to change the arc of the market than to clarify where it is concentrating. Demand for director & below talent is continuing to erode, with the share of placements now sitting at less than 13% of all filled roles. This has been a multi-year trend that we first observed in late 2023.



And, against that backdrop, demand is centering on early-stage companies building core teams and PE companies continuing to invest in finance and operational excellence.

The function mix within early-stage VC tells the story clearly: Engineering searches at Seed/Series A doubled quarter-over-quarter. Product searches rose 67%. The demand spike at early stages coincides with continued momentum in AI-driven investments, and founders appear to be investing in executive-level talent earlier in the company lifecycle.

Finance was the cross-cutting functional story of Q1. Searches for finance leadership rose sharply across multiple asset classes—up nearly 30% QoQ in PE, 53% QoQ at Series B/C, and in double-digit territory at several other stages. The asset class breakdown reinforces how differently the three major segments of the market are positioned at the start of 2026:

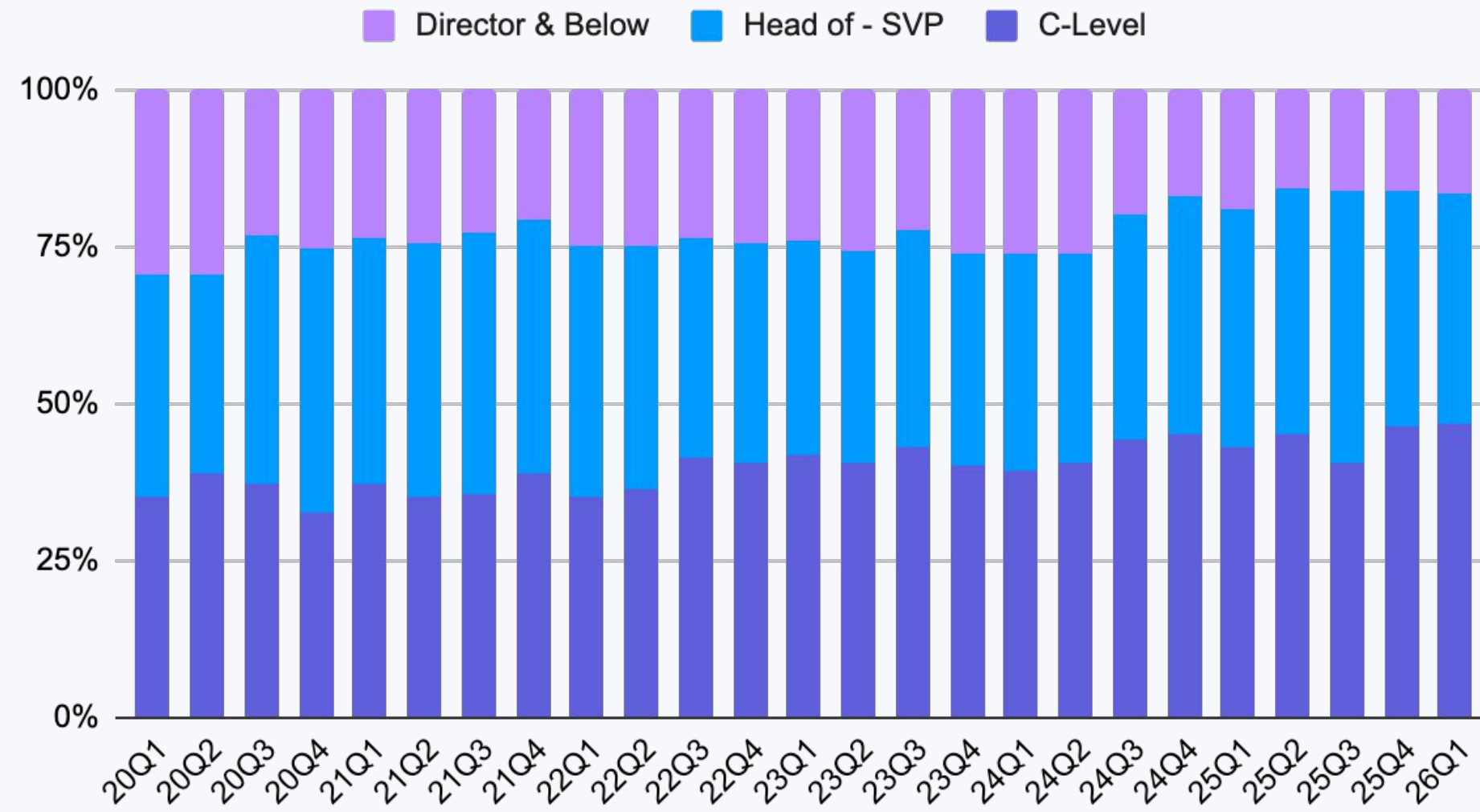
- Private equity deal value came in at \$218.8 billion in Q1 — softer than the prior two quarters, as widening credit spreads and uncertainty around software portfolios gave buyers reason to pause. PE opened searches declined 3% quarter-over-quarter but remained up 8% year-over-year, with demand skewing toward Finance and operational oversight rather than commercial build-outs. Median compensation was flat quarter-over-quarter and down 4% year-over-year — the second consecutive decline — consistent with sponsors that are focused on managing existing portfolios rather than expanding them.

- Q1 venture capital deal value came in at \$267.2 billion, which would be a good year (much less quarter) But strip out the five largest transactions and the figure falls by nearly three-quarters. Concentration has defined VC for several years now, and Q1 marked a new extreme. Executive search followed the same pattern: Seed/Series A opened searches surged 47% QoQ and 38% YoY while Series D+ searches declined 8% YoY and the time to close after a candidate was identified stretched to 109 days. Capital and hiring demand are piling into narrow ends of the market, and the rest is waiting.
- Opened searches for public companies declined 15% QoQ and were flat YoY, consistent with five straight quarters of rangebound demand. What shifted in Q1 was compensation: median public company OTE for newly hired execs rose 18% quarter-over-quarter and 8% year-over-year, the sharpest quarterly increase of any asset class. Still, the time from candidate identification to placement stretched to 100 days, up from 55 in Q4 suggesting companies may be hesitating (but maybe not pausing) on hiring plans.

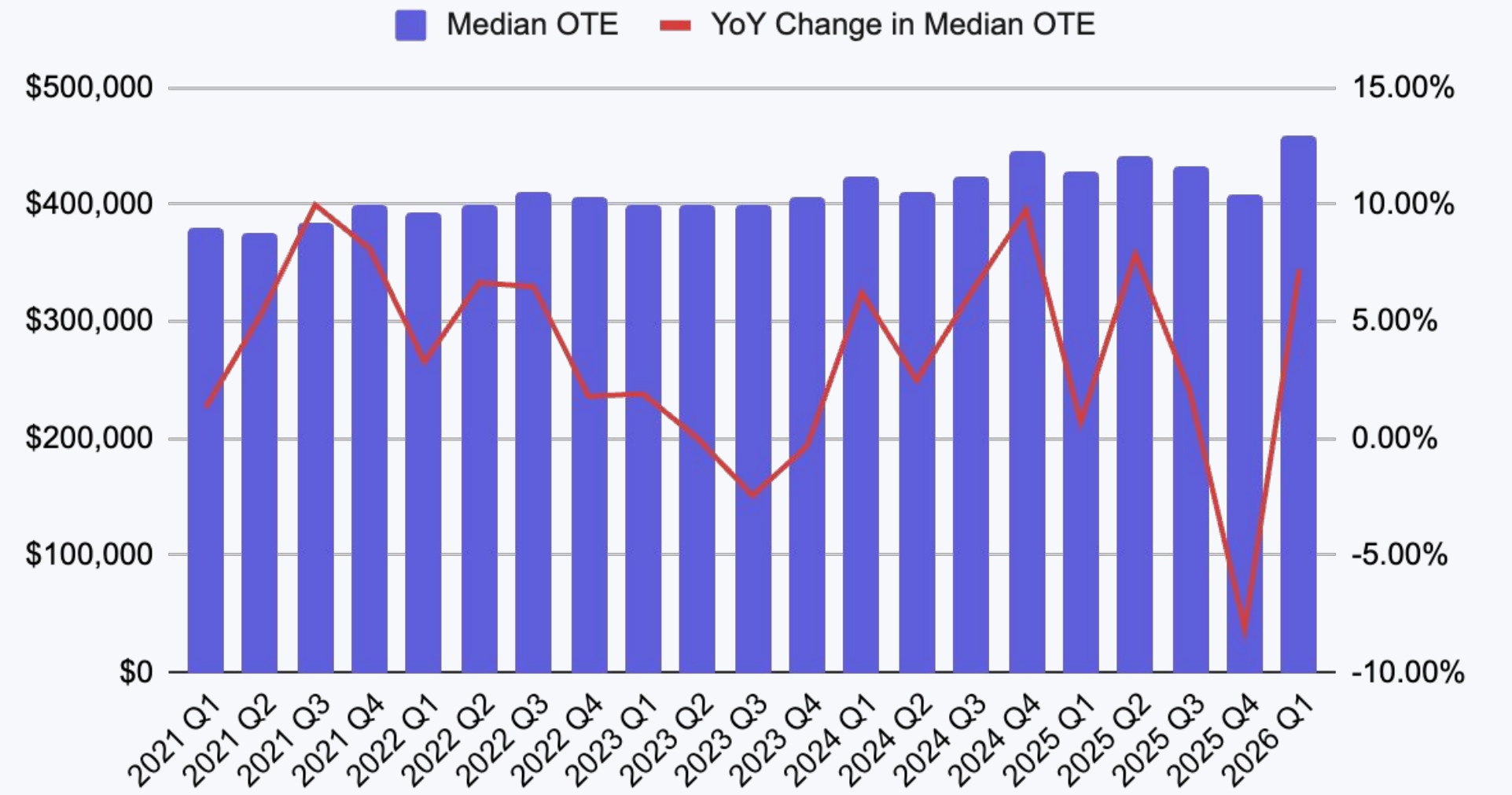
On balance, Q1 2026 is a quarter that rewards close reading more than headline watching. The 21% year-over-year gain in opened searches is real and meaningful—it marks the strongest YoY growth rate the market has posted since the post-COVID boom. But the concentration of that growth in one asset class, one stage, and a handful of functions tells a more tempered story about the market's actual posture.

AI hasn't had a chilling effect on demand yet. Instead, it's accelerated demand in specific pockets.

### Share of Opened Searches By Exec Level



### Median OTE Trend

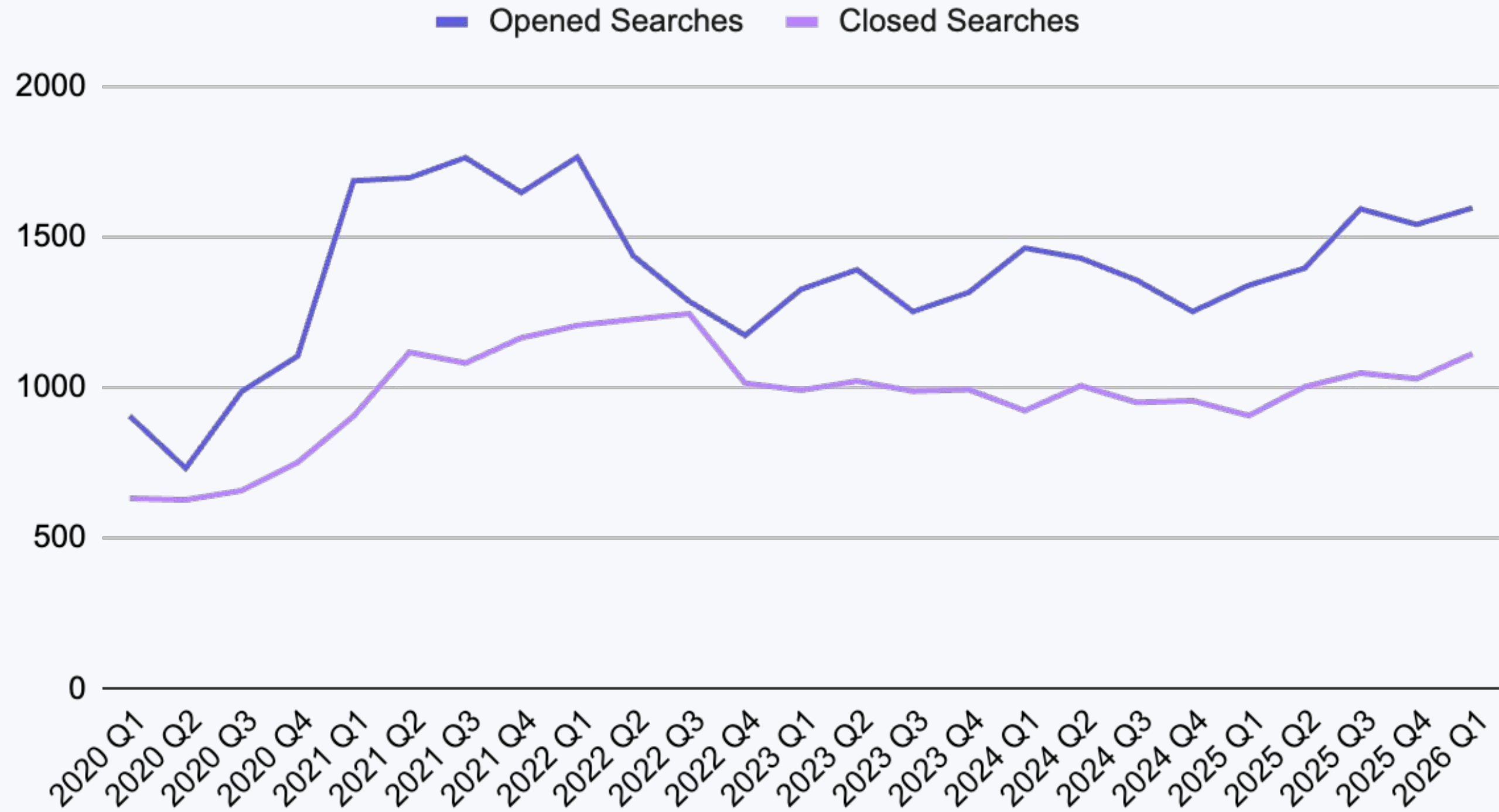


CHAPTER 2

# Leadership Hiring Benchmarks

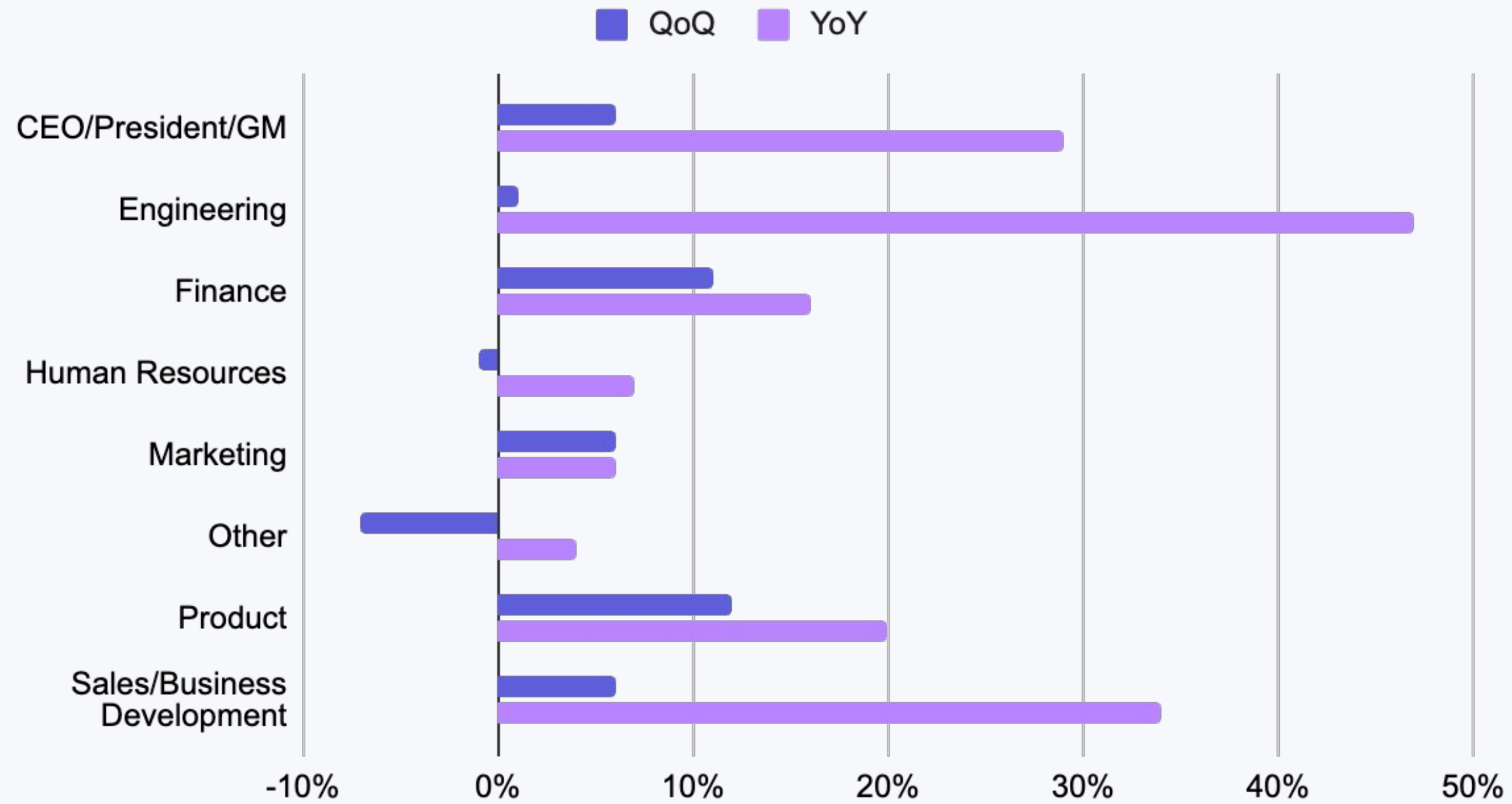
## Search Volume

### Leadership Hiring Trends By Quarter



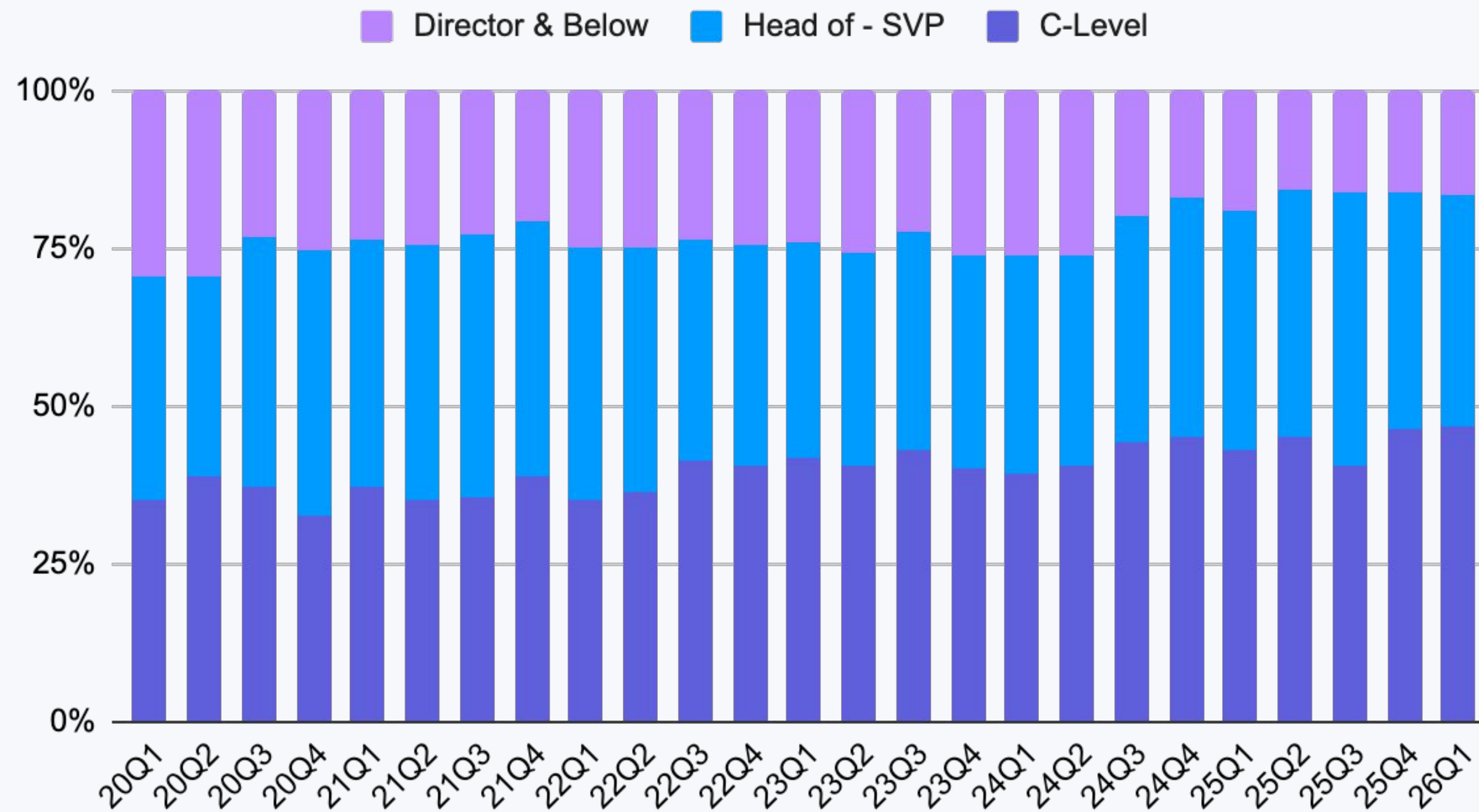
## Search Volume

### Change in Leadership Demand by Function



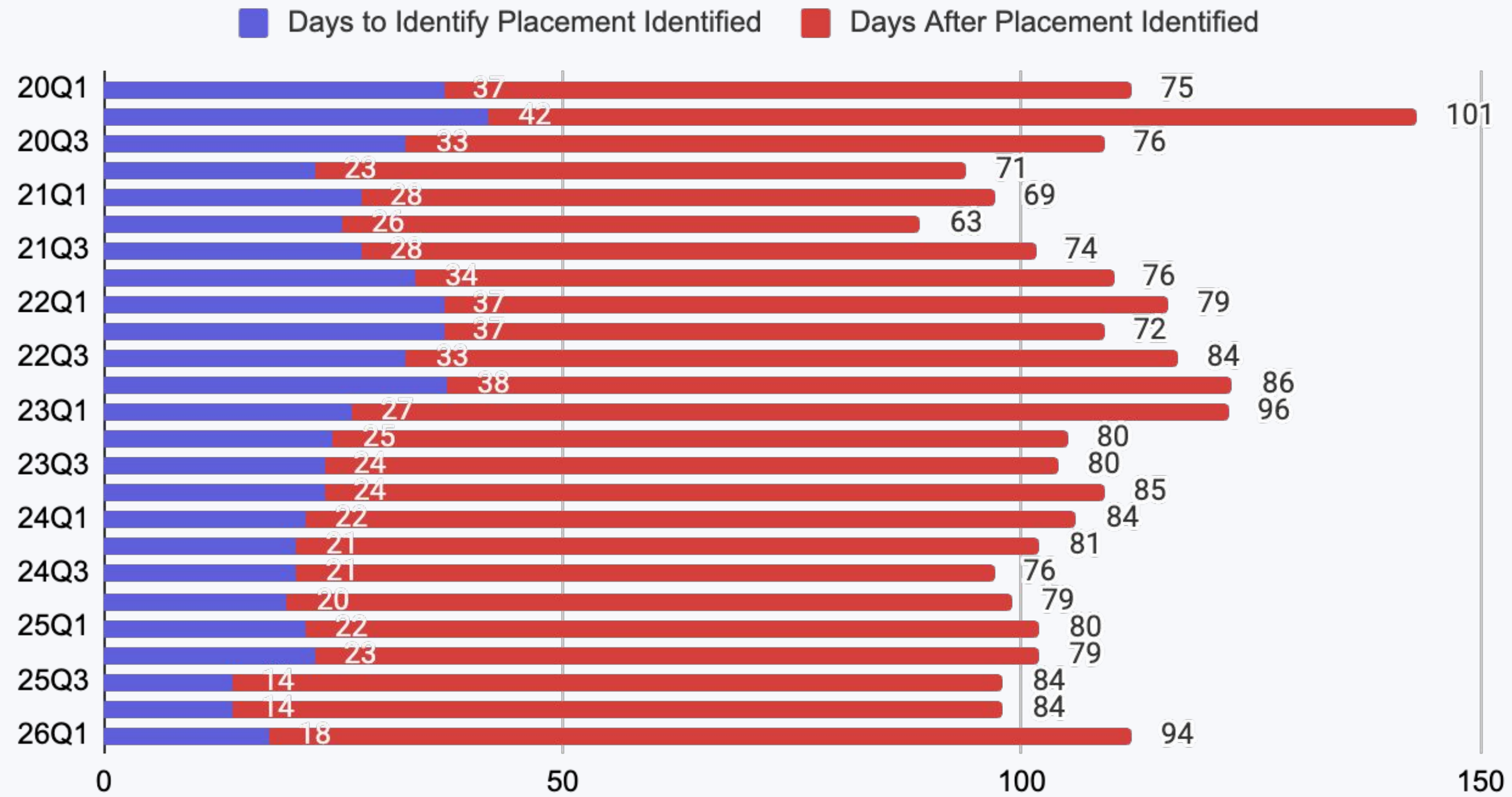
## Search Volume

### Share of Opened Searches By Exec Level

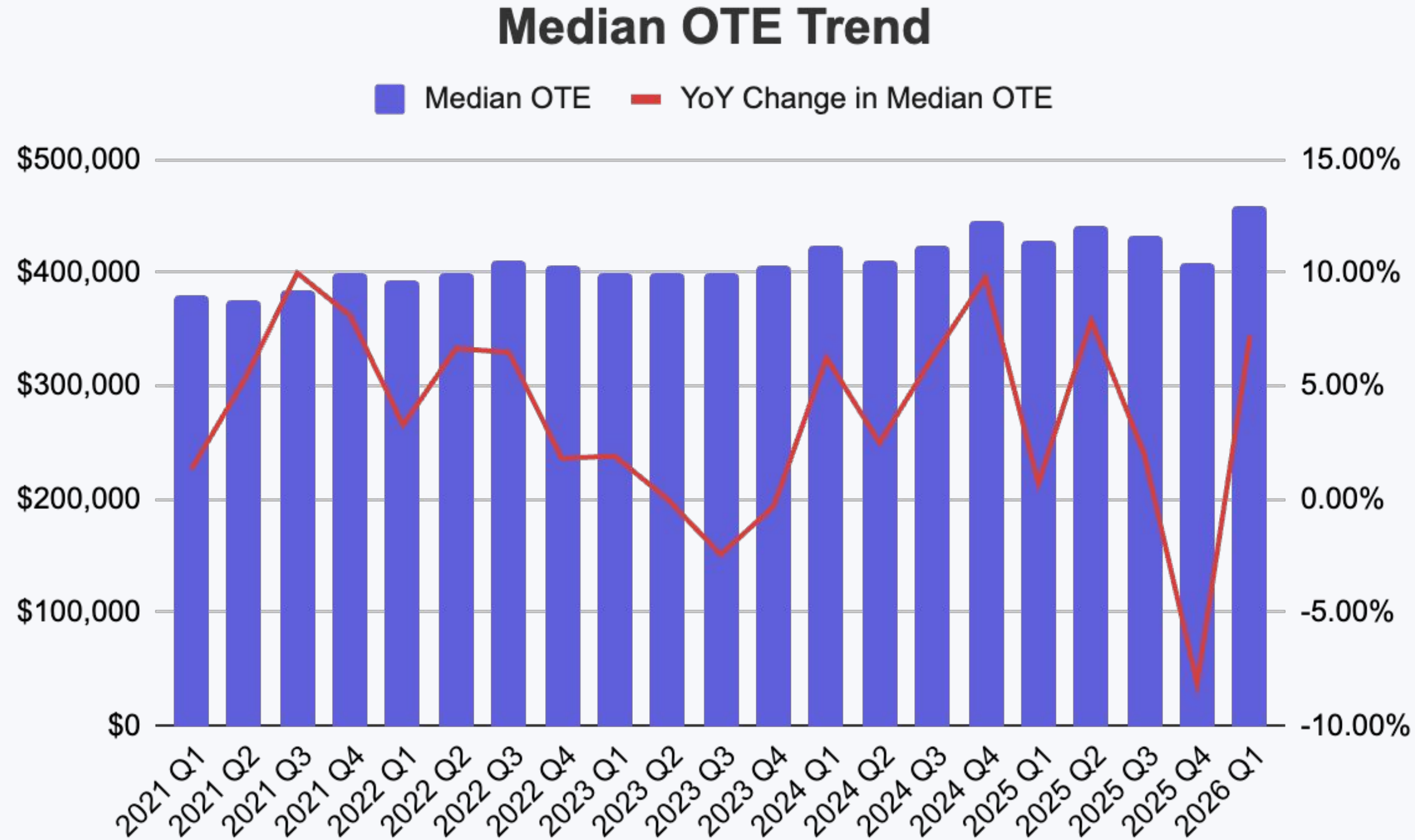


**Search Velocity**

**Search Velocity Trend**



## Compensation



## Compensation

### YoY Change in Compensation By Function

Q1 FY26 and Q1 FY25

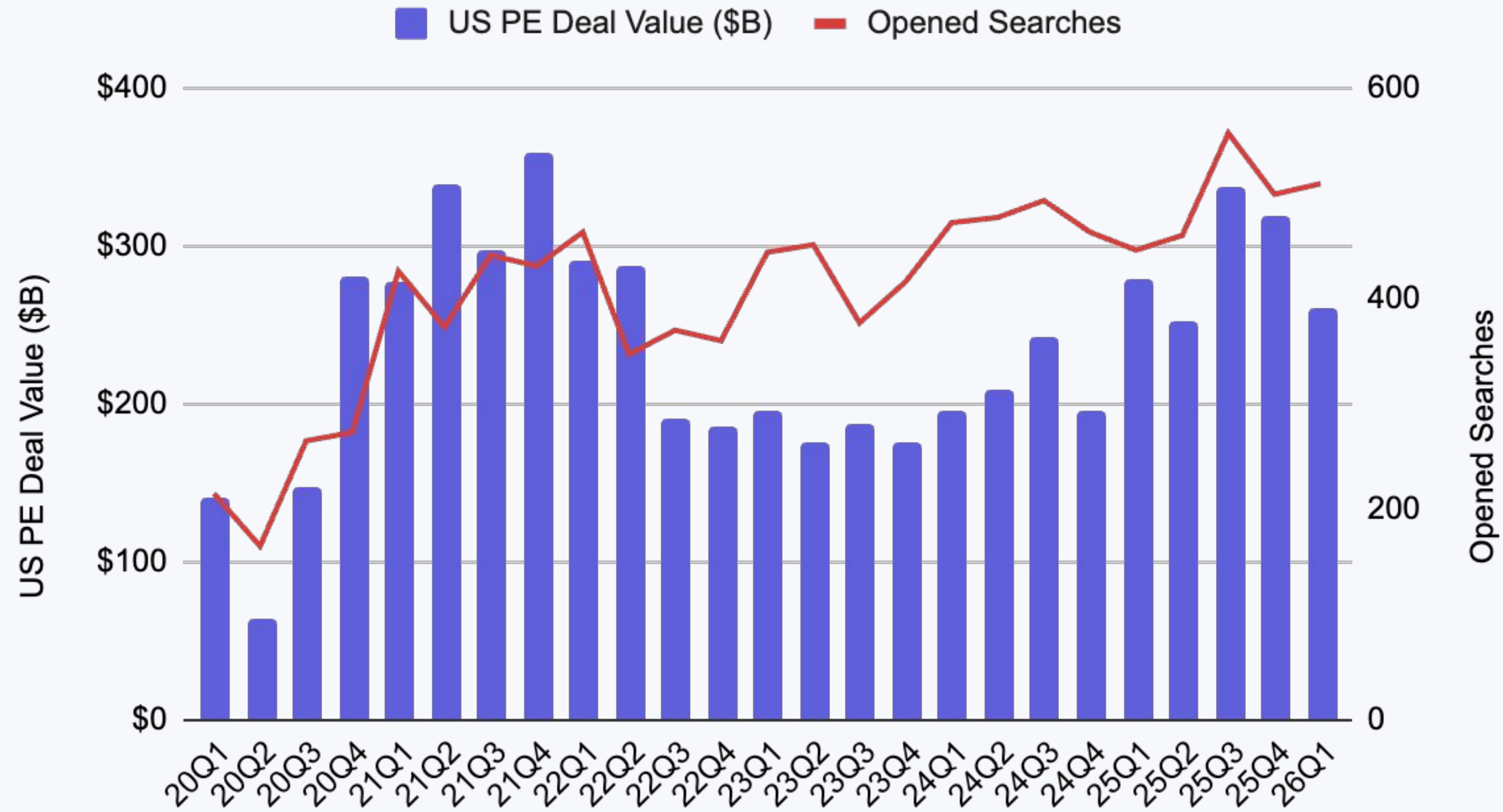
	Base		OTE	
CEO/President/GM	\$368K	-1%	\$545K	-3%
Engineering	\$358K	9%	\$471K	4%
Finance	\$378K	14%	\$533K	21%
Human Resources	\$317K	21%	\$412K	20%
Marketing	\$327K	12%	\$426K	14%
Other	\$298K	9%	\$391K	7%
Product	\$327K	-1%	\$409K	-7%
Sales/Business Development	\$292K	-1%	\$523K	-1%

CHAPTER 4

# Private Equity Deep Dive

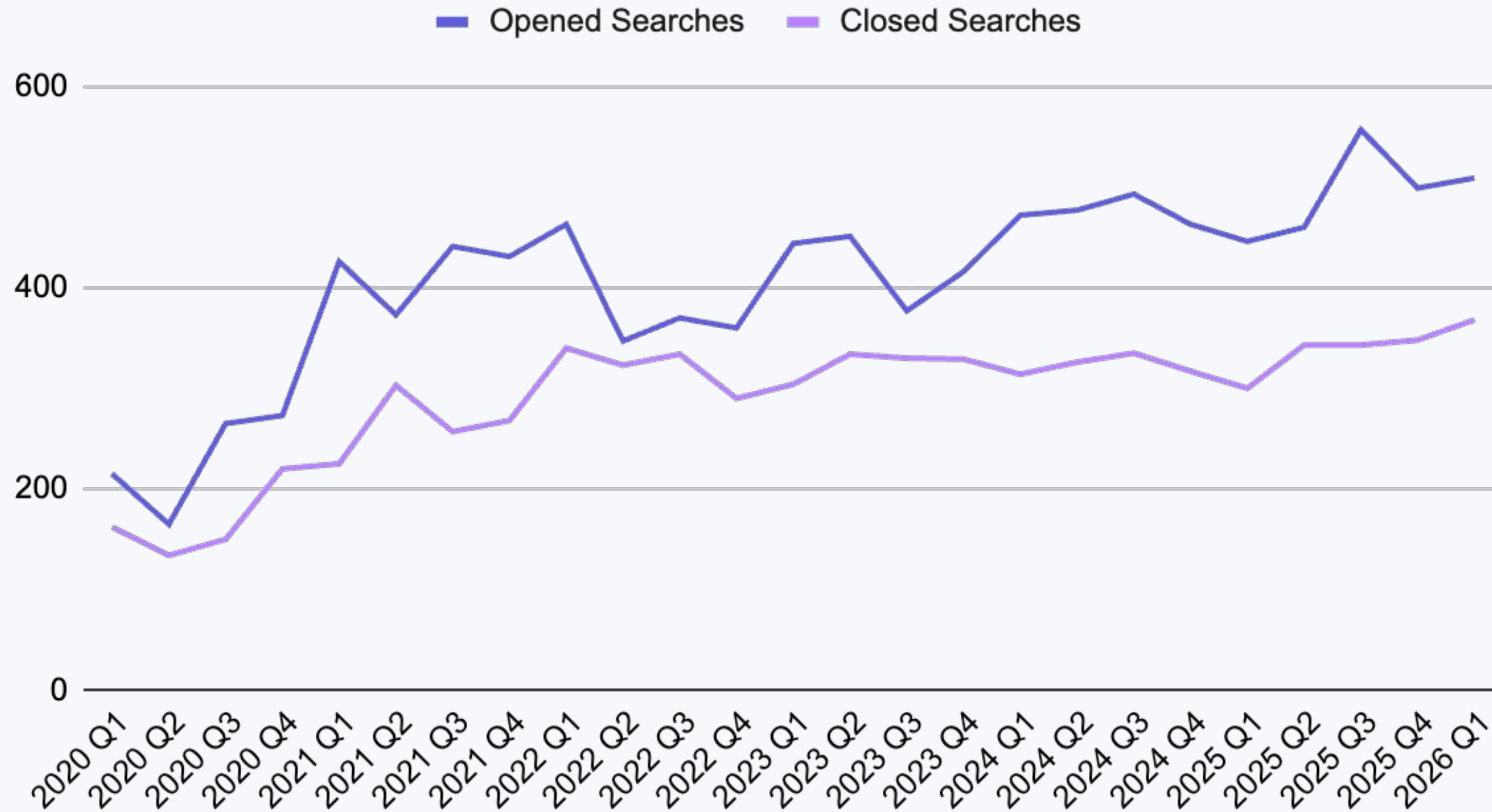
Search Volume

### PE Leadership Hiring v. US PE Deal Value



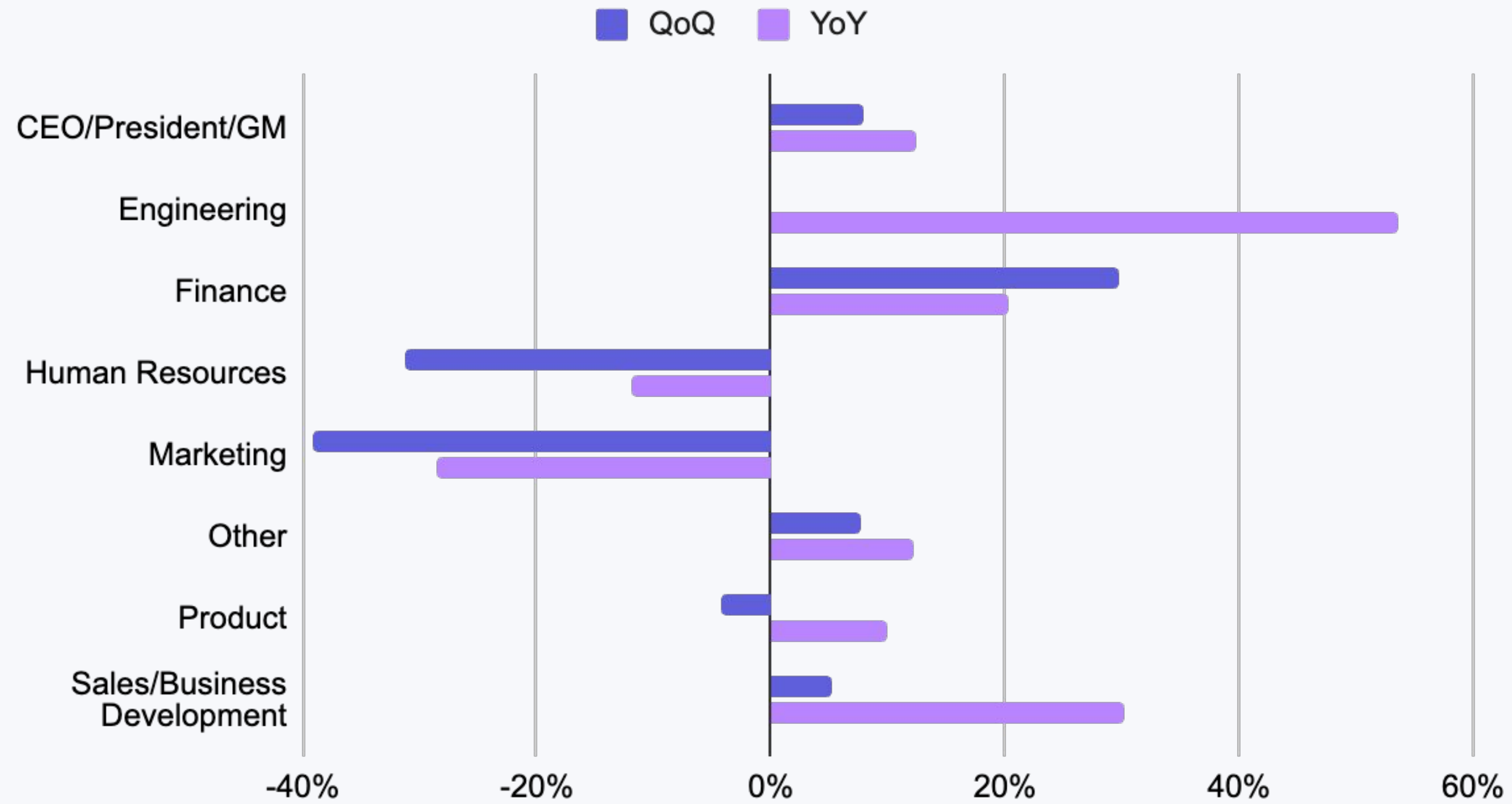
## Search Volume

### Private Equity Leadership Hiring Trends



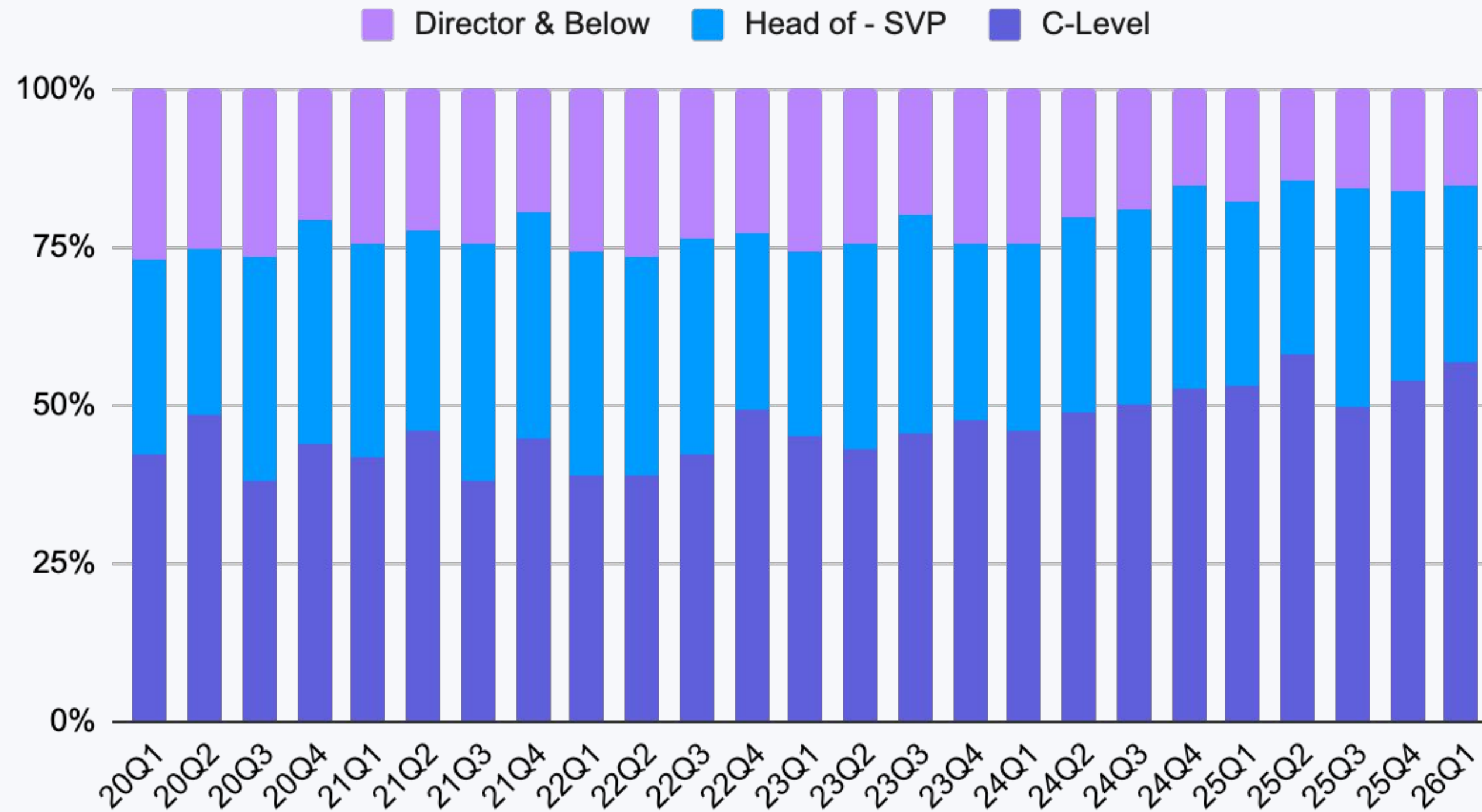
## Search Volume

### Change in PE Leadership Demand by Function



Search Volume

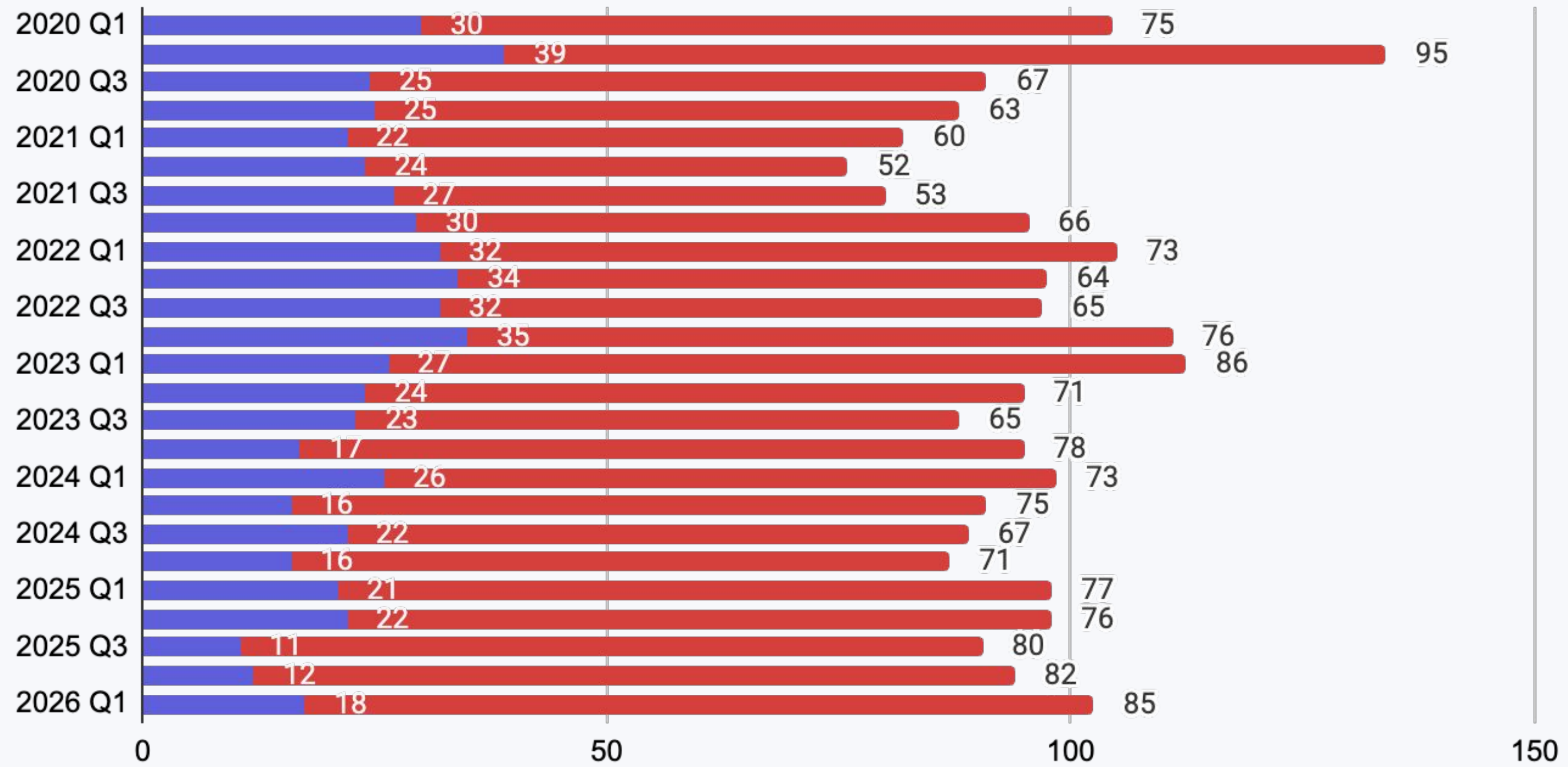
### PE Share of Opened Searches By Exec Level



**Search Velocity**

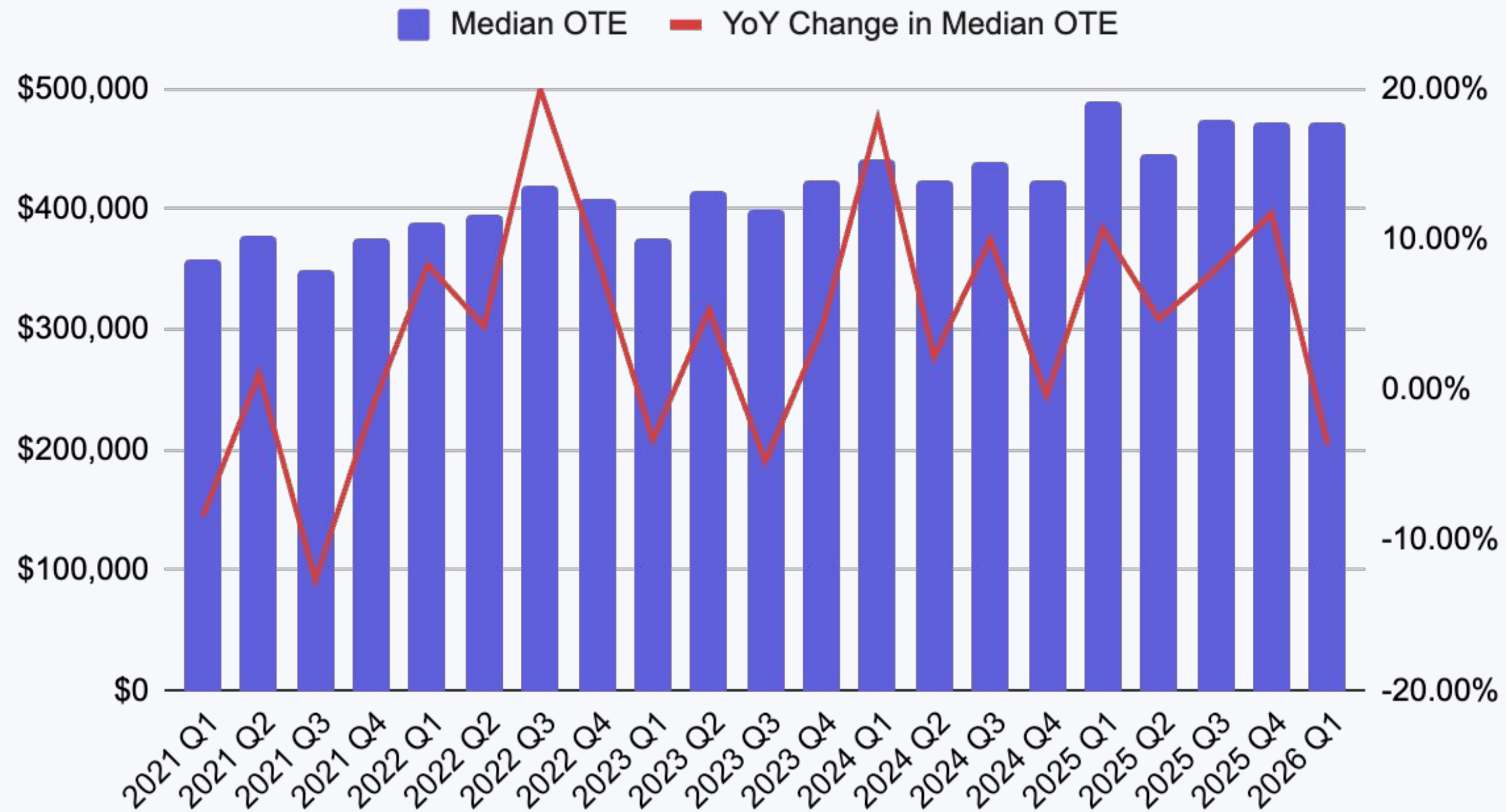
**Private Equity Search Velocity Trend**

■ Days to Identify Placement   ■ Days After Placement Identified



**Compensation**

**Private Equity Median OTE Trend**



## Compensation

### YoY Change in PE Compensation By Function

Q1 FY26 and Q1 FY25

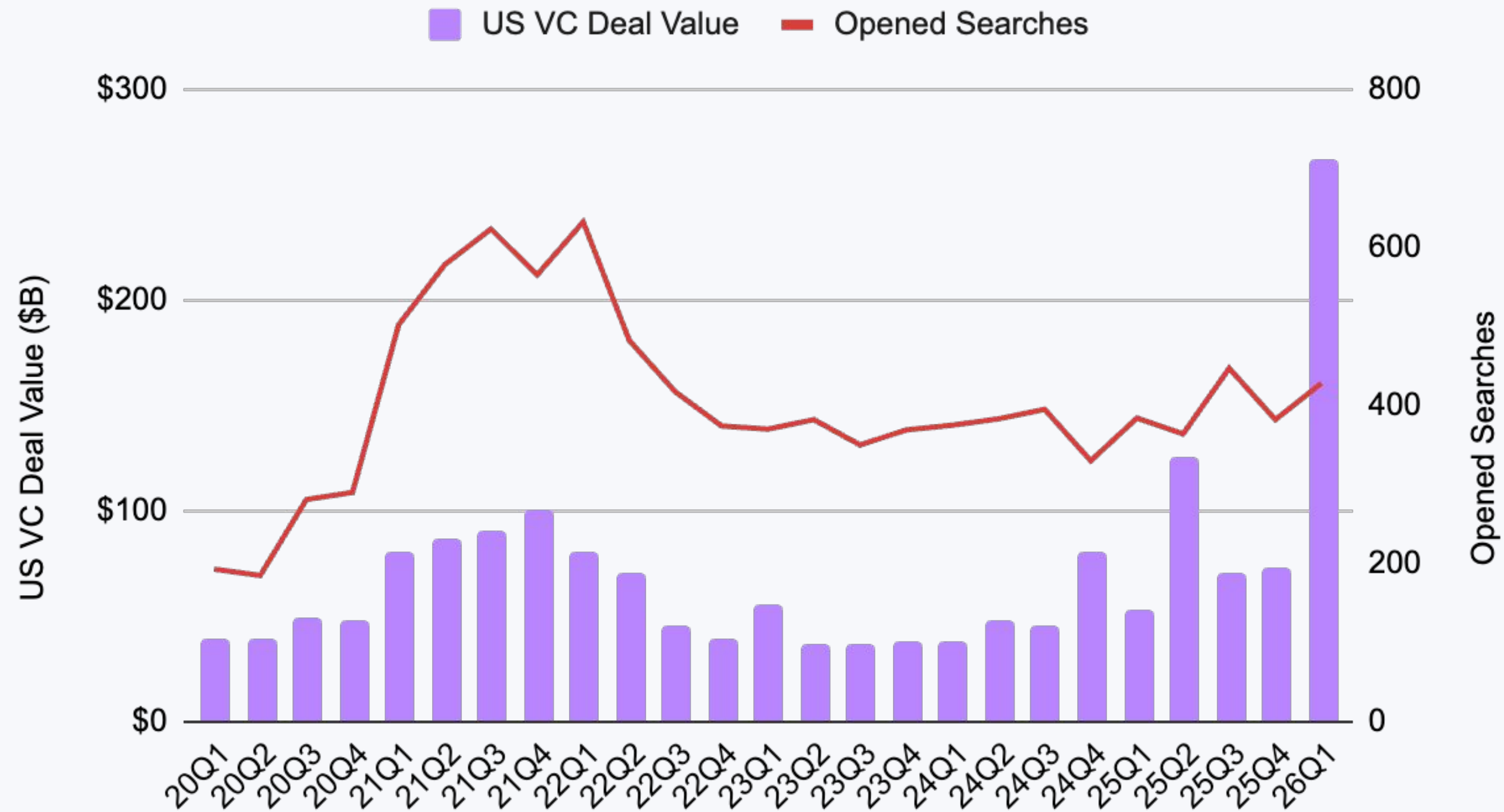
	Base		OTE	
CEO/President/GM	\$433K	8%	\$683K	11%
Engineering	\$350K	0%	\$496K	-5%
Finance	\$333K	2%	\$499K	8%
Human Resources	\$318K	-2%	\$448K	-2%
Marketing	\$335K	-4%	\$457K	-8%
Other	\$290K	14%	\$409K	20%
Product	\$308K	-12%	\$443K	-11%
Sales/Business Development	\$250K	-22%	\$470K	-11%

CHAPTER 4

# Venture Capital Deep Dive

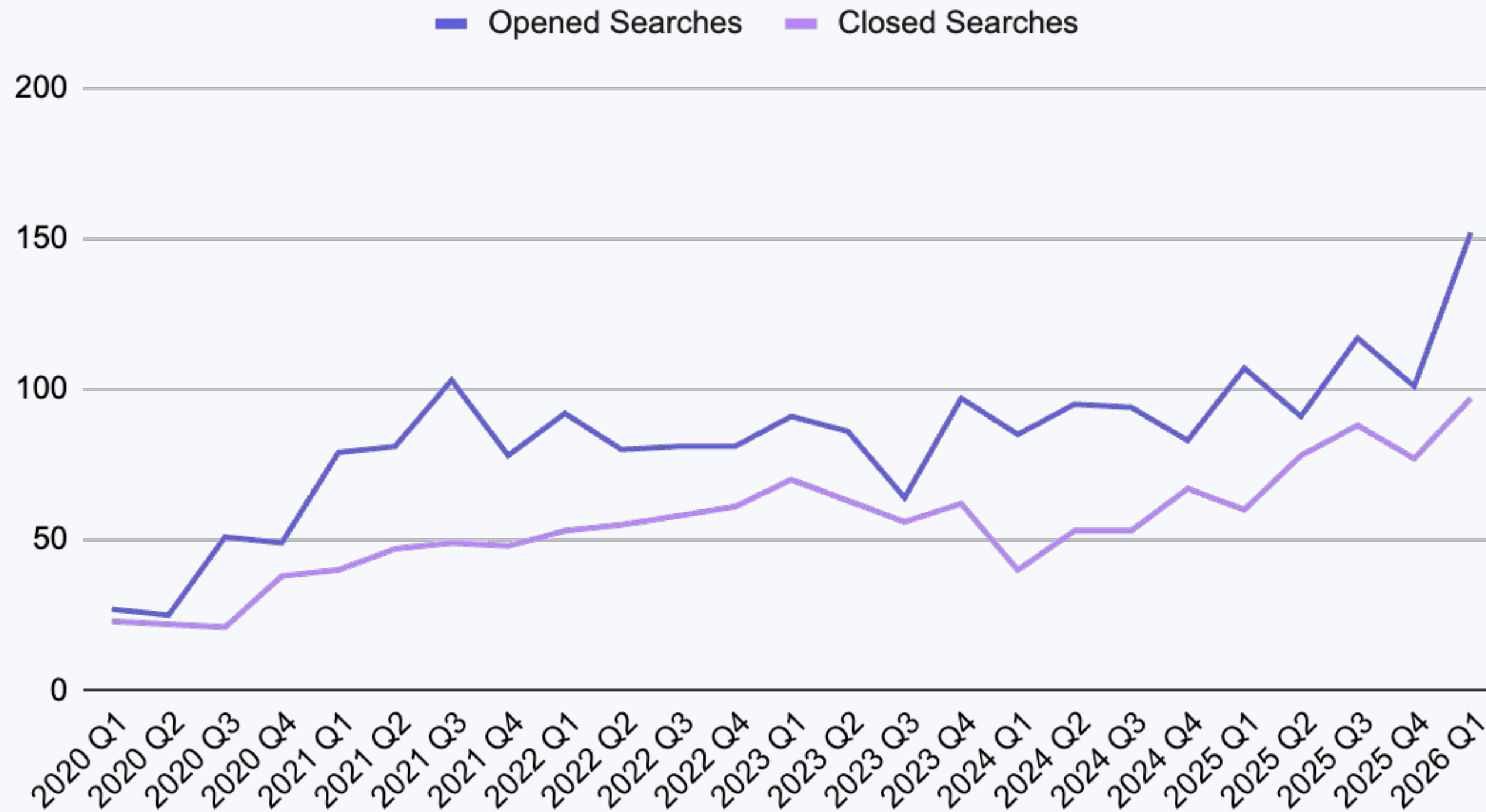
Search Volume

### VC Leadership Hiring v. US VC Deal Value



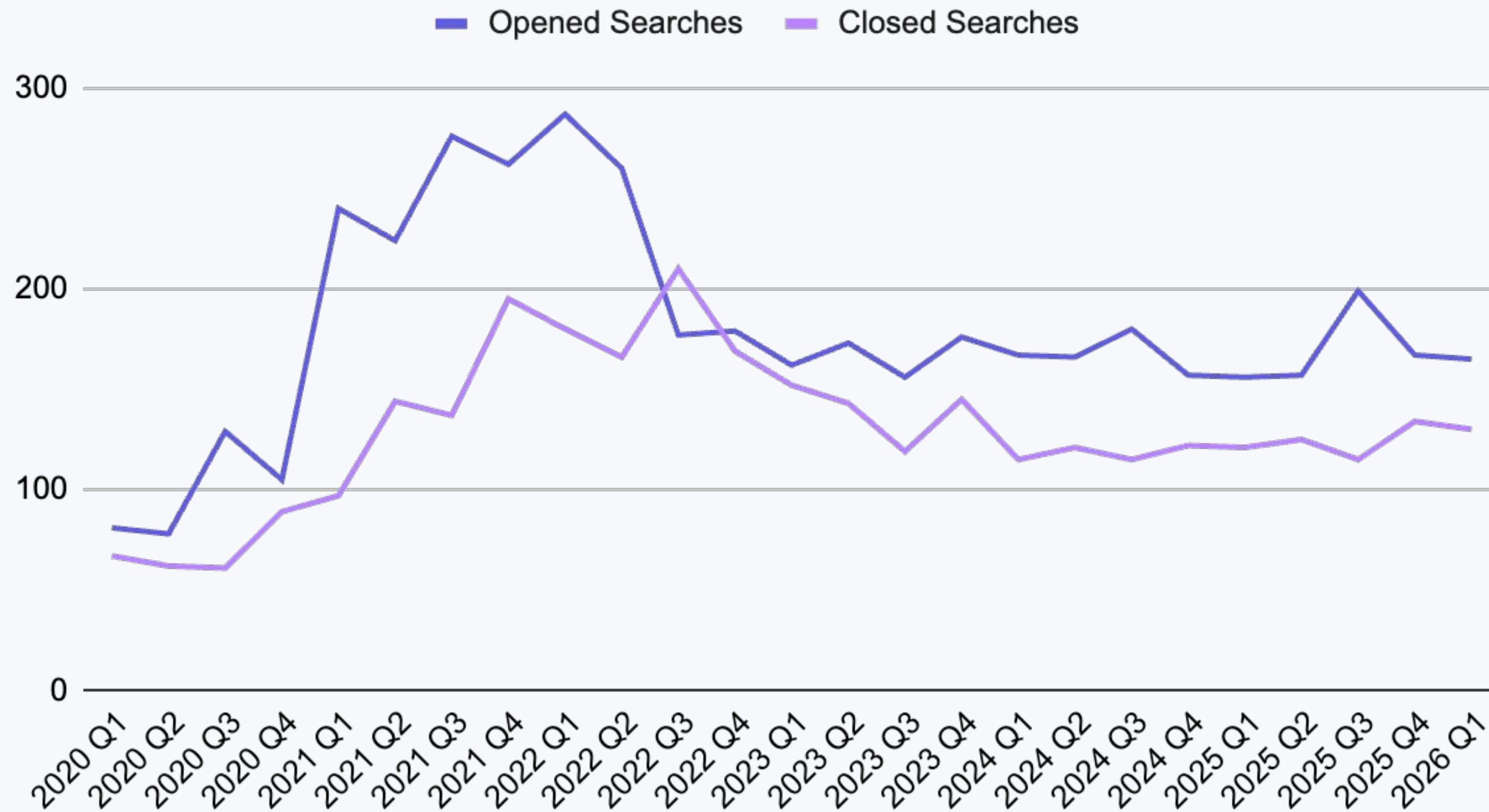
## Search Volume

### Seed/Series A Leadership Hiring Trends



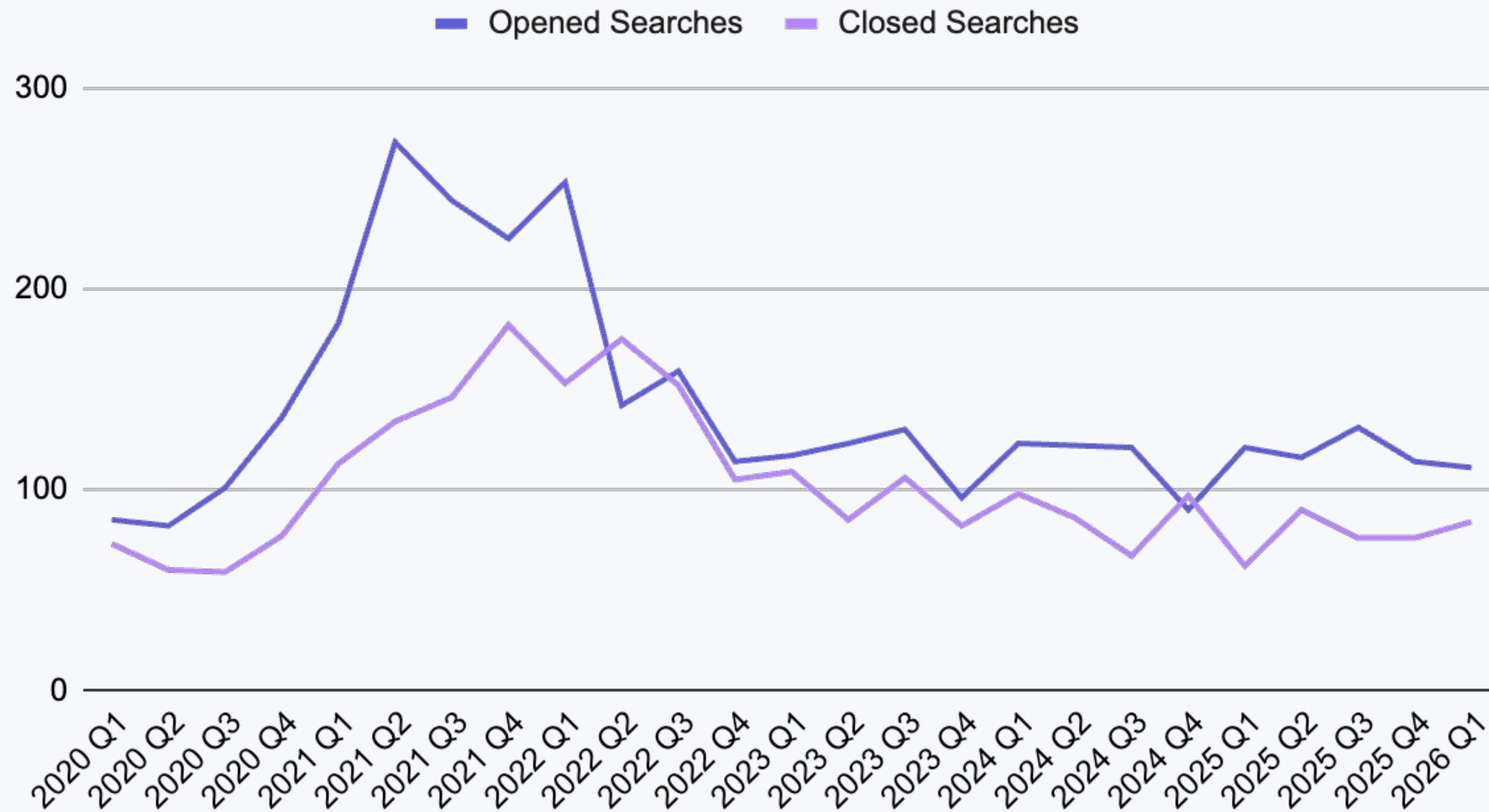
## Search Volume

### Series B & C Leadership Hiring Trends



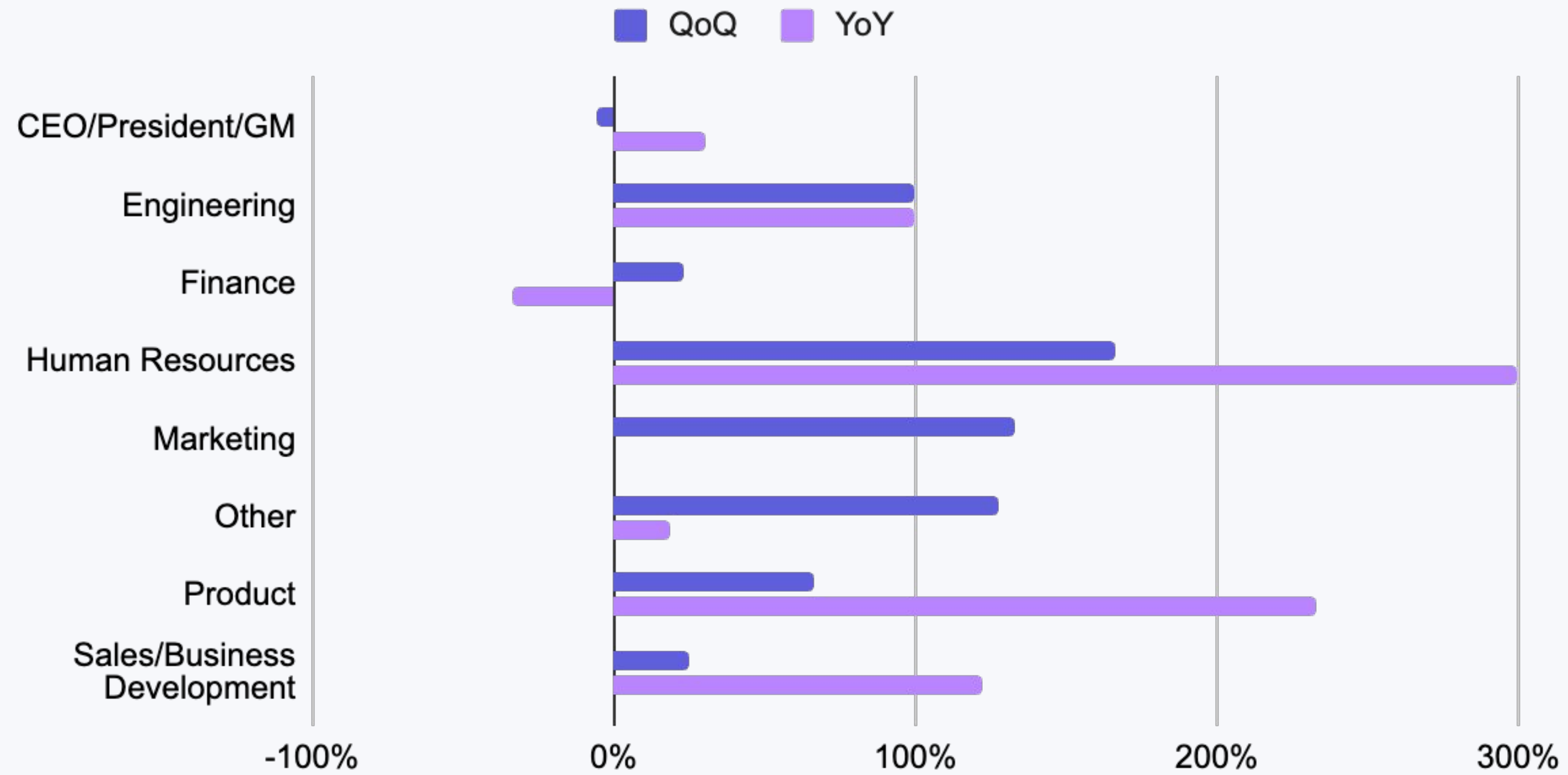
## Search Volume

### Series D+ Leadership Hiring Trends



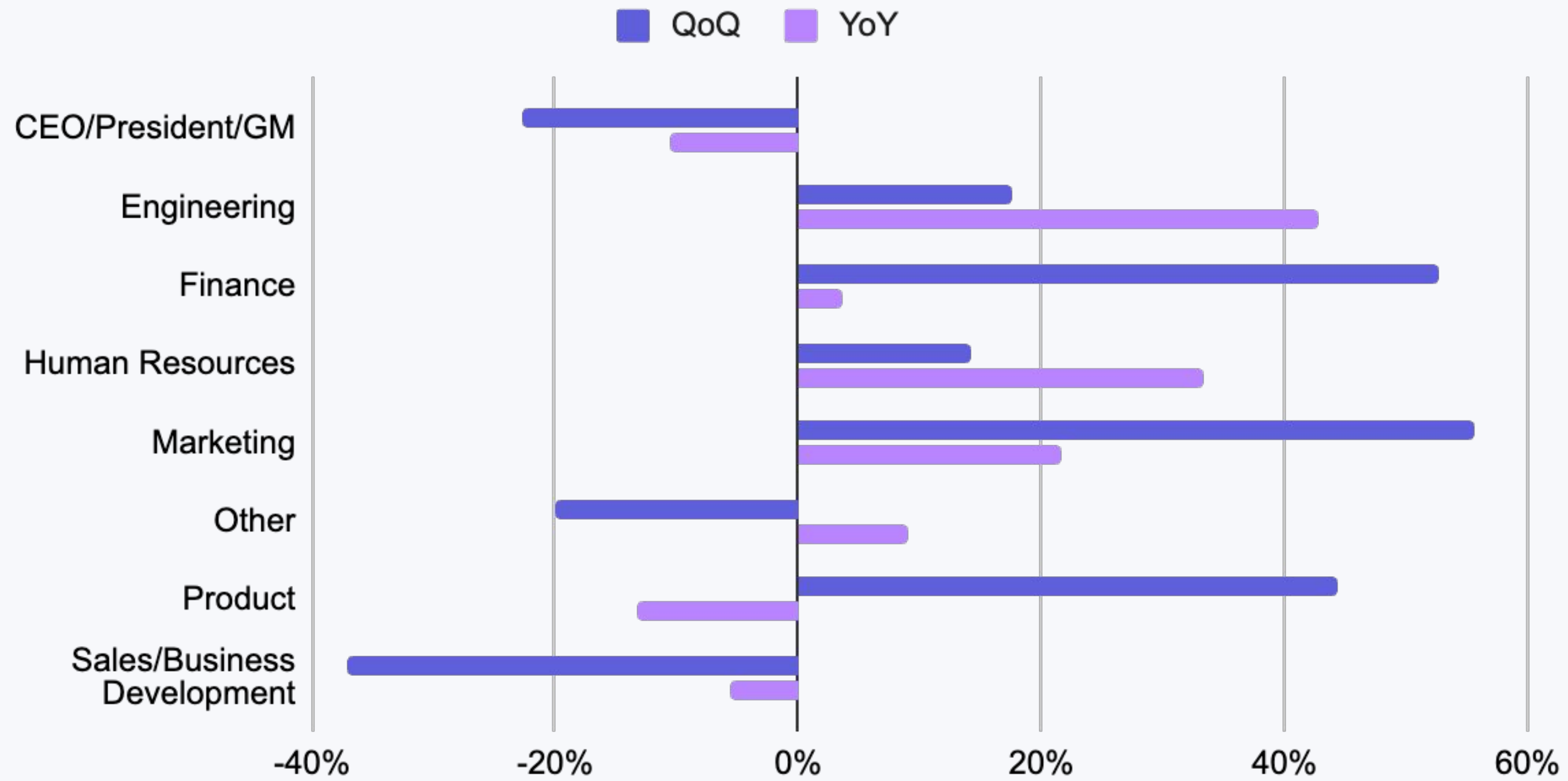
## Search Volume

### Change in Seed/Series A Leadership Demand by Function



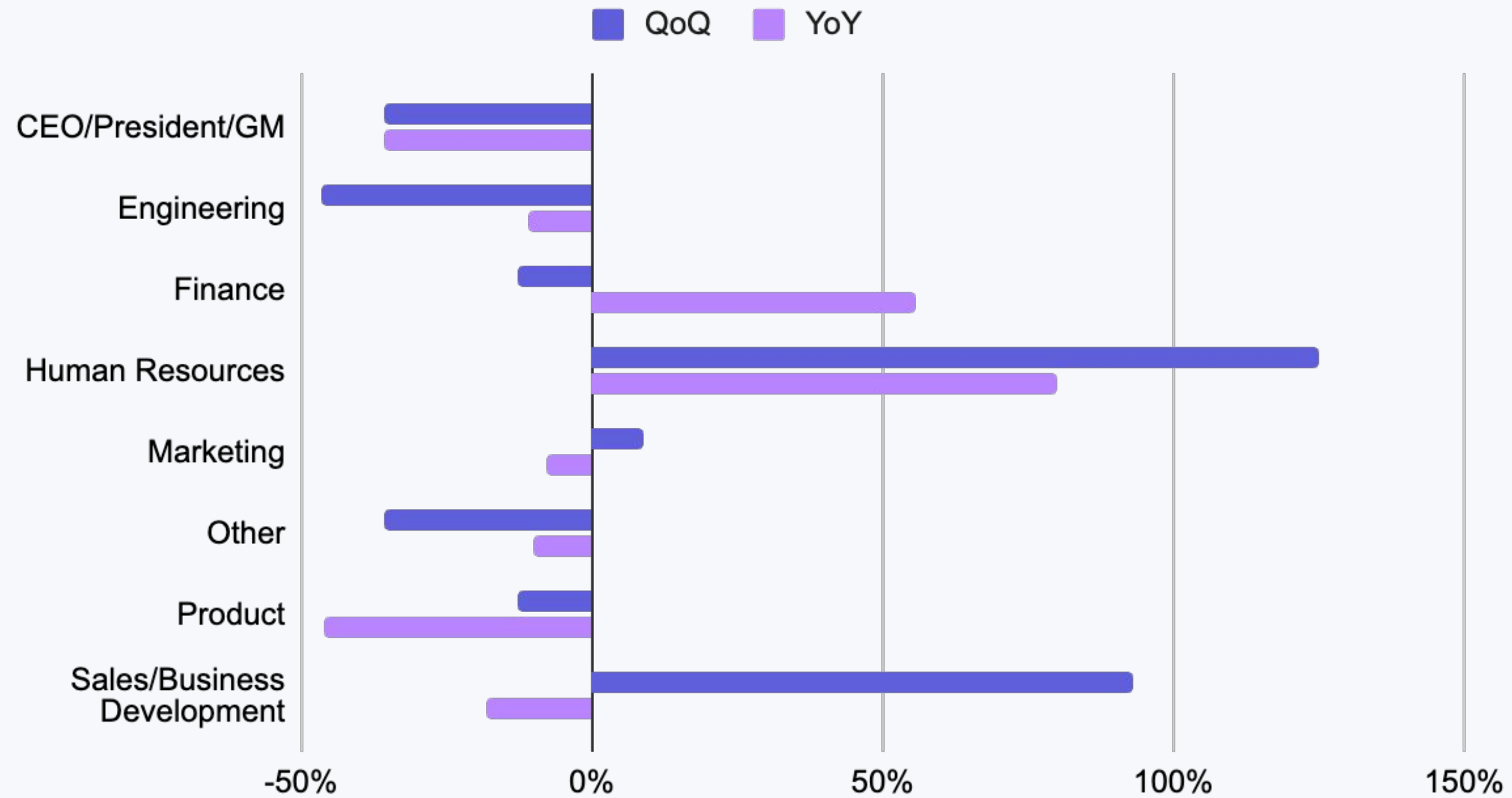
## Search Volume

### Change in Series B/C Leadership Demand by Function



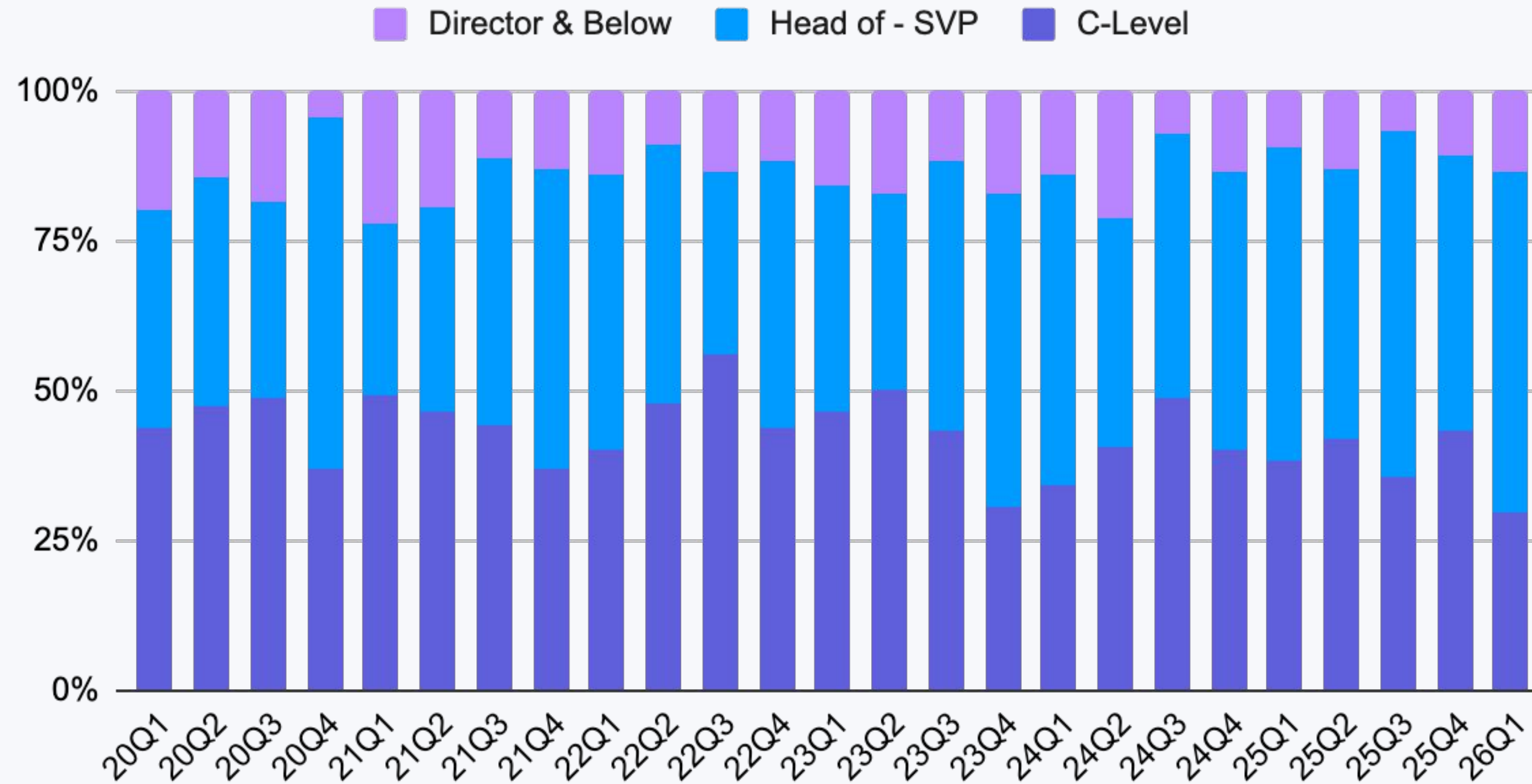
## Search Volume

### Change in Series D+ Leadership Demand by Function



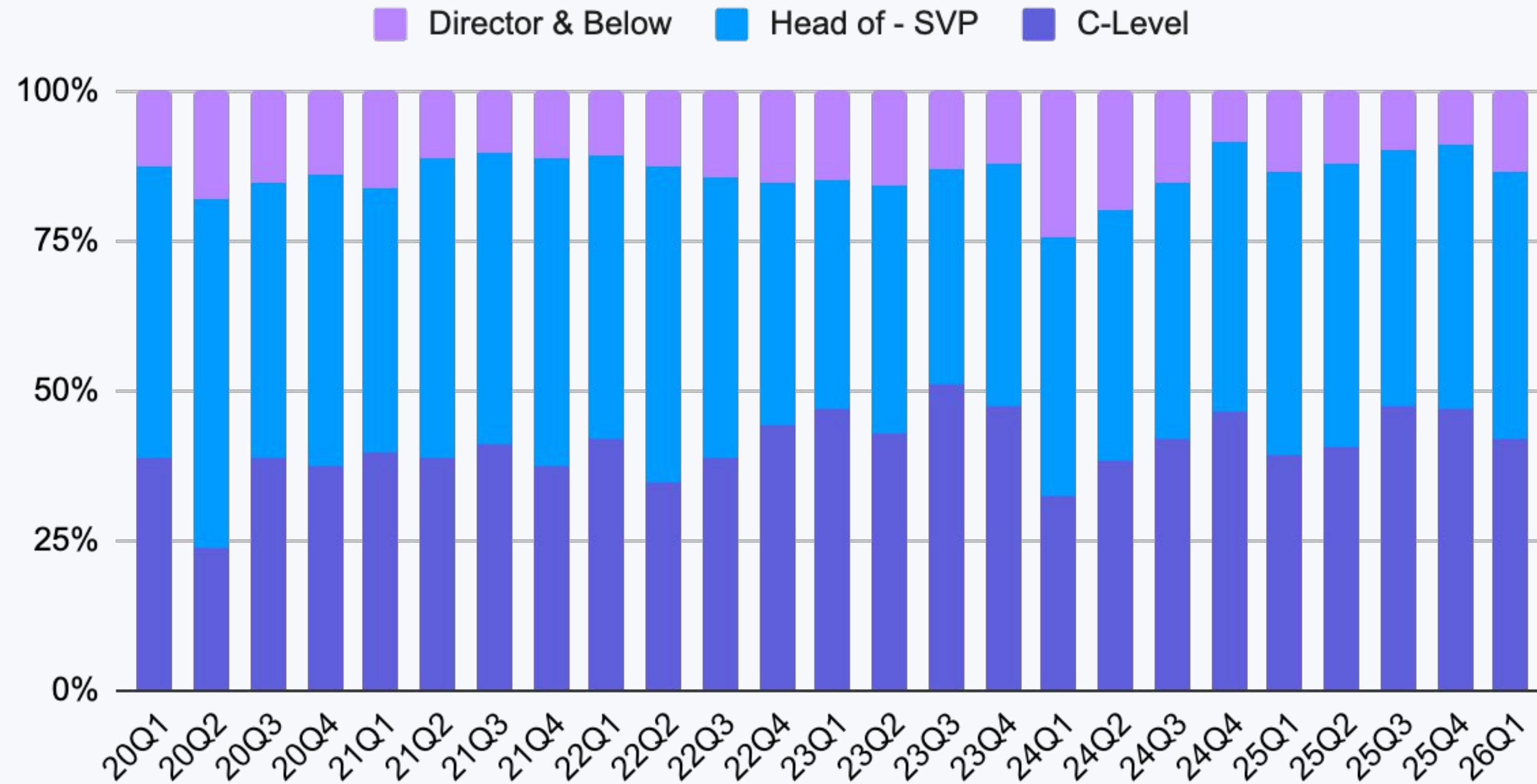
## Search Volume

### Seed/Series A Share of Opened Searches By Exec Level



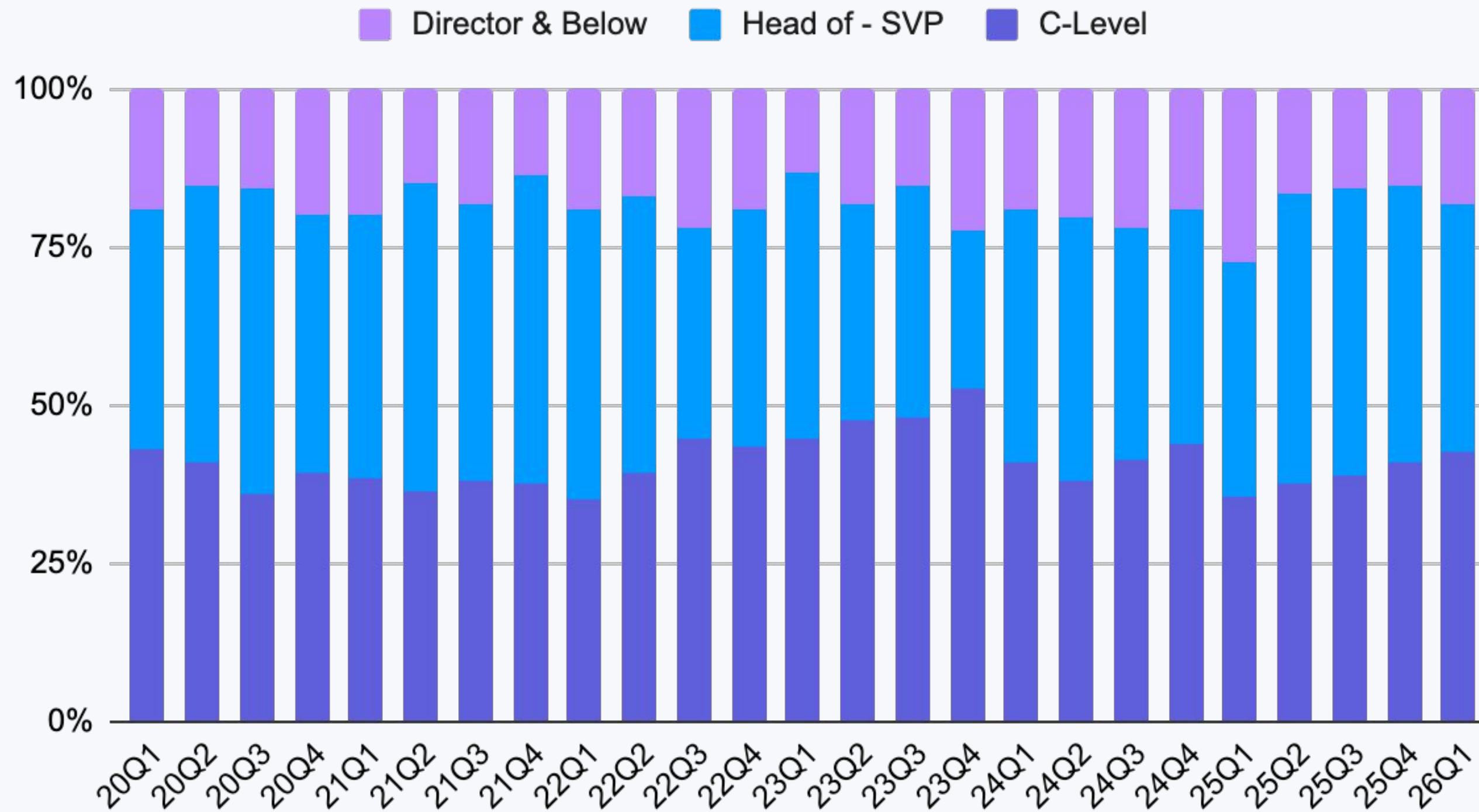
Search Volume

### Series B/C Share of Opened Searches By Exec Level



Search Volume

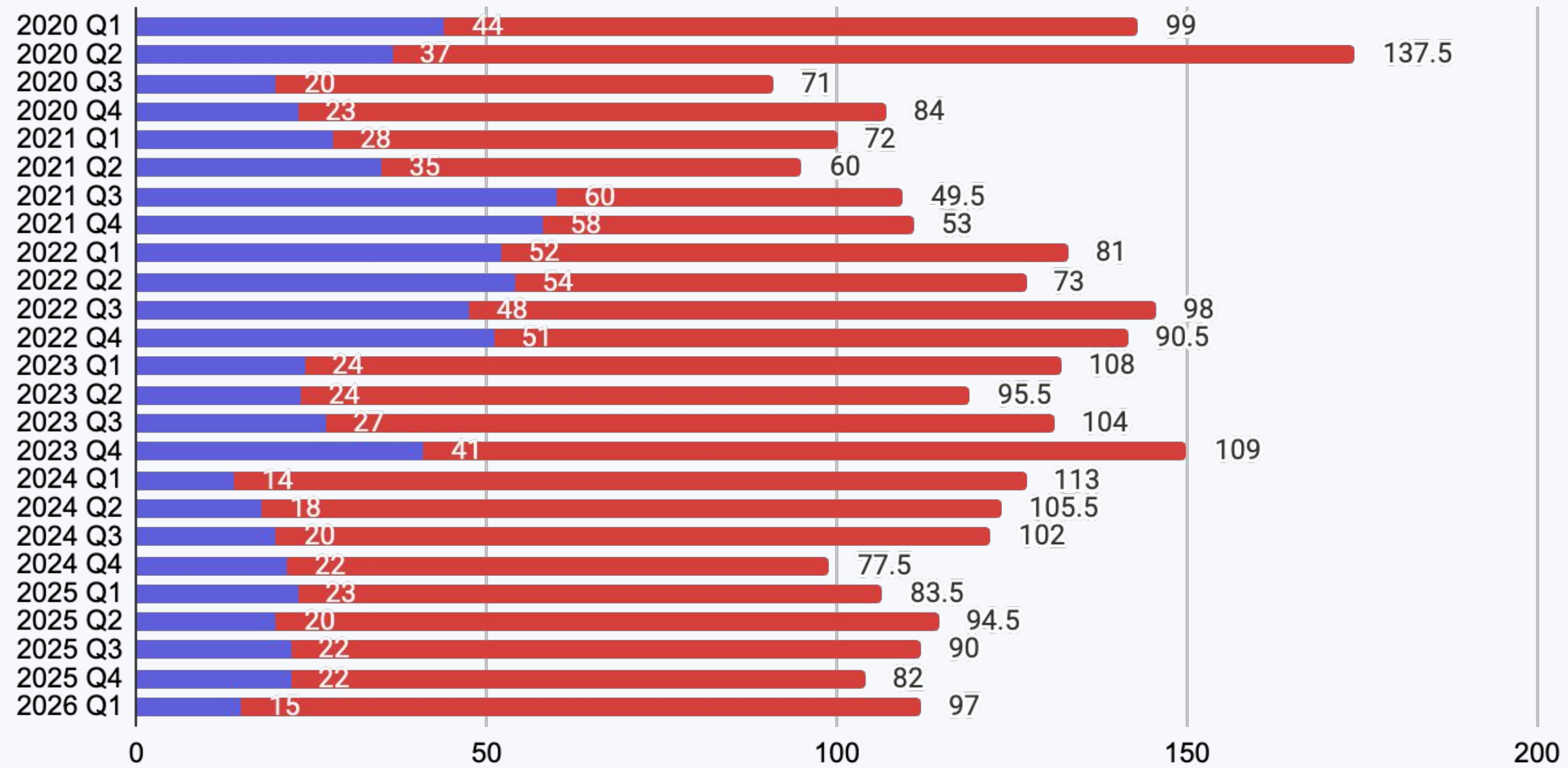
### Series D+ Share of Opened Searches By Exec Level



**Search Velocity**

**Seed/Series A Search Velocity Trend**

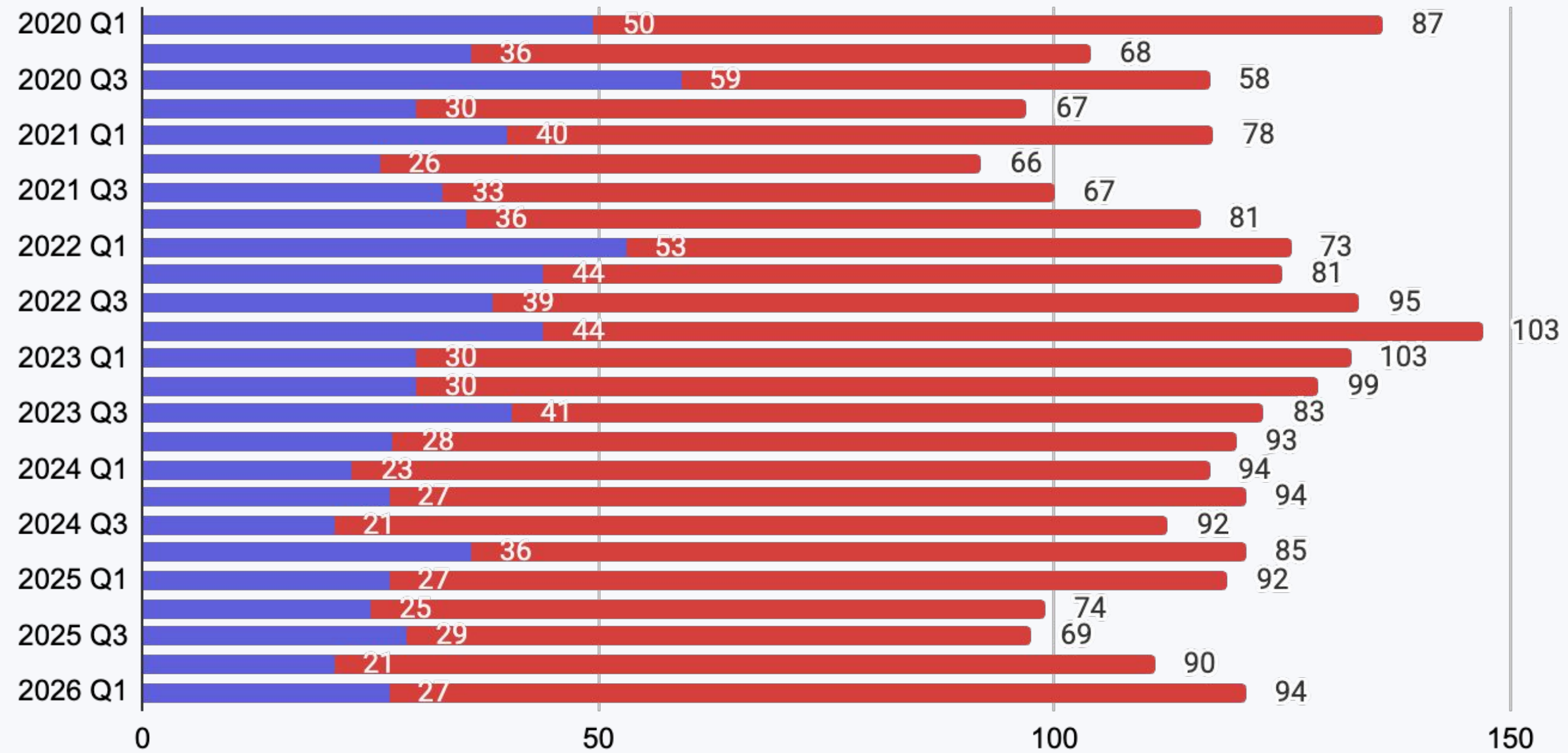
■ Days to Identify Placement   ■ Days After Placement Identified



**Search Velocity**

**Series B/C Search Velocity Trend**

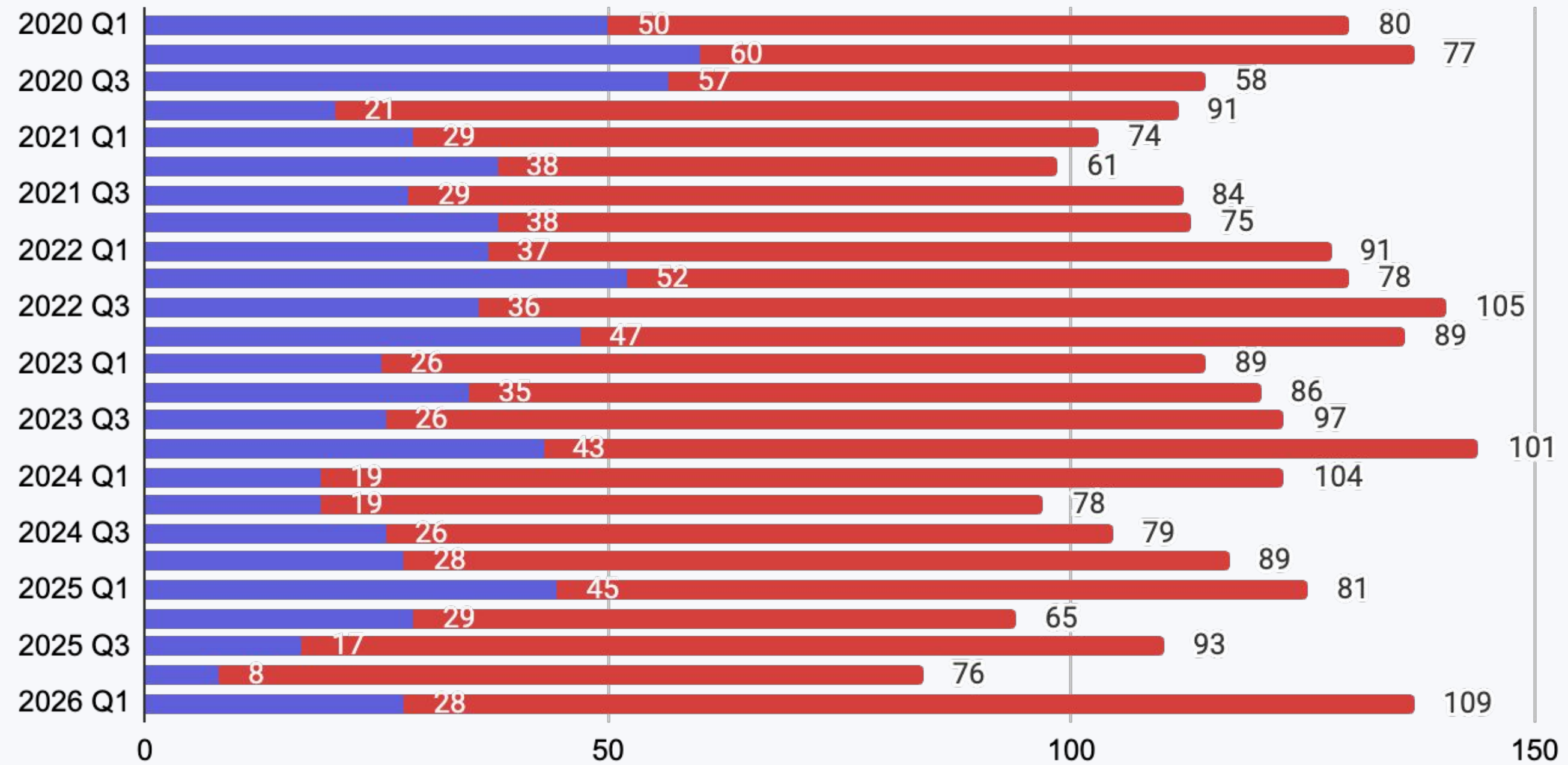
■ Days to Identify Placement   ■ Days After Placement Identified



**Search Velocity**

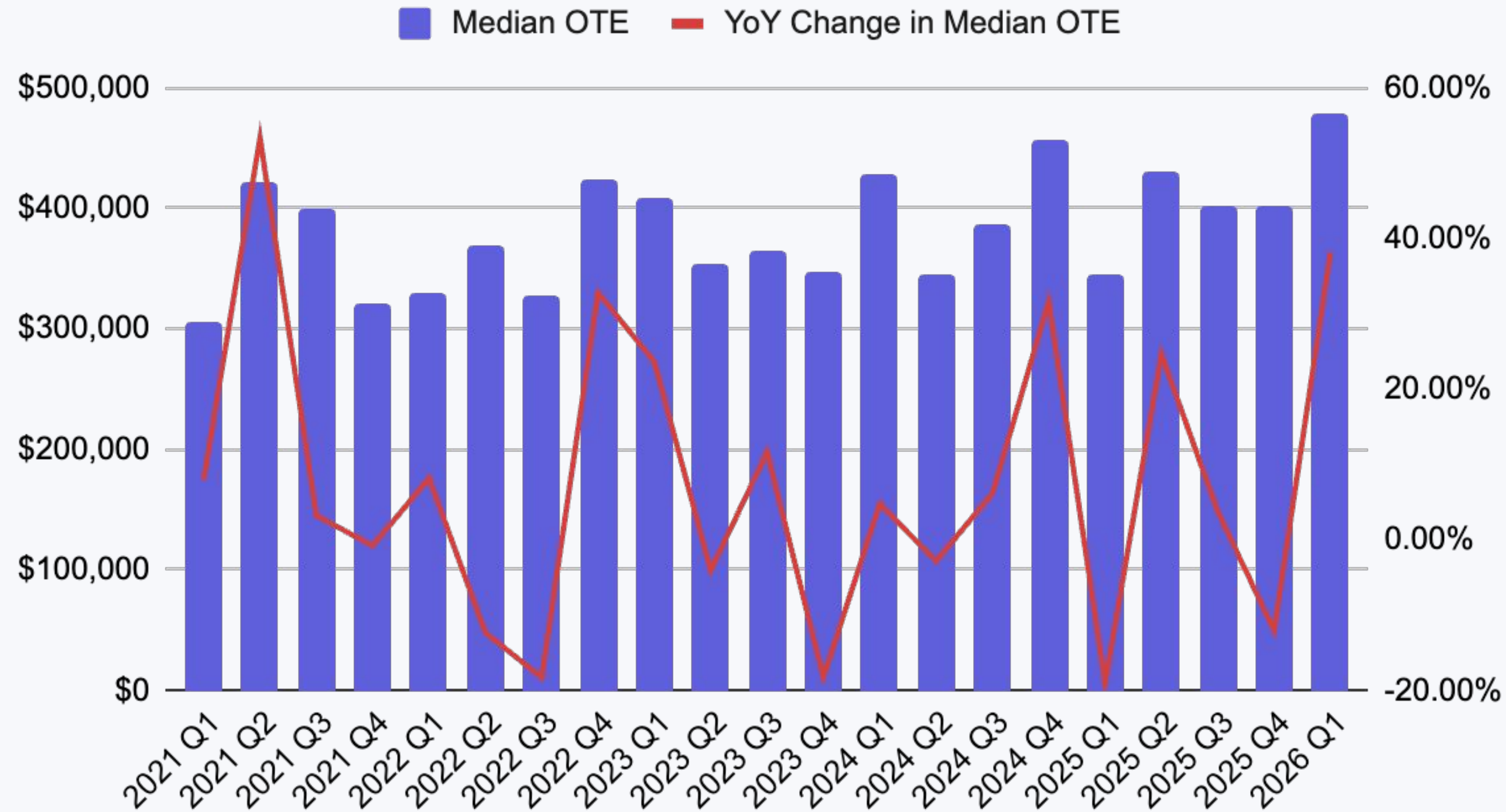
**Series D+ Search Velocity Trend**

■ Days to Identify Placement   ■ Days After Placement Identified



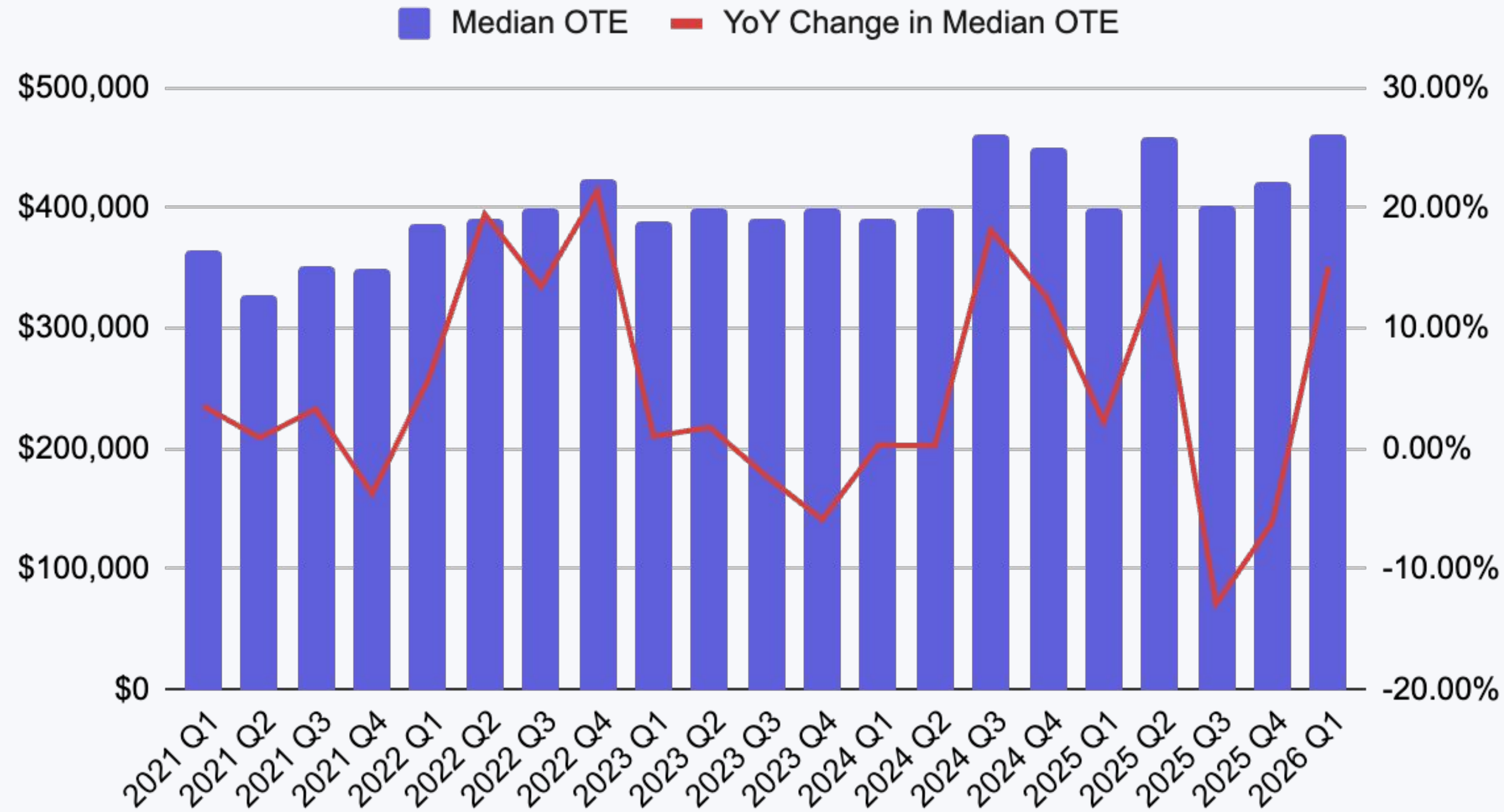
**Compensation**

**Seed/Series A Median OTE Trend**



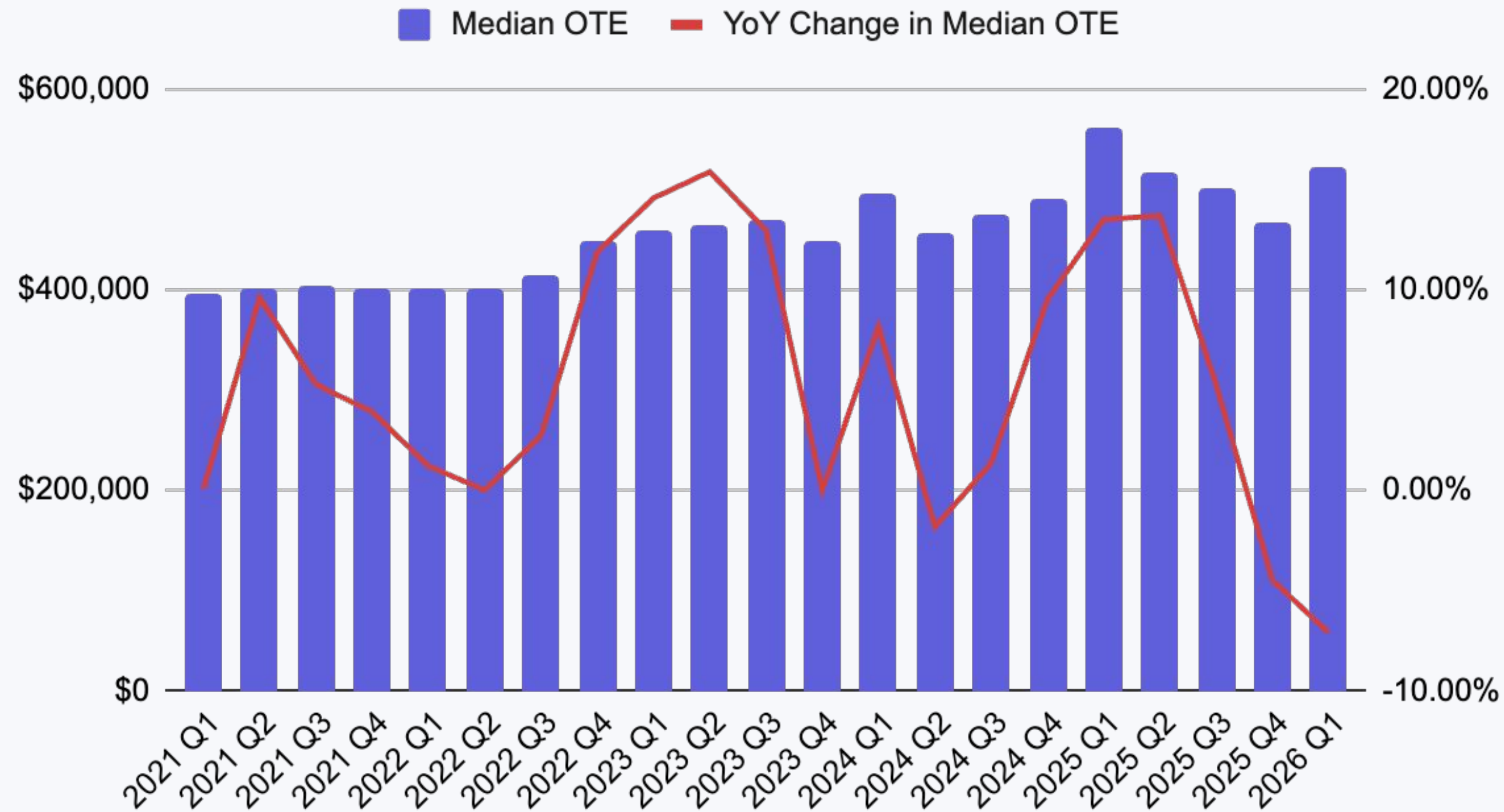
## Compensation

### Series B/C Median OTE Trend



**Compensation**

**Series D+ Median OTE Trend**



## Compensation

### YoY Change in Seed/Series A Compensation By Function

Q1 FY26 and Q1 FY25

	Base		OTE	
CEO/President/GM	\$350K	17%	\$518K	18%
Engineering	\$338K	23%	\$388K	14%
Finance	\$400K	4%	\$530K	27%
Human Resources	\$300K	43%	\$377K	51%
Marketing	\$325K	55%	\$378K	58%
Other	\$315K	5%	\$403K	-4%
Product	\$315K	2%	\$359K	-3%
Sales/Business Development	\$275K	0%	\$548K	4%

## Compensation

### YoY Change in Series B/C Compensation By Function

Q1 FY26 and Q1 FY25

	Base		OTE	
CEO/President/GM	\$375K	7%	\$563K	13%
Engineering	\$350K	0%	\$415K	-8%
Finance	\$385K	28%	\$585K	54%
Human Resources	\$254K	-17%	\$329K	-12%
Marketing	\$315K	15%	\$415K	17%
Other	\$270K	13%	\$313K	5%
Product	\$330K	-6%	\$415K	-1%
Sales/Business Development	\$300K	0%	\$575K	5%

## Compensation

### YoY Change in Series D+ Compensation By Function

Q1 FY26 and Q1 FY25

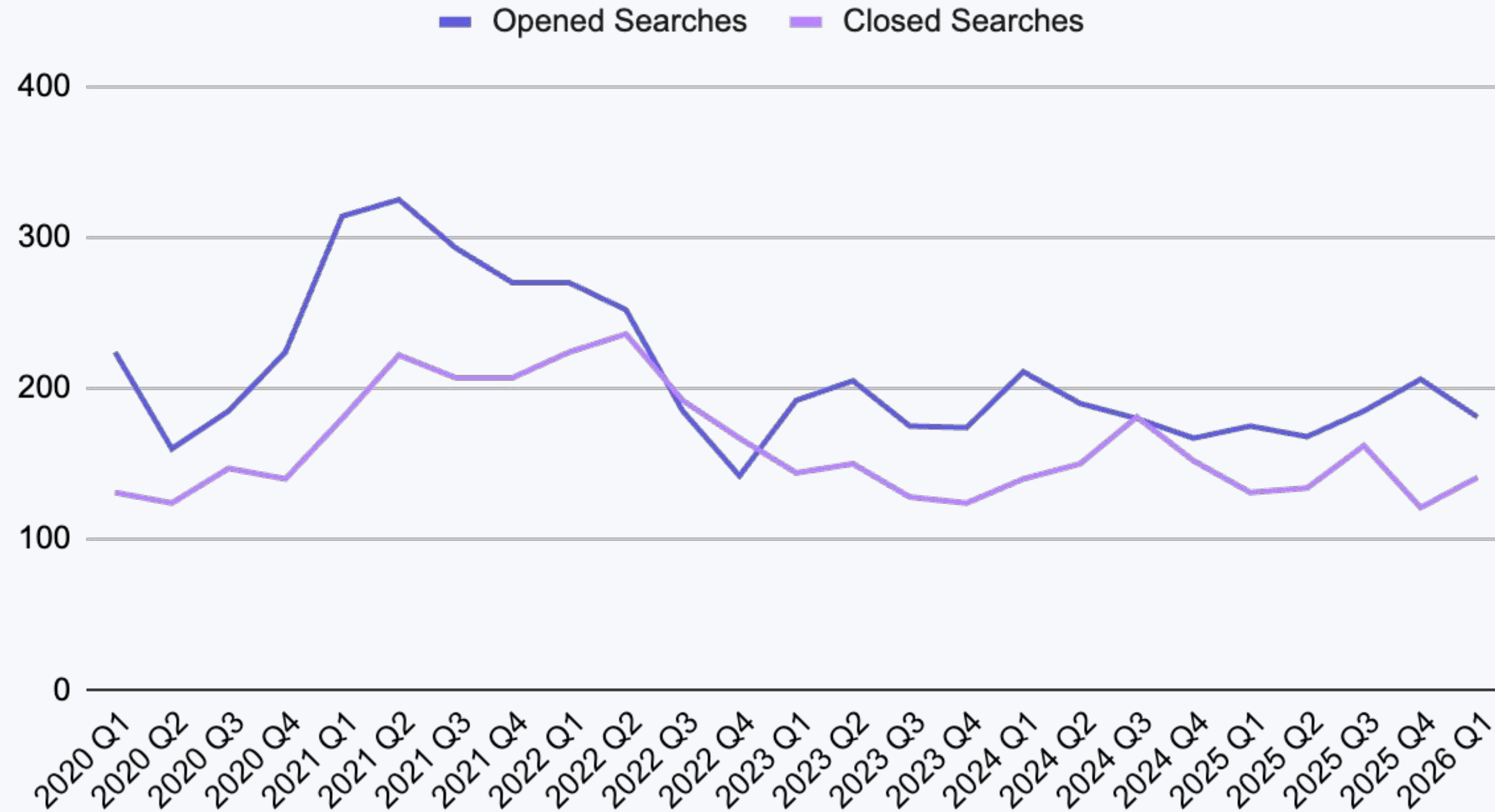
	Base		OTE	
CEO/President/GM	\$425K	-11%	\$638K	-18%
Engineering	\$380K	-5%	\$513K	-15%
Finance	\$450K	32%	\$583K	32%
Human Resources	\$400K	74%	\$500K	55%
Marketing	\$350K	8%	\$438K	11%
Other	\$320K	3%	\$415K	3%
Product	\$400K	0%	\$435K	-22%
Sales/Business Development	\$350K	6%	\$650K	-1%

CHAPTER 2

# Public Company Deep Dive

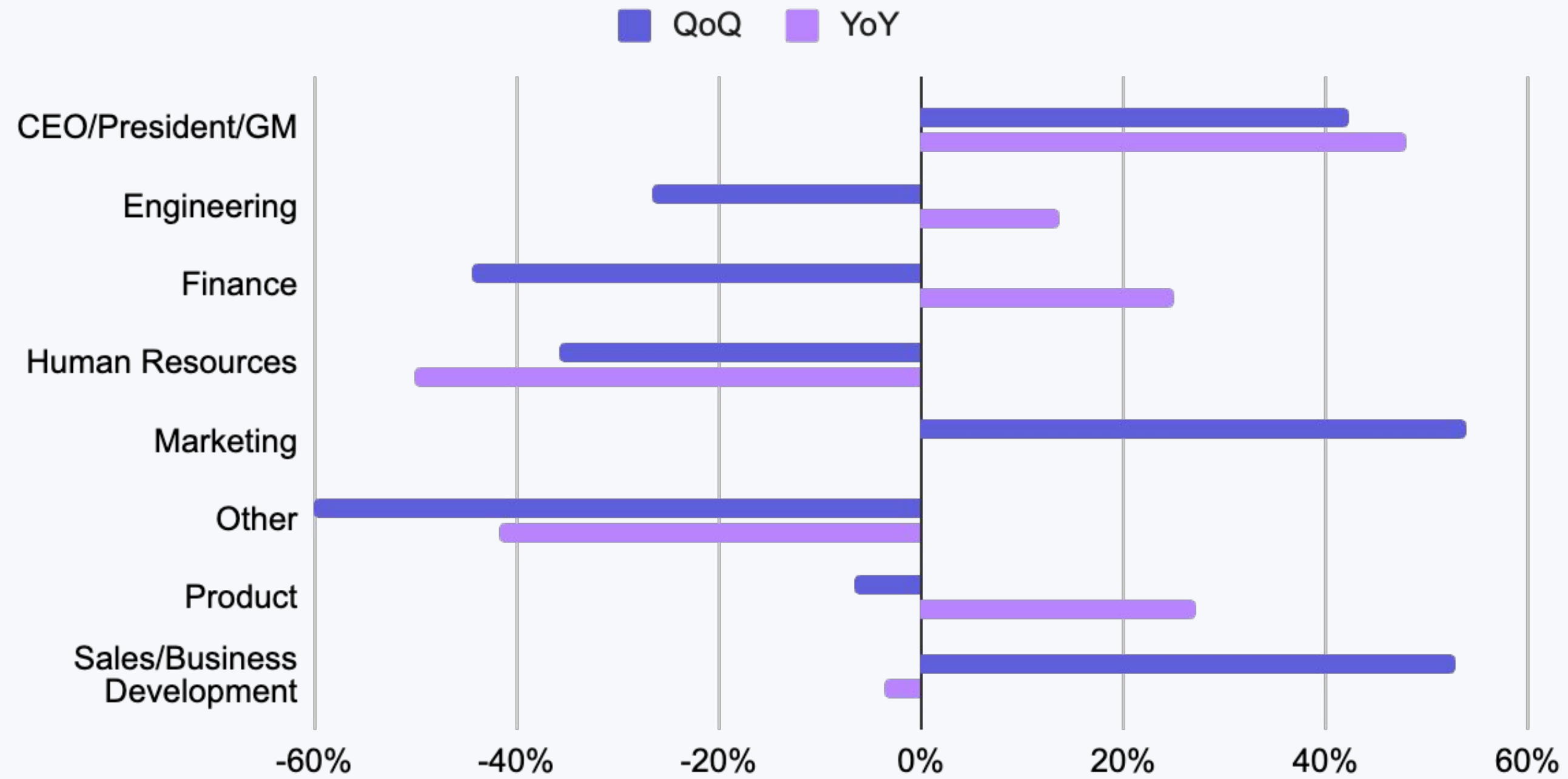
## Search Volume

### Public Company Leadership Hiring Trends



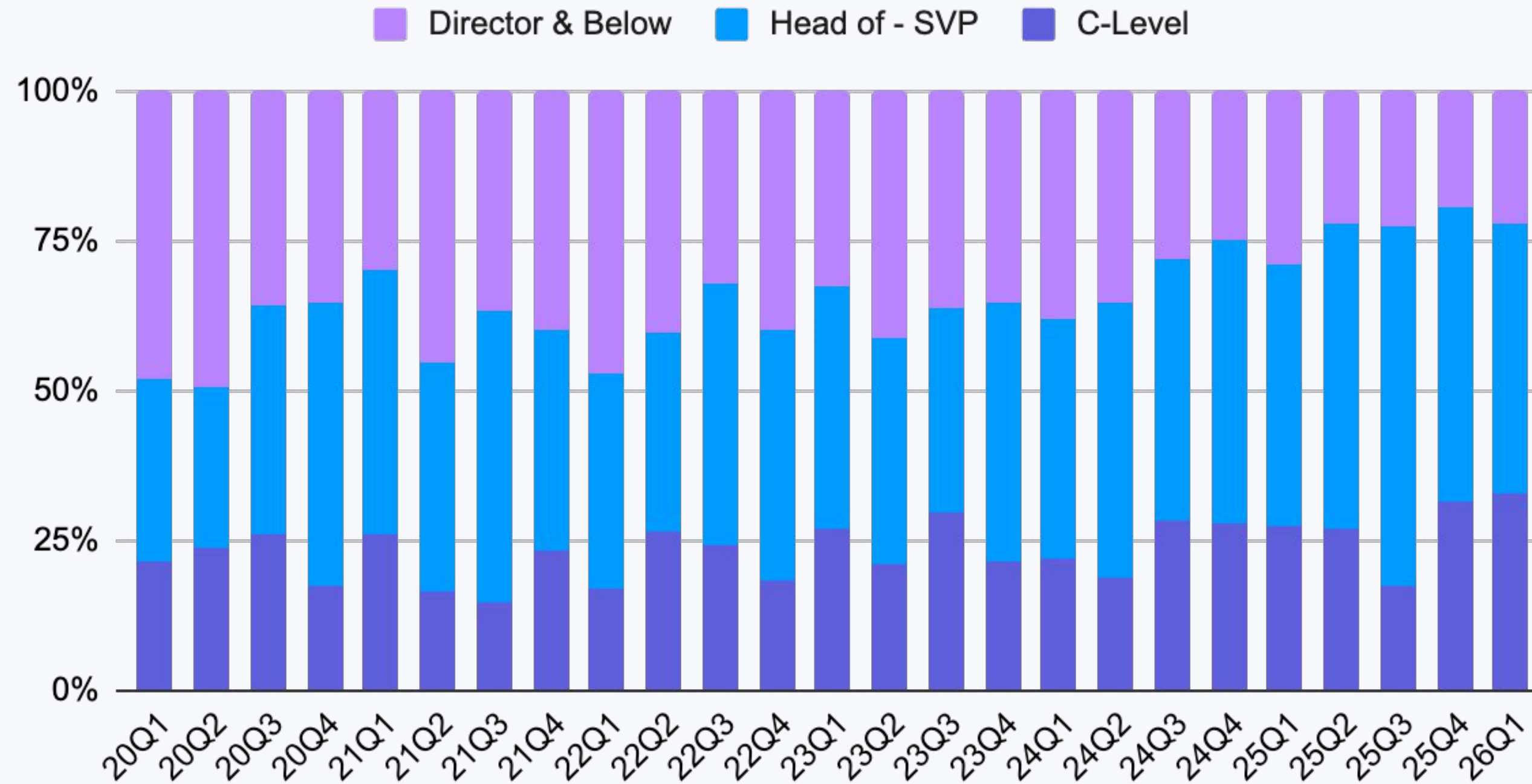
## Search Volume

# Change in Public Company Leadership Demand by Function



Search Volume

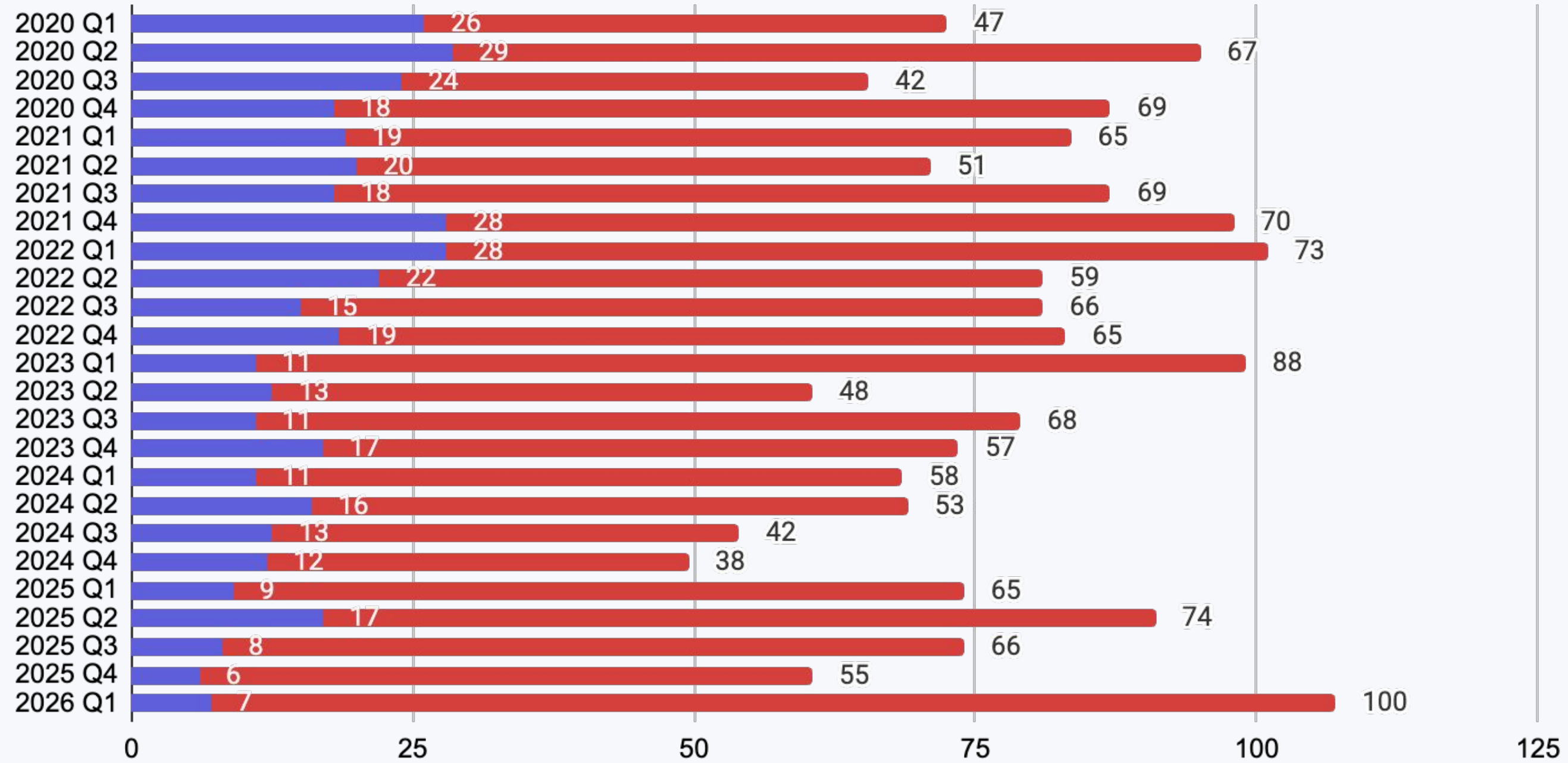
## Public Company Share of Opened Searches By Exec Level



## Search Velocity

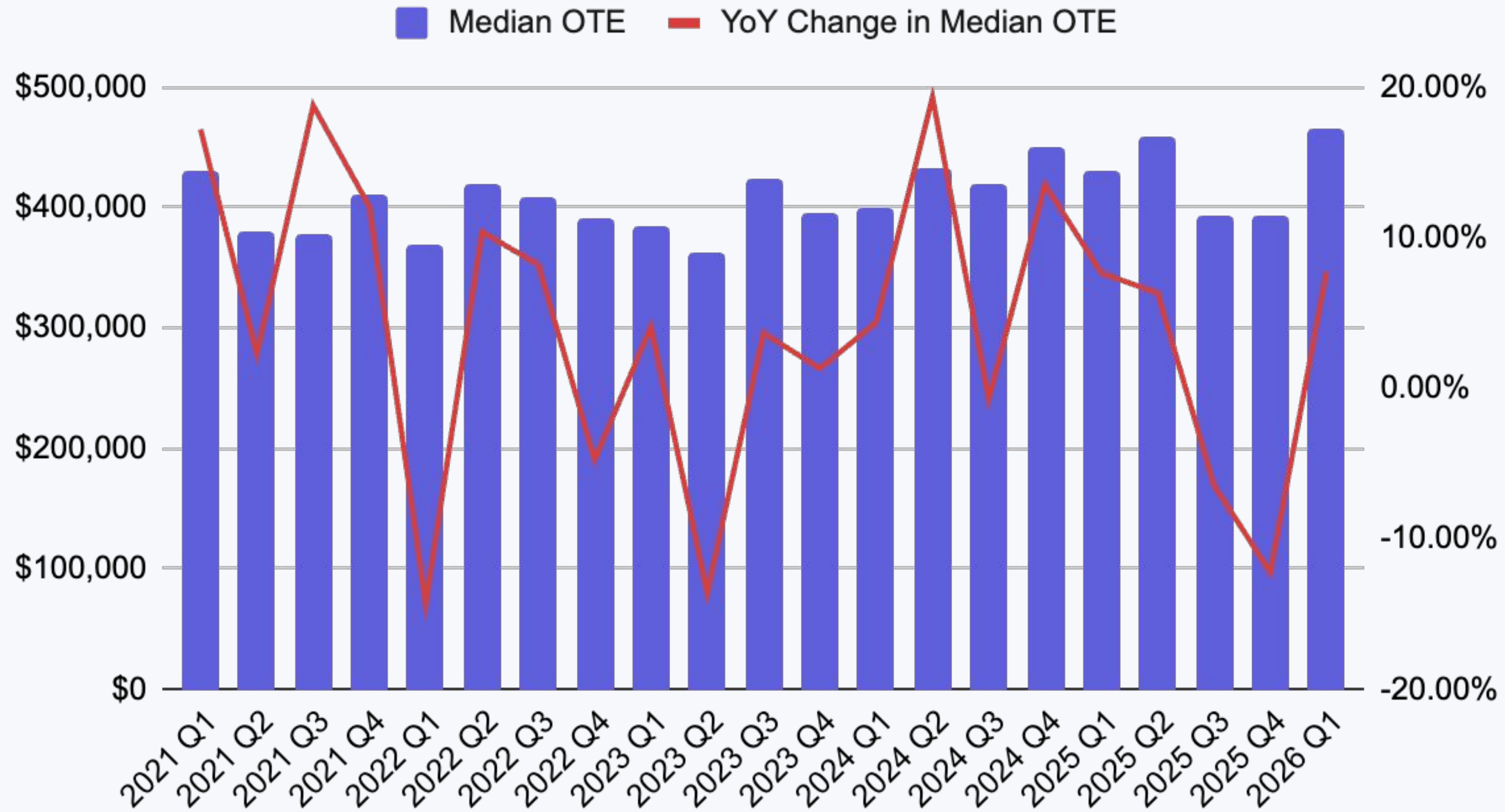
### Public Company Search Velocity Trend

■ Days to Identify Placement ■ Days After Placement Identified



**Compensation**

**Public Company Median OTE Trend**



## Compensation

### YoY Change in Public Company Compensation By Function

Q1 FY26 and Q1 FY25

	Base		OTE	
CEO/President/GM	\$363K	14%	\$527K	14%
Engineering	\$400K	27%	\$600K	23%
Finance	\$305K	2%	\$424K	9%
Human Resources	\$363K	10%	\$513K	19%
Marketing	\$300K	15%	\$423K	23%
Other	\$324K	-3%	\$429K	-7%
Product	\$278K	-8%	\$397K	-12%
Sales/Business Development	\$360K	10%	\$502K	9%

CHAPTER 6

# About the Report

# Report Overview

This report was developed to provide executive recruiters and talent leaders with data-backed insights to help them both gain a better understanding of the industry, market, and environment they operate in and make more informed decisions.

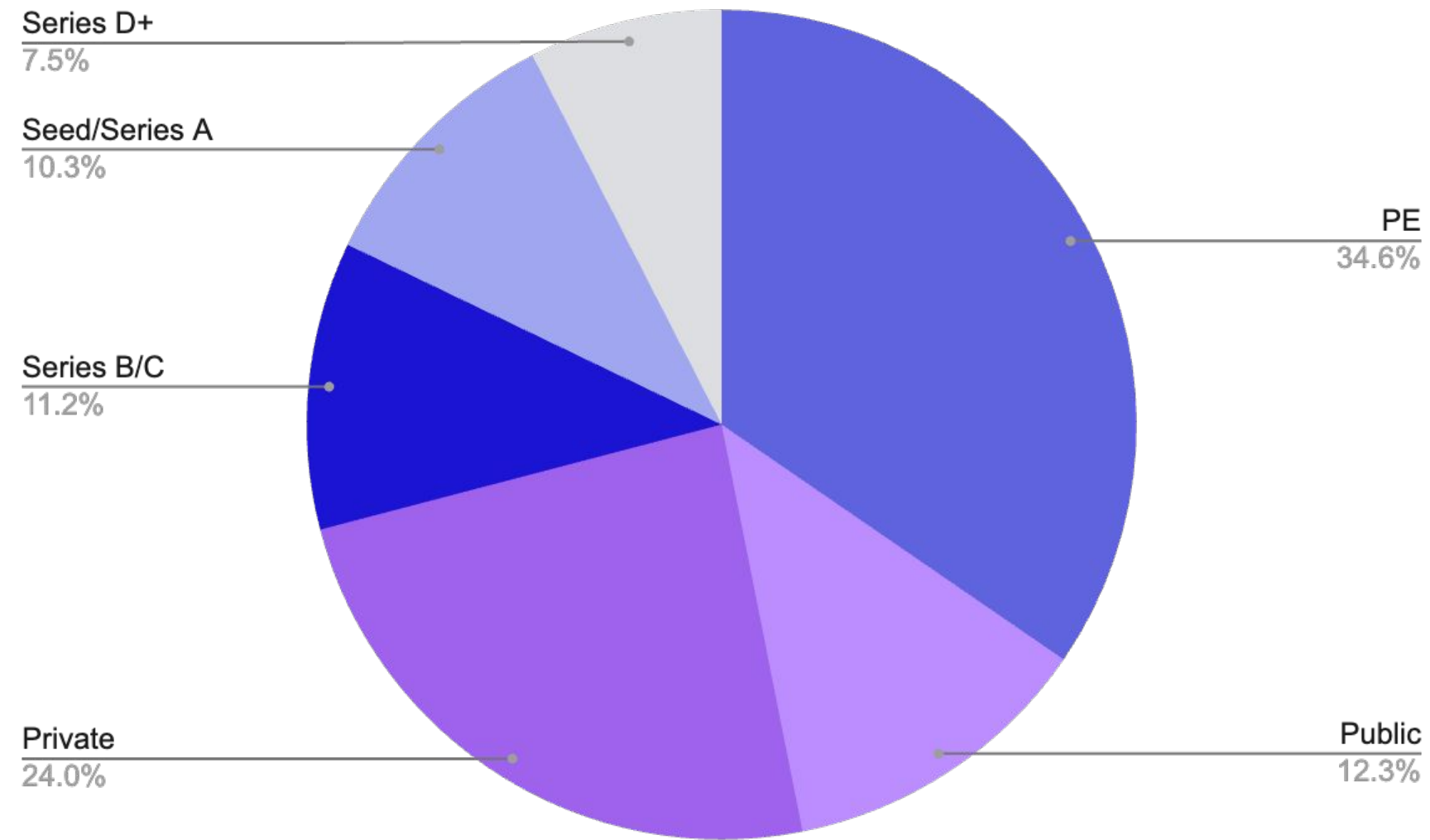
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We anonymized and aggregated our data from more than 31,000 compensation and search records to construct the benchmarks, statistics, and trends you will see in this report. We also cross-referenced relevant industry analysis and sources to understand how leadership recruiting is being impacted by rapidly evolving macro and socioeconomic events, in addition to recent extreme volatility in growth markets.

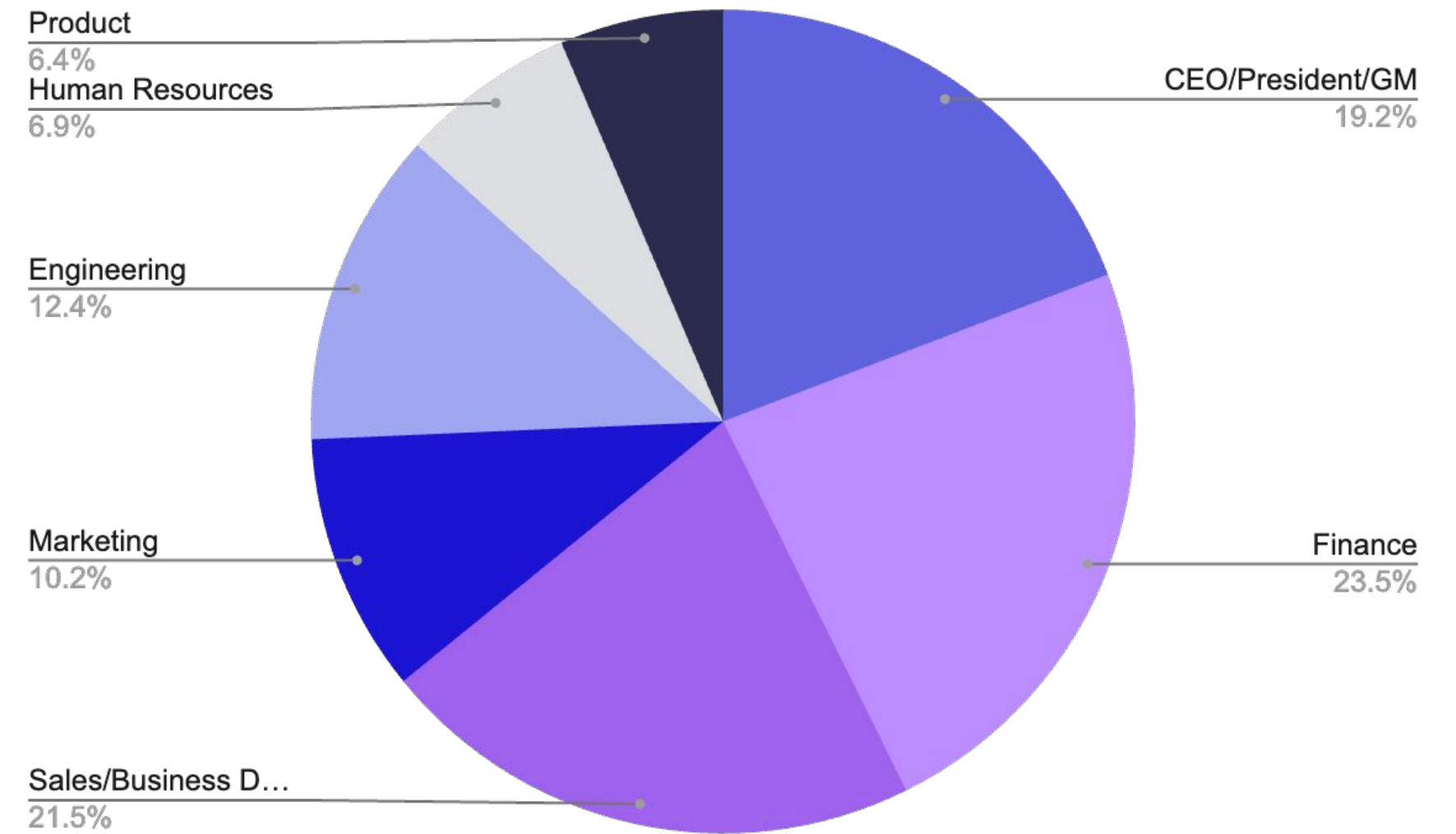
Our data and combined research uncovered leading indicators for executive hiring, how public and private market fluctuations impact demand for leadership hiring, why VCs have been impacted more than others, what the forecast is for leadership hiring over the next few quarters, as well as trends with executive compensation benchmarks.



### Asset Class Breakdown



### Function Breakdown



FULL DATA ANALYSIS TIME FRAME

# Q1 2020 - Q1 2026