

# WittKieffer underlines industry inclination for internal promotions

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WittKieffer has highlighted how internal promotions outpaced external recruitment in the animal health sector during 2025.

The company is a specialist in executive search, leadership advisory, and interim and on-demand leadership. It regularly tracks the [number of appointments and departures](#) by major players in the animal health and nutrition sectors.

According to WittKieffer, the fourth quarter of 2025 concluded “a dynamic year of senior management moves across 40 leading animal health and nutrition companies in Europe and the US”. The firm recorded 112 appointments during Q4. During this period, internal promotions surged to 77% (the highest proportion observed in 2025) – signaling commitment to homegrown talent strategies.

WittKieffer pointed out large corporations – including Boehringer Ingelheim, Covetrus, Elanco, Mars (across all veterinary divisions), Nestlé Purina Petcare and Zoetis – demonstrated strong internal mobility across their commercial, marketing, data and technology, and enterprise services functions in Q4.

Joe Kennedy – managing director for WittKieffer’s animal health team – told S&P Global Animal Health: “The fourth quarter’s 37 senior departures reflected natural succession patterns – 11% were retirements, 30% remained within the animal health industry and 59% transitioned to adjacent or other industries (among known departures). This trend suggests experienced leaders in animal health remain highly attractive across diverse sectors.”

Swedish pet health business Vimian appointed [Alireza Tajbakhsh](#) to the position of chief executive in the fourth quarter of 2023. Mr Tajbakhsh joined Vimian in 2021 and was previously the firm’s head of the veterinary services segment and interim head of the medical technology division. Vimian said Mr Tajbakhsh has “extensive international leadership experience from fast-growing entrepreneurial companies in the media and life science sectors”. He has worked in senior management positions at Omnicom Media Group and Modern Times Group.

WittKieffer said Mr Tajbakhsh “exemplifies the quarter’s dominant trend of elevating internal talent with deep operational understanding and international cross-industry experience to lead group-wide organic and M&A-driven growth”.

The fourth quarter also saw a planned leadership change at Immucell, where [Oliver te Boekhorst](#) was appointed president and chief executive. His addition brings the firm expertise in livestock and dairy diagnostics, as well as knowledge of M&A-driven portfolio consolidation and global commercial leadership. Mr te Boekhorst previously spent time at IDEXX Laboratories and had a recent role as operating partner at ArchiMed. He succeeded Michael Brigham, who was a pivotal figure in Immucell’s development. Mr Brigham joined Immucell in 1989 and served as the company’s president and chief executive since 2000.

Since the start of 2026, the most high-profile appointment in the animal health industry has been IDEXX Laboratories’ promotion of [Michael Erickson](#) to the positions of president and chief executive. This move will be included in WittKieffer’s data for the first quarter of 2026.

Phibro Animal Health is also expecting a new leader in 2026 – a move that will occur via a promotion. The firm has made [Daniel Bendheim](#) its next president and chief executive. At the end of the firm’s fiscal year on July 1, Jack Bendheim – the current chairman, chief executive and president – will become executive chairman and continue to serve as Phibro’s chairman of the board of directors.

## 2025 analysis

WittKieffer observed over 470 senior management changes across 40 leading animal health and nutrition companies in Europe and the US during 2025. This includes promotions, external appointments and departures. Mr Kennedy suggested this signifies “a dynamic leadership landscape”.

He remarked: “A defining characteristic of the year was the industry’s emphasis on internal talent development. Internal promotions consistently outpaced external recruitment with major players such as Boehringer Ingelheim, Elanco, Merck Animal Health, Nestlé Purina and Zoetis demonstrating robust internal mobility.”

“Mid-sized organizations – including Barentz, Ceva Santé Animale, Dechra Pharmaceuticals, Phibro Animal Health and Virbac – similarly invested in advancing in-house talent. Notably, these promotions extended beyond specialized commercial and technical roles, where institutional knowledge is traditionally valued. Companies elevated leaders across marketing, data and technology, and enterprise services functions, signaling confidence in their internal pipelines to deliver diverse capabilities.”

At the same time, WittKieffer noted the pace of industry growth requires strategic external hiring to “acquire specialized expertise that cannot be developed internally at the required speed and scale”.

Paul Martingell became [Virbac’s new chief executive](#) in September last year. Mr Martingell has previously worked at Ernst & Young, Reckitt Benckiser and Novartis Consumer Healthcare. For around 11 years, he held senior roles at Sanofi. He was part of an executive committee that oversaw the merger of consumer healthcare businesses at Boehringer Ingelheim and Sanofi.

Mr Kennedy noted: “Throughout 2025, the industry continued its cross-industry pollination approach, drawing talent from pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, consumer goods and technology, as well as financial services, industrial goods and hospitality. These appointments focused on closing capability gaps in digital transformation, data analytics, supply chain resilience, R&D and manufacturing – areas critical to the sector’s competitive positioning.”

WittKieffer’s annual data related to departures highlights an important consideration for succession planning. While many leaders transitioned within the industry or retired after distinguished careers, “a substantial proportion exited the animal health sector entirely”. Mr Kennedy said this outflow suggests, although the industry successfully develops talent attractive to other sectors, “creating compelling environments to retain seasoned executives remains an ongoing imperative”.

He concluded: “Ultimately, the leadership developments observed throughout 2025 reflect an industry building the organizational capacity required for its next phase of growth across commercial excellence, operational efficiency, R&D and innovation, and digital capabilities.

“This balanced approach of cultivating internal talent, while strategically importing external expertise, positions the animal health sector to navigate increasing industry consolidation, evolving delivery models and rising pet owner and shareholder expectations in the decade ahead.”

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