



The Build vs. Buy Framework: **How HR Can Shape a Sales Team Built for Revenue Growth**



The Build vs. Buy Framework: How HR Can Shape a Sales Team Built for Revenue Growth

Across every sector, the ground beneath sales organizations is shifting. AI is eliminating traditional entry routes into the profession. Core sales roles are collapsing or merging. Experienced sales talent is shifting out of organizations faster than capability can be built internally. And in many industries, M&A activity is placing new demands on teams that were never designed to operate together.

These changes are not abstract trends; they are immediate capability risks. The pipeline of future sellers is narrowing. Internal transitions that once felt feasible now create misalignment, disengagement, and avoidable attrition. And as sales expectations rise while structures stay the same, the gap between what the organization needs and what the workforce can deliver is widening.

For HR leaders, the pressure is on to develop teams capable of delivering at the highest level or retain those that already are. According to McKinsey, the top-performing sales teams deliver 2.6 times more return on investment than the bottom-performing teams. HR leaders know this gap doesn't close by accident. It demands sharper workforce decisions, clearer priorities, and a stronger link between capability and commercial outcomes – all at a time when investment is being scrutinised more closely than ever.

What's often overlooked is that these are not HR challenges in isolation – nor simply philosophical debates. They are commercial choices with revenue consequences, and therefore the concern of all go-to-market leaders, not just HR. Decisions about structure, capability, role clarity, compensation, and progression are strategic and directly affect the organization's ability to sustain and grow revenue.

This white paper explores why modern sales teams need a fundamentally different approach to workforce design – one co-owned by HR and sales. It introduces a Build vs. Buy framework to help you assess the talent you have today, define the capabilities your strategy demands, and decide where to build from within and when to recruit externally. This will help you design clearer roles, stronger pathways, and a sales organization built for sustainable revenue growth.





The Structural Shifts Reshaping Sales Talent

Sales teams are rewiring and it's not a passing trend. Most notably, AI is replacing many junior roles. The Stanford Digital Economy Lab found that entry-level hiring in jobs most exposed to AI has dropped by 13% since large language models emerged, while Goldman Sachs predicts up to 7% of US workers could lose their positions due to AI adoption.

At the same time, sales organizations still depend on a steady inflow of new talent. Today, 71% of senior inside sales reps are over 40, with a sizable proportion nearing retirement. As they leave, they take critical customer insight and institutional knowledge with them. This is not just a demographic trend; it is a structural capability gap that most firms have yet to confront.

In tandem, a rise in mergers is pushing sales reps with different goals, incentives, and products together. But structures and processes aren't being transformed to make sure the potential revenue growth is achieved. Customers have changed too. Buyers now arrive extensively self-educated, often using digital tools and AI to research options long before they speak to sales.

These tensions are forcing leaders to act under more pressure than ever, hiring costly external talent or blurring roles internally. Companies often try to move people sideways – service staff are diverted into business development, and account managers are asked to become deal makers. On paper, it looks efficient; in practice, it sets people up to fail. These roles demand different instincts; pretending otherwise leads to frustration and attrition.





Turning sales team challenges into revenue opportunities

The shifts reshaping sales teams are not abstract workforce issues. They influence the way organizations pursue growth, manage complexity, and sustain performance. When pipelines narrow, roles blur and knowledge leaves, the commercial impacts are felt across the business.

Together, these dynamics represent risks to revenue. They are not inconveniences for HR to manage quietly in the background, but structural issues that determine whether a business delivers growth or stalls.

This brings us to an inflection point. The same forces that make old models unsustainable present an opportunity to be more deliberate about how sales capability is built.

Instead of reacting with one-off hires and sideways moves, organizations can step back and ask: what work truly drives revenue, what capability does it demand, and where should we build, versus buy?

To answer these questions effectively, HR needs to be at the heart of the decision-making process as a strategic partner to sales. When they are, the way forward becomes more optimistic.

Career paths open up, roles become sharper, and investment in people is tied directly to commercial outcomes.





Underpinning Transformations with Workforce Design

Even when the case for change is clear, many sales transformations still stumble. The reasons are familiar to HR leaders, who experience them day to day:

- 1** The manager–market gap – sellers take direction from their manager and market conditions. When the two conflict, performance suffers.
- 2** Rigid processes and rhythms – sales teams are often highly process-driven, with established cadences that are resistant to change. What looks like discipline can quickly become inertia.
- 3** The adaptation myth - organizations assume salespeople will automatically adjust to new structures or expectations. In reality, many revert to old habits.
- 4** Lack of clarity and planning – change is often rolled out without the training, communication and support needed to make it stick.

By addressing these issues, your transformation has a much greater chance of success. Often the missing link is workforce design. Establishing role clarity, aligning incentives, and defining career development creates a blueprint for a team capable of delivering your commercial strategy. It also builds a compelling narrative that wins their support.

This is where the Build vs Buy framework becomes essential. It helps leaders move beyond stalled transformations by enabling them to make deliberate choices about how sales capability is built and sustained.





The Build vs Buy Framework

Modern sales transformations fail when organisations treat capability as an afterthought. The Build vs Buy framework helps HR and Sales make deliberate choices about how to create the sales capability the strategy now demands, balancing the speed and specialist expertise of “Buy” with the continuity and institutional knowledge of “Build.”

To protect revenue impact, evaluate each role through three lenses before choosing to build or buy.





1. Market context and strategic urgency

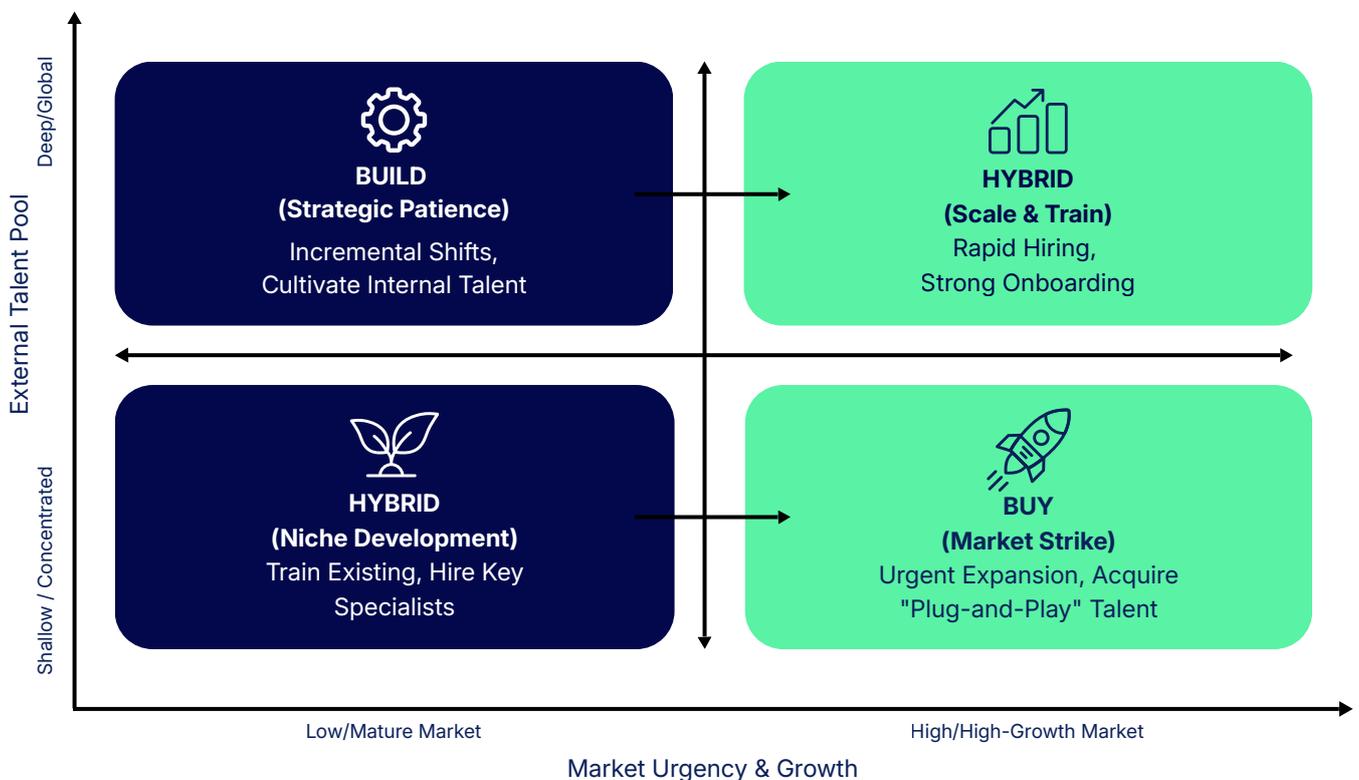
Start by mapping the external environment and the need for speed.

You will typically lean BUILD when:

- Your market is mature.
- You are operating in existing geographies.
- Talent pools are shallow.
- You have 9 to 12 months to ramp.

You will typically lean BUY when:

- You are in high-growth conditions.
- You are entering new geographies.
- Talent pools are deep.
- Immediate revenue targets require plug-and-play capability.



Strategic Note: If the market is geographically concentrated and deep, "Buying" is a low-risk, high-speed move. If the market is niche and urgency is low, "Building" is more cost-effective.





2. Sales motion and role complexity

Next, define the capabilities required for the sales motion you are moving toward.

- If the priority is growing existing customers, you can often BUILD: current reps already have the relationships and need new products, or offer training.
- If the priority is acquiring new logos, you often need to BUY: hunting is a different profile and is harder to train into a "farmer."
- If the new model requires specialist expertise (technical, industry, or a new buyer persona), bias BUY. If it is primarily a general sales methodology, bias BUILD.

Rule of thumb: when roles are genuinely brand new, hiring at least 20% externally can provide a blueprint to follow for the rest of the team.

3. Internal readiness and execution logic

Finally, check whether your internal "factory" can actually produce the talent you need.

Audit three realities:

- Talent bench: do you have high-potential "rising stars," or is the bench too shallow to build on?
- Enablement capability: do you have the trainers, content, and systems to support the pivot? Without strong enablement, building will fail.
- Change absorption: how much friction can the culture take right now? Change fatigue can make it harder to integrate external hires.

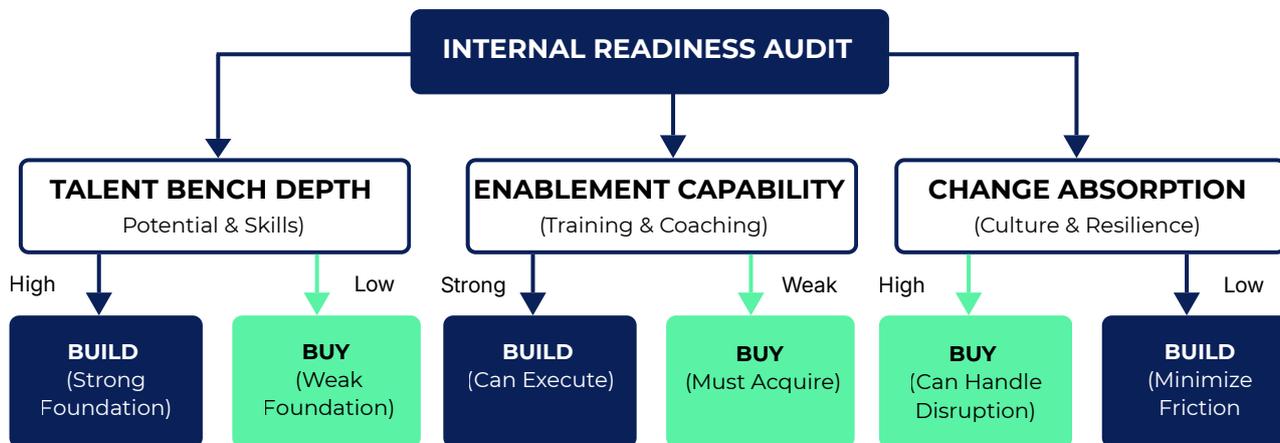




The decision rule

Use the outputs to land on one of three options:

- **BUILD** when you have a deep, high-potential bench, strong enablement, and moderate urgency.
- **BUY** when you are entering new geographies, need specialist hunters, and urgency is high.
- **HYBRID** when you promote internal champions and pair them with external subject-matter experts.



This is not just a hiring decision. It is a workforce design choice. When HR and Sales align on the right build-buy mix, you can design clearer roles, more realistic ramp plans, and career pathways that reduce attrition while accelerating revenue impact.





From Quick Fixes to Sustained Growth: Where **RevenueShift** fits in

Structural shifts in sales talent are no longer background noise - they are driving commercial risk and commercial opportunity.

The challenges we've discussed here - the impact of AI on entry routes, the loss of expertise, the blurring of roles - are eroding capability. Rising to these challenges requires more than quick fixes. It calls for a workforce strategy that is co-owned by HR and sales, built on logical decisions about when to develop talent internally and when to recruit externally.

The Build vs Buy framework offers a practical path forward. To explore how it can be applied in your organization to unlock growth, get in touch.

Let's chat about how we can support you.

// info@revenueshift.com

// (312) 690-3593

// 203 N LaSalle Street, Suite 2125, Chicago, IL 60601

