


The European VC Leadership Playbook

How Venture-Backed
Companies Can Build
Teams That Scale



ZEREN
Part of Renovata.

euovc

How to use this playbook

This playbook is written for investors and the founders they back. It is a working document, not a thought leadership piece.

Every section is grounded in live search mandates, active market data, and the patterns we see repeatedly across the European venture ecosystem. Where something is an observation, we say so. Where it is a framework, it is designed to be used.

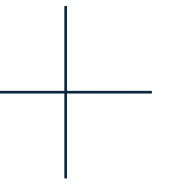
Use the **C-1 Leadership Map** in your next board prep to pressure-test whether the right roles exist at the right stage.

Run the **Hiring Readiness Checklist** before approving a headcount request. Use the Role Clarity Essentials to diagnose why a search is stalling.

Return to the **Venture Hiring Flywheel** when momentum slows and you need to identify where the system has broken down.



Contents.



Foreword.

Discipline has replaced momentum
Chris Preston, CEO, ZEREN & Renoir

01.

Leadership & Talent Trends Shaping 2026
Function-by-function analysis of how hiring expectations and market dynamics are shifting across European venture.

GTM Product & Tech Data People & Culture Finance Design

02.

The C-1 Leadership Layer
Which roles to hire, when to hire them, and the compounding cost of getting the timing wrong — with the C-1 Hiring Map

Seed Series A Series B Series C Pre-exit

03.

The Venture Hiring Flywheel
The six-stage self-reinforcing system that separates portfolios with strong talent brands from those that fight for every hire

Signal Attraction Selection Onboarding Retention Compound

04.

Hiring Readiness Checklist
The questions boards and founders must answer before a search opens — and what a "no" means for each function

GTM Product & Tech Data People & Culture Finance Design

05.

Role Clarity Essentials
Must-haves for every hiring brief, the questions strong candidates always ask, and the mis-hires that cost the most

GTM Product & Tech Data People & Culture Finance Design

06.

Compensation & Market Signals
Real data from live searches and offer negotiations across Europe — what the top 10% of talent costs, and what it takes to close them

GTM Product & Tech Data People & Culture Finance Design

07.

What's Holding Your Teams Back
The most predictable execution blockers across venture-backed businesses and how investors can spot them before they become board problems

GTM Product & Tech Data People & Culture Finance Design

08.

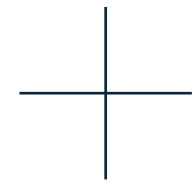
Leadership in Action
Six VC-backed case studies showing how the right hire changed the board dynamic, the revenue trajectory, and the next round conversation

09.

Interim & Fractional Leadership
The 72-hour playbook, precision interim roles for 2026, and six-week impact benchmarks across CEO, CFO, CPTO, CDO and commercial functions

72-hour playbook Interim CEO Interim CFO Interim CPTO
Interim CDO Commercial leaders

Discipline has replaced momentum



Every hire is a bet on execution.

The rules have changed but the ambition has not

We are now well into 2026, and across the European venture ecosystem the tone has shifted.

The past two years have not reduced ambition. But they have changed how ambition is realised. Capital continues to move, but it moves with greater scrutiny. Investment decisions take longer, conviction is harder to build, and boards are closer to the operating reality of their businesses than at any point in the past decade.

Growth is still the goal. It is no longer assumed, because it must be earned.

According to PwC's 2025 Global CEO Survey, 74% of CEOs now identify the availability of key skills as the greatest threat to their business, ranking ahead of macroeconomic volatility and geopolitical risk. In the venture context, this is not a background concern. It is the operating condition.

Every hire is now a board-level decision

Founders are now expected to demonstrate control before scale. Forecasting, pricing and capital allocation are under sharper pressure. And hiring, in this context, has become one of the most visible expressions of decision-making quality.

Every hire is a bet on execution. The question is no longer whether a role is needed. It is what it will change, how quickly it will deliver impact, and whether it aligns to the expectations of investors at the next round.

Similar businesses are diverging fast and leadership is the only variable that explains it

What has become increasingly clear is that businesses with similar funding, similar products and similar market opportunity are diverging. The difference is not strategy alone. It is the quality of leadership and the strength of the teams built around it. Execution,

alignment and decision-making cadence have become the defining characteristics of performance.

The bar has risen across every function. Product leaders are expected to operate commercially. Data leaders are shaping strategic direction. GTM leaders are accountable for predictability, not just growth. Leaders are measured on outcomes, not intent.

The best people are not waiting for you to be ready

At the same time, the talent market has fractured. High-impact operators are becoming more valuable, more selective and more deliberate about where they invest their time. They are drawn to businesses with clarity, credible leadership and strong investor alignment. They are not drawn to ambiguity, regardless of the size of the round.

Alongside this, we are seeing a more deliberate use of interim and fractional

leadership. Increasingly, investors and founders are introducing targeted capability at critical moments to stabilise performance, accelerate execution or de-risk key transitions, rather than waiting for a permanent hire that may take four to six months to land.

AI has raised the bar for every leader in the room

Overlaying all of this is AI. It has raised expectations across every operating role, compressing timelines and redefining what high performance looks like. Leaders are no longer judged on their awareness of AI. They are judged on how effectively they apply it to improve outcomes, efficiency and decision-making.

The leaders pulling away from the field are not simply those who understand AI. They are the ones deploying it with precision, integrating it into how their teams operate, and using it to make better decisions faster than their competitors.

ZEREN X EUVC

This playbook has been developed in partnership with EUVC, a community at the heart of the European venture ecosystem, and draws on our direct experience across leadership search, interim solutions and organisational transformation. It is designed to support the moments that matter most: when a hire needs to be right, when a function needs to be reset, and when the quality of a leadership decision will determine the trajectory of the business.

In this market, outcomes are no longer driven by pace alone. They are driven by the quality of decisions, the discipline to execute, and the strength of the leadership that carries them through.



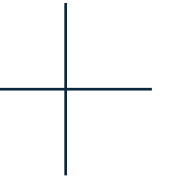
Chris Preston
CEO, Zeren & Renoir

01.

Leadership & Talent Trends Shaping 2026

These insights come directly from the frontline, shaped by the founders we challenge, the investors we work closely with, and the leaders we speak to every day across growth-stage and venture-backed businesses. What follows is a real-time view of how leadership expectations are shifting in 2026.

European VC investment stabilised at approximately €45B in 2025, according to Atomico's State of European Tech report, following the correction from the 2021 peak. The capital is still moving. The difference is that it now moves with discipline rather than momentum, and the leadership decisions that determine how that capital is deployed matter more than they ever have.





Harry Lewis
Managing Director,
Zeren

Revenue is under scrutiny, and GTM leadership is now expected to bring predictability to the board, not just growth. The era of the high-energy commercial hire who builds through momentum has given way to something more demanding: operators who can design and manage a revenue system, not just participate in one.

Hiring is active again, but with far greater selectivity. Processes are longer, involve more stakeholders, and require clear evidence of commercial impact rather than impressive CV lines. Investors are willing to wait for the right hire at senior level because one misstep here can materially affect revenue trajectory, pipeline credibility, and the narrative going into the next round.

We are also seeing something important: many businesses are discovering that their GTM challenges are structural, not purely talent related. Interim and advisory leaders are increasingly used to diagnose and reset the function before a permanent hire is committed to.

"Many businesses think they have a talent problem. In practice, they have a structure, expectations or clarity problem."

What we are seeing in live searches:

- + Precision has replaced volume hiring. Every role must have a clear line to revenue impact.
- + Misalignment across sales, marketing, CS and product on ICP, messaging and pipeline expectations remains the primary blocker to GTM scale.
- + Revenue assumptions are frequently disconnected from TAM reality and expansion constraints, and this surfaces quickly when a new commercial leader starts asking the right questions.
- + High-performing sellers are staying put longer. They want multi-year earning windows and evidence of stability before making a move.
- + Leadership expectations have intensified, with an immediate focus on performance management, forecasting discipline and cross-functional alignment.

Go-to-Market.

Product & Technology.



Paul Nicholls,
Director,
Zeren

Product, Technology and Engineering leadership has undergone a fundamental shift, driven by AI acceleration and the increasing demand for commercial accountability at board level. The separation between product, engineering and design is narrowing, and leadership is expected to bridge these areas with fluency rather than simply manage the boundaries between them.



Bryonny Barton,
Director,
Zeren

Boards now expect leaders who can operate across the full lifecycle, from product strategy through to delivery and measurable ROI. According to the LinkedIn Workforce Report 2025, demand for AI-skilled product and engineering roles across Europe grew by over 40% year on year, while the supply of qualified candidates grew by just 14%.

What we are seeing in live searches:

- + Convergence across product, engineering and design functions is creating demand for leaders who can hold all three without losing depth in any.
- + AI delivery experience commands a significant premium. Engineers who have shipped AI products into production are attracting 20 to 30 per cent above standard market rates, a figure consistent with Hired's State of Software Engineers 2025 report.
- + Bar-raising leadership, where leaders visibly lift the performance of the team around them, is increasingly a stated requirement rather than a nice-to-have.
- + Commercial acumen is now a baseline expectation for product leaders at Series B and above. Founders who do not find this combination are making a compromise.
- + Strong candidates routinely run three or more processes in parallel. Speed and clarity of process is a competitive advantage.



Kim Wardle

Director,
Zeren

Design hasn't moved away from craft, but it is no longer defined by aesthetics alone. In 2026, its role is broader and more commercially critical: enabling products to work seamlessly in the real world.

As AI capability accelerates and product complexity increases, the ability to simplify, structure and deliver genuinely intuitive user experiences has become a true competitive advantage. This is especially visible in enterprise environments, where usability and adoption are increasingly tied to renewal and revenue outcomes.

This shift is elevating the role of design leadership within product organisations. The most effective design leaders are product thinkers first. They challenge what should be built, not just how it should look or feel.

At the same time, expectations of leadership itself are changing. It's no longer enough to manage from a distance, leaders are expected to stay close to the work, actively experimenting with new tools and technologies, and leading by example.

What we are seeing in live searches:

- + Greater integration of design within product and engineering. Leaders operating in isolation are losing influence and scope.
- + Increased demand for designers who can shape product strategy upstream, rather than execute downstream.
- + Design systems expertise is becoming critical as AI-generated UI scales, maintaining coherence and brand integrity is now a leadership responsibility.
- + A stronger focus on usability, adoption and customer experience as measurable commercial outcomes, not just indicators of quality.
- + A shift toward hands-on leadership: organisations want leaders who engage directly with tools, workflows and emerging technologies, not just oversee teams.

Design.

Data.



Peter Shawyer,

Director,
Zeren

Data has moved to the centre of the operating model, and AI has exposed where foundations are not strong enough to support scale. Many organisations invested in AI capability before building the infrastructure required to make it effective. The result is technical debt at the data layer and a growing realisation that you cannot accelerate what you cannot measure reliably.

As a result, the focus has shifted decisively toward leaders who can combine technical depth with commercial awareness and organisational influence. The data leader who can only manage a team of analysts is not the hire the market needs. The one who can speak to the board, manage vendor relationships, and connect data outputs to business decisions is.

What we are seeing in live searches:

- + Continued shift toward Data Engineering and Analytics Engineering over pure analysis roles, as businesses prioritise infrastructure over insight.
- + Growing demand for AI-capable talent across all levels, with roles requiring AI and cloud experience attracting above-inflation increases, typically 15 to 25 per cent above equivalent non-AI roles at the same seniority, consistent with data from the Hired 2025 report.
- + Increased focus on governance, data ownership and reliability. Investors are asking harder questions about data quality before committing to further AI investment.
- + Hybrid roles such as ML Ops, analytics engineering and T-shaped data professionals are becoming the dominant hiring pattern over narrow specialisms.
- + Speed and transparency in the process is a distinct competitive advantage in shortage areas. The best data candidates have options, and slow processes confirm the wrong things about a company's decision-making culture.

People & Culture.



Emma Castillo,

Director,
Zeren

As the market has become more disciplined, People & Culture has become more operationally critical. Scaling is no longer just about adding headcount. It is about building organisations that can perform consistently under pressure. This places greater emphasis on organisational design, leadership capability and performance management as operational levers rather than HR deliverables.

We are seeing a clear shift toward more strategic People leadership, particularly in businesses navigating post-Series B scale where complexity increases and informal structures begin to break down.

“Scaling is no longer just about adding headcount. It is about building organisations that can perform consistently under pressure.”

What we are seeing in live searches:

- Greater focus on organisational design and role clarity before headcount is added. People leaders are increasingly brought in to design the structure, not just fill it.
- Increased demand for People leaders who can operate at board level, present to investors, own the workforce planning narrative, and connect people strategy to business outcomes.
- Strong emphasis on performance frameworks and leadership development as retention tools in a market where top talent is more selective.
- Equity is becoming a key lever in attracting senior People leaders into venture-backed businesses as the function earns its seat at the strategic table.

Finance.

Leadership & Talent
Trends Shaping 2026



Jodie Robinson,

Senior Consultant,
Zeren

Finance leadership has become a central pillar of credibility within venture-backed businesses. As capital has become more selective, the ability to demonstrate financial control, forecasting accuracy and capital efficiency has shifted from a board expectation to an investor requirement. CFOs and senior finance leaders are increasingly expected to operate as strategic partners, not just to founders, but to the investment committee.

What we are seeing in live searches:

- Increased demand for commercially minded CFOs with direct experience of growth-stage fundraising, M&A and exit preparation.
- Greater scrutiny on forecasting accuracy and cash management. Boards are pushing harder on the numbers before approving headcount or GTM investment.
- Finance teams playing a more active role in commercial decision-making, pricing strategy and capital allocation.
- Interim finance leaders being deployed to prepare businesses for fundraising or exit, often the fastest route to institutional-grade financial credibility.

Interim Leadership.

RENOIR
Part of Renovata.



**Jen
Brook-Botfield**

Director,
Renoir

Interim leaders are no longer gap-fillers. They are increasingly the fastest route to value creation, stability and execution at critical moments.

Across the venture-backed businesses we work with, investors and founders are using interim capability more deliberately, not as a fallback when permanent hiring stalls, but as a deliberate deployment of targeted expertise at the exact moment it is required.

What we are seeing in live searches:

- + Demand for impact in days, not months. The mandate is defined before the interim arrives.
- + Investors using interims to test leadership capability and cultural fit before committing to a permanent hire.
- + High-growth companies correcting execution drift with interim CEOs, CPTOs and CFOs at pivotal stages.
- + Interims driving AI transformation, commercial resets and post-investment integration with measurable results within the first six weeks.

02



Engineering
Product
GTM
Data
Finance
People & Culture
Design

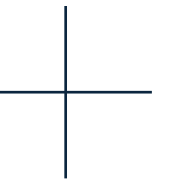


The C-1 Hiring Map

The C-1 layer, the tier of senior leaders below the founding team, is where venture-backed companies are won or lost. These are the people who operationalise founder vision, build repeatable functions, and determine whether the company can scale beyond the founders' own bandwidth.

According to Dealroom's 2025 European Venture Report, fewer than one in four European VC-backed companies that reach Series B go on to achieve a meaningful exit within seven years. The companies that do are not simply better funded or better positioned in their markets. They are better led at the layer that translates strategy into execution.

The timing of these hires is not arbitrary. It follows a pattern that is visible across high-performing European venture-backed businesses. Rather than hiring reactively, the most effective companies introduce leadership in anticipation of the next stage of scale.



The C-1 Leadership Layer

Seed

Foundation before scale

At seed, leadership is concentrated and execution is founder-led. The priority is not scale. It is signal.

Critical focus

- + product iteration
- + early technical capability
- + initial market validation.

What changes when done well:

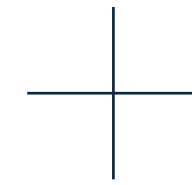
- + faster product cycles
- + stronger early product-market fit signal

Key roles

- + Founding Engineer; early Product leadership (often still founder-driven)

Where it breaks:

- + over-hiring too early
- + insufficient technical depth in the founding team



Series A

The C-1
Leadership Layer

Breaking founder dependency

Series A is the first true leadership transition. What worked at seed begins to strain under growth. Founders become bottlenecks and informal structures start to limit execution. This is where the first C-1 layer begins to form.

Key roles

Head of Engineering — owns delivery, hiring and process, freeing the technical co-founder for architecture and strategic decisions

VP / Head of Product — only once ICP and core use case are validated; premature product leadership creates roadmap confusion

First commercial leader — a player-coach profile who can prospect, close and begin building process; pedigree matters less than hustle and builder instinct at this stage

What these roles unlock

- + structured product and engineering delivery
- + early revenue discipline
- + reduced founder dependency on day-to-day execution

Where it breaks

- + hiring too senior too early
- + bringing in a leader who has only run machines rather than built them
- + delaying until dysfunction is already visible

Series B

From growth to predictability

By Series B, growth is no longer enough. It needs to be repeatable and defensible. This is where leadership begins to directly influence investor confidence, and where the first generation of Series A hires often needs to evolve or transition.

Key roles

CRO / VP Sales — the most consequential hire at this stage; requires team architecture capability, multi-channel revenue thinking and credible forecasting discipline

VP Marketing — owns pipeline generation as a system, not a campaign; must align with sales on ICP and attribution

CFO — by mid-Series B, investors expect institutional-grade financial reporting, FP&A and a clear path to unit economics transparency

What these roles unlock

- + revenue predictability
- + scalable hiring systems
- + data-informed decision-making
- + financial credibility with the board

Where it breaks

- + Revenue without structure
- + Hiring without process
- + Data without ownership
- + Financial opacity as complexity increases

Head of Data — the moment to build the data infrastructure that AI and analytics will depend on at Series C

Head of People — the hiring machine needs to be built; at Series B you are typically adding five to fifteen people per month, and without infrastructure, quality and culture erode

Series C

Complexity requires control

The C-1
Leadership Layer

At Series C, the organisation becomes meaningfully more complex. The challenge shifts from growth to control, efficiency and retention. The margin for error in leadership decisions narrows significantly.

Key roles

CPTO / evolved product leadership — product coherence across a larger engineering organisation requires explicit leadership, not assumed alignment

VP Customer Success — NRR becomes a board metric at this stage; CS leadership is no longer optional

Head of Design — design-mature companies consistently outperform on activation, NPS and enterprise win rates

CFO (upgrade) — if the Series B finance leader was primarily an operator, this is often the moment to bring in a strategic CFO with fundraising and M&A experience

What these roles unlock

- + financial discipline and investor confidence
- + product coherence at scale
- + improved retention and user experience
- + preparation for exit processes.

Where it breaks

- + financial opacity
- + product fragmentation across multiple workstreams
- + declining customer outcomes as CS is under-resourced

Execution at scale

At later stages, leadership is no longer about building capability. It is about refining it. The margin for error is significantly smaller, and leadership decisions directly influence valuation.

Key roles

COO — integrates functions that have been running semi-independently and introduces operational rigour across the business

Upgraded C-suite and C-1 leaders — some leaders who built the function will scale with it; others will not; identifying the difference early is the board's responsibility

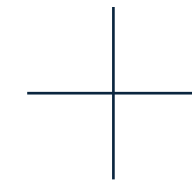
Interim operators — where a permanent search timeline conflicts with an execution window, interim leadership is the right answer

What these roles unlock

- + operational efficiency
- + exit readiness
- + consistent execution during critical valuation windows

Where it breaks

- + misalignment at the top
- + slow decision-making
- + gaps in execution during the windows that matter most

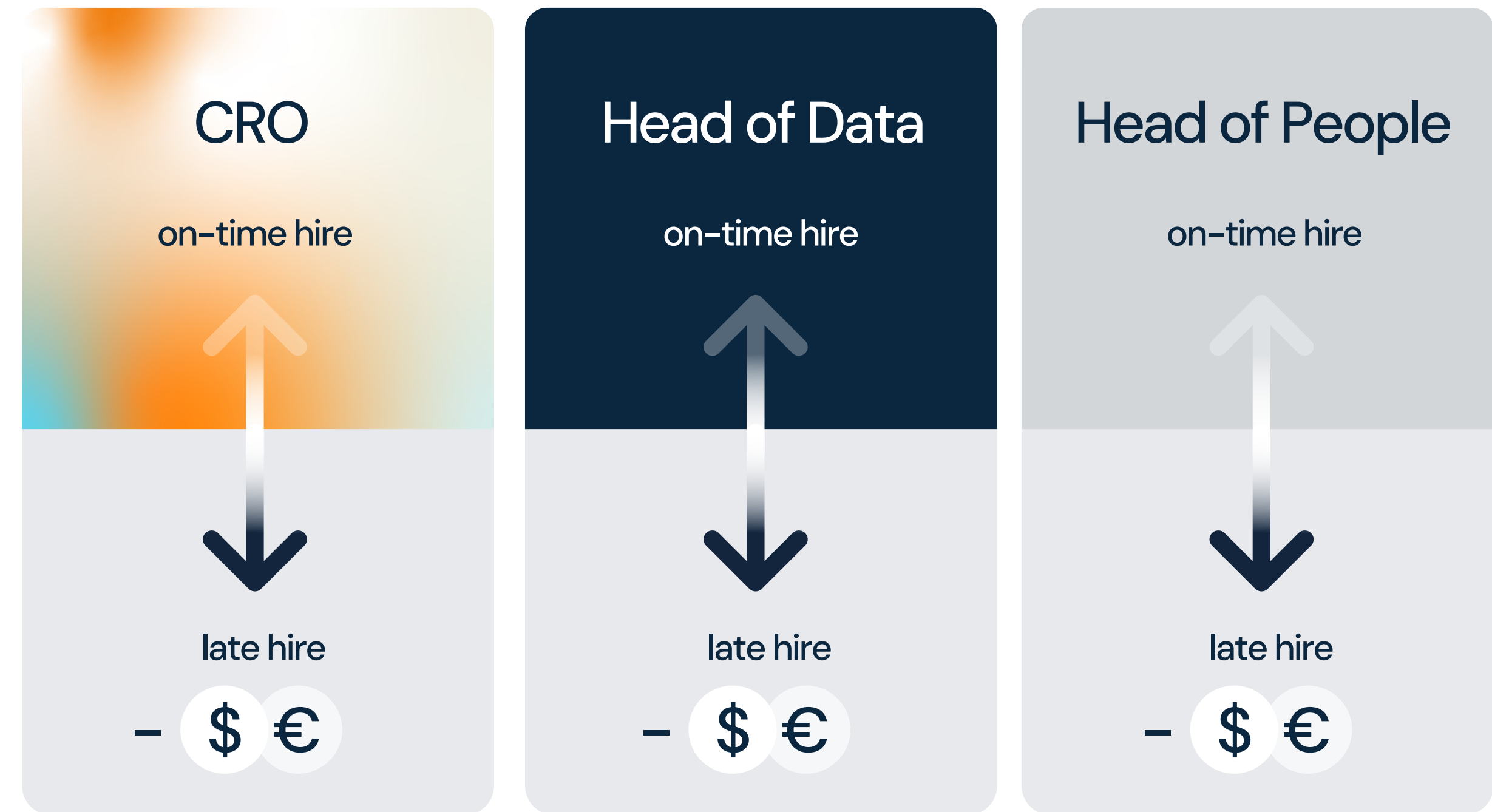
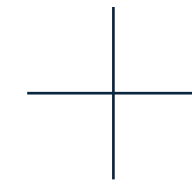


The role of interim leadership

This is particularly visible in revenue resets
Interim CRO financial control Interim CFO ,
product and AI transformation Interim CPTO ,
and organisational stabilisation
Interim People leadership .

What makes interim leadership effective in this context is not just speed. It is precision. These leaders arrive with a defined mandate, clear outcomes and a short time horizon, allowing companies to regain control and momentum without long-term structural commitment before they are ready.

The **cost** of getting the timing wrong



One of the most consistent patterns across the European venture ecosystem is not poor hiring. It is late hiring.

Leaders are introduced only once problems are visible, rather than when they are predictable. This delay compounds.

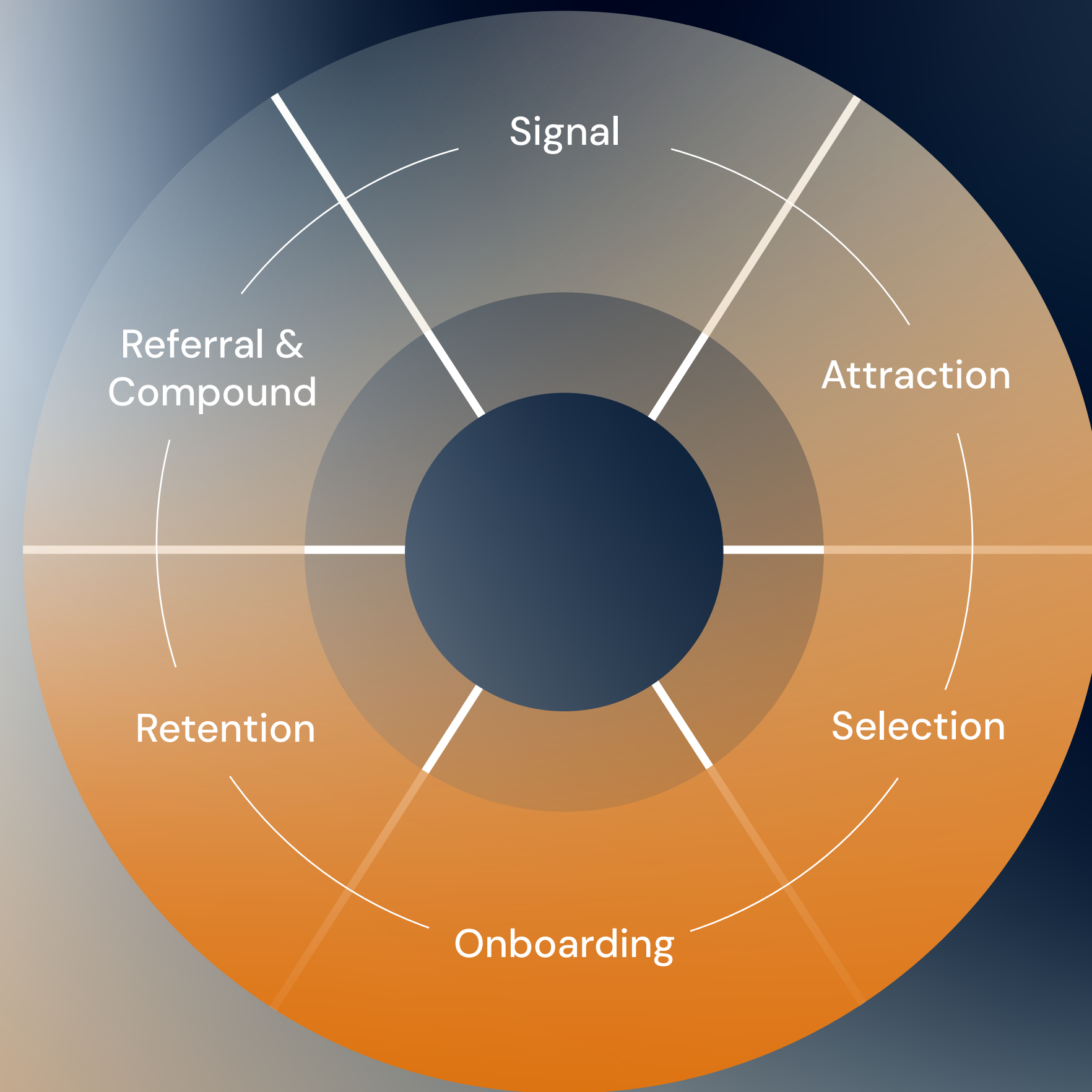
A Head of Data hired after AI initiatives begin does not accelerate progress. It slows it, because foundations need to be rebuilt before capability can be added.

A People leader introduced after rapid hiring does not scale culture. It repairs it, at significantly higher cost and lower speed than building it right the first time. According to recent benchmarking data, the average cost to replace a senior leader is equivalent to six to nine months of their salary, and that figure does not include equity dilution, board time, or the opportunity cost of operating without the right person in the role.

In each case, the cost is not just time. It is momentum, credibility, and the compounding disadvantage of operating at the wrong leadership density for your stage.

"A CRO hired six months too late does not simply delay revenue. It introduces inconsistency into pipeline, forecasting and team performance, and that inconsistency takes longer to correct than it took to create."

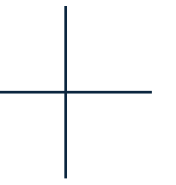
03



The Venture Hiring Flywheel

Great hiring at growth-stage companies is not a series of one-off decisions. It is a self-reinforcing system where each strong hire makes the next one easier, and each weak hire or delayed decision makes the system harder to run.

Understanding the flywheel helps investors and founders identify where they are in the cycle and what is required to accelerate it. When the flywheel stalls, the question is always: which stage broke first?



01. Signal

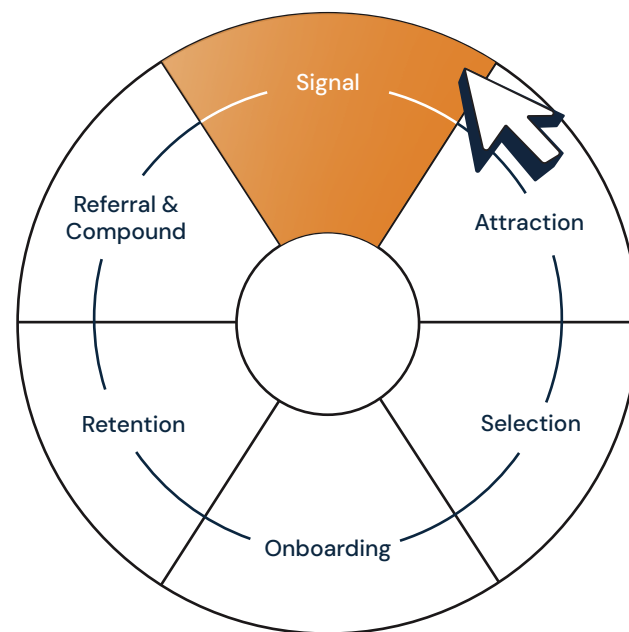
The company's reputation in the talent market is built by the quality and visibility of its team. The first C-1 hire sets the signal. A strong, well-networked leader attracts their own network.

A weak hire, or a prolonged vacancy, sends a signal that is difficult to reverse because the talent market talks.

- + **Investor role:** actively support portfolio companies in building employer brand. Introductions, endorsements and participation in ecosystem events compound over time. The fund's own reputation is a recruiting asset. Use it deliberately.

Flywheel stall signal

Candidates asking why the role has been open for a long time; declining inbound interest despite active outreach.



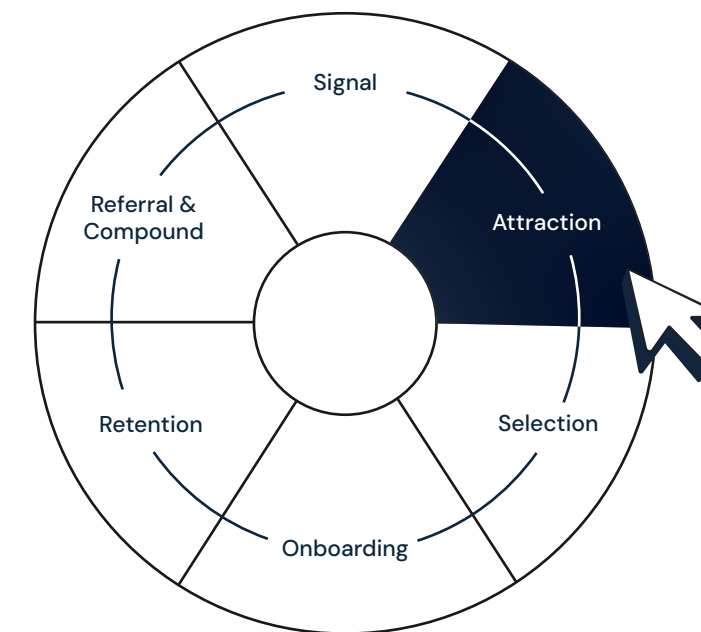
02. Attraction

Strong companies attract candidates passively. They do not need to post every role. The team, the mission and the investor backing pull the right people in. Building this requires deliberate investment in employer narrative, not just a careers page, but a clear articulation of why the best operators in each function would choose this company over better-funded alternatives.

- + **What good looks like:** candidates approaching proactively; referrals from existing employees; search partners flagging the company as a destination, not just a transaction.

Flywheel stall signal

Searches relying entirely on outbound sourcing; low response rates from target candidates; offers being declined at final stage for better opportunities.



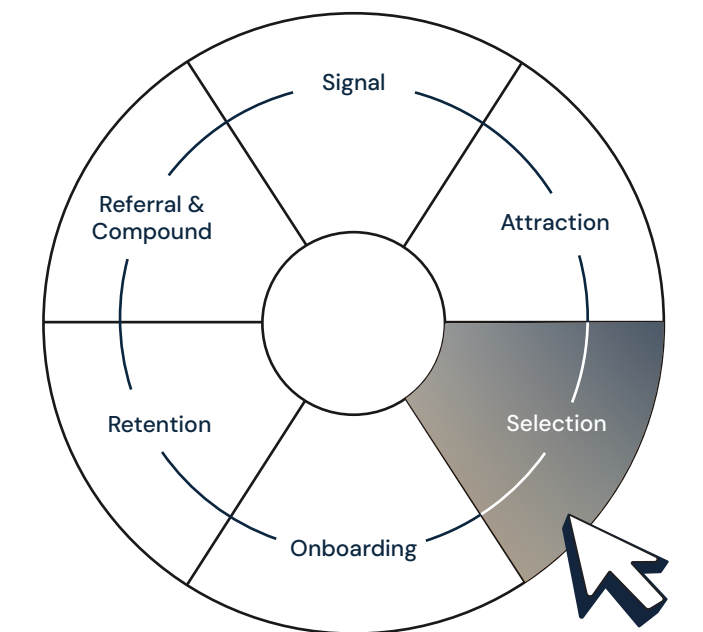
03. Selection

Assessment rigour at growth stage is frequently sacrificed in the name of speed. This is almost always a mistake. The cost of a bad senior hire, typically three to five times the individual's annual salary when equity, lost time and team disruption are included according to Harvard Business Review research updated in 2025, far outweighs the cost of a process that runs four weeks longer.

- + **Best practice:** define assessment criteria before the process begins. Use structured interviews with consistent scoring across interviewers. Include a work sample or strategic exercise for final-stage candidates. Reference check with people who will be candid, not just the names the candidate provides.

Flywheel stall signal

Interviewers giving inconsistent feedback; offers made on gut feel rather than evidence; high rate of first-year exits from senior hires.



04.

Onboarding

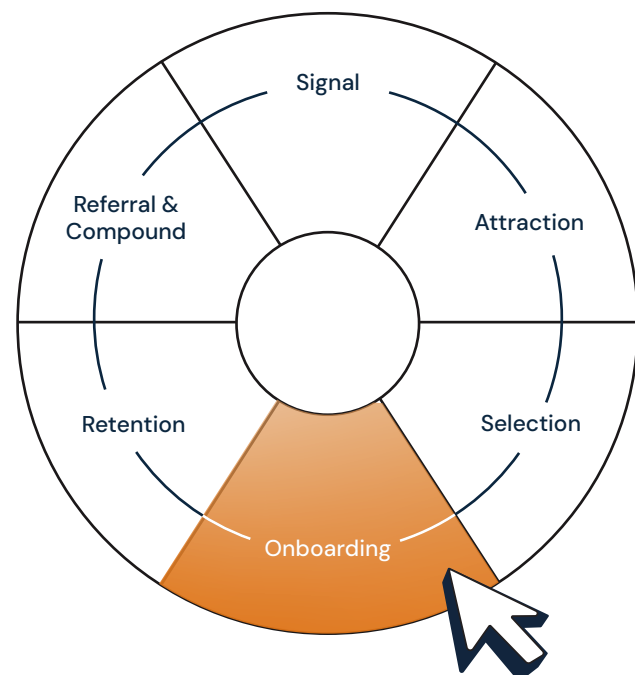
The first ninety days determine whether a hire succeeds or fails. Most companies that run excellent recruitment processes run mediocre onboarding. The two most common failure modes are over-autonomy, where the new leader is left to figure it out, and under-clarity, where the brief changes within the first month.

In a venture context, where a VP-level hire typically takes four to six months to recruit and costs the equivalent of twelve to eighteen months of salary in total investment, the case for treating onboarding as a strategic priority is straightforward.

- + **90-day framework:** days 0 to 30, listen, orient, build internal relationships and establish trust. Days 30 to 60, diagnose the function and present a clear point of view. Days 60 to 90, align on plan and begin execution with the team behind it. The CEO should hold a structured weekly check-in throughout.

Flywheel stall signal

A strong hire who becomes quiet after month two; leadership team bypassing the new hire rather than working through them; early-tenure resignation.



05.

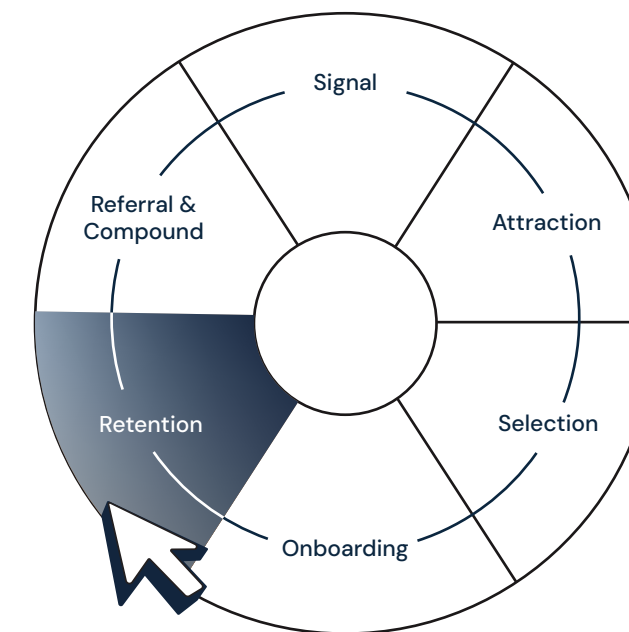
Retention

Senior leaders at growth-stage companies are continuously in-market whether they are looking or not. Retention is not a passive outcome. It is an active investment in career development, compensation competitiveness and the quality of the working environment.

- + **Common retention failures:** compensation that does not track the market after a new funding round; equity that has vested without a refresh conversation; isolation of senior leaders from strategic decisions as the company grows around them; role erosion where the company hires above or around someone without clear, honest communication.

Flywheel stall signal

Unexpected departures from leaders who seemed fine; retention conversations happening after resignation rather than before; equity cliff departures that could have been predicted.



06.

Referral & reputation compound

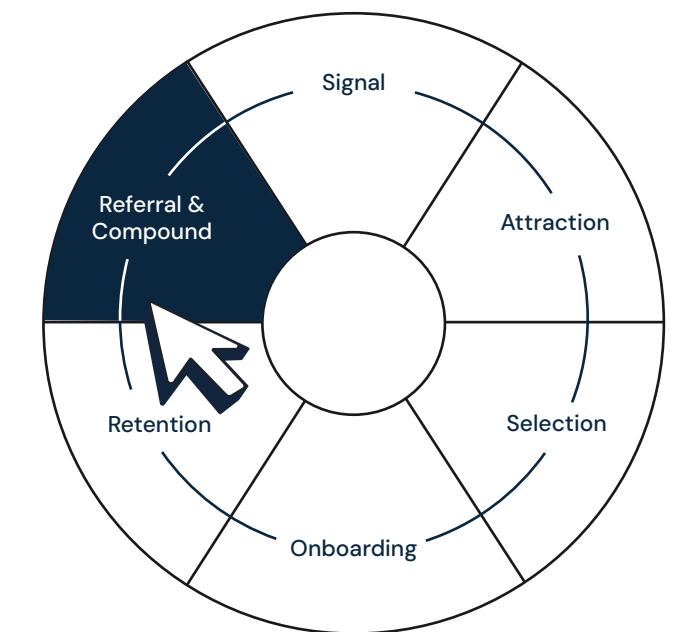
When the flywheel is working, it self-reinforces. Strong leaders refer strong candidates. Alumni become advocates. The investor network hears the right things. The talent brand compounds and each subsequent search gets faster, cheaper and more competitive.

"When the flywheel breaks at any stage, it takes longer to repair than it took to build."

The most effective portfolios treat the flywheel as a board-level metric, not an HR metric.

Flywheel stall signal

Interviewers giving inconsistent feedback; offers made on gut feel rather than evidence; high rate of first-year exits from senior hires.



04.

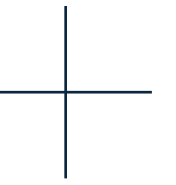
- Not ready
- Prepare to hire
- Ready to search

Hiring Readiness Checklist

Mis-hires rarely come from interviewing the wrong people. They come from starting the search unprepared.

These questions bring discipline to the front of the process. They are drawn directly from the issues we encounter in live mandates every week, designed to expose gaps, challenge assumptions, and give boards and founders an honest answer to the question: are we ready to hire?

For each question, a "no" is not a reason to stop. It is a reason to resolve before the search begins.



GTM.

A GTM hire succeeds only when the foundations are stable. Many businesses believe they have a talent problem. In practice, they have a structure, expectations or clarity problem, and a new commercial leader will surface it faster than they are ready for.

- ⊕ Do we have the GTM organisation structured in a scalable way before bringing in a senior commercial leader? (If not: the new hire will spend their first three months reorganising, not executing.)
- ⊕ Have we validated the revenue mix, specifically how much net new is genuinely achievable versus how much depends on expansion? (If not: first-quarter forecasts will be wrong.)
- ⊕ Do we understand our TAM and have we matched targets to market reality? (If not: the leader will reset expectations within ninety days, creating board credibility risk.)
- ⊕ Is our ICP aligned across sales, marketing, CS and product? (If not: pipeline quality will remain inconsistent regardless of who leads the function.)
- ⊕ Have we defined realistic revenue expectations for the incoming leader that are also investor-aligned? (If not: the hire will be set up to underdeliver against an unrealistic brief.)
- ⊕ Are we solving a capability gap, or a structural one? (If the latter: consider an interim diagnostic before committing to a permanent search.)



Product & Technology.

Hiring senior Product and Technology leaders is where most organisations underestimate readiness, particularly when AI delivery expectations are involved.

- ⊕ Can this leader make tough decisions and raise the bar in a team that may have operated without strong performance management? (If not: the hire will inherit dysfunction, not fix it.)
- ⊕ Have they genuinely delivered commercial value through AI, with shipped and measured outcomes rather than experimentation? (If not: AI delivery timelines will disappoint the board.)
- ⊕ Are we genuinely open to a step-up profile, or do we need someone who has done this exact thing before? (Both are valid answers. Being unclear is not.)
- ⊕ What cross-functional skills will drive better collaboration across Product, Engineering and GTM, and are we hiring for those explicitly? (If not: the convergence problem will persist.)
- ⊕ How hands-on does this leader need to be, and what does that actually mean in our specific context? (Ambiguity here is the most common cause of mismatch between expectation and performance.)



Data.

A strong data leader cannot fix broken foundations. These questions test whether your data strategy, governance and AI ambitions are clear enough to set a new leader up for success.

- + What stage is our data journey at: building foundations, scaling capability, or optimising performance? (The profile required at each stage is materially different.)
- + Where is productivity currently lost in the data function, and is this a people problem or an infrastructure problem? (If the latter: the new hire will spend their mandate on remediation, not value creation.)
- + What high-impact outputs can the data team realistically deliver in three to six months? (If this cannot be answered: the brief is not ready.)
- + How will AI and governance feature in our strategy, and do we have the infrastructure to support them? (If not: the hire will be forced to build before they can lead.)
- + How are we planning succession in a rapidly shifting skills market? (Data talent is mobile. Retention planning starts at hire.)

Design.

A Design hire succeeds when the product vision, user experience expectations and organisational structure are aligned. The most common failure is hiring design talent without clarity on where design sits or how it is expected to drive value.

- + Do we have a clear view of the role design plays in our product and growth strategy, or is design still treated as a finishing step? (If the latter: the hire will lack the mandate to create impact.)
- + Is design integrated into product and engineering, or operating as a support function? (If the latter: the leader will spend their mandate on positioning, not delivery.)
- + Are we hiring for craft execution or strategic design leadership, and does the brief reflect that distinction? (Both are valid. Mixing them produces a hire who is underutilised or over-promoted.)
- + How will this role influence product decisions, not just outputs? (If the answer is unclear: the hire will have impact on aesthetics but not on outcomes.)
- + Are we building a scalable design function, or responding to a specific product quality problem? (The brief, the profile and the success metrics are different in each case.)



People & Culture.

A People hire succeeds when the organisation is ready to scale, not just ready to grow headcount. Many businesses believe they need HR support. In practice, they lack structure, clarity and leadership alignment.

- ⊕ Do we have a clear organisational design that supports our next stage of growth, or are we hiring into ambiguity? (If the latter: the People leader will spend their mandate on design rather than execution.)
- ⊕ Are roles, responsibilities and reporting lines clearly defined across the business? (If not: a new People leader cannot build process on top of structural confusion.)
- ⊕ Do we have a consistent performance framework, or are we relying on informal management? (If the latter: the People leader will face cultural resistance before they can drive change.)
- ⊕ Are we hiring this role to support scale, or to fix deeper cultural or leadership issues that require CEO and board-level alignment? (The latter requires a different brief, a different profile and a different success measure.)
- ⊕ Do we need a strategic People leader or a more operational profile at this stage? (Both are legitimate. Conflating them produces a hire who underperforms on both dimensions.)



Finance.

investor expectations and growth trajectory. The most common failure mode is hiring reactively as a response to investor pressure, rather than as a proactive driver of financial credibility.

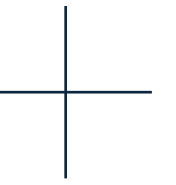
- ⊕ Do we have a clear view of our financial model, runway and capital requirements? (If not: the incoming finance leader will spend their first quarter on discovery, not credibility-building.)
- ⊕ Are our forecasting processes credible and consistent, and do they align with what investors expect to see? (If not: the hire will inherit a credibility gap with the board that is difficult to close quickly.)
- ⊕ Do we need a strategic CFO, or a hands-on operator to build financial infrastructure first? (Over-hiring here is as costly as under-hiring.)
- ⊕ How prepared are we for fundraising or exit scenarios? (The finance leader's mandate should be anchored to a specific capital event, not general improvement.)
- ⊕ Is finance currently embedded in strategic conversations, or operating as a reporting function? (The answer defines the seniority and profile required.)



05.

Role Clarity Essentials

If the role is not clear before the search begins, the search will take longer, attract weaker candidates, and produce a higher failure rate. This section sets out the critical elements every hiring brief must contain and the most common traps that lead to expensive mis-hires across each function.



GTM.



Must-have in the brief

Clear, quantified success criteria for days 30, 90 and 180, covering pipeline expectations, forecasting discipline, team productivity and early behaviour shifts. The incoming leader should know exactly what good looks like before they accept the offer.



The question a strong candidate will always ask:

"What does the current pipeline look like, and what is the gap between where it is and where the business needs it to be?" If the answer is unclear or inconsistent, the candidate will have reservations, and they should."



Most common mis-hire:

Hiring a senior GTM leader before fixing structure, segmentation, TAM assumptions or product readiness. The leader arrives, diagnoses the structural problem, and either tries to fix it without mandate or leaves. Either outcome costs six months and significant equity.

Product & Technology.



Must-have in the brief

Full transparency on culture, challenges, financials and opportunities, including the honest version of where the product is today rather than the fundraising narrative. Leaders who join on an inflated brief leave early, and they leave loudly.



The question a strong candidate will always ask:

"How do product decisions get made today, and what will change when I'm in the role?" If the answer suggests the founder will retain informal veto over the roadmap, the candidate is assessing whether they have real authority and whether it is worth taking the role."



Most common mis-hire:

Promising a VP Product full autonomy over strategy but not actually releasing control. The hire is made, the dynamic does not change, and the leader exits within twelve months.

Data.



Must-have in the brief

A clear definition of the short and long-term impact required from the role, including what done looks like for the first six months and what the data function is expected to enable at the next funding stage.



The question a strong candidate will always ask:

"What is the current state of the data infrastructure, and what are the biggest gaps between where it is and where it needs to be?" The quality of the answer tells the candidate whether the organisation understands its own data maturity."



Most common mis-hire:

Prioritising exact tech-stack experience over problem-solving capability, stakeholder influence and cultural fit. The data leader who knows your specific tools but cannot build trust across the business will not last. The one who can build that trust and can learn the tools will.

Design.

✓ Must-have in the brief

A clear definition of how design contributes to product success, customer experience and commercial outcomes, with specific reference to the metrics this leader will be expected to move.



The question a strong candidate will always ask:

"How does design currently influence product direction, and what needs to change for design to have the impact you're describing in this brief?" The answer reveals whether the business is ready to give design the mandate it is advertising."



✗ Most common mis-hire:

Treating design as a support function in practice while describing it as a strategic function in the brief. The hire joins expecting influence, finds execution, and leaves within eighteen months.

People & Culture.

✓ Must-have in the brief

Clear alignment on organisational priorities, performance expectations and the role People leadership is expected to play in enabling scale, including whether the mandate is to build infrastructure, fix culture or lead strategic workforce planning. These require materially different profiles.



The question a strong candidate will always ask:

"Where does the CEO and board sit on People as a strategic function, and has that view been demonstrated through investment rather than just stated in the brief?" Senior People leaders have heard the seat at the table promise before. They want evidence."



✗ Most common mis-hire:

Hiring a senior People leader to fix cultural or leadership issues that actually require CEO and board-level alignment to resolve. The People leader cannot fix what the leadership team is unwilling to change.

Finance.

✓ Must-have in the brief

Clarity on whether the role is primarily driving strategic finance, building operational control or preparing the business for its next capital event, alongside a clear view of the investor expectations this leader will be accountable for meeting.



The question a strong candidate will always ask:

"What does the investor base expect from the finance function over the next 12 to 18 months, and how has the business performed against those expectations so far?" This question surfaces whether the CFO mandate is real or cosmetic.."



✗ Most common mis-hire:

Hiring a CFO profile too early, resulting in an over-qualified operator with insufficient infrastructure to work with, or too late, resulting in a credibility gap with investors that takes a full year to close.

06

The top 10%

More expensive, more selective, running 3+ processes, AI premium of 20 to 30%, non-negotiable on mandate clarity.

The gap is widening.

Everyone else

More available, lower cost, but not the hires that change outcomes. A sharp dividing line between the panels. Label

The talent market is not softening. It is splitting in two.

The top operators, those with genuine delivery track records, AI fluency and cross-functional credibility, are becoming more expensive, more selective and more mobile. They know their value, they run multiple processes simultaneously, and they will not wait for slow decisions or unclear mandates.

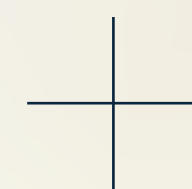
Everyone else has become easier to hire. The gap between the two groups is widening, not closing.

According to Greenhouse's 2025 Hiring Benchmarks report, candidates who receive an offer within ten days of their final interview are 2.5 times more likely to accept than those who wait three or more weeks. In a market where the best candidates are running multiple processes in parallel, process speed is not an administrative concern. It is a strategic one.

"The cost of losing a top-ten-per-cent hire to a competitor who moved faster is not recoverable in the same search cycle."

Compensation & Market Signals

GTM.



- + AEs expect higher OTEs and actively avoid early-stage companies without evidence of stability, product-market fit and a credible earning window. The equity upside story is not sufficient without accompanying base certainty.
- + Top sellers are staying put longer. Multi-year earning windows matter more than upside potential in an uncertain market. Moves happen, but the bar has risen.
- + CRO and VP Sales cash compensation remains broadly stable; equity is being used more heavily where boards want proof of impact before increasing fixed cost.
- + Marketing leaders are negotiating harder on performance bonuses tied directly to pipeline contribution. Variable compensation linked to revenue is increasingly expected rather than exceptional.
- + RevOps compensation remains inflated due to genuine scarcity of operators who combine forecasting, attribution and commercial modelling capability.

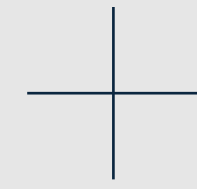
Product & Technology.

Compensation
& Market Signals

Engineers who have shipped AI products into production command a 20 to 30 per cent premium over market, consistent with data from the Hired State of Software Engineers 2025 report. This premium is real, consistent and unlikely to compress in the near term.

- + Junior and mid-level engineering roles are declining in strategic importance. Competition for senior ICs is intensifying. Hiring strategies that rely on volume over seniority are producing diminishing returns.
- + European tech hubs including London, Berlin, Amsterdam, Warsaw and Lisbon are increasingly hiring cross-border to access deeper talent pools, with remote and hybrid arrangements the norm.
- + Strong candidates routinely run three or more processes simultaneously. A two-week delay between final interview and offer is frequently enough to lose a preferred candidate.

Data.



Design.

Data compensation is broadly stable across generalist roles, but positions requiring AI and cloud-native experience are attracting above-inflation increases, typically 15 to 25 per cent above equivalent non-AI roles at the same seniority.

- + Hybrid working remains a high priority for data candidates. Approximately 40 per cent place it near the top of their decision criteria, and fully on-site requirements materially restrict the available pool.
- + Modular, opt-in benefits packages where candidates select from a menu rather than receiving a fixed bundle are gaining traction as a differentiator in competitive processes.
- + Speed and transparency in process design is a distinct competitive advantage in shortage areas. The best data candidates have options, and slow processes confirm the wrong things about a company's decision-making culture.

- + Senior design leaders with experience scaling products from early adoption to enterprise maturity command a meaningful premium in a market where this track record is scarce.
- + Demand is growing strongly for designers with AI product experience, specifically those who can translate complex AI capability into interfaces that users trust and adopt.
- + Cross-functional design leaders with product strategy influence and commercial fluency are increasingly prioritised at senior level over strong IC profiles without that breadth.
- + Top candidates consistently indicate that influence over product direction, not just execution responsibility, is a primary decision factor. Compensation must be accompanied by a credible mandate.

People & Culture. +

- + Senior People leaders are increasingly valued for their ability to operate at board level, which is being reflected in compensation packages that include meaningful equity and performance-linked bonuses tied to organisational outcomes.
- + Demand is rising for hybrid profiles who combine strategic and operational capability. Pure generalists and pure strategists are both harder to place at Series B and above.
- + Equity is a growing lever for attracting top People talent into venture-backed businesses, increasingly used to bridge the gap between venture-backed cash packages and large-company alternatives.
- + Strong candidates at senior level prioritise businesses with visible leadership alignment and a clear growth trajectory. Compensation alone does not close the gap for a candidate who has concerns about the leadership environment.

Finance.

Compensation
& Market Signals

- + CFO compensation is increasingly structured around strategic impact milestones, particularly fundraising close and exit preparation, rather than purely fixed compensation.
- + Demand for commercially minded finance leaders with growth and M&A experience continues to rise sharply relative to supply, producing meaningful premiums for candidates with demonstrable fundraising track records.
- + Interim CFOs are frequently deployed in pre-deal scenarios, with day rates reflecting the premium for speed, expertise and defined-outcome mandates.
- + Strong finance candidates expect genuine visibility into strategy and the authority to influence it, not just ownership of reporting. Packages that reflect a strategic mandate attract better candidates than those framed around financial control.

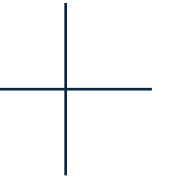
07.

What's Holding Your Teams Back

The most common execution blockers
across venture-backed businesses

Most companies are closer to high performance than they think. It is rarely a lack of talent holding teams back. It is a small number of specific execution gaps that, once identified and addressed, unlock significant momentum.

These patterns are visible across the portfolio companies we work with. They are highly predictable, entirely addressable, and most visible to investors who know what they are looking for.



GTM.

Capability gaps most commonly observed:

- + Leaders who avoid tough performance decisions, tolerating underperformance out of loyalty or conflict-aversion, create compounding drag on revenue output.
- + Weak hiring judgement in the commercial function: bringing on AEs who cannot ramp or SDRs who inflate pipeline rather than qualify it.
- + Limited operational discipline around forecasting, funnel inspection and commercial mechanics, producing board presentations that feel optimistic rather than reliable.

Friction points that slow revenue engines:

- + Misalignment between sales, marketing, CS and product on ICP, messaging and what constitutes a qualified opportunity. This is the single most common blocker to GTM scale.
- + Conflicting forecasting methodologies across sales, RevOps and finance, producing three numbers where there should be one and stalling decisions that depend on agreed data.
- + CS teams with limited influence on product direction, which weakens NRR and creates client satisfaction issues that only become visible at renewal.

Product & Technology.

Capability gaps most commonly observed:

- + Product and Engineering teams that lack commercial and ROI framing, building to specification rather than to outcome, with no clear mechanism for connecting shipped features to business results.
- + Leaders unable to hold a clear product vision under competing stakeholder pressure, resulting in roadmap drift and team disengagement.

Friction points that slow product velocity:

- + VPs too removed from execution to influence day-to-day decisions, creating a vacuum that junior team members fill inconsistently.
- + AI features or tools pushed onto teams without clarity on the value being created or the readiness of the team to use them, leading to adoption failure and credibility loss.

Data.

Capability gaps most commonly observed:

- + Micromanagement of analysts rather than investment in building scalable systems, team capability and data strategy, producing a function that does not grow with the business.
- + Prioritising everything equally rather than focusing effort on the outputs that move the commercial needle most.
- + Accumulating legacy data issues rather than addressing them systematically, creating increasingly fragile foundations that limit AI readiness.

Friction points that slow data impact:

- + No clear ownership of AI operations and data strategy, creating duplication, inconsistency and board-level confusion about what the data function is accountable for.
- + Misalignment between data, engineering and product on priorities and expected outputs, resulting in work that is technically sound but commercially peripheral.

What's Holding Your Teams Back

Design.

Capability gaps most commonly observed:

- + Limited strategic influence of design within product teams: design leaders who are respected for craft but not consulted on direction.
- + Lack of consistency in user experience and design standards across a product that has scaled through multiple teams and releases without a unifying design system.
- + Insufficient senior design leadership to guide scaling products, creating a quality gap that becomes visible in enterprise sales cycles.

Friction points that slow product adoption:

- + Design operating in isolation from product and engineering, producing work that is approved in review but proves difficult to implement or maintain.
- + Misalignment between product vision and user experience, particularly in AI-driven products where the technical capability exists but the interface does not make it accessible.
- + Difficulty translating complex product capability into interfaces that users trust, adopt and return to.

People & Culture.

Capability gaps most commonly observed:

- + Lack of consistent performance management across functions, resulting in uneven standards, quiet underperformance and retention of people who are preventing growth.
- + Over-reliance on informal structures and founder relationships as the business scales past fifty people, creating invisible dependencies and fragility.
- + Leadership teams not aligned on what high performance looks like, producing mixed messages that undermine the People function's credibility.

Friction points that limit organisational scale:

- + Unclear roles and responsibilities leading to duplication, gaps and the political friction that comes with unresolved ambiguity.
- + Inconsistent leadership capability across functions, where some teams operate to a high standard and others do not, creating internal perception problems and retention risk in the better-run teams.
- + Difficulty retaining high performers in a more selective talent market, particularly when compensation has not been reviewed since the last funding round.

Finance.

Capability gaps most commonly observed:

- + Weak forecasting discipline and lack of reliable financial visibility, producing a board dynamic where investors are managing the numbers rather than reviewing them.
- + Finance operating as a reporting function rather than a strategic partner, present at board meetings but absent from the commercial decisions that determine what gets reported.
- + Insufficient experience managing financial complexity at scale, particularly across multiple geographies or product lines.

Friction points that slow decision-making:

- + Misalignment between finance, GTM and leadership on which performance metrics actually matter, producing competing narratives that slow investment and hiring decisions.
- + Lack of clarity on cash, runway and capital allocation, creating board-level anxiety that consumes time that should be spent on strategic decisions.
- + Delays in commercial decisions due to insufficient financial modelling or scenario planning capability.

08.

Leadership in Action

Real impact at critical stages of
venture scale

The following cases are drawn from
VC-backed mandates completed by
ZEREN. All are anonymised but
representative of the patterns we see
across the European venture
ecosystem.



The founder who was the sales team – and the hire that changed that

Series A to B VP Sales AI / Automation SaaS

Business context:

Founder-led sales at Series A. No structured qualification process, no forecasting methodology, and a pipeline that existed in the founder's head rather than a CRM. The business had traction but could not demonstrate it credibly to investors.



What the investor saw:

a business that moved from "we think we can hit the number" to "here is why we will hit the number."

Outcomes delivered:

- + Introduced disciplined pipeline management across all territories within sixty days
- + Established a credible forecasting process for the first time, giving the board a number they could trust
- + Refined segmentation and launched an enterprise motion that had previously been too dependent on founder relationships
- + Strengthened the team through targeted hiring and honest performance management

Series C Head of Data VC-Backed Fintech

Business context:

Three years of rapid growth had produced a fragmented data environment. Leadership was making strategic decisions on reports that different teams disputed. The board had noticed and was asking questions the management team could not answer consistently.



What the investor saw:

a business that moved from "we think we can hit the number" to "here is why we will hit the number."

Outcomes delivered:

- + Stabilised core data foundations and introduced governance standards within the first quarter
- + Delivered a single, agreed reporting layer for leadership and investors, ending the "which number is right" dynamic
- + Identified realistic AI use cases tied to commercial outcomes rather than technical aspiration
- + Reduced contractor dependency by building internal capability

When the board stopped trusting the numbers – and one hire fixed that

Series B VP Engineering VC-Backed Marketplace

Business context:

A marketplace at Series B with delivery inconsistency, a growing tech debt burden and an engineering team that had lost confidence in its own velocity. The situation was beginning to affect the product roadmap conversation with investors.



What the investor saw:

a business that had previously struggled to give a straight answer on delivery timelines, now hitting them.

Outcomes delivered:

- + Improved engineering throughput through clearer delivery frameworks and honest prioritisation
- + Raised the hiring bar and brought in senior IC depth that changed the team's output standard
- + Converted tech debt from an unquantified risk into a structured remediation plan with board-visible milestones
- + Improved reliability through new quality and observability practices

Tech debt was becoming a board risk. One hire turned it into a roadmap.

Marketing was busy. Sales was not closing. One hire connected the two.

Series B Chief Marketing VC-Backed B2B SaaS

Business context:

Strong brand awareness but weak pipeline quality. Marketing and sales were running separate playbooks with no shared ICP or attribution model. The mismatch was costing the business opportunities at the top of the funnel and credibility at board level.



What the investor saw:

a GTM function that finally spoke the same language as the board.

Outcomes delivered:

- + Refined ICP and repositioned messaging around commercial value and risk reduction rather than product features
- + Shifted the marketing model from activity reporting to pipeline contribution
- + Introduced demand programmes tied directly to pipeline coverage targets
- + Improved the quality and consistency of early-stage opportunities entering the sales funnel

Nine weeks to a hire that unlocked the next round conversation

Series A VP Engineering & Product

VC-Backed Fintech

Business context:

An early-stage fintech that needed a hands-on engineering leader who could also credibly represent the product in enterprise customer conversations and in the Series B dialogue with investors.

Placed in 9 weeks.



What the investor saw:

a founding team that had added the missing dimension and could now walk into a Series B conversation with confidence.

Outcomes delivered:

- + Improved engineering velocity, platform scalability and roadmap prioritisation within the first quarter
- + Raised the bar on technical credibility in customer and investor conversations
- + Deepened product capability through direct fintech domain expertise
- + Contributed directly to ARR growth through tighter product and commercial alignment

Series B

VP Product

VC-Backed B2B SaaS

Business context:

A B2B SaaS business navigating CPO succession with a product and design function that needed both stability and a step-change in capability. The transition window was narrow and the cost of getting it wrong was visible to investors.

Placed in 11 weeks.



What the investor saw:

a high-risk leadership transition handled with no visible disruption to the product or the team.

Outcomes delivered:

- + Secured a leader with deep domain expertise and experience scaling in both early and growth-stage environments
- + Improved Product and Design capability across the team from day one
- + Provided continuity through the leadership transition with no loss of roadmap momentum
- + Created a credible internal succession path going forward

The CPO was leaving. The product couldn't afford to miss a beat.

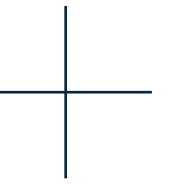
09.

Interim Leadership

The fastest route to clarity, control and visible impact

When the permanent search timeline conflicts with an execution window, or when a function requires rapid stabilisation before a leadership structure is confirmed, interim leadership is the right answer.

ZEREN builds the leadership teams that scale venture-backed businesses. Renoir steps in when you need impact before the permanent team is in place. Renoir provides interim leaders across CEO, CFO, CPTO, CDO and commercial functions. What follows is the framework that the highest-performing interims apply, and the results that are consistently achievable within six weeks.

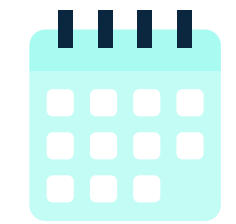


The first 72 hours: what high-impact interims do immediately

The highest-performing interims do not settle in. They create clarity from the moment they arrive.



By Day 3, something meaningful has moved.



Interim Leadership

0 Day

Before arrival:

Elite interims prepare with precision. Before they walk through the door they have studied board materials and financials, understood revenue, cash and margin pressures, mapped leadership bandwidth constraints, and identified ongoing challenges and key risks. When time is compressed, preparation becomes impact.

"When time is compressed, preparation becomes impact."

1 Day



Control, clarity and confidence

In the first three hours: a structured rapid scan covering what is working, what is broken, where value is leaking, where decisions are stuck, and what is blocking execution.

Within the first day: identification of the real organisation, not just the org chart, but the influence network. Who accelerates. Who obstructs. Who silently carries the operation. Where the sensitivities lie.

By end of day: a first proof point. A small, visible action that resets momentum, whether fixing a reporting inconsistency, unblocking a stalled initiative, clarifying ownership of a key metric, or bringing control back to cash or pipeline visibility. Teams feel the shift immediately.

2 Day



Alignment and operating rhythm

A new cadence is in place: daily ten-minute stand-ups, twice-weekly sponsor alignment, a 48-hour decision cycle, clear escalation pathways and calm, visible communication. Everything is prioritised against a single question: will this materially change performance in twelve weeks? Everything that does not meet this bar is deprioritised.

3 Day



Execution and first delta

A 12-week plan is visible: three to five core priorities, clear owners, defined success measures and early deliverables at weeks two, four and eight. Something meaningful has moved. Confidence rises. Teams feel supported. Sponsors feel time coming back.

Interim Leadership

Precision interim roles for 2026

Interim CEO

Commercial operators for SaaS and venture-backed tech

Specialists in rebuilding pricing, packaging and segmentation; restoring pipeline health and forecast accuracy; improving NRR; simplifying the operating model; and tightening the exit narrative. Ideal for founder transitions, stalled growth and board-mandated commercial resets.

Interim CFO / VP Finance

Pre-round and post-investment

Pre-round: model, cash and working capital assessment; fundraising readiness and investor alignment; financial governance and risk visibility. Post-investment: 90-day operational plans; cash discipline; finance team capability uplift. Ideal for first-time institutional ownership and value creation acceleration.

Interim CPTO

AI transformation and execution

The fastest-rising interim category for 2026. These leaders combine product, engineering and AI delivery capability. They deliver AI transformation strategies tied to commercial outcomes, AI feature development and deployment, engineering velocity improvements, and product-tech alignment with revenue goals.

Interim CDO

Data foundations for AI, analytics and scale

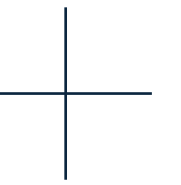
AI and analytics cannot scale without strong data foundations. CDOs focus on data architecture unification, AI-ready pipelines, reporting accuracy and governance. Most valuable when AI initiatives are stalling or data fragility is slowing growth.

Interim Commercial Leaders

GTM, Revenue, CS and CRO-level

These operators rebuild revenue engines quickly by reinstating pipeline discipline, resetting pricing and packaging, reducing churn, improving sales velocity and conversion, repairing forecasting accuracy, and creating a consistent cross-functional execution cadence.

Six weeks to visible impact



NRR improved through targeted retention focus; pricing discipline reintroduced; pipeline-to-forecast accuracy significantly increased; exit narrative clarified and strengthened.



Cash visibility restored; working capital improvement identified; reporting standardised for board and investors; financial model validated and timelines accelerated.



First AI feature launched; engineering blockers removed; roadmap credibility restored with stakeholders; measurably improved conversion in customer demos.



Critical data sources unified; reporting error rate reduced; AI experimentation unblocked; reliable KPIs established for management and investors.



Sales cycle shortened; forecasting accuracy restored; conversion improved through disciplined pipeline management; sales, CS and product aligned on ICP and execution cadence.

Working with ZEREN and Renoir

ZEREN builds the leadership teams that scale venture-backed businesses. Renoir steps in when you need impact before the permanent team is in place.

Together, we partner with founders, CEOs and investors at the moments that matter most: building the right leadership team, strengthening critical functions, and restoring clarity and execution during periods of change.

"2026 will not be won on strategy alone. It will be won on who you hire next, and when."

Leadership Search · Team Hiring · Fractional Leadership

For Leadership Search and Team Hiring



Harry Lewis
Managing Director, GTM
harry.lewis@zerenglobal.com



Paul Nicholls
Director, Product & Tech
paul.nicholls@zerenglobal.com



Bryonny Barton
Director, Product & Engineering
bryonny.barton@zerenglobal.com



Peter Shawyer
Director, Data
peter.shawyer@zerenglobal.com



Kim Wardle
Director, Design & Innovation
kim.wardle@zerenglobal.com



Emma Castillo
Director, People & Culture
emma.castillo@zerenglobal.com



Jodie Robinson
Senior Consultant, Finance
Jodie.robinson@zerenglobal.com

For Interim Leadership



Jen Brook-Botfield,
Director & Head of Interim, Renoir
jen@renoirinterim.com

RENOIR
Part of Renovata.

ZEREN
Part of Renovata.