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Intelligent Recruiting, Human-Led

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The Senior Hire Risk Pyramid

How risk compounds across five layers of a senior commercial search

Why this exists

Drawn from MOGEL's senior commercial recruiting practice since 2014, with founder experience in senior commercial recruiting dating to 2002. The observations below come from active engagements across EdTech, SaaS, FinTech, HealthTech, and PE-backed and venture-backed growth environments.

Across that work, the same five layers of risk repeat in nearly every senior commercial search. Each layer is harder to fix than the one beneath it. A miss at intake is a 30-day delay. A miss at tenure is a 24-month write-down.

This is not a research model. It is a pattern recognition framework drawn from running and recovering from the searches in question.

The thesis

Most senior commercial searches do not fail because the talent does not exist. They fail because risk accumulates in places hiring teams stop looking after the offer is signed.

The pyramid sits visible to the search team for the first 30 days. Then attention shifts to the candidate. The risks at the top of the pyramid never get the discipline applied to the risks at the base. That asymmetry is the single biggest cause of failed senior hires.

The five layers

The pyramid reads from base to apex. The base is the widest, most preventable layer. The apex is the narrowest, most expensive to fix.

Layer	Risk type	What it costs to miss
5 (apex)	Tenure Risk	24-month write-down + cultural cost
4	Integration Risk	6-month run-out + replacement search
3	Compensation Risk	Stalled search + offer rejection
2	Calibration Risk	30-60 day delay + market exposure
1 (base)	Intake Risk	Foundation of every failed search

Layer 1: Intake Risk (the base)

In our experience, intake is the most common origin of failed senior commercial searches.

What we mean by intake risk: the search is launched before the role is properly scoped, the success metrics are defined, the stakeholders are aligned, or the compensation reality is calibrated to market.

The warning signs we see consistently across active searches:

- Misaligned stakeholders. The CEO wants one profile. The CFO wants another. The Head of Sales wants a third. The search begins without resolution.
- Unclear success metrics. "Drive revenue" is not a metric. The search begins anyway.
- Compensation resistance. The hiring manager treats the comp band as fixed before the market has been tested. Reality surfaces in week three.
- Shifting scope. The role definition changes between the first intake call and the first slate review.
- Founder or operator misalignment. The founder describes one mandate. The board expects another.
- Unrealistic profile expectations. The "perfect candidate" combines five categories of experience that almost never appear in one person.

The correction is not a longer intake call. It is a different kind of intake call: structured, written, signed off by every stakeholder, and revisited in week two.

Layer 2: Calibration Risk

In our experience, a meaningful share of senior commercial searches requires recalibration mid-process.

Well-calibrated searches close in 45 to 60 days. Searches that drift extend to 75 to 120 days.

Calibration risk shows up when: - A slate of strong candidates surfaces a misalignment in what the hiring team actually wants - The market reality shifts what is achievable at the offered comp - A senior stakeholder enters the process late and resets the bar - A competing internal candidate emerges and forces a comparison the search was not built for

The pattern we observe: recalibration is the right move when it happens. The cost is the lost weeks before it happens. Searches that recalibrate in week two cost 15 days. Searches that recalibrate in week six cost 60 days.

The discipline that prevents this is a structured week-two checkpoint built into the intake itself.

Layer 3: Compensation Risk

Across many senior commercial searches, compensation band misalignment surfaces during the search itself.

When the gap appears, it is typically 15 to 25 percent below current market expectations for the role being scoped.

The pattern we see most often: a target compensation set 12 to 18 months ago, against a market that has since accelerated materially. AI, Enterprise SaaS, Cybersecurity, and Data & Analytics leadership compensation have moved fastest. The hiring manager has not refreshed the band. The recruiter inherits a search that cannot close at the offered number.

The correction is not a higher band. The correction is a calibration conversation in week one, before three weeks of sourcing and two interview rounds compound into a stalled search.

What we tell clients: compensation surprises are a planning failure, not a market failure. The market is observable. The planning needs to refresh.

Layer 4: Integration Risk

In our experience, the strong majority of MOGEL-placed senior commercial leaders are still in role at 90 days. Retention softens modestly across the following eighteen months, with the integration period accounting for most of the drop-off.

The drop between 90 days and 18 months is where integration risk lives.

Early-placement failures rarely come from candidate capability. They come from:

- Founder or operator mismatch that becomes clear in the first 60 days
- Shifting expectations post-hire that the candidate was not briefed on during the search
- Lack of onboarding structure for executive-level roles
- Conflicting executive stakeholders that surface only after the candidate is in seat
- Unclear ownership boundaries with adjacent functions
- Unrealistic first-90-day expectations that no candidate could meet

The discipline that prevents this is treating the first 90 days as part of the search, not the end of it. MOGEL's embedded model includes structured 30/60/90 day check-ins built into the engagement.

Layer 5: Tenure Risk (the apex)

Average tenure of MOGEL-placed senior commercial leaders trends to approximately three years. The majority remain in role past 24 months.

Tenure risk is the hardest layer to predict and the most expensive to miss. A senior commercial leader who departs at 18 months is a 24-month write-down: the search cost, the ramp time lost, the strategic momentum interrupted, and the second search that follows.

The hiring manager characteristics correlated with long-tenure placements:

- Clear decision-making structures inside the company
- Realistic onboarding expectations
- An aligned executive team that does not relitigate the role in month four
- Willingness to calibrate compensation early when the market shifts
- Strong founder self-awareness about what they need from this role specifically

The patterns above are not about the candidate. They are about the environment the candidate enters. The most under-appreciated lever in senior commercial hiring is the maturity of the hiring organization itself.

How to read the pyramid

The pyramid is built to be read bottom-up. Most hiring teams read it top-down: they focus on the candidate (apex) and assume the foundation (base) was set correctly.

The reverse discipline produces the better outcome.

- Spend the first week on intake (Layer 1) until every stakeholder signs the scorecard
- Build in a week-two calibration checkpoint (Layer 2) before sourcing breadth scales
- Pressure-test compensation against current market (Layer 3) before the slate review
- Plan the integration runway (Layer 4) before the offer is extended
- Choose for tenure (Layer 5) by selecting for the environment, not just the role

When all five layers are built with discipline, time-to-hire compresses and tenure extends. When any one layer is rushed, the cost shows up at a higher layer 90 days later.

What we observe across our growth-stage, PE-backed, venture-backed, and enterprise client base

- The strongest VP Sales candidates increasingly come from adjacent categories rather than direct competitors
- Product Marketing remains one of the most difficult leadership functions to recruit across SaaS and EdTech
- Customer Success leadership profiles are becoming more technical
- PE-backed and growth-stage companies continue prioritizing revenue leadership over functional specialization at the executive level
- The highest-performing hiring organizations treat recruiting as infrastructure rather than a series of transactions

These observations are not industry forecasts. They are what MOGEL is seeing in active searches right now, across our growth-stage, PE-backed, venture-backed, and enterprise client base.

How MOGEL operates differently

MOGEL is not a retained search firm and not a contingent recruiter. MOGEL operates as embedded recruiting infrastructure for growth-stage, PE-backed, venture-backed, and enterprise organizations. The five layers above are the discipline MOGEL applies inside that model.

What that looks like in practice:

- Structured intake with written sign-off from every senior stakeholder
- Week-two calibration checkpoint built into every engagement
- Compensation pressure-test against current MOGEL placement data
- Integration planning included in the search, not added after the offer
- 90-day post-placement check-in tied to the original scorecard

The discipline at each layer is the product. The pyramid is the framework that organizes the discipline.

Methodology and sources

Drawn from MOGEL search work since 2014. Founder experience in senior commercial recruiting since 2002.

Specifically:

External research consulted for validation only: Harvard Business Review on executive transition risk, Bain on PE talent operating models, SHRM on time-to-fill benchmarks, Pave on compensation market dynamics.

MOGEL does not maintain a salary database. The compensation observations above come from active search calibration conversations, not survey data.

Request a Senior Hire Risk Assessment

Share the context of your upcoming senior commercial search. MOGEL will return a documented risk map against the five-layer framework, calibrated intake corrections, and the specific week-one moves to prevent the most common failure modes.

Confidential. No cost. No commitment to engage MOGEL on the search.

Reach Christine directly at christine@mogelrpo.com or our team at hello@mogelrpo.com.

About MOGEL

MOGEL helps high-growth companies scale talent through AI-enabled, human-led recruiting. Operating since 2014 across EdTech, SaaS, FinTech, HealthTech, and PE-backed and venture-backed growth environments.

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