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The Corporate Development challenge is more than AI, it's People.

Why the next twelve months of M&A will be decided by how the teams that surround you adapt to AI.

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This paper originated as an internal strategy document, a redesign of Beyond's own team model, prompted by what we were witnessing in the field. When the evidence became too consistent to ignore, it was worth sharing beyond our own walls.

INTRODUCTION

The shifts reshaping Corp Dev right now

Four shifts are happening simultaneously, and each one changes a different part of the Corporate Development picture. Together they explain why deals that looked sound on paper in 2024 are starting to behave differently in 2026, and why the deciding factor is increasingly people, not the technology itself.

Advisory firms are restructuring. The pyramid of seniors-over-juniors that has defined professional services for a century is being compressed by AI into small, senior-led pods. The thinking you receive from a firm is no longer independent of how that firm is organised, or who is actually doing the work.

Acquisition targets are bifurcating. AI-native firms are generating revenue per head an order of magnitude above their traditional rivals, and they now compete directly with incumbents three times their size. The rest are quietly losing operating leverage. The diligence question 'how is AI changing this business?' has moved from supplementary to core valuation.

Integration playbooks are misfiring. The standard post-close moves, harmonise systems, absorb the team into functional silos, layer in process, were built for businesses where value lived in contracts and assets. When value lives in interlocking AI workflows and a small team's tacit knowledge, those same moves destroy what you bought.

Corp Dev itself is exposed. The analytical, research, and synthesis work at the core of deal origination and diligence is precisely the work AI is most rapidly transforming. Your own team knows this, even if the conversation has not yet happened.

This paper takes those four shifts in order, outside-in, across three areas: the firms you hire, the firms you evaluate, and the one you run. The timeframe throughout is twelve months, not a five-year transformation horizon. The common thread is People First: in every shift, the deciding variable is human, not technical.

WHAT THIS PAPER COVERS, AND WHO IT IS FOR

Three parts, in order

This paper is for Corporate Development professionals who are buying, evaluating, and integrating businesses. It is organised around three distinct but connected parts, each introduced by its own divider page.

Part One. The advisors you hire

The firms you bring in to help execute deals: DD Advisors, integration consultants, strategic partners. Are they built for this world? Are you getting their best thinking, or a committee-approved version of it? The operating model of your advisory firm matters more than most buyers realise, and this part gives you a practical way to assess it.

Part Two. The targets you evaluate

The companies you are considering acquiring. Is their operating model genuinely AI-native, or AI-washed? What signals distinguish one from the other? And when you buy a 'firm of the future,' how do you integrate it without destroying what you paid for?

Part Three. Your own team

The Corp Dev function itself. The same forces reshaping advisory firms and acquisition targets are reshaping your team too. This is the most uncomfortable part, and the most important.

Before we get to Part One, two short framing sections set the scene: what we have been witnessing inside AI-native firms, and why our individual responses to that shift are more predictable than they feel.

FRAMING

What we're witnessing in the field

Over the past eighteen months, during technology due diligence projects, our team has encountered something that has changed how we think about professional services, about M&A targets, and about our own business.

We've been inside what I've started calling firms of the future: small, AI-augmented teams, delivering the output of traditional firms ten times their size. Not occasionally. Consistently. Their target is 90% automation of analytical and operational work. Their financial model shows revenue growing while headcount stays flat.

> *Cursor reached $1bn ARR in under 24 months with roughly 300 employees, about $3.3m of revenue per head. Midjourney generates over $12.5m per employee. The top ten AI-native companies average $3.48m per employee, against a traditional SaaS average of $200k. These are not outliers. They are the direction of travel.*

The most instructive example we encountered was not a headline-grabbing AI unicorn. During one engagement, we assessed a new market entrant, half software, half services, with a stated target of 90% operational automation within twelve months. No legacy infrastructure to unpick, no inherited processes to defend. Twenty-six people. £7m ARR. Two people in the technology function. The revenue-per-head figure sits well below Cursor or Midjourney, but that misses the point. This was a real, operating business, a direct competitor to firms three times its size, running on a fraction of the headcount its rivals considered normal. The structural advantage was not the AI tooling. It was the absence of the organisational assumptions the tooling had made redundant.

Beyond had already started adapting. We had been operating, and pitching, a 'No Juniors' model for some time before our internal team transformation began. No pyramids. No layers of review between the senior thinking and the client. Every engagement is led by a senior operator with direct accountability for the output. The firms of the future we were assessing had independently arrived at the same conclusion, from a different direction. That observation became a formal internal team-model redesign.

That redesign became this paper.

FRAMING

This has happened before, but it feels different depending on where you stand

Before we get into the mechanics of what is changing, it is worth stepping back. Because most of the anxiety around AI, in organisations, in teams, in individual careers, is not really about AI. It is about change. And our relationship with change is more predictable than we tend to acknowledge.

Jason Feifer, editor-in-chief of Entrepreneur magazine and author of Build for Tomorrow, has spent years studying how people respond to disruption. His finding: everyone moves through the same four phases, without exception.

Panic. Adaptation. New Normal. Wouldn't Go Back.

The printing press caused panic among scribes. The automobile caused panic among horse breeders. The ATM caused panic among bank tellers, yet bank branch employment increased in the decade after ATMs were introduced, because lower transaction costs made branches more commercially viable. The pattern repeats, industry after industry, century after century.

> *Our fears about new technologies often aren't even about the new technologies. They're really about a larger societal shift that those technologies represent.*
>
> JASON FEIFER

This is why Morgan Housel's Same as Ever (2023) is such a useful companion text. The world changes constantly, but people do not. Loss aversion, the psychological finding that we are more motivated to protect against loss than to pursue gain, explains most of the resistance. The 55-year-old partner who has built a career on being the most senior person in the room is responding to AI differently from the 25-year-old who sees it as an accelerator before they have a career to protect. Both responses are entirely rational, given where each person stands.

For Corp Dev, this lens matters in two ways

First, when evaluating targets: the team's relationship with AI, whether they are in Panic, Adaptation, or already at New Normal, is a material diligence signal. A leadership team still in Panic mode will make defensive, short-term decisions about AI adoption. A team in Adaptation is investible. A team already at Wouldn't Go Back is a structural advantage.

Second, when integrating: the friction you encounter post-close is not cultural or attitudinal in the way that word implies. It is rooted in where different people are in the four-phase change cycle. The AI-native team you just acquired is at Wouldn't Go Back. Your integration team is, in many cases, still in Adaptation, or Panic. Understanding this gap is the first step to managing it.

PART ONE

The advisors you hire

Why the operating model of your advisory firm now matters as much as its brand, and how to tell the difference in a single conversation.

The pyramid is everywhere, and it's breaking

Most Corp Dev teams evaluate advisory firms on reputation, sector experience, and relationships. Very few evaluate the operating model of the firm itself. The objective of this part is simple: to ensure that the thinking you are paying for is actually the thinking you are receiving.

Every professional services firm runs the same model. A few seniors at the top who originate work and hold client relationships. A layer of mid-level professionals who supervise execution. A large base of junior staff who do the analytical, research, and drafting work. It is how law firms, consulting firms, investment banks, accountancies, and advisory practices have operated for a century.

The pyramid was built around three jobs: originating work, supervising it, and doing it. AI is breaking all three, simultaneously.

McKinsey finds that generative AI and other technologies now have the potential to automate work activities that absorb 60 to 70 percent of employees' time. BCG is direct about where this leads: 'Work will be organized around lean, elite teams of specialized, well-paid employees. Hierarchies will flatten as AI agents, overseen by humans, operate back-office processes.'

The AI automation of analytical execution does not just create a productivity gain. It removes the foundation of the pyramid's economic model. Junior staff were not merely cheap labour; they were the apprenticeship layer. The junior analyst who spent three years building financial models was also building judgment. Sector pattern recognition. An instinct for what a number means in context. Take away the execution work and the apprenticeship goes with it, which is why the pyramid cannot simply shrink. It has to be redesigned.

AT A GLANCE

Pyramid vs. Pod

	Traditional Pyramid	AI-Native Pod
Shape	Broad junior base, thin senior tier	A partner, two seniors and no juniors.
Leverage	Associates × rate × utilisation	Domain expertise × AI quality × client trust
Who does the work	Juniors execute; seniors review	Seniors orchestrate AI workflows directly
Apprenticeship	Three to five years before judgment forms	Apprenticeship layer vanishes. AI handles execution.
Output speed	Weeks to months per deliverable.	Days to weeks per deliverable. Daily updates compound the value of the work.
Pricing logic	Time and materials	Outcomes and access to senior thinking
Revenue per head	~ $200k (SaaS benchmark)	$1m to $12m+ (AI-native benchmark)
Failure mode	Filtered thinking; account-managed relationships	Capacity ceiling if seniors over-commit

A team of three configured this way can produce the output of a traditional team of ten. AI handles the 60 to 70% of work that was analytical execution. The remaining 30%, judgment, framing, relationships, ethical accountability, is where human expertise concentrates.

THE NEW OPERATING MODEL

The roles inside the Pod

Across advisory and professional services, a lean team model is emerging. HBR identifies this as a structural shift driven by AI's capacity to automate the tasks that junior tiers traditionally performed: research, modelling, data synthesis, first drafts. What remains, and what AI cannot replace, is judgment, framing, relationships, and accountability.

The Relationship Lead. The senior operator who holds the client relationship, frames the problem, and is accountable for outcomes. Not a coordinator. A practitioner with genuine domain expertise who brings that expertise to bear directly, without dilution.

The Delivery Lead. Structures the engagement, designs the AI-enabled workflow, interprets outputs, and translates findings into actionable recommendations. The new centre of gravity in the evolved advisory model.

The AI Facilitator. Designs and runs the AI-enabled workflows through which the work is done. Not a junior analyst rebranded. A technically fluent professional developing judgment at a pace the traditional career path never allowed, because they are directly exposed to problem-framing, client context, and iterative decision-making from day one.

DIAGNOSTIC · PART ONE

Is your advisory relationship pyramid-filtered?

Use these questions to test the operating model of any firm you hire. The consolidated tear-out on the final page distils the most critical items for fast in-deal reference.

- Do you receive the senior partner's unfiltered view, or a synthesised version prepared by a junior team?
- Are deliverables produced in days, or in weeks/months?
- Does the person who presents the findings also lead the analysis, or are these different people?
- Does the team get smaller and more senior as the engagement deepens, or does the junior base stay constant throughout?
- Can you call the senior advisor directly when something changes, without going through account management?
- Are recommendations clear and direct, or hedged with layers of caveats and qualifications?
- Does your advisor ever disagree with you directly, or do they tend to reflect your own position back to you?
- Is the pricing model based on time and materials, or on outcomes delivered?

PART TWO

The targets you evaluate

Telling AI-native from AI-washed, and integrating what you bought without destroying it.

Is the target AI-native, or AI-washed?

The previous part examined the operating models of your advisory partners. Now we turn to the companies you are acquiring. The same AI-native vs. traditional distinction applies, but the stakes are higher, because you are making a valuation decision, not just an advisory selection.

Evaluating the operating model of a target

- Is AI woven into core workflows from the ground up, or bolted on as optional features after the fact?
- Is the team's headcount growing in proportion to revenue, or is revenue growing while headcount stays flat?
- Does the team have a documented view of what they are automating and over what timeframe?
- Are AI tools in active daily use at the operational level, not just piloted by a working group or featured in the investor deck?
- Does the company's data infrastructure support AI model training and feedback loops, or is data siloed and unstructured?
- When you ask the leadership team how AI changes their business over the next 12 months, do they give a specific answer, or a general one?
- Is there genuine AI literacy at the leadership level, or only in a dedicated AI team that operates separately from the business?
- Is pricing tied to output or outcomes, or still calculated on headcount and time?
- Is there a 90-day AI roadmap with measurable targets, or a vision slide with no milestones?
- Would the business model survive if its human headcount doubled? If yes, it is AI-native. If it would simply get slower and more expensive, it is not.

INTEGRATION RISK

What you are actually buying, and what you can accidentally destroy

The most consequential risk in acquiring an AI-native firm is this: the qualities that make it valuable are precisely what traditional integration playbooks destroy.

An AI-native firm of ten people is not a small version of a traditional firm. It is a different operating system. Its value does not live in its brand, its contracts, or even its technology stack in isolation. It lives in:

- the interlocking workflows between a small team and their AI systems, relationships built through iteration and tacit knowledge;
- the psychological safety that allows fast, honest, non-hierarchical decision-making;
- the autonomy to iterate and adapt without bureaucratic approval cycles;
- the people, who have been selected and developed for exactly this way of working, and who will not thrive in a different environment.

Apply a standard integration playbook to this, and the IMAA research documents what happens: the innovative culture is absorbed into the acquirer's structure. Founders depart after earnouts. Key talent drifts to competitors. The acquirer pays a premium for a capability and then systematically dismantles it.

The Wharton research on acqui-hires, published in the Strategic Management Journal, is explicit: when acquired founders with disruptive know-how are dispersed into the legacy hierarchy rather than kept together as a unit, the risk of premature founder exit rises sharply. The finding is precise. Preserving the team intact in a single business unit, and assigning the acquired founder to a high-status position, are the two strongest structural predictors of retention.

> *Keeping the team together is critical to preserve the socially complex knowledge embedded in team interactions and relationships.*

McKinsey case studies on cultural integration show that firms which protected acquired units with explicit autonomy shields, deliberately limiting integration rather than maximising it, achieved materially different outcomes: attrition limited to 30% against a projected 70%, revenue growth of 20% over three years in a declining market, and growth at 1.5 times the industry rate in new geographies.

THE FOUR ARCHETYPES

The integration spectrum

There is no single correct approach. There are four, and choosing the wrong one has direct financial consequences.

- **Full Assimilation.** Integrate the target into the acquirer's structure, processes, and culture. Fast and inexpensive to execute. Reliably destroys what you bought when the asset is an AI-native operating model.
- **Managed Integration.** Harmonise selected processes, typically finance, legal, reporting, while protecting delivery autonomy. Viable with deliberate design and active monitoring. Requires someone with accountability to defend the boundary between what is harmonised and what is not.
- **Subsidiary Model.** The target operates independently under the acquirer's umbrella. Highest value preservation of the four approaches. Also requires the most restraint from the acquirer. The impulse to standardise is constant and must be actively resisted.
- **Acqui-hire.** Absorb the people; dissolve the entity. Appropriate only if the people are the exclusive asset. If the operating model is also an asset, the acqui-hire approach destroys it by design.

The people and psychology dimension

This dimension is consistently under-weighted in integration planning and consistently over-represented in post-close regret. Amy Edmondson's research establishes that psychological safety, the belief that you can speak, challenge, and fail without personal penalty, is the primary predictor of team effectiveness.

AI-native firms, by design, operate with high psychological safety. Small teams, direct communication, fast iteration, no approval theatrics. This is not a cultural preference. It is a structural feature of how their work gets done.

When you integrate that team into a hierarchy, you place people who are hardwired for autonomy and fast iteration into a system that rewards deference and process compliance. The friction this creates is not attitudinal. It will not be resolved by a culture workshop or an onboarding programme. Using Kolbe psychometrics, we can see this clearly: conative profiles show direct, measurable incompatibility between the instincts required for AI-native work and those rewarded in large hierarchical organisations. It is conative mismatch, not culture clash.

> *M&A has always been a People First endeavour. The big tech CEOs tell us it's cloud first, mobile first - and now AI first, but the reason 80% of M&A deals fail to deliver financial benefits is a failure to engage technology teams as people, not resources.*
>
> PEOPLE FIRST (2018)

Protecting value when acquiring an AI-native firm

The detailed working checklist. A condensed deal-room version is provided in the tear-out summary on the final page.

Before signing

- Map the AI workflows and document which humans are critical to which systems. Know specifically what breaks, and how quickly, if key people leave.
- Assess the conative profile of the founding team and critical talent. Understand how they are hardwired to act, and whether your integration environment will support or suppress those instincts.

In the SPA

- Consider earnouts structured around team retention, not only revenue milestones. In AI-native firms, revenue follows people. The two are not separable.

In the first 30 days

- Do not impose your process or technology stack on the target. Observe first. Understand what you have before you standardise it.
- Give the founding team a high-status role in the combined organisation, VP level or above, with real scope and real authority. Wharton research identifies this as the single strongest predictor of founder retention.

In the first 90 days

- Decide the integration archetype deliberately (assimilation, managed integration, subsidiary, or acqui-hire) and communicate it clearly to both organisations. Ambiguity is the primary enemy of retention in the early post-close period.
- Run a Kolbe or equivalent conation assessment on both teams to map friction points before they manifest as departures.

Ongoing

- Protect the Pod structure. Do not disaggregate the AI-native team into the functional silos of the acquirer.
- Measure retention of AI-native team members separately from overall integration metrics. If AI Facilitators and Delivery Leads are leaving, the operating model is degrading faster than the revenue line will yet show.
- Give the acquired team explicit permission to work differently (different tools, different rhythms, different meeting cadences). Forcing cultural conformity is how you kill the goose.

WHY THIS IS URGENT

The 12-month window

The transformation described in this paper is not a five-year story. The evidence indicates it is happening on a 12-month horizon, including to targets you are evaluating right now.

The WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025 finds that 86% of employers expect AI and information-processing technologies to transform their business. 40% anticipate workforce reductions where AI can automate tasks. In Information and Technology Services, the sector most relevant to many Corp Dev targets, near-universal adoption is expected, with a 99% rate of anticipated impact.

The McKinsey State of AI 2025 reports that a median 30% of respondents already expect a decrease in their function's workforce size in the coming year as a result of AI use. In the prior year, a median 17% decline had already occurred. These are not projections. They are reports from the field.

Oxford's Carl-Benedikt Frey draws a critical distinction: as a general rule, AI may be able to replace human labour in many virtual settings. If a task can be done remotely, it can also potentially be automated. The corollary, which matters for advisory services, is that high-trust, in-person, long-tenure relationships are the most durable. Transactional advisory relationships are not.

> *Time is a wasting asset. The longer companies wait, the more likely their competitors will not.*
>
> BCG

For Corp Dev specifically, this creates a diligence gap that is widening in real time. A target that presented as a healthy, growing business in 2024 may have a fundamentally challenged operating model by 2026 if it has not adapted. The question 'how is AI changing this business?' is no longer a supplementary diligence question. It is a core valuation question.

Bain's analysis of more than 300 companies found that less than 10% face existential AI disruption (the 'revolution' category). About half face meaningful efficiency gains without wholesale disruption (the 'augmentation' category). The remainder face a requirement for substantial business model change. Buyer teams that do not know what to look for will systematically misprice AI exposure in both directions: overpaying for AI-washed incumbents, and under-valuing genuine AI-native firms whose financials do not yet reflect their structural advantage.

PART THREE

Your own team

The same forces reshaping advisory firms and acquisition targets are reshaping the Corp Dev function itself. Your team already knows.

The leadership gap is the bigger risk

The final part is the one most Corp Dev professionals skip past. Don't. The dynamics reshaping your advisory partners and your acquisition targets are also reshaping your own function, and your team members are already aware of it, whether or not the conversation has happened yet.

McKinsey's Superagency research finds that workers are three times more likely than leaders realise to expect AI to replace at least a third of their work in the near future. The leadership gap is real and measurable: C-suite leaders consistently underestimate both how much their employees are already using AI and how much disruption those employees expect it to bring. Employees are ahead of leaders on AI readiness, and they are waiting for leaders to catch up.

This matters for Corp Dev teams because the analytical, research, and synthesis work that forms the core of deal origination and diligence is precisely the work AI is most rapidly transforming. Market mapping. Comparables analysis. First-draft IC papers. Synthesising data rooms. Vendor red-flag reports. Integration planning frameworks. None of this is going away, but the time and headcount it absorbs are about to compress sharply. The professionals doing that work know this. They are already experimenting in private tools. They want direction.

What changes for the Corp Dev function specifically

Three shifts will define the next twelve months inside Corp Dev teams that adapt, and will quietly hollow out the ones that do not.

- **The analyst tier compresses.** The same dynamic dismantling the advisory pyramid applies inside the buy-side. Tasks that justified two or three FTE (long-list screening, competitor landscaping, first-pass financial scrubbing) are increasingly done in hours by a single operator with the right toolkit. The headcount question is no longer 'how many analysts?' but 'how many AI-fluent operators, paired with what infrastructure?'
- **The diligence stack expands.** AI exposure is now a core valuation lens alongside commercial, financial, legal, and tech. It cuts across all of them and changes what each one is actually measuring. The Corp Dev function that does not build, or buy in, an explicit AI diligence capability will misprice deals in both directions for the next eighteen months.
- **The integration mandate widens.** Integration was already the most under-resourced part of most Corp Dev functions. When the targets being acquired are AI-native pods rather than traditional businesses, the integration team's job changes from 'standardise' to 'protect, observe, and selectively harmonise'. That is a different skill set and a different operating cadence, and very few in-house integration teams have been redesigned for it.

Target and portfolio management must be operated by AI tools

The same logic that applies to advisory firms and acquisition targets applies to the tools you run your own function on. Spreadsheets, deal-tracker SaaS, and a project manager are no longer enough. Corp Dev needs an AI brain that looks after the function, not another project management tool.

Talk to us about Lens, our affordable due diligence and post-merger management product with a strong artificial intelligence layer. We built Lens before AI became mainstream and have battle-tested it across hundreds of deals. The single problem it solves is corporate-wide accountability through M&A-focused AI and intelligence. You do not want a project management tool; you want an AI brain that looks after your Corp Dev function.

The redesign conversation, and a 90-day playbook

When we came back from those first engagements, I had an honest conversation with my own team. I told them: your role is changing, and neither of us knows exactly how. So let's start redesigning it together, so that you ride this wave rather than be overwhelmed by it. I also told them something harder: our own business model will be defunct within a few years if we do not adapt. That is the conversation every leader in professional services needs to have. Not once. Continuously.

The function is not a fixed thing to be redesigned at a single point in time. It is a system that will need to be updated at the pace AI is developing, which is faster than any previous technology cycle. The firms and teams that treat this as urgent, specific, and collaborative, rather than theoretical, distant, and top-down, are the ones that will retain the people who are capable of doing the work.

What good looks like, five markers

Across the Corp Dev functions we have seen begin this redesign successfully, five markers tend to appear together. None is sufficient on its own.

- **A named owner for AI inside Corp Dev.** Not the CTO, not 'everyone', not a working group. One person whose remit is the Corp Dev function itself.
- **A short list of agreed use cases** (three to five) where AI is being used in live deal work, with explicit guardrails on data, IP, and confidentiality.
- **A standing forum,** monthly, time-boxed, where the team shares what is working, what is wasting time, and what guardrails need adjusting. The cadence matters more than the format.

- **A redesigned analyst role** with a clear, honest growth path that acknowledges the apprenticeship layer has changed. Pretending it has not is the fastest way to lose your best junior talent.
- **A direct line to the executive committee** on what the function will look like in twelve months. Not a slide, an actual answer with implications for hiring, partnering, and budget.

90-DAY PLAYBOOK

A 90-day playbook for the Corp Dev leader

Days 1 to 30 · Diagnose

- Map current Corp Dev workflows end-to-end. Mark each task by AI-exposure: automate now, augment, protect as human judgment.
- Survey the team, anonymously, on how they are already using AI. The honest answer will surprise you, and it is your real baseline.
- Name an internal owner for the redesign. Give them air cover and explicit time.

Days 31 to 60 · Decide

- Pick three live use cases to run end-to-end with AI in the loop. One in origination, one in diligence, one in integration. Set guardrails before you start, not after.
- Decide what stays in-house and what moves to AI-native advisory partners. Apply Part One to your own panel.
- Rewrite the analyst job description for the next twelve months, not the next five years. Share it with the team and adjust.

Days 61 to 90 · Operate

- Run the standing forum. Cut what is not working. Double down on what is.
- Report a one-page update to the executive committee, including headcount, partner mix, and AI exposure across the live pipeline.
- Schedule the next 90-day cycle. Treat the function as a rolling product, not a project.

Your team are already ahead of you on AI. Your job as a Corp Dev leader is no longer to issue an AI strategy. It is to redesign the function with them, on a rolling 90-day cycle, before the market does it for you.

TEAR-OUT SUMMARY

AI-Native acquisition & integration

A one-page deal-room reference. Detach, print, or save. The full diagnostic checklists sit in Parts One, Two, and Three above.

A. Before you bid, evaluating the target

- Is revenue growing while headcount stays flat, or is headcount growing in proportion to revenue?
- Are AI tools in active daily use at the operational level, or only visible in the investor materials?
- When you ask leadership how AI changes their business in 12 months, do they give a specific answer?
- Is there a 90-day AI roadmap with measurable targets, or a vision slide with no milestones?
- Would the business model survive if human headcount doubled, or would it just get slower and more expensive?

B. Structuring the deal

- Consider earnouts structured around team retention, not revenue milestones alone. In AI-native firms, team and revenue are the same asset.
- Assign the acquired founder to a VP-level role with real scope at signing. Not as a courtesy, but as deal architecture.
- Map the critical AI workflows and the humans tied to them before the SPA is finalised. Know what you are actually buying.

C. The first 100 days

- Choose the integration archetype deliberately (assimilation, managed, subsidiary, or acqui-hire) and communicate it clearly to both organisations.
- Do not impose your process or technology stack on the target in the first 30 days. Observe first.
- Run a conation assessment (Kolbe or equivalent) on both teams within 90 days to identify friction before it becomes attrition.
- Protect the Pod structure. Do not disaggregate the AI-native team into the acquirer's functional silos.
- Measure AI-native team retention separately. If AI Facilitators are leaving, the operating model is degrading before it shows in the revenue line.

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