

Hybrid Role Design in Start-Up Teams: When Sales and Marketing Merge

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Abstract: *Start-ups often operate under resource constraints, requiring employees to take on hybrid roles that merge multiple functions. One common configuration involves the integration of sales and marketing responsibilities, a combination that can drive agility but may also generate role ambiguity. This study investigates the design and outcomes of hybrid sales-marketing roles in early-stage start-ups. Using a mixed-method approach combining surveys and semi-structured interviews with start-up employees, the study examines the impact of hybrid roles on role clarity, team collaboration, and performance outcomes. Findings suggest that while hybrid roles enhance flexibility and cross-functional understanding, clear communication, defined responsibilities, and supportive leadership are critical to avoid confusion and burnout.*

Keywords: Hybrid roles, start-up teams, sales-marketing integration, role design, team performance, role clarity

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving start-up ecosystem, teams are often lean, with individuals taking on multiple responsibilities to meet business objectives. This necessity has led to the creation of hybrid roles, particularly in functions such as sales and marketing, where overlapping objectives exist. While traditional organizations maintain strict functional boundaries, start-ups benefit from flexibility and cross-functional skill development. However, hybrid roles can introduce challenges, including role ambiguity, work overload, and conflicts in priority-setting. This paper explores how start-ups design hybrid sales-marketing roles, the factors influencing their effectiveness, and the impact on team performance.

2. Literature Review

Role design is a critical element of organizational behavior, affecting employee satisfaction, productivity, and collaboration. According to Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964), clearly defined responsibilities reduce ambiguity and stress, while ambiguous roles increase conflict and job dissatisfaction. Hybrid roles in start-ups combine multiple functional responsibilities, requiring employees to navigate competing demands (Barker, 1993).

Sales and marketing are closely aligned functions, yet they traditionally operate with distinct objectives: marketing focuses on lead generation and brand awareness, while sales drives conversion and revenue. When merged into hybrid roles, employees must balance strategic marketing initiatives with tactical sales targets. Research on cross-functional teams suggests that while integration enhances coordination and innovation, it also increases cognitive and emotional workload (Rothaermel & Alexandre, 2009).

Studies on start-ups highlight the advantages of hybrid roles, including agility, faster decision-making, and enhanced skill development (Mintzberg, 1979). However, empirical evidence is limited on best practices for structuring these roles, particularly regarding the sales-marketing interface. This gap motivates the current study.

3. Methodology

A mixed-method approach was employed to investigate hybrid role design in start-ups.

Sample: 50 employees from 15 early-stage start-ups operating in technology and consumer products.

Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore employees' perceptions of role clarity, workload, and collaboration. A survey measured perceived role ambiguity, job satisfaction, and self-reported performance outcomes.

Analysis: Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns in role experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analyses to assess relationships between hybrid role characteristics and performance indicators.

4. Findings and Discussion

The study revealed several key insights:

- 1) **Enhanced Agility:** Hybrid roles allowed start-ups to adapt quickly to market changes and respond to customer needs more efficiently. Employees developed a broader understanding of the business, fostering innovative approaches.
- 2) **Role Ambiguity:** Ambiguity was common, particularly regarding task prioritization. Employees experienced stress when sales targets conflicted with marketing initiatives.
- 3) **Importance of Communication:** start-ups with structured communication channels and regular check-ins reported higher satisfaction and performance among hybrid-role employees.
- 4) **Leadership Support:** Supportive founders and managers who clarified objectives, provided resources, and recognized effort mitigated the negative effects of role overload.

These findings suggest that while hybrid sales-marketing roles can drive performance and agility, their effectiveness

depends on clear role design, continuous communication, and leadership support.

5. Conclusion

Hybrid roles are a strategic necessity for start-ups, particularly in sales and marketing functions. This study highlights that while these roles enhance flexibility and cross-functional expertise, careful design is essential to avoid role ambiguity and employee burnout. start-ups should prioritize clear expectations, structured communication, and leadership support to maximize the benefits of hybrid role integration. Future research could explore longitudinal outcomes of hybrid roles and compare different hybrid configurations across industries.

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