



KEN RESEARCH · METHODOLOGY

Did AI kill the SDR role?

The data, the methods, every number and every limitation behind the study.

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Founder of Ken

ABOUT THE DATA

This study uses Ken internal data: the company, people and web records Ken uses for sales and outreach, reused by Cristian Frunze for this study.

Aggregates only. Any group smaller than 50 people is suppressed, and no individual is named.

Figures 1 to 4 are the study page's charts, drawn from the same numbers. The methodology after them keeps the full tables.

SUMMARY

Did AI kill the SDR role?

Not in headcount. SDRs were 6.7% of software sales teams in March 2026, against 6.8% a month after ChatGPT launched.

-1.5%

relative change in the SDR share of software and IT sales teams, from 6.8% at the end of 2022 to 6.7% in March 2026.

44,829

SDRs in March 2026, level with the September 2022 peak of 44,855, after a 12.5% fall to early 2024.

-7.7%

change in SDRs per AE. The ratio fell because AE headcount grew 12.0%, against 3.4% for SDRs.

+12.5%

for junior SDRs against junior support and marketing roles at the same companies (95% interval 7.0% to 17.9%).

Data and method

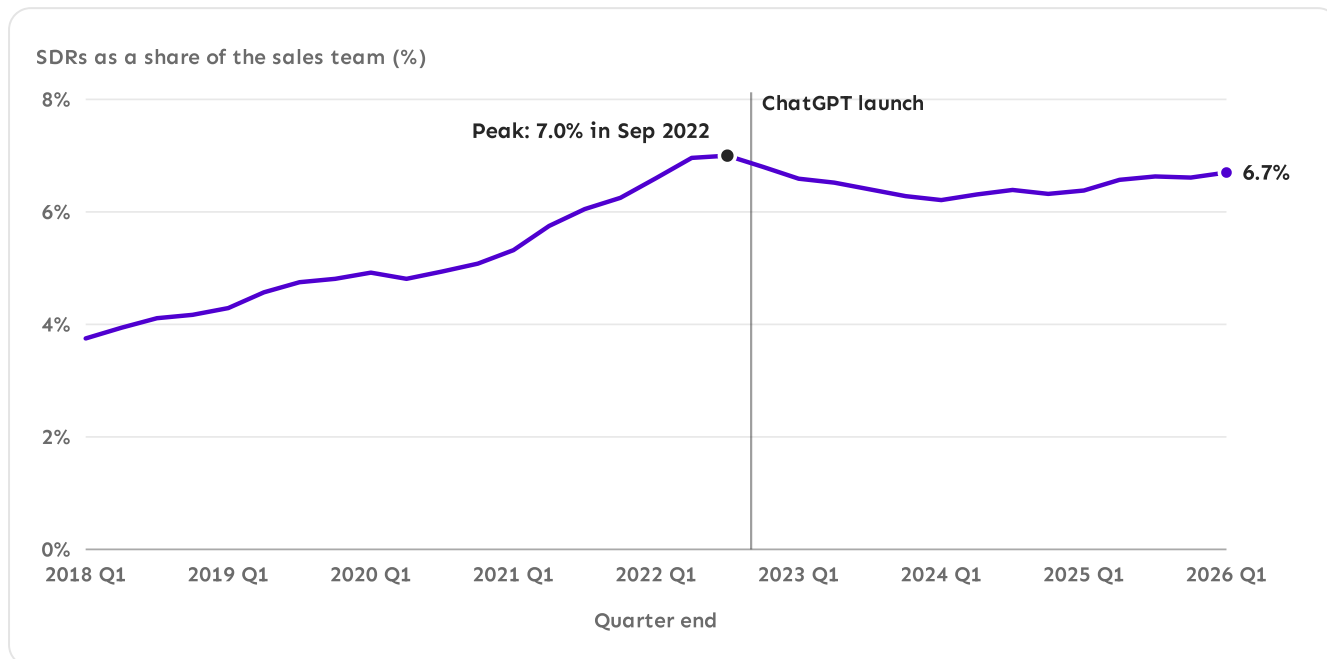
Data	Ken internal data: the public work histories and company records Ken uses for sales and outreach, reused by Cristian Frunze for this study. Six countries: the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, Ireland and New Zealand.
Sample	113,233 software and IT companies, with headcount rebuilt at every quarter end from each role's start and end dates.
Date range	Quarter ends from 2018 Q1 to 2026 Q1, with profiles updated up to April 2026. The end of 2022 is the reference quarter.
Method	Pre-registered time series with a comparison group (junior support and marketing roles at the same companies): a break-date search with a company bootstrap and an event study with 95% intervals. Headline numbers recomputed by a separate analysis.
Excluded	• Role records with no start date, or that end before they start • Companies outside the 18 software and IT industry labels, except in the all-industries check • Quarters after March 2026, which are still filling in
Privacy	Aggregates only. Any group smaller than 50 people is suppressed, and no individual is named.

FIGURES

The study's charts

FIGURE 1

The SDR share of software sales teams barely moved after ChatGPT

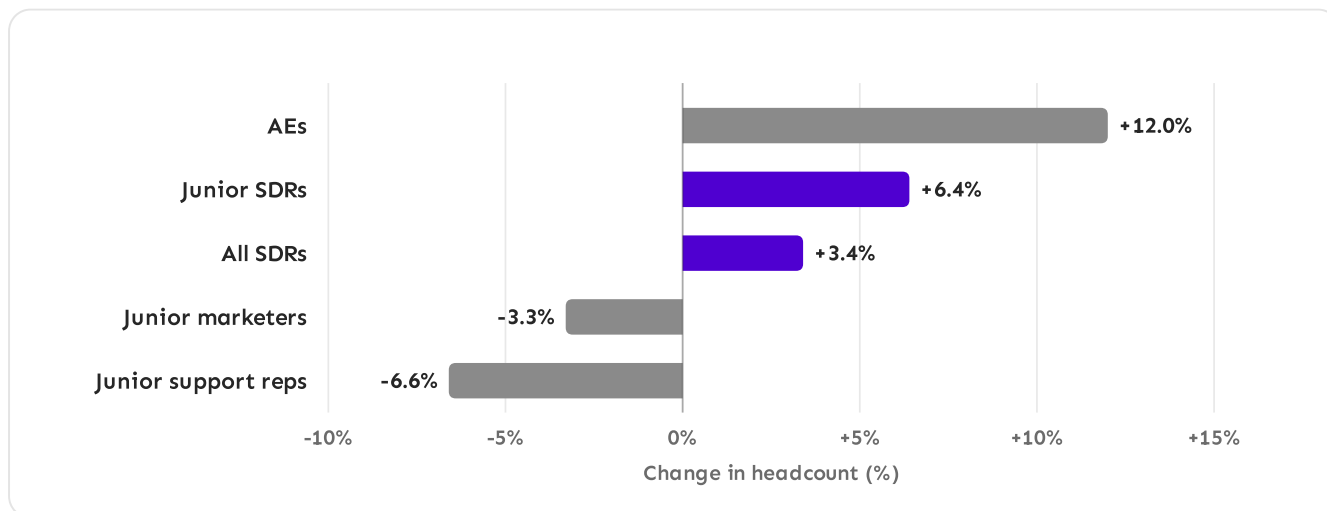


SDRs and BDRs as a share of sales-team headcount at software and IT companies, at each quarter end. The share nearly doubled from 2018 to its peak in September 2022, two months before ChatGPT launched.

Source: Ken internal data (company and career records Ken uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

FIGURE 2

AEs grew faster than SDRs, and other junior roles shrank

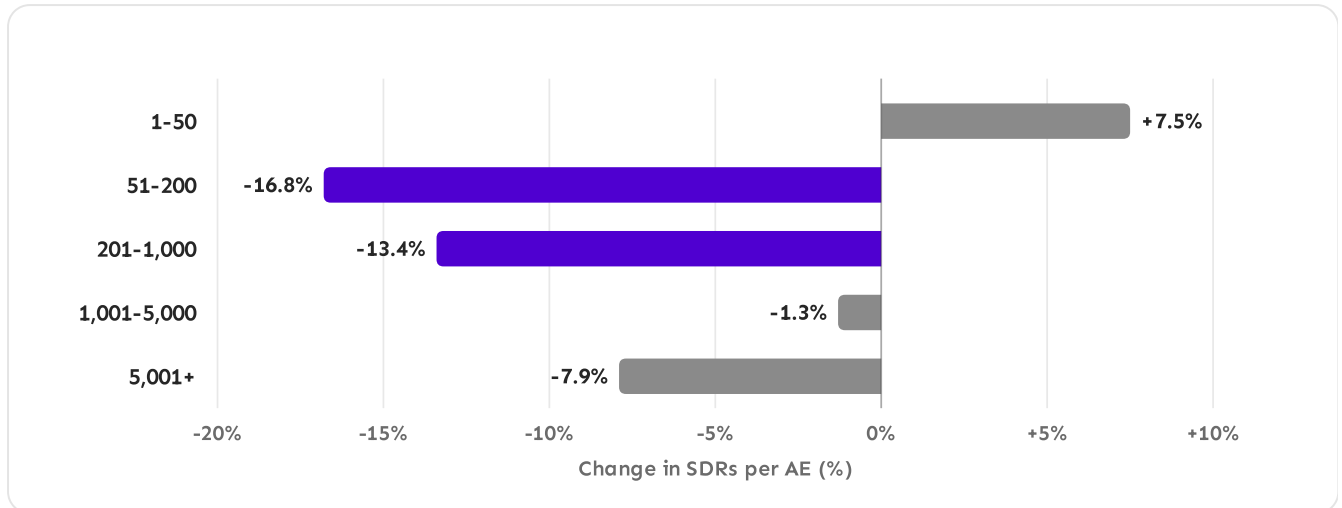


Change in headcount at software and IT companies from the end of 2022 to March 2026. Junior roles are entry-level titles in each function.

Source: Ken internal data (company and career records Ken uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

FIGURE 3

Mid-size companies cut SDRs per AE the most

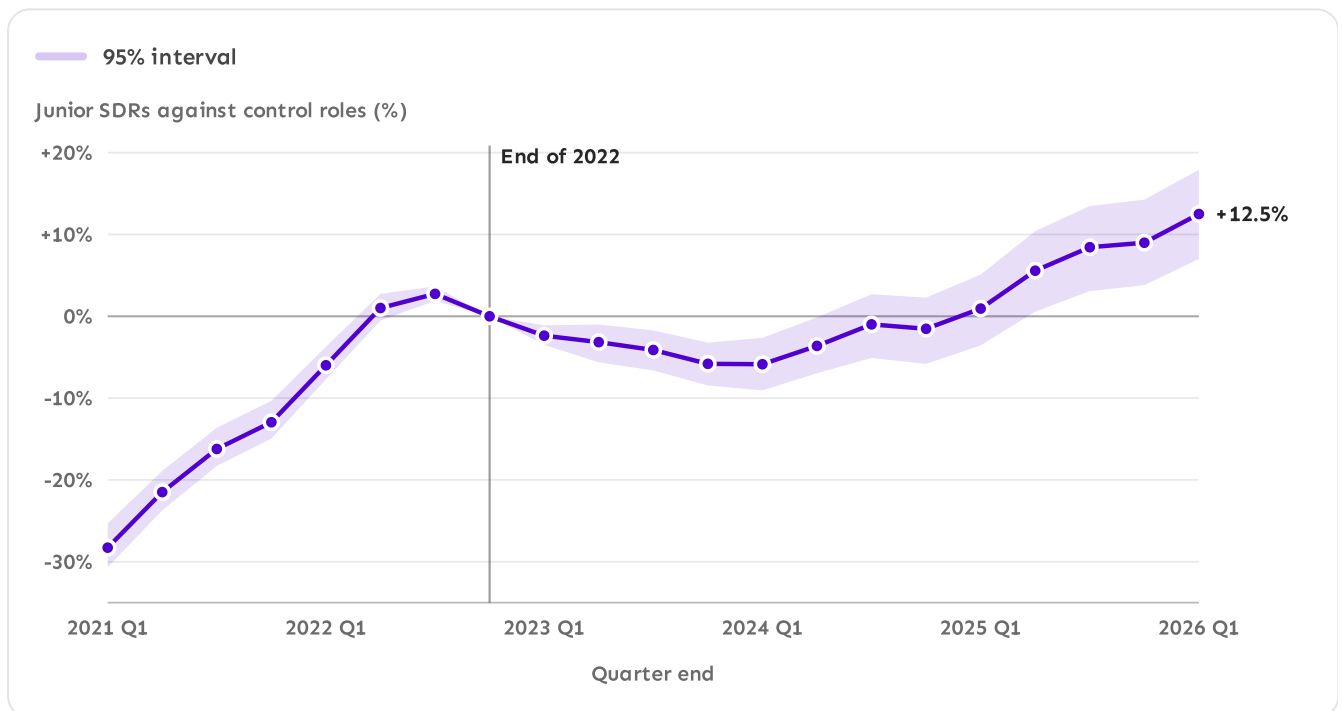


Change in SDRs per AE at software and IT companies from the end of 2022 to March 2026, by company size.

Source: Ken internal data (company and career records Ken uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

FIGURE 4

Junior SDRs dipped against other junior roles in 2023, then pulled ahead



Junior SDR headcount relative to junior support and marketing roles at the same companies, against the end of 2022 (0%). The band is the 95% interval. Before 2021 junior SDRs grew much faster than the control roles; the methodology PDF has the series from 2018.

Source: Ken internal data (company and career records Ken uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

The data, the methods and every number

Data: Ken internal data (Ken's dataset of public professional profiles, work histories and company records), rebuilt into a quarterly headcount history from the snapshot of 2026-04-30. Analysis run on 2026-10-17 and, after verification, 2026-10-18.

1. Question

Has the SDR share of sales teams fallen since ChatGPT (released 30 November 2022) and the AI SDR wave (2024)? How has the SDR-to-AE ratio moved, by company size?

2. Pre-registration

The hypothesis, the plan and the results that would prove each part wrong were pre-registered on 2026-10-16, before any data was queried. In short:

- 1. The fall is real.** The SDR share of sales headcount and the SDR-to-AE ratio are both at least 5% lower (relative) in 2026 Q1 than in 2022 Q4, in software and IT companies and in all companies. Wrong if either is less than 5% below its 2022 Q4 level.
- 2. It started before ChatGPT.** The SDR share peaked before 2022 Q4. Wrong if it peaked in 2022 Q4 or later.
- 3. No extra AI break against other junior roles.** Against junior support reps and junior marketers at the same companies, junior SDR headcount shows no extra drop at ChatGPT (2023 Q1) or when AI SDR products spread (2024 Q1). Wrong if the 2023 Q1 or 2024 Q1 slope change in $\log(\text{junior SDR} / \text{control})$ is negative with a 95% interval that excludes zero *and* the event-study gap at 2026 Q1 is below -10%; or if the best-fitting break date is 2023 Q1 or later.
- 4. By size,** the biggest fall in the SDR-to-AE ratio is at companies with 51-1,000 employees. Wrong if it is in the 1-50, 1,001-5,000 or 5,001+ band.

The headline metric was fixed in advance: the SDR share of sales headcount in software and IT companies, 2026 Q1 against 2022 Q4, with the SDR-to-AE ratio beside it, and the event-study estimate of junior SDRs relative to the control roles in 2026 Q1 against 2022 Q4.

3. Data

Source	What we used	Size
Ken internal data, people (via the quarterly headcount history built by this study on 2026-10-16/17)	Every work-history entry (title, company id, start and end month, current flag) of every non-deleted profile; people whose current country is the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Ireland or New Zealand	171,326,491 people with at least one entry; 555,053,752 entries, of which 342,882,318 cover a quarter end from 2015 Q1 to 2026 Q1
Ken internal data, company records	Industry label, size band and employee count of each company	23,338,222 records
Shared sales careers extract (built for the Ken Research study <i>Who are GTM engineers, and where do they come from?</i> , 2026-10-15)	Every spell of every person with at least one sales or marketing title, for job starts (flows) and a cross-check	136,156,211 spells of 23,543,766 people; 687,214 SDR or BDR spells
Ken job-change index	Job changes detected month to month, for the reporting lag	1,822,157 changes, all detected in June 2026

Source	What we used	Size
Ken function headcount snapshots	Headcount per company and function (Sales, Support, Marketing, Business Development) in the 2026-03 and 2026-06 snapshots, for a cross-check	5,102,029 rows

Entries dropped when building headcount: 68,590,726 with no start date, 29,251 with no end date that are not current, 50,763 that end before they start, 26,744 that start after the snapshot, and 143,473,950 that cover no quarter end in 2015 Q1-2026 Q1. Of the kept entries, 84,075,220 carry no company id. They are counted under company id -1, so they enter totals by role (the "all spells" rows below) but never a company-level analysis. The company records list no merged company ids (0 rows in the company id map), so no ids were folded.

People add new jobs to their profiles months late. Profiles were last updated up to 29 April 2026 and the snapshot date is 2026-04-30, so the last complete quarter is 2026 Q1 and the series stops there.

4. Definitions

- **Sample:** companies with at least one person in a sales-team role at some quarter end from 2018 Q1 to 2026 Q1 (1,612,821 companies including company id -1; 113,233 software and IT companies). 8,159,641 companies with people in the data but no sales-team person at any of those quarter ends are left out, so their support and marketing staff never enter the control roles.
- **Headcount at a quarter end:** the number of people with an entry at the company that covers the date: it started on or before the quarter end, and it ended on or after it (the end month counts in full) or is current. Role counts add up people over title levels, so a person with two titles of the same function at one company on the same date counts twice (rare).
- **Titles** are classified with the shared sales title taxonomy, unchanged, plus one rule added in the headcount history for customer support titles (customer service, support, care or experience; technical, IT or product support; help desk, service desk; call or contact centre; support specialist, agent or technician). The support rule only applies to titles the sales taxonomy leaves outside sales and marketing, and never to titles that also name social care, education, health or sales.
- **SDR:** function `sdr_bdr` at any level: SDR, BDR, MDR, ADR; sales, lead, market, account, outbound or inbound development; business development representative or associate; appointment setter; cold caller.
- **AE:** function `account_exec` (account executive, sales executive, closer).
- **Sales team:** SDR + AE + account management + general sales + business development and partnerships + sales engineering. Customer success, RevOps, enablement and marketing are not in it. **Narrow sales team** (robustness): SDR + AE + general sales.
- **Junior:** title levels `ic` and `senior_ic` (no manager, director, VP, C-level, founder or intern titles).
- **Control roles:** junior customer support reps plus junior marketers (`marketing` , `demand_gen` , `growth_marketing`) at the sample companies. Each is also used alone, and all other junior non-sales, non-marketing roles at the same companies are an alternative control.
- **Populations.** *Software and IT companies:* company records whose industry is one of 18 industry labels: software development and the software product labels, IT services and the IT system labels, data infrastructure and analytics, technology, information and internet, internet marketplace and social networking platforms, and computer and network security. *All companies:* every sample company with a company id, any industry, including ids with no company record. *All spells:* every entry, including those with no company id. *Balanced panel:* software and IT sample companies with at least one person at every quarter end from 2018 Q1 to 2026 Q1 (71,944 companies).

- **Company size:** the size band on the company record (both spellings of each band merged), or the employee count when the band is missing, in bands 1-50, 51-200, 201-1,000, 1,001-5,000 and 5,001+. A robustness check uses bands from rebuilt 2022 Q4 headcount instead.
- **Events:** ChatGPT = 2023 Q1, the first full quarter after its release; the comparison quarter is 2022 Q4 (31 December 2022). AI SDR wave = 2024 Q1. Both dates were fixed in the pre-registration.
- **Suppression:** every published group has at least 50 people; smaller counts are shown as "<50" and ratios built on them are blanked.

5. Methods

1. **Series:** a company-quarter panel of role counts from the headcount history for the sample companies (one row per company and quarter end 2018 Q1-2026 Q1 at which the company has anyone in the data), summed by population and quarter. SDR share = SDR / sales team; SDR-to-AE ratio = SDR / AE. Changes are relative: $100 \times (2026 \text{ Q1} / 2022 \text{ Q4} - 1)$.
2. **Interrupted time series:** least squares of the log outcome on a linear quarter trend, a level change and a slope change at 2023 Q1, a further slope change at 2024 Q1 and quarter-of-year dummies, over the 33 quarters 2018 Q1-2026 Q1, with Newey-West standard errors (4 lags). Outcomes: SDR share, SDR-to-AE ratio, and junior SDRs over each control. The "gap against the pre-trend" extrapolates the 2018-2022 trend to 2026 Q1.
3. **Event study:** for each quarter, $\log(\text{junior SDRs} / \text{control})$ minus its 2022 Q4 value, summed over the companies of a population and shown as a percent, $100 \times (\exp(\text{estimate}) - 1)$. This is a difference-in-differences of junior SDRs against the control roles at the same companies, indexed to 2022 Q4. The 95% intervals come from a company cluster bootstrap with 200 draws, using Poisson(1) weights per company (the large-sample form of resampling companies with replacement; seed 49).
4. **Break-date search:** for each candidate quarter from 2020 Q1 to 2025 Q1, least squares of $\log(\text{junior SDRs} / \text{control})$ on a linear trend, a level change and a slope change at that quarter, and quarter-of-year dummies; the best break minimises the sum of squared residuals. The search is repeated on every bootstrap draw.
5. **Flows:** new SDR, AE and sales-team spells started per quarter in the sales careers extract (a person counts once per company, start quarter and function), joined to the company records.
6. **Robustness:** series ending 2025 Q3; the balanced panel; all companies; all spells; the narrow sales team; size bands from rebuilt headcount; each control alone and all other junior roles as the control.
7. **Cross-checks:** SDR and AE counts in the headcount history against the sales careers extract; and 2026 Q1 function headcount per company against Ken's 2026-03 function headcount snapshot.
8. **Renamed SDR jobs:** job starts per year for titles that look like SDR work but are not labelled `sdr_bdr` (pipeline, prospecting, outbound, outreach, lead generation, appointment, new business or development representative, business development specialist or executive, AI SDR, GTM representative), against `sdr_bdr` starts.
9. **Reporting lag:** of the job changes Ken detected in June 2026, how many had started by 2026 Q1, overall and for SDR-, AE-, support- and marketing-like titles.

6. Results

6.1 Headline

Software and IT companies	2022 Q4	2026 Q1	Change
SDRs	43,357	44,829	+3.4%
Account executives (AEs)	118,977	133,299	+12.0%

Software and IT companies	2022 Q4	2026 Q1	Change
Sales team	637,507	669,256	+5.0%
Junior SDRs	36,590	38,918	+6.4%
Junior support reps	166,115	155,229	-6.6%
Junior marketers	85,128	82,311	-3.3%
Control roles (support + marketing)	251,243	237,540	-5.5%
SDR share of the sales team	6.8%	6.7%	-1.5%
SDRs per AE	0.3644	0.3363	-7.7%
Junior SDRs per control-role person	0.1456	0.1638	+12.5%
Sample companies with anyone in the data at the quarter end	97,966	104,131	+6.3%

The SDR share of software and IT sales teams was **6.8%** at the end of 2022 and **6.7%** in 2026 Q1, a relative change of **-1.5%**. The SDR-to-AE ratio fell **7.7%**, from 0.3644 to 0.3363, because AE headcount grew faster than SDR headcount. The event-study estimate of junior SDRs against the control roles in 2026 Q1 is **+12.50%** (95% interval 7.01% to 17.91%) against 2022 Q4.

6.2 The path since 2018

- The SDR share of software and IT sales teams rose from 3.75% in 2018 Q1 to a peak of 7.00% in 2022 Q3, fell to 6.21% in 2024 Q1 (-11.3% from the peak) and recovered to 6.7% in 2026 Q1 (+7.9% from the low).
- SDR headcount peaked at 44,855 in 2022 Q3, fell 12.5% to 39,267 in 2024 Q1, and rose 14.2% to 44,829 in 2026 Q1 (-0.1% against the peak).
- From 2022 Q4 to 2023 Q4, SDR headcount fell 9.2% while AE headcount fell 1.4%.
- Across all companies the SDR share was 2.18% in 2022 Q4 and 2.33% in 2026 Q1 (+6.8%); its highest quarter in 2018-2026 is 2026 Q1. Before 2023 it peaked in 2022 Q3 at 2.21%. SDRs per AE: 0.2304 and 0.2359 (+2.4%). The all-company sales team is dominated by general sales titles in retail and consumer industries, which is why the headline population is software and IT.

6.3 By company size

Company size	SDRs 2022 Q4	SDRs 2026 Q1	AEs 2022 Q4	AEs 2026 Q1	SDRs per AE 2022 Q4	SDRs per AE 2026 Q1	Change	SDR share 2022 Q4	SDR share 2026 Q1
1-50	3,538	5,246	8,728	12,043	0.4054	0.4356	+7.5%	4.56%	5.47%
51-200	7,984	7,800	15,873	18,637	0.503	0.4185	-16.8%	9.02%	8.09%
201-1,000	12,584	11,745	24,290	26,171	0.5181	0.4488	-13.4%	10.72%	9.59%
1,001-5,000	9,666	10,423	28,897	31,582	0.3345	0.33	-1.3%	8.18%	8.45%
5,001+	9,583	9,615	41,186	44,866	0.2327	0.2143	-7.9%	4.06%	4.16%

The biggest relative fall in the SDR-to-AE ratio is in the 51-200 band (-16.8%). Across all companies it is in the 201-1,000 band (-2.9%):

Company size (all companies)	SDRs per AE 2022 Q4	SDRs per AE 2026 Q1	Change
1-50	0.1939	0.2395	+23.5%
51-200	0.2593	0.2583	-0.4%
201-1,000	0.2993	0.2906	-2.9%

Company size (all companies)	SDRs per AE 2022 Q4	SDRs per AE 2026 Q1	Change
1,001-5,000	0.2352	0.2385	+1.4%
5,001+	0.1864	0.1826	-2.1%

With size bands taken from each company's rebuilt 2022 Q4 headcount in Ken internal data instead of the company record (software and IT companies present in 2022 Q4), the 51-200 band still has the biggest fall:

Size band from rebuilt 2022 Q4 headcount	SDRs per AE 2022 Q4	2026 Q1	Change
1-50	0.4047	0.4138	+2.3%
51-200	0.5165	0.4288	-17.0%
201-1,000	0.4676	0.4237	-9.4%
1,001-5,000	0.3125	0.2871	-8.1%
5,001+	0.1933	0.1861	-3.7%

6.4 Junior SDRs against the control roles

From 2022 Q4 to 2026 Q1 in software and IT companies, junior SDR headcount rose 6.4%, junior support reps changed -6.6% and junior marketers -3.3%. Event-study estimates (percent difference in junior SDRs / control against 2022 Q4):

Population	Control	2023 Q4	95% interval	2026 Q1	95% interval	Range before 2022 Q4
Software and IT	support reps + marketers	-5.81%	-8.46 to -3.22	+12.50%	7.01 to 17.91	-51.82 to 2.74
Software and IT	support reps	-6.06%	-8.99 to -3.44	+13.82%	8.06 to 19.96	-53.93 to 2.92
Software and IT	marketers	-5.33%	-8.33 to -2.63	+10.00%	3.93 to 15.5	-47.08 to 2.37
Software and IT	all other junior roles	-7.62%	-10.22 to -4.93	+4.39%	-0.89 to 9.75	-46.68 to 3.45
All companies	support reps + marketers	-1.53%	-2.91 to -0.08	+17.14%	14.31 to 20.09	-47.19 to 1.62
All companies	support reps	-0.34%	-1.67 to 1.17	+21.43%	18.49 to 24.34	-49.43 to 1.65
All companies	marketers	-3.14%	-4.53 to -1.75	+11.62%	8.89 to 14.14	-43.69 to 1.58
All companies	all other junior roles	-3.61%	-5.07 to -2.22	+9.81%	6.91 to 12.36	-45.35 to 2.05
Software and IT, balanced panel	support reps + marketers	-7.22%	-9.58 to -4.83	+6.22%	1.19 to 11.1	-50.7 to 2.96
Software and IT, balanced panel	support reps	-7.59%	-9.95 to -5.31	+6.66%	1.48 to 12.19	-52.39 to 3.18
Software and IT, balanced panel	marketers	-6.46%	-9.09 to -3.53	+5.35%	0.12 to 10.92	-46.87 to 2.51
Software and IT, balanced panel	all other junior roles	-8.81%	-10.95 to -6.69	-1.11%	-6.3 to 3.05	-45.63 to 3.63

Before 2022 Q4 the estimates are far below zero (-51.82% in 2018 Q1 for software and IT): junior SDRs grew much faster than the control roles from 2018 to 2022. The parallel-trends assumption of a standard difference-in-differences therefore does not hold before 2022, and the estimates after 2022 Q4 are read as a change in the gap since the end of 2022, not as the effect of any one event. The interrupted time series and the break-date search below model that pre-2023 trend directly.

6.5 Interrupted time series

Outcome (log), software and IT	Trend per quarter	Level change 2023 Q1 [95% interval]	Slope change 2023 Q1 [95% interval]	Slope change 2024 Q1 [95% interval]	2026 Q1 against the 2018-2022 trend
SDR share	0.03289	-0.09903 [-0.14168, -0.05637]	-0.04747 [-0.05008, -0.04487]	0.02428 [0.02166, 0.02689]	-37.8% [-42.0, -33.3]
SDRs per AE	0.0275	-0.0958 [-0.1332, -0.0584]	-0.043 [-0.04494, -0.04105]	0.01835 [0.01706, 0.01964]	-37.2% [-40.9, -33.2]
Junior SDRs / control	0.03886	-0.07829 [-0.14155, -0.01504]	-0.04897 [-0.05324, -0.0447]	0.03285 [0.02853, 0.03716]	-33.2% [-39.8, -25.8]
Junior SDRs / support reps	0.04133	-0.08052 [-0.14897, -0.01206]	-0.05183 [-0.05648, -0.04718]	0.03497 [0.03035, 0.03959]	-34.5% [-41.5, -26.6]
Junior SDRs / marketers	0.03369	-0.07286 [-0.12628, -0.01943]	-0.04307 [-0.04665, -0.0395]	0.02877 [0.02502, 0.03251]	-30.2% [-36.1, -23.8]
Junior SDRs / all other junior roles	0.03383	-0.08537 [-0.14573, -0.02501]	-0.04909 [-0.05295, -0.04523]	0.03162 [0.02747, 0.03577]	-34.4% [-40.6, -27.6]

Coefficients are changes in the log of the outcome (per quarter for the trend and the slope changes), with Newey-West 95% intervals over 33 quarters. For log(junior SDRs / control) the slope change at 2023 Q1 is negative and its interval excludes zero, and the slope change at 2024 Q1 is positive and its interval excludes zero. All companies, junior SDRs / control: level change at 2023 Q1 -0.05645 [-0.10105, -0.01184], slope change at 2023 Q1 -0.03603 [-0.0391, -0.03297], slope change at 2024 Q1 0.02107 [0.01815, 0.02399]. The column "against the 2018-2022 trend" compares 2026 Q1 with a straight-line extension of the 2018-2022 boom; that extension assumes the boom-era growth would have gone on, which is not a realistic counterfactual, so it is reported for completeness and not used as an effect size.

6.6 Break-date search

The single break (level and slope change) that best fits log(junior SDRs / control) in software and IT companies is **2023 Q2**. The fit barely separates it from its neighbours: the four best candidates are 2023 Q2 (sum of squared residuals 0.048765), 2023 Q1 (sum of squared residuals 0.049333), 2022 Q1 (sum of squared residuals 0.050284), 2021 Q4 (sum of squared residuals 0.050585). In the company bootstrap, 45.0% of draws put the break before 2023 Q1 and 55.0% in 2023 Q1 or later (quartiles 2022 Q1, 2023 Q1, 2023 Q2). In all companies the best break is 2021 Q4 (74.5% of draws before 2023 Q1); in the balanced software and IT panel it is 2023 Q1 (26.0% before 2023 Q1). Without the quarter-of-year dummies the best breaks are 2023 Q1 (software and IT) and 2022 Q1 (all companies), found by the verification; the software and IT break is in 2023 Q1 or later under both specifications.

6.7 Flows: new SDR and AE jobs

Year	SDR starts, software and IT	AE starts, software and IT	SDR share of sales-team starts, software and IT	SDR starts, all companies	AE starts, all companies
2019	21,083	42,759	10.43%	41,720	144,767
2020	20,550	36,882	11.56%	41,136	117,013
2021	34,489	55,352	13.54%	65,476	165,169
2022	39,582	62,070	14.38%	76,161	180,197
2023	27,363	45,657	13.66%	59,142	150,691
2024	28,005	50,036	13.43%	59,352	154,742
2025	29,648	54,884	13.82%	60,708	154,715

In software and IT companies, SDR starts fell 30.9% from 2022 to 2023 and AE starts 26.4%. From 2022 to 2025, SDR starts fell 25.1% and AE starts 11.6%. In all companies the 2022-2025 changes are -20.3% (SDR) and -14.1% (AE). Starts in the latest years are the most affected by late reporting (section 6.10), so the 2025 figures are lower bounds.

6.8 Robustness

Population and check	Metric	2022 Q4	End	Change
Software and IT: headline (end 2026 Q1)	SDR share of sales team, %	6.8	6.7	-1.5%
Software and IT: headline (end 2026 Q1)	SDRs per AE	0.3644	0.3363	-7.7%
Software and IT: headline; series ending 2025 Q3 (end 2025 Q3)	SDR share of sales team, %	6.8	6.63	-2.6%
Software and IT: headline; series ending 2025 Q3 (end 2025 Q3)	SDRs per AE	0.3644	0.3403	-6.6%
Software and IT: headline (end 2026 Q1)	SDR share of narrow sales team (SDR + AE + general sales), %	13.69	13.49	-1.5%
Software and IT, balanced panel: balanced panel (people in the data at every quarter end 2018-2026) (end 2026 Q1)	SDR share of sales team, %	6.73	6.44	-4.3%
Software and IT, balanced panel: balanced panel (people in the data at every quarter end 2018-2026) (end 2026 Q1)	SDRs per AE	0.3571	0.3221	-9.8%
Software and IT, balanced panel: balanced panel (people in the data at every quarter end 2018-2026); series ending 2025 Q3 (end 2025 Q3)	SDR share of sales team, %	6.73	6.42	-4.6%
Software and IT, balanced panel: balanced panel (people in the data at every quarter end 2018-2026); series ending 2025 Q3 (end 2025 Q3)	SDRs per AE	0.3571	0.327	-8.4%
Software and IT, balanced panel: balanced panel (people in the data at every quarter end 2018-2026) (end 2026 Q1)	SDR share of narrow sales team (SDR + AE + general sales), %	13.54	13.05	-3.6%
All companies: all companies (end 2026 Q1)	SDR share of sales team, %	2.18	2.33	+6.8%
All companies: all companies (end 2026 Q1)	SDRs per AE	0.2304	0.2359	+2.4%
All companies: all companies; series ending 2025 Q3 (end 2025 Q3)	SDR share of sales team, %	2.18	2.28	+4.5%
All companies: all companies; series ending 2025 Q3 (end 2025 Q3)	SDRs per AE	0.2304	0.234	+1.6%
All companies: all companies (end 2026 Q1)	SDR share of narrow sales team (SDR + AE + general sales), %	3.25	3.55	+9.5%
All spells, incl. no company id: all spells, including no company id (end 2026 Q1)	SDR share of sales team, %	1.86	2.01	+8.1%
All spells, incl. no company id: all spells, including no company id (end 2026 Q1)	SDRs per AE	0.2135	0.221	+3.5%
All spells, incl. no company id: all spells, including no company id; series ending 2025 Q3 (end 2025 Q3)	SDR share of sales team, %	1.86	1.97	+5.8%
All spells, incl. no company id: all spells, including no company id; series ending 2025 Q3 (end 2025 Q3)	SDRs per AE	0.2135	0.2189	+2.5%
All spells, incl. no company id: all spells, including no company id (end 2026 Q1)	SDR share of narrow sales team (SDR + AE + general sales), %	2.68	2.97	+10.6%

Event-study estimates with the series ending in 2025 Q3:

Population	Control	Estimate at 2025 Q3 against 2022 Q4	95% interval
Software and IT	support reps + marketers	+8.44%	3.07 to 13.48
Software and IT	support reps	+9.43%	4.02 to 14.5
Software and IT	marketers	+6.56%	0.96 to 11.25

Population	Control	Estimate at 2025 Q3 against 2022 Q4	95% interval
Software and IT	all other junior roles	+1.68%	-3.7 to 6.58
All companies	support reps + marketers	+13.20%	10.52 to 15.69
All companies	support reps	+16.95%	14.28 to 19.73
All companies	marketers	+8.32%	5.84 to 10.87
All companies	all other junior roles	+6.82%	4.34 to 9.05
Software and IT, balanced panel	support reps + marketers	+3.72%	-0.9 to 8.31
Software and IT, balanced panel	support reps	+4.03%	-0.65 to 8.92
Software and IT, balanced panel	marketers	+3.11%	-1.78 to 7.91
Software and IT, balanced panel	all other junior roles	-2.41%	-7.06 to 1.6

The balanced panel (companies present at every quarter end since 2018) shows a larger fall in the SDR share (-4.3%) and the SDR-to-AE ratio (-9.8%) than the full panel. It leaves out companies that first appear after 2018 or have no one in the data at some quarter end, and most of those are small: the 1-50 band is the only band where SDRs per AE rose, and its SDR share rose most (4.56% to 5.47%, section 6.3). The balanced panel is still short of the 5% fall in the share that hypothesis 1 needed. The share of SDRs whose entry carries a company id was 81.6% in 2018 Q1, 89.6% in 2022 Q4 and 90.7% in 2026 Q1 (AEs: 77.4%, 83.1% and 85.0%), so the coverage of company-level counts barely moved over the comparison window.

6.9 Cross-checks

- **Against the sales careers extract** (all spells): the sales careers extract holds 90.4% of the SDRs and 96.9% of the AEs that the headcount history counts in 2022 Q4, and 90.0% and 97.0% in 2026 Q1. The SDR gap is expected: the sales careers extract only keeps people whose titles pass its sales and marketing filter, which misses some SDR titles without a sales word (such as market development representative). The share is stable over time, so the two extracts agree on the trend.
- **Against Ken's function headcount snapshots** (2026-03 snapshot, 1,738,714 of its 1,892,105 companies matched; companies with at least 10 people on either side): our sales team plus customer success, RevOps and enablement against the snapshot's Sales plus Business Development has a rank correlation of 0.683 across 96,770 companies, and our total is 0.734 of theirs (75.8% of companies within a factor of 2). Support: rank correlation 0.542, ratio 0.784. Marketing: 0.694 and 0.807. Rebuilt headcount is lower than the snapshot's, as expected from six-country coverage and late-added jobs, and ranks companies alike.
- **No trend check was possible.** For the 1,548,025 companies in both the March and June 2026 snapshots, every function dropped in three months (Sales -18.3%, Support -24.4%, Marketing -7.7%, Business Development -8.0%). Drops that size across every function point to a change in how the snapshots were built, not to hiring, and the September snapshot is a copy of June. The function headcount snapshots are used for levels only.

6.10 Late reporting

Of the 1,822,157 job changes Ken detected in June 2026, 41.1% had started in January-March 2026 and 89.9% by the end of March 2026: jobs that had started but were not yet on the profiles. The 2026 Q1 share differs by role: 61.2% for SDR-like titles (6,017 changes), 55.6% for AE-like titles, 35.1% for support-like titles and 48.1% for marketing-like titles, so the last quarter may undercount some roles more than others. Ending the series in 2025 Q3 instead gives an SDR share change of -2.6% and an SDR-to-AE change of -6.6% (section 6.8), close to the 2026 Q1 results.

6.11 Renamed SDR jobs

Titles that look like SDR work but are not labelled SDR made up 39.9% of SDR-like job starts in 2022 and 41.3% in 2025 (all spells in the sales careers extract). Their starts fell 15.5% from 2022 to 2025, against 20.4% for SDR-labelled starts. The most common candidates are business development executive, specialist, consultant and coordinator titles, which have been common for years. There is no sign of a large move from SDR titles to new names. Per year, candidate share of SDR-like starts: 2018 54.7%, 2019 51.7%, 2020 49.2%, 2021 42.7%, 2022 39.9%, 2023 44.1%, 2024 43.4%, 2025 41.3%.

7. Hypotheses against results

Hypothesis	Pre-registered test	Result	Verdict
1. The fall is real	SDR share and SDR-to-AE ratio both at least 5% lower in 2026 Q1 than 2022 Q4, in software and IT and in all companies	Software and IT: share -1.5%, ratio -7.7%. All companies: share +6.8%, ratio +2.4%	Wrong
2. It started before ChatGPT	SDR share peaked before 2022 Q4	Software and IT: peak in 2022 Q3. All companies: highest quarter is 2026 Q1 (before 2023 the peak was 2022 Q3)	Right for software and IT, the headline population; wrong for all companies
3. No extra AI break against other junior roles	Wrong if a 2023 Q1 or 2024 Q1 slope change is negative with an interval excluding zero and the 2026 Q1 event-study gap is below -10%; or if the best break is 2023 Q1 or later	Slope change 2023 Q1 -0.04897 [-0.05324, -0.0447], 2024 Q1 0.03285 [0.02853, 0.03716]; 2026 Q1 gap +12.50%, so the first test is not met. Best break 2023 Q2 (all companies 2021 Q4)	Wrong for software and IT on the break-date test; no drop at the AI SDR wave (2024 Q1); right for all companies
4. Biggest ratio fall at 51-1,000 employees	Wrong if it is in 1-50, 1,001-5,000 or 5,001+	Software and IT: 51-200 (-16.8%); all companies: 201-1,000 (-2.9%)	Right

The study expected a real fall, mostly linked with the 2022-2023 hiring downturn. The data shows no lasting fall in the SDR share of software and IT sales teams; the SDR-to-AE ratio is lower because AEs grew faster. Junior SDRs lost ground against the control roles from 2022 Q4 to 2024 Q1 (lowest point -5.86% in 2024 Q1) and gained it back after 2024 Q1. The best-fitting break date (2023 Q2) falls in the window that hypothesis 3 reserved for an AI effect, but the break-date fit is flat across 2021 Q4-2023 Q2 and the 2023 tech layoffs fall in the same window, so the design cannot attribute it to ChatGPT.

8. Verification

An independent re-analysis, written from the study plan alone without seeing our code, recomputed 96 numbers. It had only the study plan (hypothesis, plan and logged decisions, with the Software and IT label list and the size-band mapping that the decisions point to) and the extracts, and did not read this study's code, outputs or work files. Its numbers were compared with the study's line by line. The first run's tables that the first comparison used, and that comparison, are kept.

What the first comparison found, and the fixes.

1. Every SDR, AE and sales-team number matched, but every number built on the control roles differed: junior SDRs / control was 0.1456 and 0.1638 in the re-analysis, against 0.1356 and 0.1501 in the first study run, and the 2026 Q1 event-study estimate 12.5% against 10.67%. The cause was in the study's panel step. The plan's sample is companies with at least one sales-team person at some quarter end, and the re-analysis applied it; the study's panel kept every company-quarter with a sales-team, support or marketing person, so support and marketing staff at companies with no sales team entered the control counts. With that filter switched off, the re-analysis code

gave the first run's numbers exactly. The panel now applies the pre-registered sample; it and the analyses built on it were re-run on 2026-10-18.

- SDR and AE start counts differed slightly, with the same percentages (39,641 against 39,582 SDR starts in 2022). The study had counted a person once per company, start quarter, function and title level; the re-analysis once per company, start quarter and function, which matches "a new job" better. The study now counts the same way, and the counts match exactly.

After the fixes, 94 of 96 numbers match at the reported precision:

Number	Study	Re-analysis	Match
SDR share 2022 Q4 / 2026 Q1, software and IT	6.8% / 6.7%	6.8% / 6.7%	yes
SDR share change	-1.5%	-1.5%	yes
SDRs per AE 2022 Q4 / 2026 Q1	0.3644 / 0.3363	0.3644 / 0.3363	yes
SDRs per AE change	-7.7%	-7.7%	yes
Junior SDRs / control 2022 Q4 / 2026 Q1	0.1456 / 0.1638	0.1456 / 0.1638	yes
Event study 2026 Q1	12.5%	12.5%	yes
Event study 2026 Q1, 95% interval	7.01 / 17.91	7.27 / 18.32	within bootstrap noise
Event study 2023 Q4	-5.81%	-5.81%	yes
ITS slope change 2023 Q1 / 2024 Q1	-0.04897 / 0.03285	-0.04897 / 0.03285	yes
Peak SDR share, software and IT	2022 Q3 / 7.0	2022 Q3 / 7.0	yes
All companies: SDR share change / SDRs per AE change	6.8% / 2.4%	6.8% / 2.4%	yes
Biggest SDR-to-AE fall by size	51-200 / -16.8	51-200 / -16.8	yes
SDR starts 2022 to 2023 / 2022 to 2025	-30.9% / -25.1%	-30.9% / -25.1%	yes
AE starts 2022 to 2025	-11.6%	-11.6%	yes
Balanced panel: SDR share change / SDRs per AE change	-4.3% / -9.8%	-4.3% / -9.8%	yes
Best break, software and IT / all companies	2023 Q2 / 2021 Q4	2023 Q1 / 2022 Q1	same specification: yes (see below)

The two that differ are the break dates, and the difference is the specification, not the data. Method 6 of the study plan names only the level and slope change, so the re-analysis fitted no quarter-of-year dummies and found 2023 Q1 (software and IT) and 2022 Q1 (all companies). With the dummies the study uses in both the time series and the break search, the re-analysis code finds 2023 Q2 and 2021 Q4, the study's values. Under both specifications the software and IT break is in 2023 Q1 or later and the all-company break is before 2023, so the verdict on hypothesis 3 does not depend on the choice. The bootstrap intervals differ by less than 1 point because the random draws differ (Poisson weights with seed 49 in the study, resampling with replacement in the verification). The re-analysis notes also quote t-based intervals for the time-series coefficients; the intervals compared here are the normal-based Newey-West intervals that both analyses report.

9. Alternative explanations and limitations

The strongest alternative explanations (the study's own list and those raised by the re-analysis), and how the analysis deals with each:

- **The 2022-2023 hiring downturn, not AI, drove the 2023 dip.** Partly supported. The SDR share peaked in 2022 Q3, before ChatGPT; new AE jobs fell almost as much as new SDR jobs in 2023 (-26.4% against -30.9%); and SDRs recovered after 2024 Q1, while AI SDR tools spread. But junior SDRs did fall against the control roles in 2023 (event study -5.81% at 2023 Q4), and the best break date (2023 Q2) cannot separate ChatGPT from the 2023 layoffs and the end of the funding boom. Named as a limitation: the design cannot say how much of the 2023 relative dip, if any, was linked with AI.
- **New companies prop up the SDR share.** Partly supported. The number of software and IT sample companies with anyone in the data grew 6.3% from 2022 Q4 to 2026 Q1, and small companies are the one band where SDRs per AE rose. In the balanced panel of companies present at every quarter end since 2018, the SDR share fell 4.3% and the SDR-to-AE ratio 9.8%, both more than in the full panel, but the share still fell less than the 5% that hypothesis 1 needed. At established companies SDRs lost a little ground; there was no collapse.
- **Late reporting hides a recent fall, or fakes the recovery.** Not supported for the headline. SDR jobs are short and entry-level and may be added late more often than AE jobs, which would push recent SDR counts down, towards a decline. Ending the series in 2025 Q3 gives the same picture (share -2.6%, ratio -6.6%, event study +8.44%), and the recovery runs through 2024 and 2025, quarters that are mostly filled in. The 2025 job starts are lower bounds.
- **Survivorship and title overwriting.** Only profiles that exist today are in the data, and some people promoted from SDR to AE inside a company edit the old title. Both thin out older SDR spells, which makes the pre-2023 SDR counts too low and biases the study towards finding no decline. Named as a limitation; it cannot be measured in Ken internal data.
- **SDR work was relabelled, so the rule misses it.** Not supported as a large effect. Titles that look like SDR work but fall outside the rule were 39.9% of SDR-like starts in 2022 and 41.3% in 2025. Prospecting done under AE titles (associate or inbound AE) would show up as a lower SDR-to-AE ratio, which is one reading of the 7.7% fall; the data cannot tell it apart from fewer SDRs per AE.
- **Offshore and outsourced SDR teams.** Ken internal data covers people in six countries only, and SDR agencies carry other industry labels. A shift of prospecting to offshore teams or agencies would look like an SDR fall at software companies; the opposite would look like a rise. Named as a limitation.
- **The control roles are not AI-neutral.** Partly supported. Junior support reps fell 6.6% and junior marketers 3.3%, and both are exposed to AI tools. Against junior marketers alone, junior SDRs gained +10.00% (95% interval 3.93 to 15.5); against all other junior roles at the same companies, +4.39% (-0.89 to 9.75); in the balanced panel against all other junior roles, -1.11% (-6.3 to 3.05). Against the broadest control at established companies, junior SDRs kept pace rather than gained. The headline does not depend on the control roles: SDR headcount itself is back at its 2022 peak.
- **AI changes the SDR job without changing headcount.** Not testable here. Headcount cannot show output per SDR, the mix of tasks, or pay.

Further limitations:

- **Six countries, current profiles.** Staff that companies have elsewhere are missing, deleted profiles drop out, and older years undercount. The study compares roles with each other at the same date, which cancels much of this, but levels are not market totals.
- **Self-reported titles.** Titles are what people write. Some SDRs call themselves business development reps or executives; the SDR rule includes business development representative and associate but not executive (section 6.11).
- **Company attributes are current.** Industry and size band come from today's company record. A company that changed industry label or size band since 2018 is classed by its label today.
- **Spells with no company id.** 84,075,220 kept entries carry no company id; they enter only the all-spells totals. Company-id coverage of SDRs barely moved between 2022 Q4 and 2026 Q1 (section 6.8).

- **The comparison is descriptive.** The interrupted time series and the event study show timing and size; they cannot separate AI from interest rates, funding, layoffs or the end of the 2021-2022 boom, which hit the same years. Where the text says "linked with", it names the design.

10. Data and sources

- Quarterly headcount history (built by this study, first build finished 2026-10-17): quarterly headcount per company, function and level.
- Sales careers extract (built for the GTM engineer study, build of 2026-10-15): sales and marketing spells for flows and a cross-check; taxonomy used unchanged.
- ChatGPT release date: OpenAI, "Introducing ChatGPT", 30 November 2022, <https://openai.com/index/chatgpt/>
- People and company data: Ken internal data, Ken's dataset of public professional profiles, work histories and company records.

Ken Research · Did AI kill the SDR role? · Cristian Frunze, Founder of Ken