

# Winning the War for Sales Talent: How to Dispel Lay Beliefs, Fight the Stigma, and Create a Profession of Choice

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## **Abstract**

Given the pressing talent shortage in B2B sales, understanding how to increase graduates' low interest in B2B sales is critical for management. With a mixed-methods approach, the authors develop a theory-based model to understand which specific beliefs deter students from entering B2B sales (Study 1), which they benchmark with those of alternative careers (Study 2) and those of B2B salespeople (Study 3). Results show that alternative careers outrank B2B sales, particularly in societal prestige and that students hold lay beliefs about a lack of intrinsic and social rewards in B2B sales, which personal, vicarious, and educational sales exposure can dispel. Combining text analysis of labor market communication (Study 4) with conjoint analysis (Study 5), the authors reveal misalignment between communication's focus on extrinsic rewards and students' career choice drivers (intrinsic, social). The studies provide actionable recommendations on promoting B2B sales as a profession of choice.

**Keywords:** *business-to-business sales; sales education; sales diversity*

**Track:** Sales Management and Personal Selling