

# **ACCOUNT TEAM PRODUCTIVITY IS A SECRET GROWTH WEAPON**

Three powerful ways to unlock immediate productivity gains to drive faster revenue growth.

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## INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of constant change and disruption. However, account teams aren't empowered to be adaptive let alone to manage the complexity of large multi-national accounts that spend the most.

Current state productivity challenges, including information overload, lack of situational knowledge and awareness, and internal fragmentation cause "time poverty" and stress which leads to burnout. There is an opportunity to reverse seller drag by modernizing capabilities through automation, increased knowledge and centralization to drive a three-fold productivity gain that reduces wasted time, and increases pipeline and revenue. Additionally, employee impacts are equally valuable and span many intangible benefits that drive and motivate employees.

Executives should consider funding productivity through headcount budgets that tether the investment level to the gains realized vs. disconnected budget categories.

# ACCOUNT TEAM PRODUCTIVITY IS A SECRET GROWTH WEAPON

Three powerful ways to unlock immediate productivity gains to drive faster revenue growth.

By Dave Irwin, CEO & Founder, Polaris I/O

We live in a world of constant change and unprecedented disruption. Knowing how to successfully navigate the changes and disruptions is a must. However, account teams aren't empowered to be adaptive, let alone to manage the complexity of large multi-national accounts that spend the most. Shifting from a current state that is highly manual, decentralized, and time-consuming to a future state that is automated, actionable, centralized, and customer driven empowers account teams to be more productive in three compelling ways: more selling time, greater account knowledge, and increased collaboration. The financial and employee impacts are substantial. When investing in productivity, businesses should tie these investments to the very headcount budgets they support so levels of investment and return are connected.

Businesses must be flexible and responsive to changing global conditions caused by a continuous stream of economic, political, legislative, technological, climate, and digital transformation disruptions that affect local, national, and international regions of operation. In McKinsey's February 2023 article, "Seizing the Momentum to Build Resilience for a Future of Sustainable Growth," the concept of a new "resilience agenda" is introduced and the need for companies to "strengthen resilience...to enable long-term, sustainable, and inclusive growth" is promoted as a core long-term mode of operation companies must embrace. It's amazing how much and how fast the world has changed in three years, and it has created the need for a mindset shift.

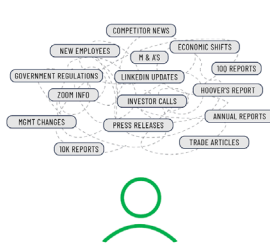
We highlighted in our article, [The Key to Revenue Growth: The Economy of Enterprise Accounts](#), that the Forbes Global 2000 drives over 50% of the world's GDP and it's also true that a mere 591 companies drive 70% of GDP in the United States. With such a high concentration of revenue and spend in the hands of these multi-national enterprises, combined with a continuous stream of global disruptive events, it's critical that businesses monitor, adapt and proactively respond to these changing conditions as they affect their own enterprise key accounts in the form of opportunities for growth and risk. Modernizing to empower key account teams to be constantly informed, adaptive to changing conditions and proactive is not only a significant opportunity to increase productivity, but directly affects growth and long-term resiliency in a continuously disruptive environment.

## CURRENT STATE PRODUCTIVITY CHALLENGES

Why there is such a big payoff for productivity gains is anchored in the fact that the current state environment for key account teams is highly manual, time-consuming and fragmented. The following are common obstacles key account teams deal with every day:

- **Information overload** is exacerbated by highly manual time-consuming research across many sources of news and information.
- **Lack of situational knowledge and awareness** about customer needs and the stakeholder roles who make buying decisions.
- **Internal fragmentation** that decentralizes information and people based on roles and departments, blocking alignment, and collaboration.

### Current state: It's highly manual, decentralized & time-consuming



#### Information Overload

CURRENT STATE

- Google Searches
- Hoovers Reports
- LinkedIn Look-Ups
- Financial Reports
- Investor Calls
- Trade Articles
- Newspapers
- Social Media

5 - 8 hours per week of manual research



#### Irrelevant Conversations

CURRENT STATE

- Create an Opportunity
- Research Stakeholders
- Explain Plan to Team
- Create Pitch Materials
- Review with Team
- Explain Status to Mgmt
- Explain Strategy to Mgmt
- Review with Mgmt

6 - 8 hours per week to develop a new opportunity



#### Internal Fragmentation

CURRENT STATE

- Email Notes & Updates
- Explain History
- Onboard New People
- Look For Files
- Email Files to Team
- Review Stakeholders
- Track Changes
- Explain Team Needs

5 - 8 hours per week of manual searching / sharing

These current state obstacles cause “time poverty” and stress which reduce productivity and lead to burnout.

These current state obstacles cause “time poverty” and stress which reduce productivity and lead to burnout. According to Harvard Business Review’s article, *The Busyness Trap*, March – April 2023, activity is not a metric for success and “corporate cultures that value busyness are partially to blame.” And a recent Gartner survey report reveals “89% of sellers report feeling burned out from work,” and 54% of respondents are looking for a new job.” Gartner further explains “The challenge is drag, the opposite

of drive, which manifests in avoiding or procrastinating work, boredom, and a struggle to focus. Sellers experiencing drag achieve lower quota attainment, have higher burnout, are more likely to express intent to leave and have shorter expected tenures. About a quarter of sellers experience high drag, and more than half experience medium levels of drag.”

Respondents to the survey defined seller drag as including a “high burden of non-value added administrative tasks, such as seeking multiple approvals for deals.”

## WHAT THE FUTURE STATE CAN BE

Account team objectives are based on driving value for customers in the form of achieving their desired outcomes, along with pipeline and revenue growth for their own companies. And while the current state reality is that companies have high expectations, they don’t provide teams with the time, knowledge and collaborative environment they need to maximize outcomes for customers and output for their companies.

The current state creates the following problems which hinder account teams from achieving the value delivery and growth goals expected of them. Businesses can flip this around by moving away from past approaches of “more headcount, do it yourself and find it on your own” to a future approach of “more selling time, it’s done for you, and our team shares a centralized view” to empower account teams.

<p><b>LACK OF TIME</b> CURRENT STATE</p> <p><b>PAST</b> More headcount</p> <p><b>FUTURE</b> I have more selling time</p> <p>“Account teams spend 70% of their time internally.”</p> 	<p><b>LACK OF KNOWLEDGE</b> CURRENT STATE</p> <p><b>PAST</b> Do it yourself</p> <p><b>FUTURE</b> Research is done for me</p> <p>“Only 11% of sales conversations are relevant.”</p> <p><b>FORRESTER®</b></p>	<p><b>LACK OF COLLABORATION</b> CURRENT STATE</p> <p><b>PAST</b> I need to find it</p> <p><b>FUTURE</b> Our team shares a centralized view</p> <p>“High levels of cross functional collaboration increases key account spend by 215%.”</p> <p><b>Gartner</b></p>
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## THREE-FOLD PRODUCTIVITY MODEL FOR THE FUTURE STATE

There is a three-fold productivity opportunity that creates leverage for your most important asset... people, and that directly addresses “seller drag” and creates “seller drive” by moving to a future state that creates “more for less” while improving the overall quantity and quality of both the outcomes and the team dynamic. By automating account research for increased selling time, increasing actionable

knowledge of customer needs and centralizing information to increase collaboration, companies can achieve an immediate three- fold increase in productivity measured by increased customer growth and retention, reduced internal time waste, increased pipelines and increased revenue.

These outcomes are achieved through:

- More relevant sales conversations
- More relevant team collaboration
- More relevant opportunity creation

### Three-fold Productivity Gain Resulting in Relevant Customer Conversations, Team Collaboration, and Opportunity Creation

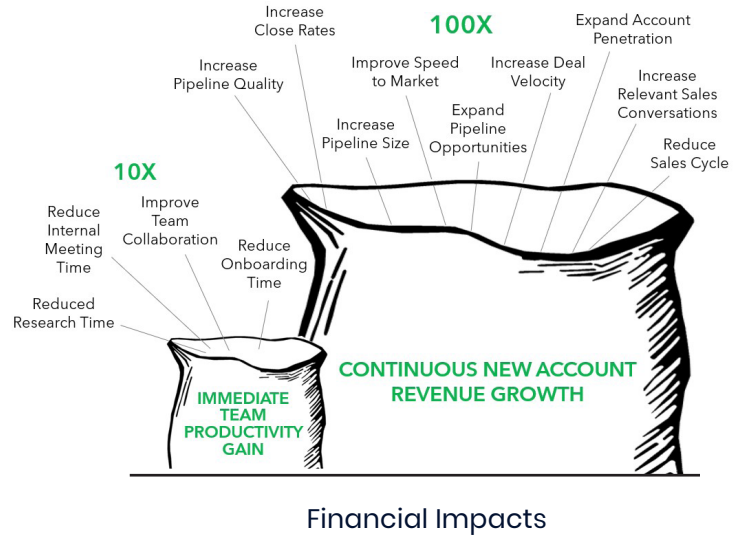


The productivity gains made by modernizing the current state through automation, actionable account intelligence and centralization have a compounding effect on productivity in a way that further advances team drive vs. team drag. The effect on account teams includes greater productivity through new departmental and team synergies, ideation, innovation, shared best practices, retained tribal knowledge, resource allocation, upskilling existing talent, onboarding new talent, creating motivation through success and, in general, creating happier employees and customers.

## THE BUSINESS IMPACTS OF IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

We've found that a typical account team resource spends up to 20 hours a week on three core activities.

**Reducing Internal Time Waste:** When it comes to financial impacts, the immediate gain is in reducing wasted internal research time, irrelevant customer meeting time and internal resource coordination and information sharing time, which adds up. We've found that a typical account team resource spends up to 20 hours a week on three core activities: 1) looking up information online about their key accounts using search engines, social media sites, online news, customers own web sites, LinkedIn, other subscription services and reading and listening to investor calls and reports, 2) translating manual research into sales conversations, presentations and meetings with team and management input that takes a lot of time, but often misses the mark from a customer relevancy perspective, and 3) coordination of fragmented teams and information across departments, roles and regions particularly when resources change or need to be onboarded.



**Increasing Pipelines:** Increased pipelines are a critical KPI for revenue and investment of resources and they are tied directly to what is in the pipeline. Pipeline quality and quantity are, therefore, equally important. In our [Unlock Your Invisible Pipeline](#) white paper, six dimensions of quality are discussed. As a result, not only does a significant increase in pipeline opportunities driven by customers happen, but pipeline quality is also impacted. These quality impacts include bigger opportunities within higher altitude levels of executive buyers, subsidiary based opportunities, global opportunities spanning countries, long term views of opportunities, and an opportunity knowledge library that can be sorted and organized by different categories and opportunity buying networks that, once known, can be replicated over and over.

**Increased Revenue:** As a result of a more expansive and higher quality pipeline within an existing enterprise account, it is likely that close rates will be higher than pure prospecting – significantly higher. In fact, shorter sales cycles, bigger deals and higher close rates should all manifest themselves over time as this broader, more relevant customer driven pipeline connects with key account stakeholders in meaningful ways.



The combination of these financial impacts add up when you empower account teams with greater time, knowledge and collaboration by creating the ability to leverage more robust customer-driven pipelines to drive revenue growth.

**Centralization is foundational and creates synergy, alignment, coordination and momentum that didn't exist in a decentralized environment which is frustrating and difficult.**

## EMPLOYEE IMPACTS

Employee impacts are equally valuable and span many intangible benefits that drive and motivate employees.

**Departmental and Team Synergies** – the impact of centralization for sharing account knowledge across departments, roles and regions is significant. One leader commented, “now no one can say they didn't know.” When the same set of information is available in one place, it fosters collaboration and team effectiveness. Centralization is foundational and creates synergy, alignment, coordination and momentum that didn't exist in a decentralized environment which is frustrating and difficult. Large scale teams spanning over a dozen departments with documents and information scattered randomly across email and different file locations is common. Needless to say, your customer experiences this fragmentation as well when interacting with your team.

**Faster Ideation** – with external news feeds and updates of all kinds flowing into a centralized account view, including updates on key stakeholders, new ideas for aligning solutions to client needs by type can be generated faster and made actionable. These ideas are triggered by external events that create opportunities to be proactive with new ideas to address customer problems, anchored in combinations of existing product and service bundles that connect required capabilities together in ways that are meaningful to customer stakeholders. All perspectives from different departments and product lines are valuable in this context.

**New Innovation** – seeing new growth opportunities which are not yet discovered leads to innovative approaches that create new ways of introducing value and impact. This is exciting for account teams looking for these opportunities and they can then show management where new concepts are originating in order to get support and resources.

**Shared Best Practices** – new opportunities and wins can be more easily shared across accounts with the historical context captured, including assets and feedback from specific stakeholders by role, during the process. Sharing best practices across teams from a centralized place helps create a faster and more effective way for best practices to be shared AND applied in similar situations on other accounts.



**As tribal knowledge is retained, businesses and support teams benefit greatly by not having to “start over” and can take advantage of known success patterns that can be replicated over time.**

**Retained Tribal Knowledge** – there is so much tacit and explicit knowledge captured and built over time by account teams that is never protected, retained or made accessible by new and different people coming in and out of the account. This knowledge can be captured and stored centrally by opportunity in a way that protects the large investment made in understanding stakeholder behavior, changing situational factors, overcoming obstacles, and advancing “buy in” across a network of different stakeholders. As tribal knowledge is retained, businesses and support teams benefit greatly by not having to “start over” and can take advantage of known success patterns that can be replicated over time.

**Resource Alignment** – matching internal and external resources, based on backgrounds, connections, areas of expertise, geography, role or any other factor, becomes something that can be thoughtfully applied. This gives teammates situational context of where, when and with whom they can add value and why it makes a good match-up. Successful teams can be replicated across situations where desired outcomes were accomplished and applied in other similar situations.

**Upskilling and Onboarding Talent** – when “new to company” resources or people who don’t have as much domain expertise as others are given access to information and playbooks that are matched to opportunities, they have an ability to execute faster without having to figure it all out on their own. This becomes a very practical approach to getting more productivity from people who want to contribute, but aren’t sure how, by providing them with centralized plays to run within the customer context which leads to higher success rates. This is motivating and reduces the dependence and time on training – and reinforces a more optimal “learn by doing” approach.

**Less meetings, easier ways to communicate, more automated ways to update management and each other become a cornerstone for higher morale and greater success.**

These are meaningful productivity gains which motivate and drive individuals that are part of teams to be successful together. Most people like to be part of a team – but not a dysfunctional one! When everyone has the same information, accessible in a common centralized way that can be shared in one place, it helps the team perform more seamlessly. Less meetings, easier ways to communicate, more automated ways to update management and each other become a cornerstone for higher morale and greater success.

## So, shouldn't investments in productivity be tied to the people budget they are designed to support?

### FUNDING ACCOUNT TEAM PRODUCTIVITY

How do companies fund productivity? We have seen layoff announcements everywhere, but one critical factor to think about is what happens to the people that REMAIN vs. just those that left. They are suddenly expected to do more with less. Modernization makes the remaining people more effective. So, shouldn't investments in productivity be tied to the headcount budget they are designed to support?

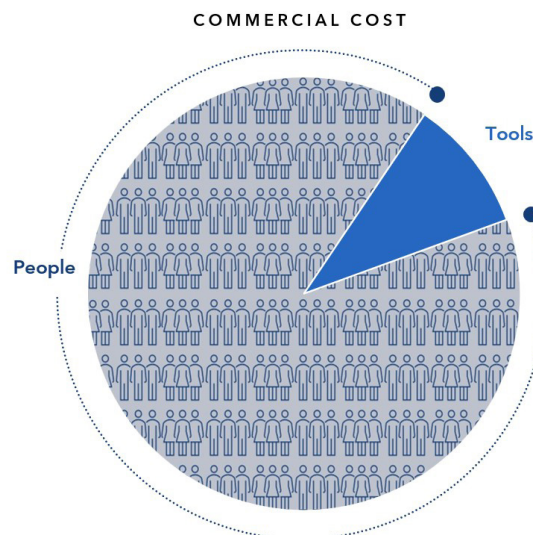
The biggest expense companies have when it comes to commercial expense is people. It is where investment should be focused when making productivity improvements. Pulling from the software, tools or research budgets that are designed to buy "things" disconnects investments in productivity from the budget category it is affecting, which is headcount. When investing \$10 in productivity capabilities to gain \$100 dollars in impact, business should consider the connection between the people investment and the productivity gains as going hand in hand. More productivity, less people cost, higher output.

### Commercial cost is mostly people.

Invest in productivity to realize big gains in pipeline and revenue with simple offsets that are part of the current budget.

#### Make productivity gains for all account staff positions, not just sales

- Double team efficiency
- Reduce resource burnout
- Talent multiplier for upskilling
- Increase account knowledge
- Improve relevancy
- Increase quality of sales conversations and meetings
- Improve coordination



#### OFFSET COST: TOOLS

**Overlapping Research:** Decommission or reduce overlapping research costs (subscriptions) that aren't actionable by sales for creating pipeline opportunities

#### OFFSET COST: PEOPLE

**People That Leave:** Offsets the need to replace some of the people that leave across all types of commercial support roles

**New Hires:** Offsets the need for some of the new hires in the budget by making existing resources more productive

**Lead Gen Resources:** Offsets traditional lead gen investment expenses (e.g., SDRs, research, campaigns)

Using the headcount budget to invest in capabilities that directly impact the very headcount from which offsets in new hires are planned, replacement costs for people that leave, or less staff needed in one area that can be redeployed in another is common sense. Invest in empowering the people by investing some of the cost allocated for the people to drive productivity gains and, thereby, realize a substantial upside. The payoff is in the output of a much more efficient commercial workforce overall for the very modest cost of a few headcount. Those that remain behind to do all the work with expanding expectations will be grateful, more effective and motivated at a time when drag vs. drive is a pervasive problem.