Airtable
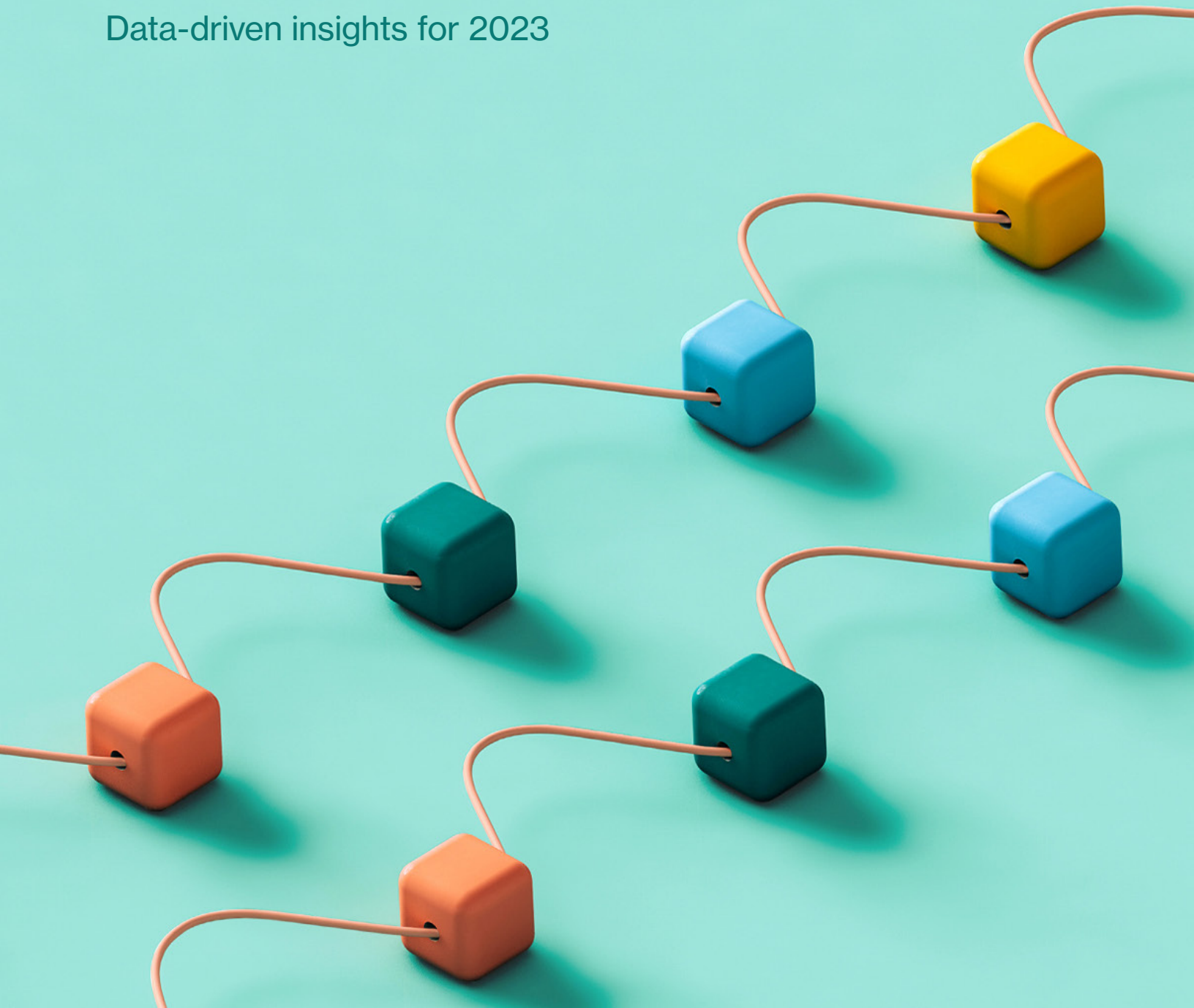
Product teams benchmark report

Data-driven insights for 2023

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Introduction

Understanding the anatomy of a product team.

We surveyed more than 700 professionals working on product teams—from individual contributors to C-level executives—to learn more about how they work.

In this report, you'll find data-backed benchmarks to reference as you grow your own team: from how other leaders are structuring their teams, to how they're making decisions about product roadmaps.

Keeping up with these changes takes a powerful investment of your teams' energy and time—an investment we could be spending on the work itself. This report suggests that we're increasingly balancing deep work with chasing asset approvals, communicating the same information in multiple places, keeping data up to date, and proving our value as marketers, as a team.

In this report you'll find quantitative benchmarks for:

- **How product teams are structured**, including the size of an average product team by company size, and plans for headcount growth.

- **How product makes strategic decisions**, like the factors most likely to influence roadmap prioritization, and which cross-functional teams they work with most frequently.

- **How teams measure impact**, including most common quantitative metrics, how often they hit their goals, and how much time they spend on goal-oriented work.

Chapter 1

Who we surveyed

We surveyed 739 people in the US working on a product team. The survey group included all levels of seniority, both B2B and B2C businesses, and a wide range of industries.

The survey included only those working at companies with 1,000+ full-time employees, and who contributed to at least one digital product at their company as a part of their role.

Primary market

B2B	8%
B2C	6%
Both B2B and B2C	86%

Company size (by FTEs)

1,000 to 4,999	53%
5,000 to 9,999	30%
10,000 to 24,999	10%
25,000+	6%

Job level or role

Associate coordinator or team member	16%
Administrator or lead	10%
Individual contributor / Professional	10%
Supervisor	17%
Manager	10%
Senior Manager	9%
Director	13%
VP	7%
C-level or executive	8%

Industry

|	
Manufacturing	21%
Retail and eCommerce	12%
Consumer goods and services	11%
Consumer technology	11%
Technology (software)	9%
Financial services and insurance	7%
Healthcare and life sciences	5%
Professional and technical services	5%
Automotive	4%
Utilities and energy	3%
Technology (hardware)	3%
Education	2%
Media, entertainment and publishing	2%
Telecommunications services	2%
Travel and hospitality	2%
Transportation	1%

Chapter 2
Building a team

How are companies investing in product teams?

A growing product team is a clear signal of company-level investment in the org. Here's how most companies are choosing to scale their Product teams. The average product team at a 1,000-4,999 person company has 214 full-time employees (FTEs).

Analysis

As the size of the company increases, generally, so does the size of the product team. But that's not always the case. In some rarer cases, the product team makes up only a small percentage of the company.

Product team size by company size

● 1,000–4,999 FTEs   ● 5,000–9,999 FTEs   ○ 10,000 FTEs
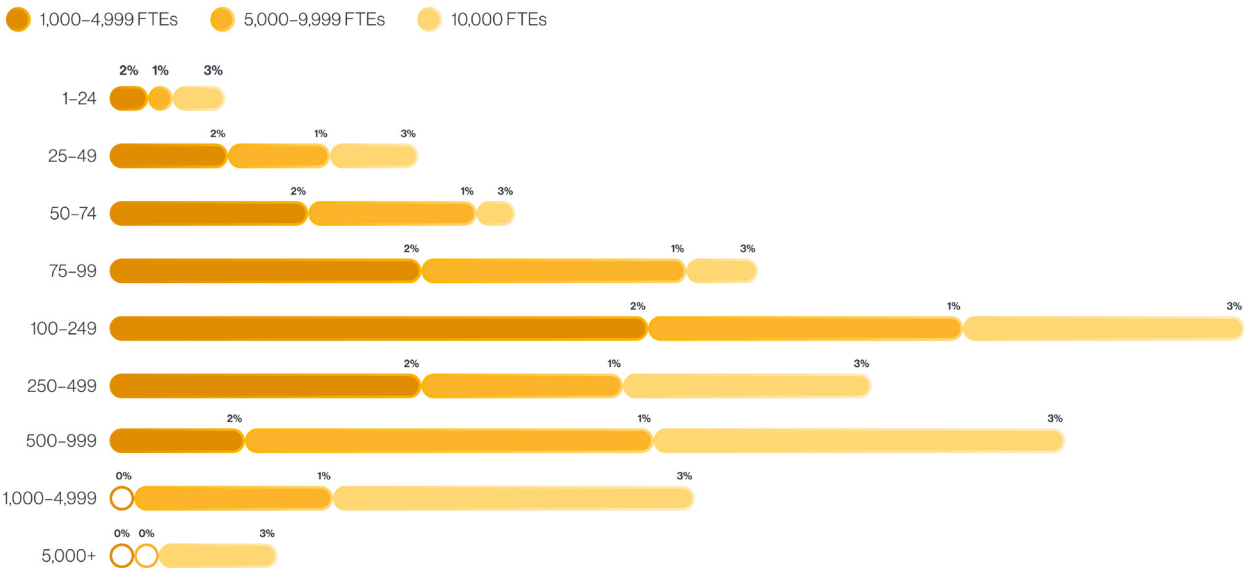
Average product team size (measured in # FTEs)

1,000–4,999 FTE company: **214**

5,000–9,999 FTE company: **635**

10,000+ FTE company: **1,301**

Overall: **522**

How much are teams expecting to grow?

As products evolve, so does the investment in the teams that build them. Here's how much teams are expecting to grow team headcount year over year. About half of product teams expect to grow their teams by 10-19.9% in the next year.
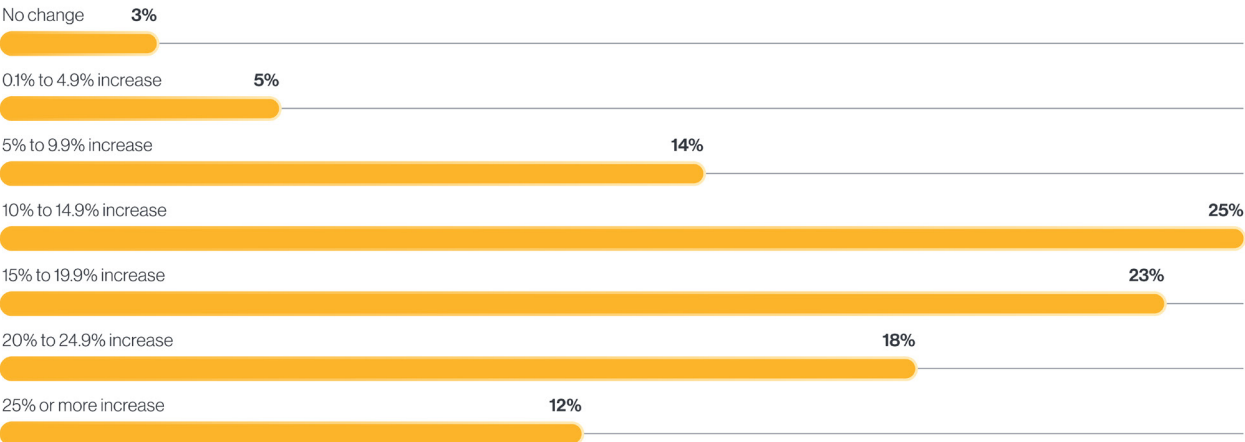
Analysis

The majority of product teams surveyed are planning to grow. Only 3% of teams say their teams anticipate no year-over-year change—and none report planned headcount decreases.

Digging deeper, the most dramatic headcount increases belong to companies in the 5,000+ employee range. 13% of companies with 5,000 - 9,999 employees, and 15% with 10,000+ employees expect product headcount to jump 25% or more.

The most incremental headcount increases, though, belong to companies in the 10,000+ employee range. Another 15% of companies in that size range expect only a 0.1 - 4.9% increase in headcount in the next year.

Expected product headcount growth

	No change	3%
0.1% to 4.9% increase	5%
5% to 9.9% increase	14%
10% to 14.9% increase	25%
15% to 19.9% increase	23%
20% to 24.9% increase	18%
25% or more increase	12%

	1,000 to 4,999	5,000 to 9,999	10,000+
No change	3%	2%	2%
0.1% to 4.9% increase	3%	4%	15%
5% to 9.9% increase	14%	14%	12%
10% to 14.9% increase	27%	24%	19%
15% to 19.9% increase	24%	23%	20%
20% to 24.9% increase	19%	19%	16%
25% or more increase	9%	13%	15%

Who does the work of product operations?

Product operations, as a named discipline, is relatively new—but the work of product ops has existed much longer. These are the teams responsible for stewarding and up-leveling the product development lifecycle. Nearly half of teams rely on a dedicated product operations, or program management team to do the work of product ops.

Analysis

While product operations is the backbone of any product team, not every organization has a dedicated team to do that work. Of the teams we surveyed, 29% delegate the work to product managers, and another 22% delegate it to business operations.

The majority (49%) invest in a dedicated product operations function. That's even more pronounced within 5,000 - 9,999 employee companies, 57% of which have a dedicated product ops team.
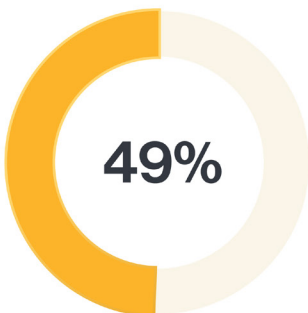
Who takes on the work of product operations
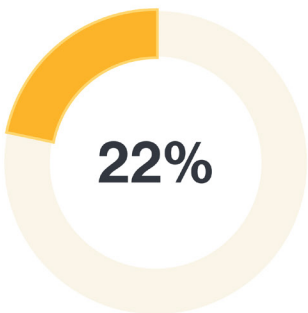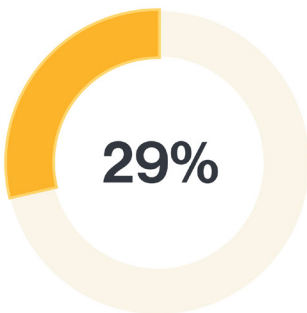
22%	29%	49%
Business operations team	Product managers	Product operations or program management team

	1,000 to 4,999	5,000 to 9,999	10,000+
Product operations or program management team	48%	57%	40%
Product managers	28%	24%	39%
Business operations team	24%	19%	20%

Spotlight: How Frame.io built product operations on Airtable

As Director of Operations at Frame.io, Caroline Vernick has built a system that connects Engineering and Product as they build together—and gives leadership and the rest of the org visibility into their progress and roadmap. See how it works in this 20-minute walkthrough.

Watch video

Chapter 3
Strategy and operations

What influences product decisions?

The way a product evolves is a byproduct of the people and sources that influence the roadmap. These are the factors that influence outcomes most.

Direct customer feedback, direction from leadership, and internal product feedback are the three biggest influences on product decision-making and prioritization.

Analysis

Deciding who (or what) you prioritize is as strategically important as your roadmap itself. A focus on competitive intelligence, for example, could lead you to prioritize differently than a focus on direct customer feedback.

On the whole, most teams take a balanced approach, considering a fairly even spread of inputs to make decisions. That keeps them from over-rotating on any one source: like building only in response to competitor activity, or focusing exclusively on customer feedback without a clear pulse on the market. Since the spread of sources is so diverse, it becomes even more important for product teams to efficiently synthesize many different inputs, from many different sources.

How much influence common reference points have over roadmap prioritization and decision-making

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	A great deal
Direct customer feedback	0%	9%	37%	53%
Direction from leadership	0%	7%	39%	53%
Direct product feedback from employees	0%	9%	38%	53%
Synthesized customer feedback from customer-facing teams	0%	7%	42%	50%
User research	0%	11%	40%	49%
Financial or growth goals	0%	11%	40%	49%
Competitive intelligence	0%	11%	42%	47%
Personal or anecdotal data	1%	12%	41%	46%
External research and insights (e.g., analyst reports)	0%	12%	42%	46%

Spotlight: LinkedIn's custom-built research repository

Capturing feedback and insights is one of the most difficult, but most important stages of the product development lifecycle. Take a hands-on look at how LinkedIn's research team tracks the lifecycle of each research project, and better understand their customers' experiences.

Learn more

What parts of the product development lifecycle do teams struggle with?

The operational subprocesses, tasks, and actions that guide the product development lifecycle are all interconnected. When one stage struggles, so do those downstream, with problems compounding as the lifecycle progresses. These are the stages of the product development lifecycle that teams find most challenging.

41% of teams struggle with managing product launches.

Analysis

As noted in the Airtable product insights report, the majority of teams struggle with at least one stage of the product development lifecycle. Only a small cohort of teams (10%) say they don't struggle with any of the product development lifecycle.

But even challenges with one stage are often symptomatic of deeper, systemic issues within the product development lifecycle. For example, if managing product launches is your #1 challenge, that's only made harder if you struggle to manage product build and delivery. So solving for challenges in one stage can have outsized impact on the development lifecycle.

The stage teams were least likely to struggle with was conducting user research—only 34% of teams found it highly challenging.

Stages of product development that are "highly challenging" for teams

Stage	Percent
Managing product launches	41%
Collecting and analyzing product and customer feedback	39%
Analyzing and reporting on results/progress	39%
Managing product build and delivery	38%
Managing product roadmaps	38%
Setting and aligning on team objectives	36%
Prioritizing product features and capabilities	36%
Conducting user research	34%
None of the above	10%

Spotlight: How Highspot manages their product roadmap in Airtable

With Airtable, Highspot's product team is able to provide roadmap visibility to their internal partners, determine which features to highlight for upcoming releases, and align each product feature to a strategic goal. Get a closer look at how they built it in this story.

Learn more

Which cross-functional teams do most product teams partner with?

Great products are rarely built in a silo: partners such as go-to-market teams, engineering teams, and others help to build products, improve them, and get into the hands of prospective customers. These are the teams that product partners with most often.

Customer support is the team that product partners with most often.

Analysis

Customer-centricity is one of the hallmarks of a successful product team. So it's no surprise that, when asked which teams are "cross-functional partners" of product, the #1 response was customer support teams. A massive 68% of product teams say they consider customer support to be a cross-functional partner.

Customer support sits on the front lines of your company. While customer success, marketing, and sales also work directly with customers, it's customer support that's most exposed to the technical challenges with your product. They're also a magnet for direct customer feedback, which is pivotal for understanding how your product is (or isn't) resonating in the wild.

And today, the partnership between product and support is more important than ever. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, support teams saw a 53% uptick in the volume of customer queries. As the volume of support feedback grows, so does the need to work cross-functionally to address it.

Teams considered cross-functional partners

Customer support 68%

Customer success 56%

Marketing 55%

Engineering 45%

Sales 42%

Finance 34%

Legal 21%
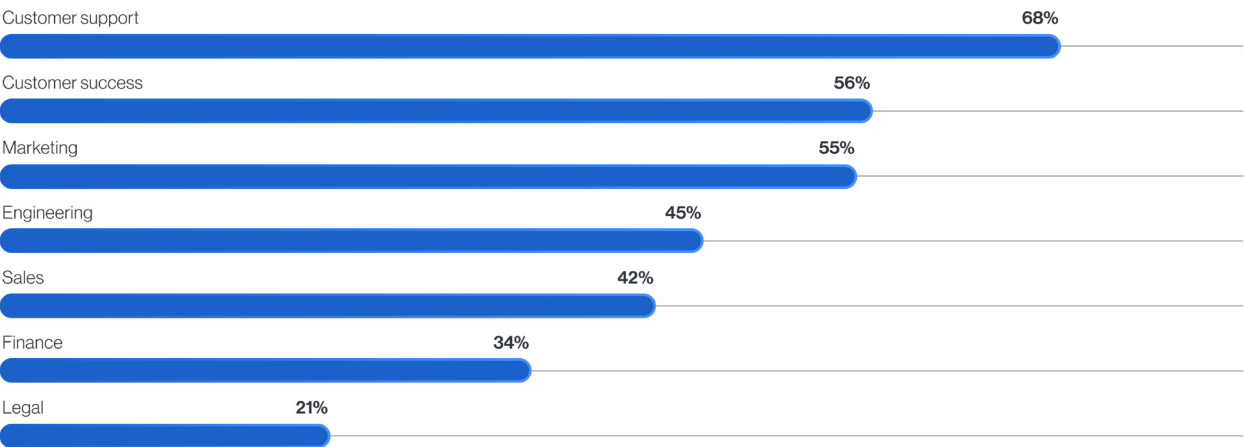
Success and productivity

What metrics are teams using to benchmark success?

You can't manage what you don't measure. Across teams, here are the metrics product teams are using to measure their progress.
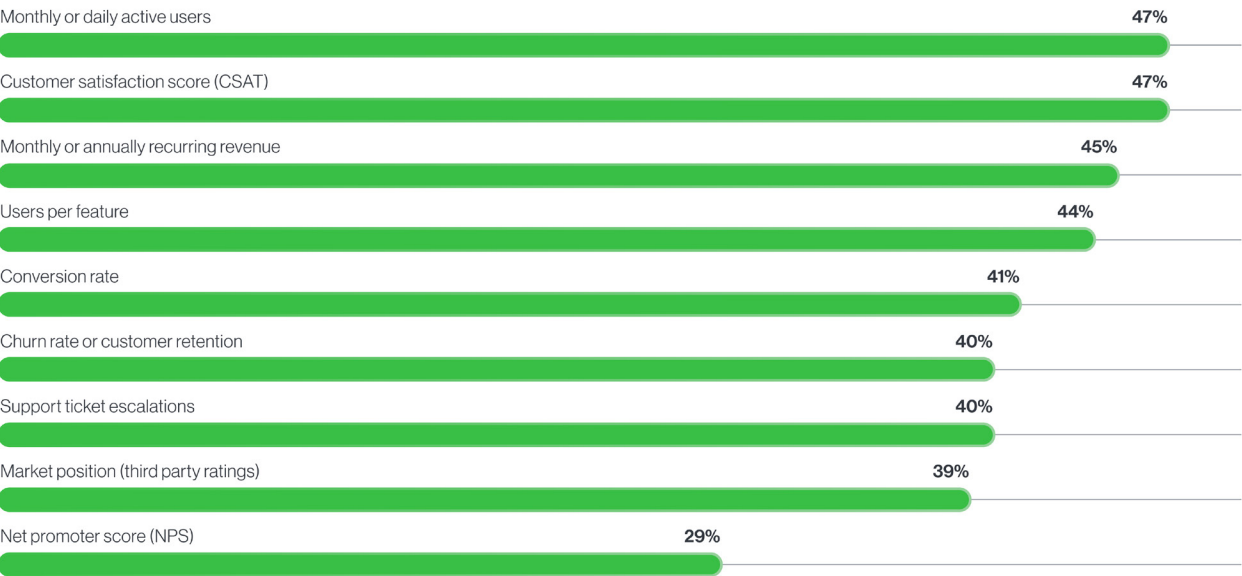
Product teams are most likely to measure themselves against active users, customer satisfaction score (CSAT), and recurring revenue.

Analysis

Teams measure a mixed bag of metrics to track their progress: from active users to conversion rates. It's a good signal that teams are measuring progress holistically: seeking to understand the total impact of their work, instead of over-emphasizing on only a handful of metrics.

The least popular metric here is net promoter score (NPS). When it comes to tracking customer feedback at scale, most teams aren't a fan of the NPS framework—only 29% are responsible for the metric. On the flip side, 47% track CSAT.

Metrics teams are accountable for

Metric	Percentage
Monthly or daily active users	47%
Customer satisfaction score (CSAT)	47%
Monthly or annually recurring revenue	45%
Users per feature	44%
Conversion rate	41%
Churn rate or customer retention	40%
Support ticket escalations	40%
Market position (third party ratings)	39%
Net promoter score (NPS)	29%

Average CSAT: 73.4 | **Average NPS:** 54.8

How frequently are teams hitting their goals?

Defining the right metrics to own will shape your team's goals. This is how often the teams we surveyed accomplish their goals.

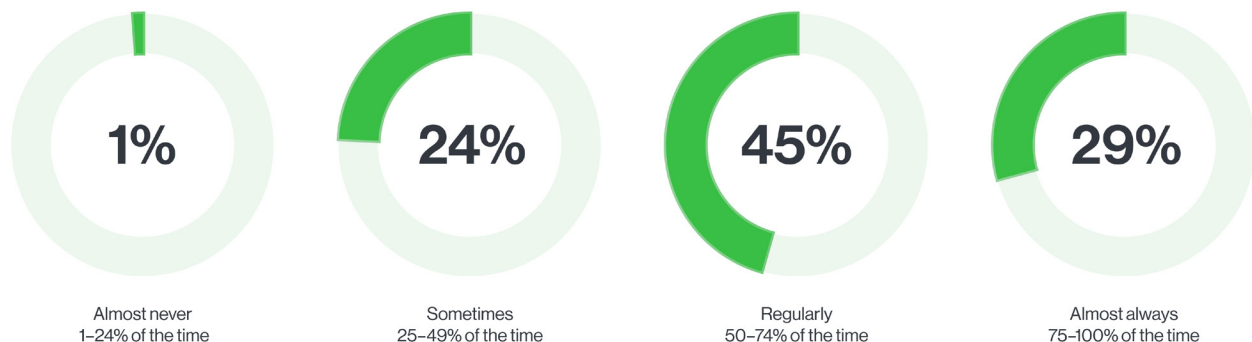On average, product teams hit their goals 63% of the time.

Analysis

Less than a third of product teams "almost always" hit their goals. And only 25% "almost never" or only "sometimes" hit their goals. The remaining 45% feel they hit their goals "regularly."

So why are so few teams "almost always" hitting their goals? The **product insights report** shows that product teams most likely to hit their goals:

- Have higher autonomy
- Have better visibility into performance metrics and progress toward goals
- Better understand the long-term vision of the product
- Feel strongly that they have tools they need to ship on time
- Find it easy to access the information they need to do their work across tools

How often teams hit their goals

1%	24%	45%	29%
Almost never 1–24% of the time	Sometimes 25–49% of the time	Regularly 50–74% of the time	Almost always 75–100% of the time

Spotlight: Connecting strategy & execution with BlueOcean

As the head of the Enterprise Product Management Office, Jenny Bodenlos developed a system to solve what she calls "the read thread problem": a way for teams to create a direct link between every action, and the strategic goal it serves. Learn how she keeps the team realigned and connected by mapping every task to company-wide objectives and key results.

Learn more

How much time is spent on working toward goals and deliverables?

Administrative tasks, meetings, and day-to-day communications are a necessity for keeping teams connected—but they don't always contribute directly to goals and deliverables. Here's how much time teams are spending on those "non-core" tasks.

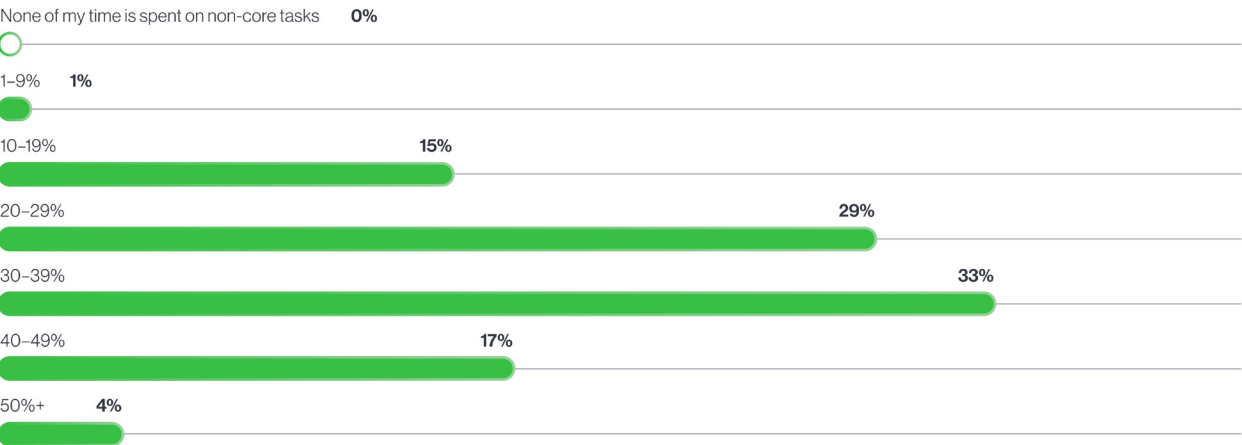The average person working in product spends 31% of their week on non-core tasks.

Analysis

Most product folks weren't hired to write emails, or create documents for administrative purposes—but as with almost any job, these sorts of "non-core" tasks are still necessary. Besides, it'd be unreasonable for any company to expect their product team to work on goal-related work for every minute of a 40-hour work week—they are human, after all.

But even so, most product teams are spending a lot of time on work that doesn't contribute to goals and deliverables. And that steadily increases with company size, with people at 10,000+ person companies spending 33% of their week on non-core work.

If we assume a 40-hour work week, that means those people are spending more than 13 hours a week on tasks that don't directly relate to their work—which could spell an opportunity to increase efficiency.

Percentage of each work week spent on non-core tasks

None of my time is spent on non-core tasks **0%**

1–9% **1%**

10–19% **15%**

20–29% **29%**

30–39% **33%**

40–49% **17%**

50%+ **4%**

Percentage of each work week spent on non-core tasks: Company size

1,000–4,999 FTE company: **30%**   5,000–9,999 FTE company: **31%**   10,000+ FTE company: **33%**

Conclusion

Every product is unique—and consequently, so is every product team. How you build yours is a function of the products you create, the company resources available to you, and the way your company operates.

The goal of these benchmarks isn't to define what is, or what isn't normal for your team. They're a peek into the teams of other peers in product—so that you can better strategize with your team, and make informed decisions about how to build and scale it.

If you're looking for more insights to draw from, visit the resources below at any point: from more original research on product teams, to guidance on how to run your product team on Airtable.

Resources

Airtable product insights report

Backed by original research, this data-driven report unpacks insights for product teams—like what's motivating most teams, and what's holding them back.

Download the report

Product operations playbook

This collection of best practices—based on interviews with Airtable customers—shows how your team can build product operations on Airtable.

Download the playbook

Rules of the roadmap— an expert-led guide

Gathering insights, aligning on objectives, and prioritizing a roadmap requires a cross-functional effort. In this ebook, product experts share detailed insight into how they manage it.

Download the guide

Webinar: Streamlining product operations

Interested in learning how product operations works on Airtable? This webinar shares a tactical walkthrough of how our most successful customers run their product ops on Airtable.

Watch the webinar

About Airtable

Airtable enables teams to build workflows that modernize their business processes.

More than 300,000 organizations, including more than half of the Fortune 1000, use Airtable's visual, flexible tools to customize workflows that meet their exact needs, whether they're creating blockbuster movies, designing running shoes, distributing life-saving vaccines, or anything in between.

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