

| Airtable product insights report

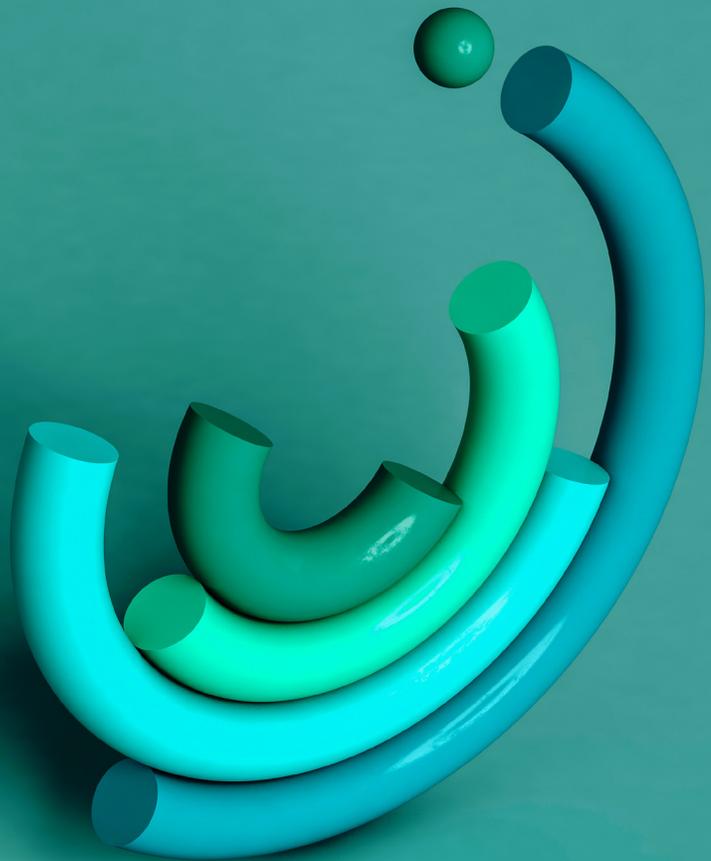


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Introduction

Getting back to the bigger picture

A product team's job is to think about the big picture: the needs of your customers, and the innovations that can push your org into the next chapter of growth.

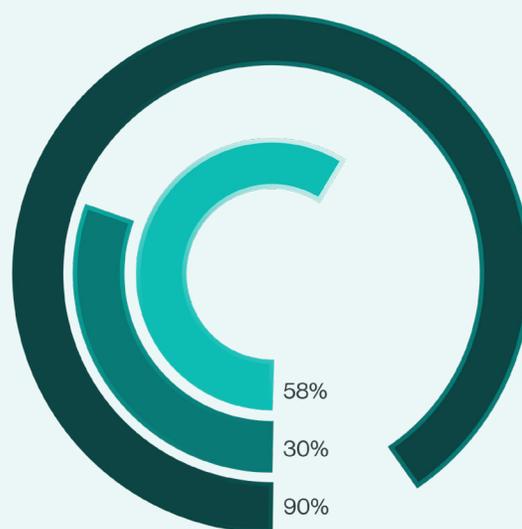
But that big picture can be elusive. And before you can deliver what's best for your customers, you need your whole team aligned behind a clear, data-backed vision.

So when less than half of your team understands the product vision in full, what's the real cost to your organization, and your customers? And more importantly: how do you clear the weeds so your team can stay focused?

In this survey of over 700 product professionals, we took a closer look at the habits of product teams. Read on to learn what motivates teams like yours, what keeps them aligned, and what's holding them back—and how people, process, and tech influence your impact on customers and the business.

A peek at the findings

- 58% of product team members don't have a strong understanding of their company's product vision
- Low individual autonomy is correlated with low team-level engagement—but only 30% of product team members say they have "high autonomy" in determining how to do their work
- 90% of product teams find at least one stage of the product lifecycle highly challenging to execute, even though 81% have processes in place for 5 or more stages



Who we surveyed

A closer look at the audience

For our inaugural product trends report, we drew insights from product professionals across the United States.

We worked with Lawless Research to survey over [700 product professionals in the United States](#)—from individual contributors up through C-level executives.

Each respondent was a part of a product team, and employed full-time at a 1,000+ employee company. Respondents worked on a mix of B2B and B2C products, and a mix of physical and digital products across a wide range of company sizes and role levels. We asked questions about their team, the tech they use, the processes they implement, and the impact they have on the business to form the insights in this report.

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

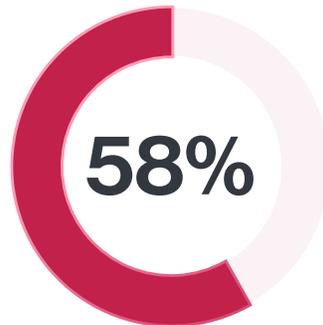
Manufacturing	21%
Retail and eCommerce	12%
Consumer Goods and Services	11%
Consumer Technology	11%
Technology (Software)	9%
Financial Services and Insurance	7%
Healthcare and Life Sciences	5%
Professional and Technical Services	5%
Automotive	4%
Utilities and Energy	3%
Technology (Hardware)	3%
Education	2%
Media, Entertainment and Publishing	2%
Telecommunications Services	2%
Travel and Hospitality	2%
Transportation	1%

Insight 1

The big picture isn't easy for most teams to see

As a product team, rallying around your product vision is about more than setting lofty goals. It's the heart of what a product team does: a charter that defines the problem you're solving, the people you're solving it for, and the reason you're solving it.

But most product teams aren't seeing the big picture as clearly as they might like. **Few product teams fully understand the vision they're chasing—and that disconnect only amplifies as companies scale.**



of product team members don't have a strong understanding of the product vision



of team members have high visibility into goals and objectives



say it's very easy to access the information they need to do their work from self-serve tools and resources

The product vision gets blurrier as a company scales

Across the board, fewer than half of product team members feel strongly that they understand the long-term vision of the product they're working on.

That's even more pronounced as a company scales. At companies with 10,000+ employees, only about a third of product team members "strongly agree" that they understand the long-term product vision.

A few contributing reasons:

Information isn't moving smoothly across the product org.

Only 24% of product team members find it "very easy" to access information they need to do their job from self-serve tools and resources. Even if they're not directly seeking information on the product vision to do their work, those gaps in context could impact their ability to tie their work to broader goals and strategy.

Visibility into high-level objectives and goals isn't consistent.

Only 53% of product team members say they have "high visibility" into team-wide goals and objectives. In other words: the other half of product team members have only partial visibility into the goals and objectives they're driving toward. Without that insight, it's challenging for product team members to understand the high-level strategy behind their work.

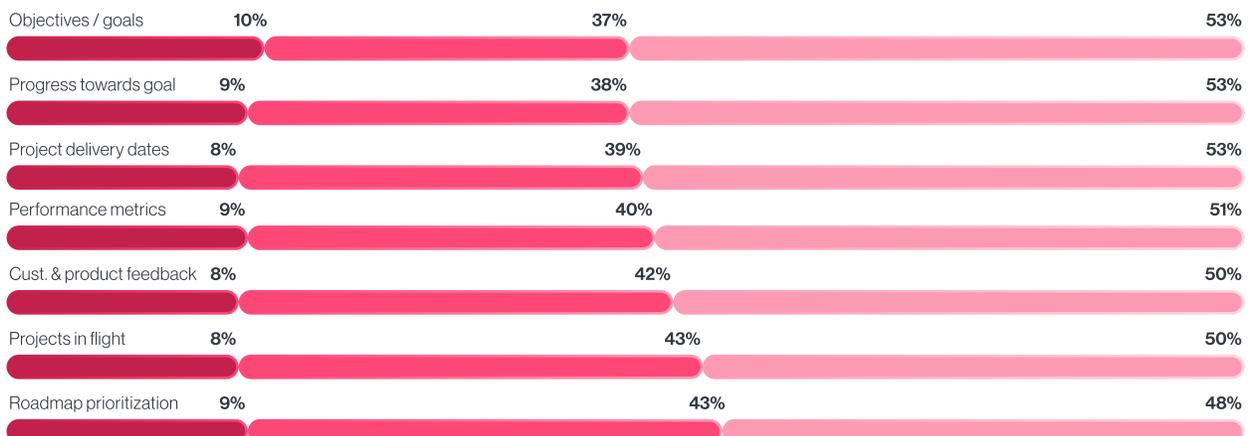
Team members with a strong understanding of the product vision

Company size (by FTEs)



Level of visibility into team-level information

● Low (or none) ● Moderate ● High



Take action: Prioritize creating and socializing a single source of truth for broader, better alignment.

Alignment is tricky for any team, but it's especially difficult for large and growing teams. Without an established "source of truth" in place for objectives and goals, for example, it's easy for sub-teams to create their own silos of information. That, in turn, can inadvertently impede visibility across the entire product team.

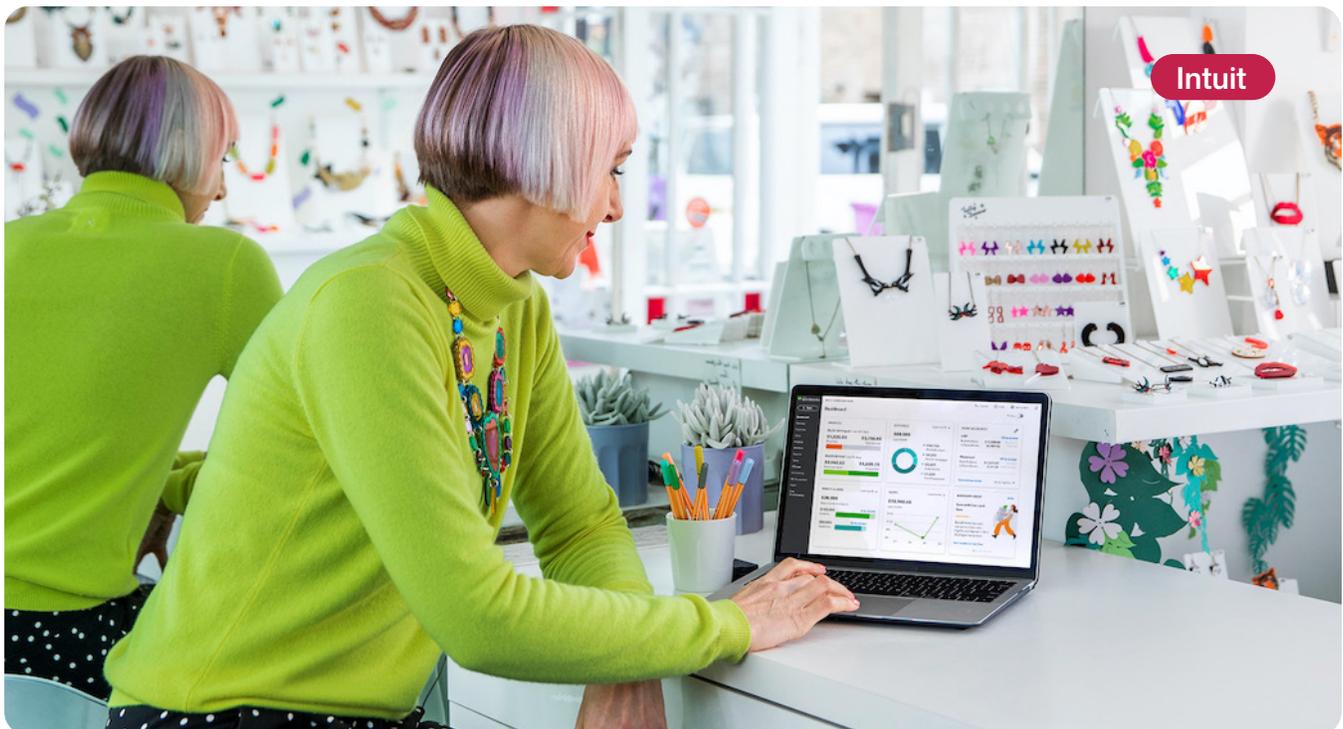
As you scale, building out highly accessible sources of truth can keep your team aligned—especially when it comes to the details about your company strategy, like your objectives and goals. Use them to consolidate, and then widely share information like goals and objectives to help your team understand the "why" behind their work.

Spotlight story: Intuit

49% of teams surveyed say that user research influences roadmap prioritization and decision-making "a great deal." And when Adela-Lia Muresan joined Intuit, their team had a wealth of previous research insights—but no way to reliably find them. Individual designers used different processes, leading to silos, duplication of research, and difficulty measuring the impact of their efforts.

That's when they created "International Truth": an Airtable base with the goal of consolidating global research and insights, standardizing the teams' process, and allowing team members around the world to leverage the same templates, research nuggets, and best practices.

[Read more](#)



Insight 2

Autonomy drives impact

Autonomy's ability to motivate teams is well-researched, and well-publicized. As it turns out, it also has a tangible impact on the way product teams run.

First and foremost, it means people can spend more time on their work, and less time interpreting directives. But it also has downstream impacts: teams with less independence are less engaged at work.

And lower engagement has an outsized impact on performance: it's a drag on alignment, and slows down ship times. **So keeping folks interested in their work isn't just good for your team—it's good for your customers and the business, too.**

“You need to approach everyone within your organization with the assumption that they ultimately want to do the right thing, and that's where they're coming from...You share the same objective.”



Brian Bhuta

CPO, Forsta

—previously Signify Health, Dell EMC

Source



of team members report having "very high" autonomy



of team members with low autonomy are highly engaged at work

Independence propels engagement, engagement propels performance

Product leaders have their work cut out for them: less than a third of product team members say they have high autonomy—or, a sense of freedom and control over how they do their work. That, in turn, makes them less interested in the work itself. Teams with low autonomy are significantly less engaged at work.

Unsurprisingly, increasing autonomy can have a huge positive impact. By giving folks more freedom in how they do their work, you increase their interest in the work. And engaged teams are 5x more likely to understand the long-term vision, and 8x more likely to ship products on time.

That trend is magnified for individual contributors, who are 17x more likely to ship products on time when they're engaged.

“You need to create space, empower others and let go...It’s a balance between creating enough autonomy while ensuring the product is cohesive and surprises are avoided.”



Nikhyl Singhal

VP of Product, Facebook
—previously Credit Karma, Google
Source
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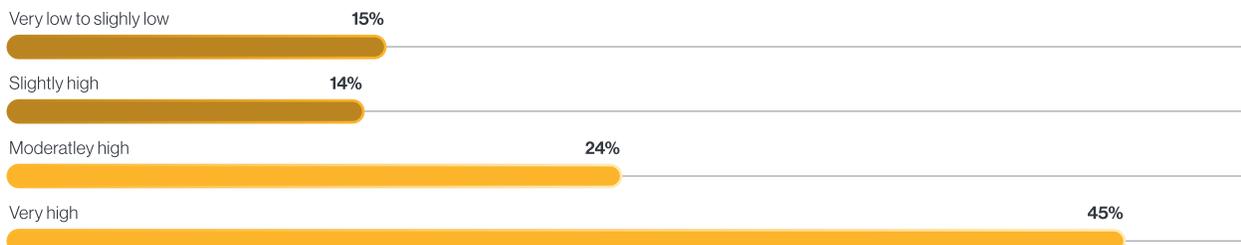
High level of engagement by autonomy level

Degree of autonomy



Likelihood to ship on time by autonomy level

Degree of autonomy



Take action: Create a sense of independence without sacrificing structure or visibility.

Our data shows that autonomy has a positive influence on engagement. It also shows that teams with high autonomy, but fewer documented processes, are less likely to meet their goals. It's important to give teams flexibility in how they work without losing a sense of structure.

To raise engagement, leaders need to build an organizational structure that empowers individuals, but doesn't sacrifice org-wide consistency. Start by building global alignment and structure around team-wide processes, creating high visibility around information like OKRs, feature tracking, milestones, and the like. Then, focus on enabling those at the edges of your organization—your individual contributors—to work independently on the day-to-day within the org-wide

Spotlight story: Hearst Magazines

In 2017, Hearst Magazines brought all of its product teams under one umbrella: combining operations from several teams, managing a total of 25 powerful brands and 245 websites. While the product team was combining operations, they were also streamlining processes across their web properties to improve publishing speed and efficiency.

When they built a centralized publishing system, they were able to build a structured source of truth that gave their whole team the insight and freedom they needed to move quickly, better understand their products, and be more proactive about where the marketplace was headed.

[Read more](#)



Insight 3

Teams have processes in place—but they aren't working

Many teams realize the pivotal role of product operations: almost half have a dedicated product operations team to manage and uplevel the product development lifecycle. And the majority have processes built out to support every stage of that cycle.

The hangup is in the effectiveness of those processes. Even though most teams have built processes to guide the various stages of the product lifecycle—like feedback collection or feature prioritization—most still struggle with at least one stage.

For leaders, that means having processes in place isn't enough—they also need to validate that those processes are performing as intended.

“Strengthening cross-functional teams, processes, and foundation isn't sexy, but it's key to innovation.”

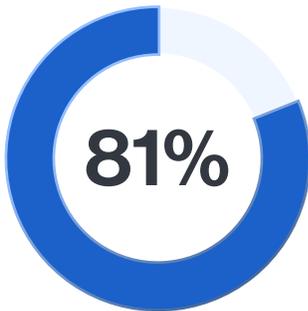


Nikhyl Singhal

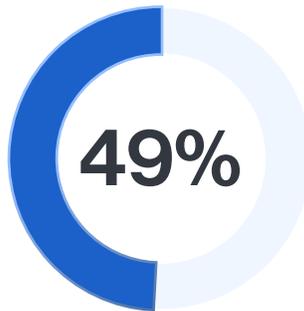
VP of Product, Facebook

—previously Credit Karma, Google

Source



of teams have a documented process for 5+ stages of the product development lifecycle



of teams have a dedicated product operations function



of teams still find at least one stage of the product development lifecycle highly challenging

Processes need to pull more weight

The product development lifecycle can be broken down into a handful of distinct stages—and the majority of teams have a process or workflow for addressing each and every one of them:

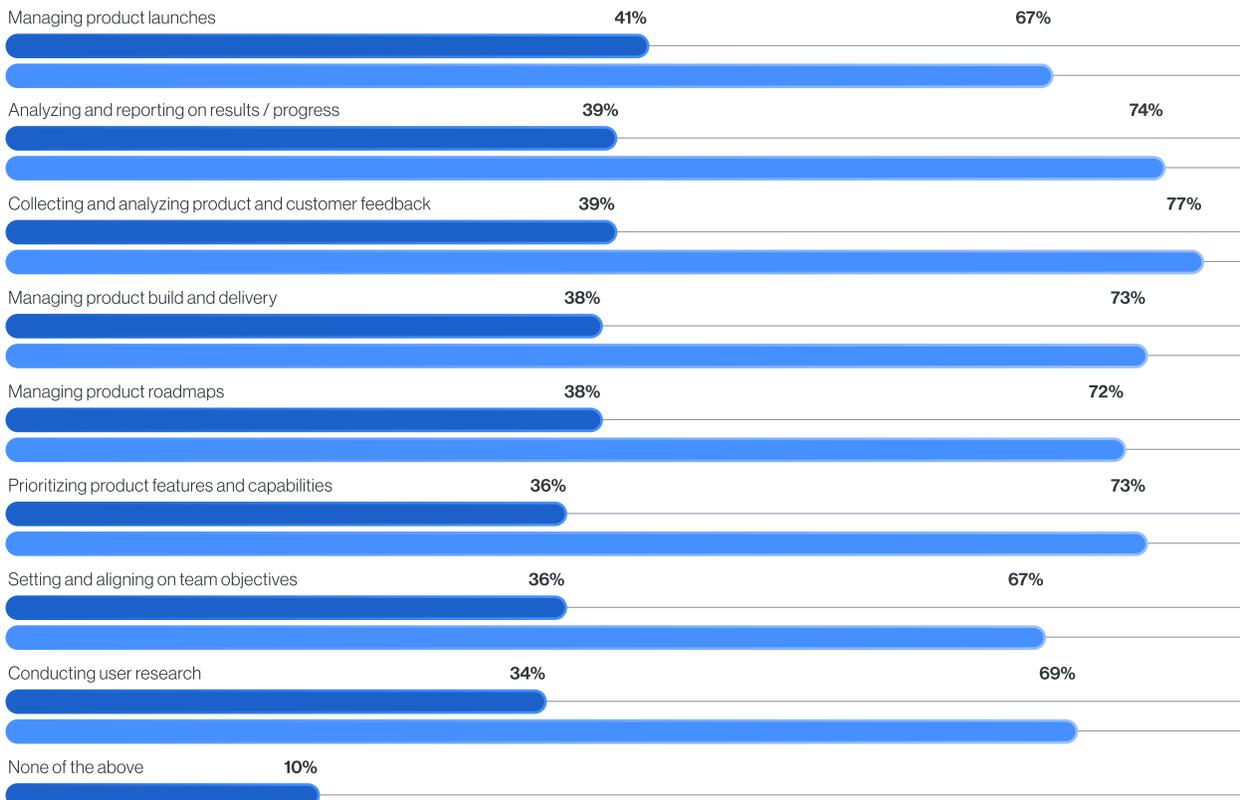


On the surface, that’s a net positive: it means that most teams are investing in product operations throughout the product development lifecycle.

But if you’re still struggling: you’re not alone. Most teams said they struggled with at least one stage. [Managing product launches](#), [collecting and analyzing feedback](#), and [analyzing progress](#) topped the list. Only 10% said they found none of the stages “highly challenging” to tackle.

Processes that are highly challenging vs. whether they are documented

● Highly challenging ● Use a documented process



Take action: Audit your processes to identify blocks.

If you've already got processes in place for each stage of the product lifecycle, take this as an opportunity to step back and reevaluate. Start with questions like:

- Where is your team still struggling? Which stages of your cycle need streamlining most?
- How do your stakeholders (internal and external to your team) feel about your processes? Where do you need to build stronger feedback loops to verify that things are working as intended?

- Where are your bottlenecks? Are folks struggling to find the information they need? Is cross-functional collaboration clunky or manual?
- Are the tools and software in place helping my processes run efficiently and effectively? Or are they falling short?

Spotlight: Rethinking the rules of the roadmap (and the processes behind it)

Good product development happens when an entire organization works together, combining each team's skills with deep customer feedback to create a product bigger than the sum of its parts. But that's far easier said than done.

This ebook unpacks best practices for planning, measuring, and prioritizing: from centralizing feedback to creating accessible roadmap resources for your org. It also takes a closer look at how Airtable runs product operations—and a tactical guide for borrowing their processes for your own team.

[Learn more](#)



Insight 4

Measurement methods are a mixed bag (and so are results)

As the saying goes: “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.”

And for product teams, there’s no universal way to measure progress. From monthly or daily active users to market position from third-party ratings, teams reported an eclectic mix of key performance indicators (KPIs).

Their ability to hit those KPIs, though, was consistently inconsistent.

“Quite simply, it’s the product manager’s job to articulate two simple things: What game are we playing? [And] how do we keep score?”

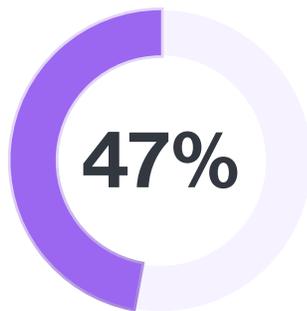


Adam Nash

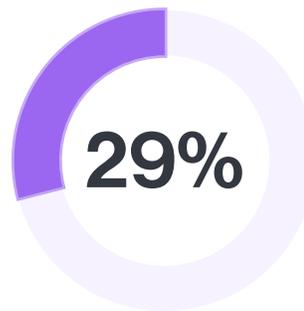
CEO, Daffy

—previously Dropbox, Wealthfront, LinkedIn

Source



of teams are measured against monthly or daily active users—the most used KPI among product teams (tied with CSAT)



of teams “almost always” hit their goals and objectives, compared to 26% of teams that almost never, or sometimes hit their goals

Measured, but not necessarily managed

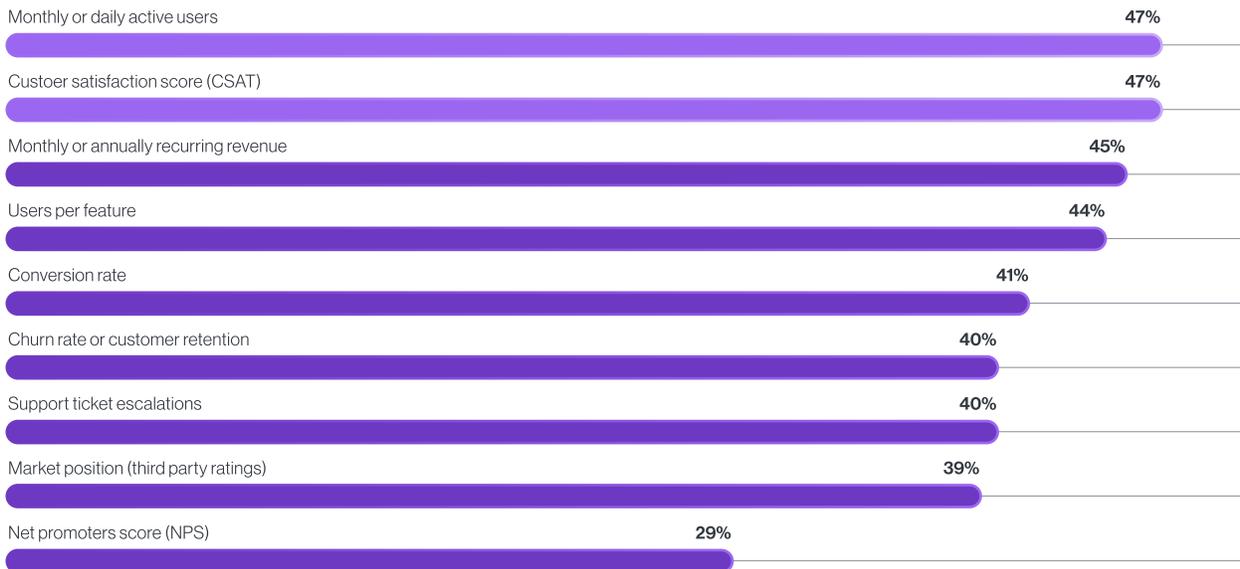
So how are product teams measuring impact? The most popular metric of success: monthly or daily active users, which 47% of product teams measure against. **Customer satisfaction score (CSAT)**, **monthly or annual recurring revenue**, **users per feature**, and **conversion rate** round out a top 5.

And when it comes to performance, most teams have mixed results. Only 29% of teams say they almost always hit their objectives and goals. And only 1 in 4 say they almost always ship on time.

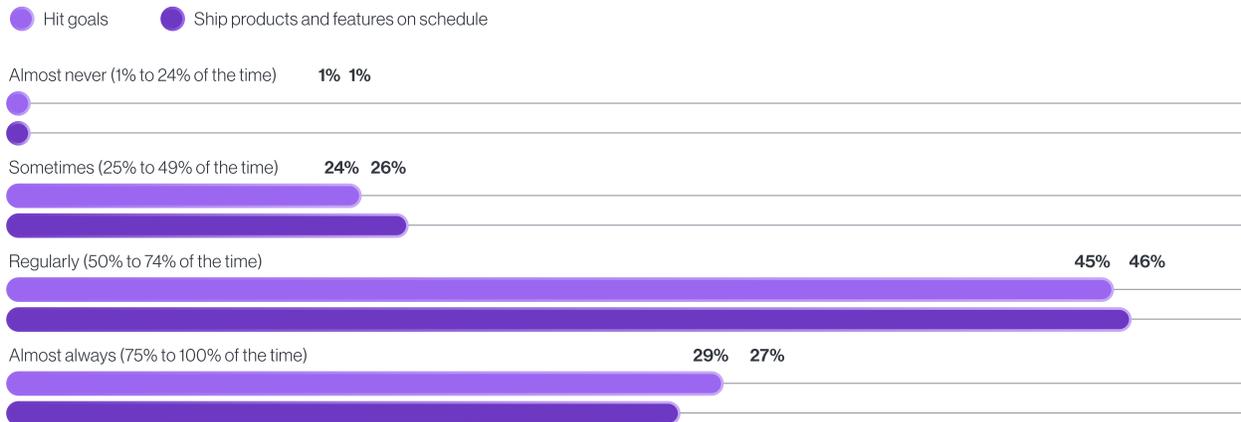
Based on the data, the product teams that are most likely to hit their goals:

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

Most common performance metrics



Frequency hitting goals vs. shipping on time



Take action: Empower your team with more context to help them hit goals.

Nobody wants to hit their goals 29% of the time. While every organization is different, the data gives us a few clear directives on how to improve.

First of all: focus on building autonomy in the team. This can increase your likelihood of hitting goals and shipping on time, as we discussed earlier in the report. You can also work on giving your team the tools they need, and putting in the operational groundwork to make information more available across your team's tools—especially in terms of performance metrics and progress toward goals.

It's also worth noting the gap between hitting deadlines vs. hitting team-wide goals. Hitting shipping deadlines lets you plan ahead—but for larger developments, the launch motion itself can influence your ability to hit team-wide goals.

Successful launches require a team not just to ship on time, but to educate cross-functional partners, customers, and prospects on those developments so they can actually put them to use. So leaders should take a closer look at their launch processes, too.

Spotlight story: Frame.io

When Sam Seely, Director of Product, joined Frame.io as their third product hire, the team was still managing the roadmap in different presentations, documents, and spreadsheets—every quarter he and the team would try a new method to share product updates with the rest of the company.

Naturally, that made it hard for the team to find the information they needed. “We were spending so much time trying to find information that by the time we found it, the opportunity had passed.”

To fix it, they built a roadmap—but not in the form of a deck. Instead, they made a living, accessible roadmap that saved product managers time, and gave the entire go-to-market team visibility into their work.

[Read more](#)



Insight 5

Our tools need to pull more weight

Building a solid tool stack helps teams stay focused. Strong tools help your team distribute (and receive) information, and make it possible to streamline otherwise manual work.

Most teams feel like they have the tools they need—even if it means they have to use 14 tools a day to get their work done.

But when we take a closer look, this stack of tools might not be as impactful as it seems. Teams are still struggling to ship on time, and still having trouble finding the context they need to excel at their jobs, with only 24% saying it's "very easy" to find the information they need from their tools.

“There’s great value in role-specific tools... But doing so without a clear connection to the bigger picture is a missed opportunity for both employees and the enterprise as a whole.”



Ilan Frank
VP Product, Airtable
—previously Slack
Source



14 tools are used daily by the average product team



95% of teams agree they have the tools they need to ship on time—but the majority still don't ship on schedule



Only 1 in 4 teams say it's "very easy" to find the information they need for their work

A persistent visibility problem

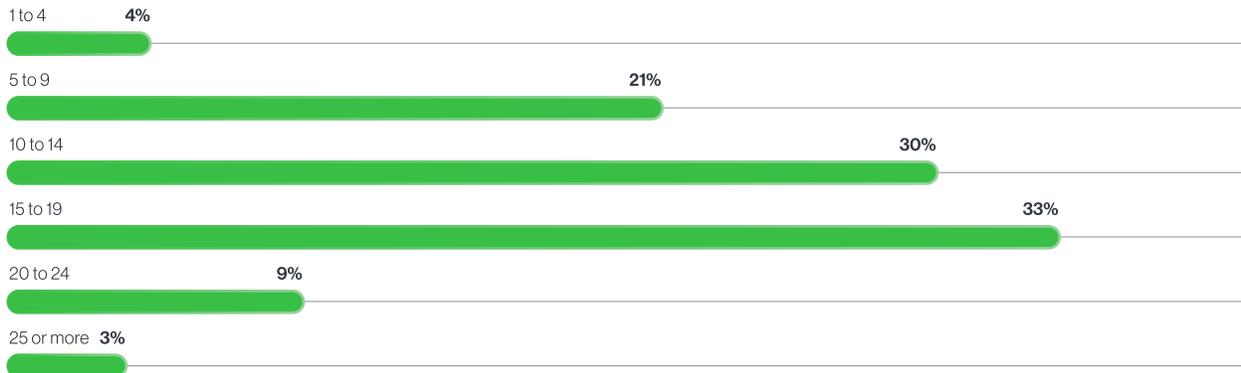
Most product teams are at peace with their current tool stack: 95% feel they have what they need to ship in a timely manner. But as we saw in the last section, that doesn't always add up in results, since only about a quarter of teams say they always ship on time.

The disconnect between support and performance could be in how those tools function. Even with the average product team using 14 tools every day, there are still significant gaps in visibility across the team.

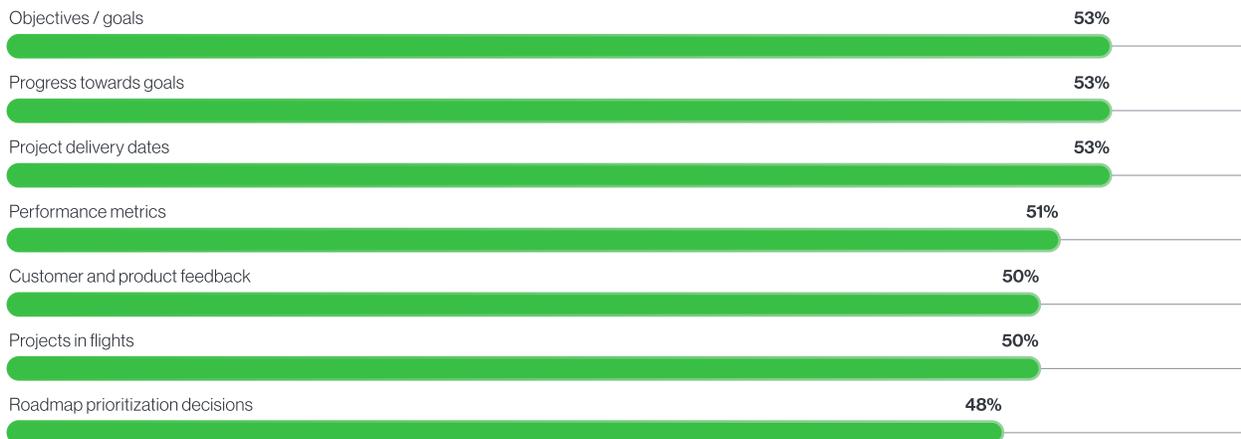
For example, only 53% of teams say they have high visibility into objectives and goals—and only half have high visibility into what's shipping at all. So our tools could be doing more to make that information visible.

And even for the information they do have visibility into, getting that information isn't easy. Only 24% of teams say it's "very easy" to use their tools to find the information they need for their work.

Number of tools used day-to-day



Where teams have high visibility into the product lifecycle



Take action: Make information highly visible and easy to access.

Most teams have an overall positive sentiment of their tools—even when those tools aren't performing. So if you're trying to understand how impactful your tools are, you'll need to look beyond team sentiment toward them.

So how do you know if your team is getting the information need to do their best work (without having to dig)? You can start by answering questions like:

- How visible is the information our team cares about? How aware are they of our objectives and goals, our performance metrics, projects in flight, and the like?
- How easy or hard is it for my team to find that information? Do they have to dig through multiple docs, apps, and spreadsheets to find the latest? Or are they able to get updates from a more consolidated source of truth?
- What process would your team need to go through if they wanted to find the information on the previous page for a team working on a different product, or a different area of the product? Are they able to find that information if they need to?

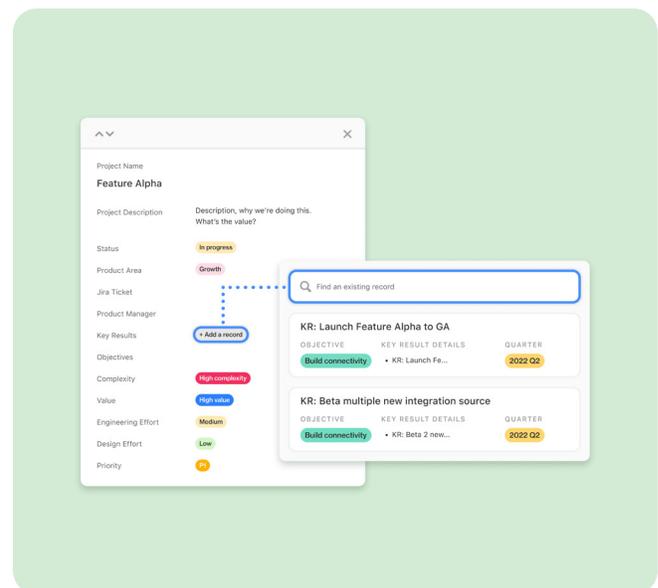
Audit your tools and the data that lives in each of them, keeping an eye out for duplicative and siloed sources. From there, you can start to identify the different pools of information on the team, and find opportunities to consolidate across product teams, researchers, engineers, and more. It's a tedious task: but it's worth it if your team stands to benefit.

Spotlight: Airtable for product operations webinar

Creating a solid, smoothly-functioning tool stack isn't just a tech problem—it's a team-wide operational problem. Solving it means building a stack that gives your team what they need, without bogging them down in red tape or restrictions.

In this webinar, we'll take a tactical look at how product teams run on Airtable. We'll show how you can keep your team working as one through all stages of their workflow, so they can stay focused on what matters most: your customers.

[Watch now](#)



Conclusion

Investing in operational foundations helps your team get the **right context**, and **build the right structure**. After that, it's time to hand the reins to your team.

Team practices, process, and tech all have outsized ability to impact the way teams work—and the organization they work for. Building the right foundations lets your team move faster, and stay focused on building innovative products your customers love. Here's how:

- 1 Prioritize creating (and socializing) a single source of truth for better alignment.**
Only 42% of product teams understand the long-term product vision.
- 2 Enable autonomy without sacrificing structure**
Autonomous teams are more engaged, more likely to understand the product vision, and more likely to ship on time.
- 3 Audit your processes to identify blocks.**
Most teams have processes to tackle every stage of the product development lifecycle, but 9 in 10 still struggle.
- 4 Empower your team with more context to hit goals**
Only 29% of teams always hit their goals—but better visibility and information access can increase odds of success.
- 5 Make information highly visible and easy to access.**
A mere 24% of teams say it's very easy to find the information they need to do their work successfully.

Methodology

The study includes **739 respondents** from iMAD's B2B panel who met the following criteria:

- Full-time employee of a US company with 1,000 or more employees that have one or more product teams that build digital products, services or applications for consumers or businesses
- In one of the following industries: consumer good/services, consumer technology, education, financial services and insurance, healthcare and life sciences, manufacturing, media/entertainment/publishing, professional and technical services, retail and ecommerce, technology, telecommunications services, transportation, travel and hospitality, or utilities and energy
- Associate level or above in customer analytics, product design or development, product management, product operations program management, or sales who have responsibility for consumer or business digital products or services
- Product team member who contributes to (or has oversight for) one or more of the following: analyzing and report on results/progress, building and delivering products, collecting and analyzing product and customer feedback, conducting user research, managing product launches, managing product roadmaps, prioritizing product features and capabilities, setting and aligning on team objectives

Results were gathered via a 10-minute online survey designed by Lawless Research and programmed in Decipher, fielded March 22 to April 15, 2022. Data was analyzed using Q Research.

About Airtable

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

More than 250,000 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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