Enterprise Revenue Growth Leadership Playbook

Revenue and customer leadership for managed and recurring services

A visual-first practitioner guide to aligning leadership, customers and commercial execution.

Jonathan McCulloch

September 2026



Jonathan McCulloch

Commercial growth and transformation leader

linkedin.com/in/Jonathan-McCulloch

Background

With more than 20 years of experience in customer-facing commercial growth, I have increased ARR and NRR across mid-market and enterprise accounts. Across direct and partner channels, I have built and scaled efficient revenue engines supported by data-led operating models that make profitable growth more predictable. My approach brings together strategic direction, practical execution and direct accountability. My experience spans enterprise software, SaaS and managed cloud services, including sovereign and hyperscale environments, as well as data centres, critical infrastructure and data services covering governance, quality, structuring, analytics, visualisation, machine learning as a service and managed IBM Maximo EAM. I have also won and managed contracts worth up to seven figures for organisations ranging from the mid-market to the Fortune 500.

My leadership experience includes multi-regional teams responsible for new business, expansion within the installed base, customer success and RevOps. These teams operated in organisations of 150–400 employees and managed approximately £40 million to £90 million in annual functional ARR. Whether serving as Group Sales Director, Commercial Director or Chief Commercial Officer, my priorities centred on scaling established markets and developing new routes to market. The businesses included both privately owned and private equity-backed organisations. As a member of the leadership team, I typically work alongside the CEO, CFO and COO, while maintaining regular dialogue with investors and shareholders on strategy, performance and growth plans.

Beyond leading the commercial growth engine, I have been responsible for integrating acquisitions, delivering rebranding programmes, launching products and pricing, and developing direct and partner routes to market. This work has involved global systems integrators, OEM partners and reseller networks, including partnerships designed to support expansion into international markets such as the Middle East.

The playbook shared here reflects many years of successful application, informed by practical experience, positive results and lessons learned. It is intended to highlight the most significant obstacles to growth, provide the wider organisation with the clarity needed to make sound decisions and investments, deepen long-term customer relationships, and convert growth ambitions into sustainable outcomes. A complete transformation is not required from the outset; the most effective starting point is the challenge or opportunity with the greatest importance. The degree of complexity can then be adapted to the needs of your business, services and customers. Please contact me directly if you would like to discuss any element of the playbook.

WHY IT MATTERS

Weakness in one stage becomes cost, delay or customer risk somewhere else.

PRACTICAL TEST

Start with the constraint that most limits growth and value.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Sustainable growth follows from shared objectives, clear ownership and well-informed management decisions.

Who this playbook is for

Written for anyone shaping how a business grows, whatever stage they're at.

01

NEW TO THE ROLE

You know the challenges. This helps you frame how you'll address them.

02

A SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

You're working a particular problem or opportunity and want to sharpen your thinking.

03

WIDER LEADERSHIP

You're not in sales, but you need to understand the disciplines behind growth that lasts.

04

CAREER AMBITION

You want to move into commercial leadership, and you want to learn more about the disciplines and skills of the role.

If it helps with any of that, it has done the job it was intended for.

Growth built on customer value

My approach: Remove the biggest constraints to growth first, then strengthen the wider commercial operation over time. Shaped by successes and lessons from leading commercial teams in mid-market technology businesses serving complex enterprise needs

LAND

New business

Demonstrate value that earns the decision.

RETAIN

Trusted relationships

Deliver on promises and keep proving value.

EXPAND

Customer opportunity

Grow the relationship through mutual value.

CUSTOMER VALUE AT THE HEART

Deliver, maintain and grow mutual value with integrity.

HOW I PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

01 — Diagnose

Find the biggest constraints holding growth back.

02 — Prioritise

Focus effort where it will matter most.

03 — Act

Align people and execute with discipline.

04 — Refine

Measure results and improve the wider system.

Scale the disciplines to your business, services and customers.

WHY IT MATTERS

Lasting growth depends on customer value and efficient execution.

PRACTICAL TEST

Which constraint, if removed, would make the biggest difference?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

More wins, stronger retention and profitable expansion.

The playbook at a glance

Nine connected disciplines. One commercial and customer system.

01	MARKET FOCUS	Context before pipeline
02	LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT	Shared plan, reward and intervention
03	CUSTOMER VALUE	Land, expand and retain
04	PEOPLE AND ASSETS	Capability, enablement and promise
05	DEAL EXECUTION	Qualify, decide and mobilise
06	AI FOR COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE	Useful automation with clear controls
07	FORECAST AND INSPECTION	An operating rhythm grounded in evidence
08	METRICS AND ECONOMICS	Scorecards, acquisition cost and payback
09	IMPLEMENTATION	30–60–90 and continuing governance

Scale the detail to your business, service complexity and customers.

SYSTEM
How the commercial office and customer motions connect.

METHOD
How evidence turns activity into decisions.

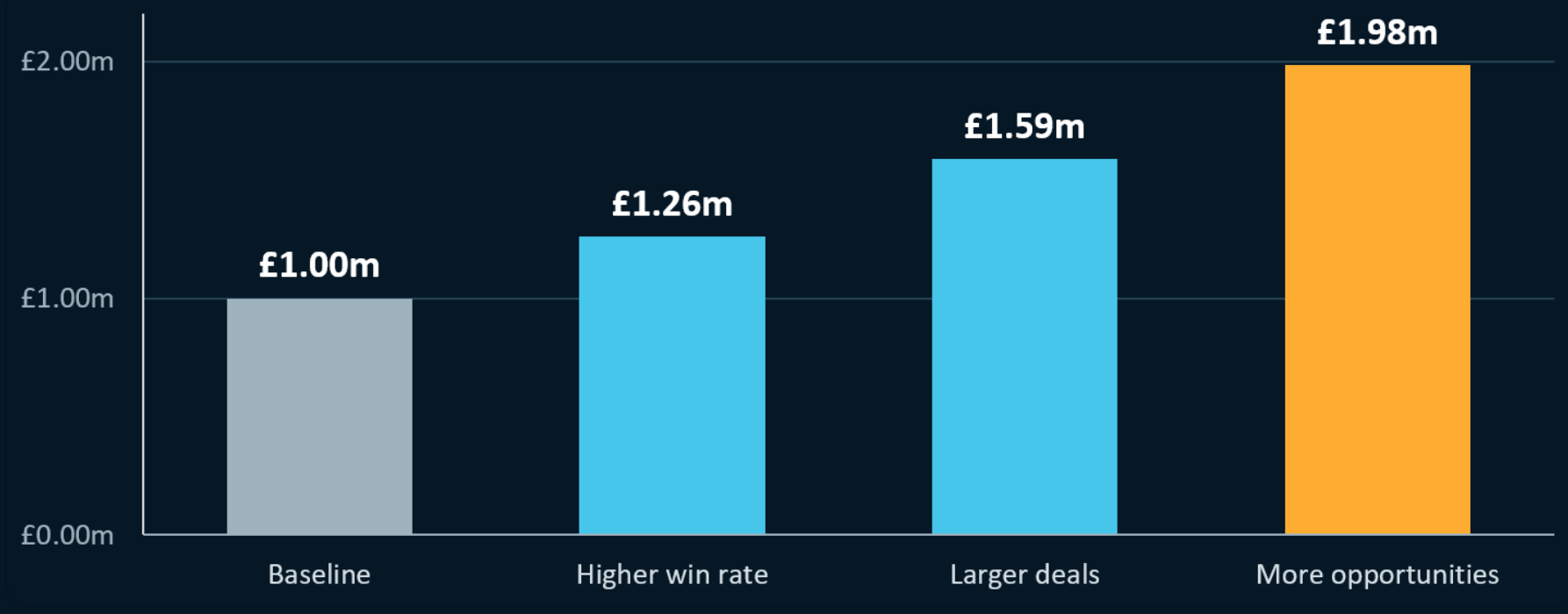
EXECUTION
How leaders make the system repeatable.

CAP GROWTH FORMULA

Three levers to grow new recurring revenue

Early in my B2B sales career, I learned the CAP formula: Conversion Rate, Average Deal Size, and Pipeline, a simple framework for driving organic growth that has stayed with me ever since. As a seller, it helped me translate targets into actionable levers. As a manager, it shaped how I coached teams and planned performance. Now in senior leadership, it's become a way I validate growth assumptions, expose constraints, and focus investment where it matters most. When organisations build discipline across all three levers, the impact on growth is substantial. In the example below, new annual recurring revenue (ARR) nearly doubles through a 26% improvement in win rate and ARR per deal, combined with a 25% increase in qualified pipeline.

New ARR = qualified opportunities × win rate × average ARR per win



Illustrative new ARR (£m). Each step retains the previous improvement.

Based on increasing 20 to 25 qualified opportunities (+25%) Win rate: 50% to 63% (+26%)
£100,000 to £126,000 average ARR per win (+26%) **- 1.26 × 1.26 × 1.25 ≈ 1.98**

WHY IT MATTERS

The combined improvements can grow new ARR from £1m to £1.98m. Each lever contributes to the result.

PRACTICAL TEST

Can all three improve together? Test the assumptions against your sales cycle, average deal size, team capacity and gross margin.

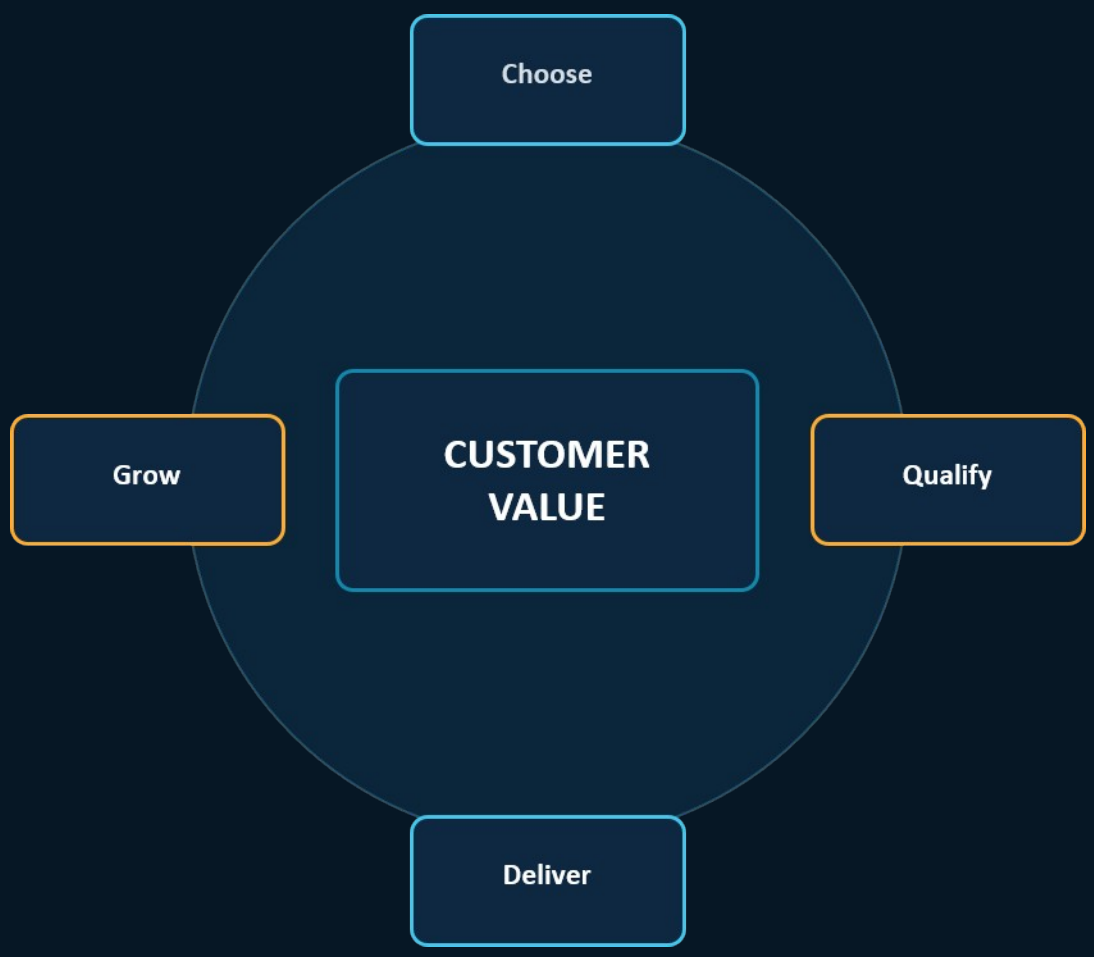
WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Use a consistent opportunity cohort and recurring value basis. Track each lever alongside gross margin.

Illustration, not a forecast. 50% to 63% is +13 percentage points. ARR excludes one-off fees. Total ARR growth also depends on expansion, contraction and churn.

One connected customer lifecycle

Choose the right customers. Qualify the investment. Deliver the value.



1. **Market and account focus** →
2. **Evidence before capacity** →
3. **Promise into delivery** →
4. **Client value into growth**

WHY IT MATTERS

Growth is a system, not a single sales number.

PRACTICAL TEST

Ask what must be true before the next investment.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every stage improves evidence, ownership and customer value.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Score yourself first

Score where your commercial system stands today, before you read on.

Discipline	Question	Score
1. Market focus	Can you name the account, buyer and proof point before pipeline opens?	1 to 5
2. Leadership and reward	Do the CEO, board and functional peers share one growth plan?	1 to 5
3. Land, expand, retain	Is installed-base growth planned, not a late-stage rescue?	1 to 5
4. People and capability	Is ownership designed around outcomes, not titles?	1 to 5
5. Deal execution	Does pursuit investment increase only as evidence strengthens?	1 to 5
6. AI for commercial performance	Does AI reduce routine work without reducing judgement?	1 to 5
7. Forecasting and inspection	Does the forecast record evidence, not confidence?	1 to 5
8. Metrics and economics	Are growth, retention, margin and acquisition cost read together?	1 to 5
9. Implementation and adoption	Is there a tested 90-day plan behind the ambition?	1 to 5

Suggested Scoring Definitions 1 Ad hoc 2 Partial 3 Defined 4 Consistent 5 Measured and improving

WHY IT MATTERS

A general framework is only useful once you know your own constraint.

PRACTICAL TEST

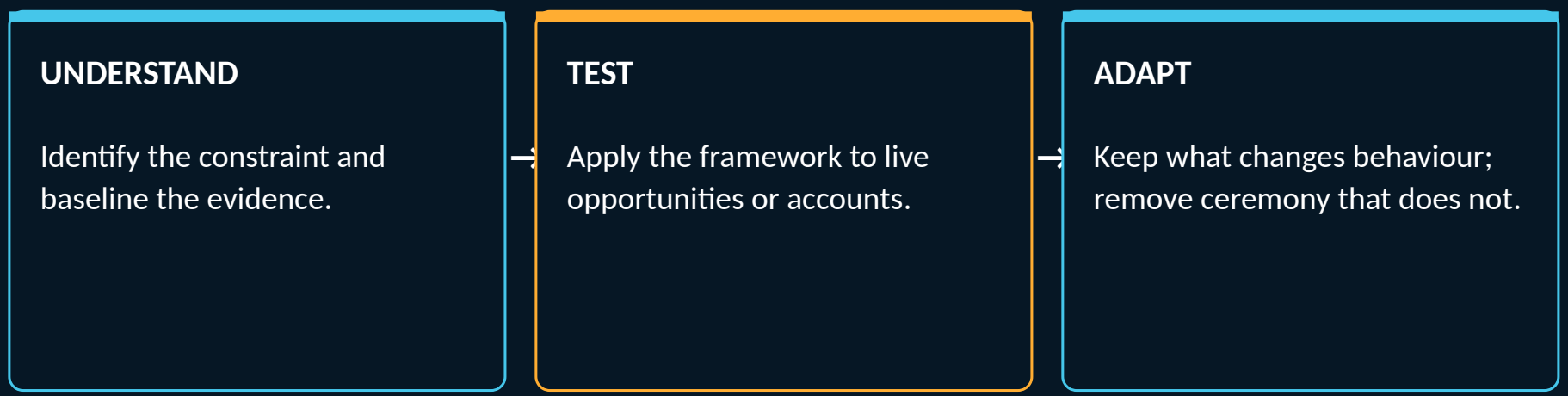
Score honestly against live evidence, not intention.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

You know which part to read first, and why it matters most right now.

A working reference, not a rulebook

Use the playbook to choose a manageable intervention, test it on live work and adapt what improves decisions and outcomes.



A practical loop: understand the constraint, test the smallest useful change, then keep or remove what the evidence supports.

WHY IT MATTERS

Evidence supports principles; choices remain local.

PRACTICAL TEST

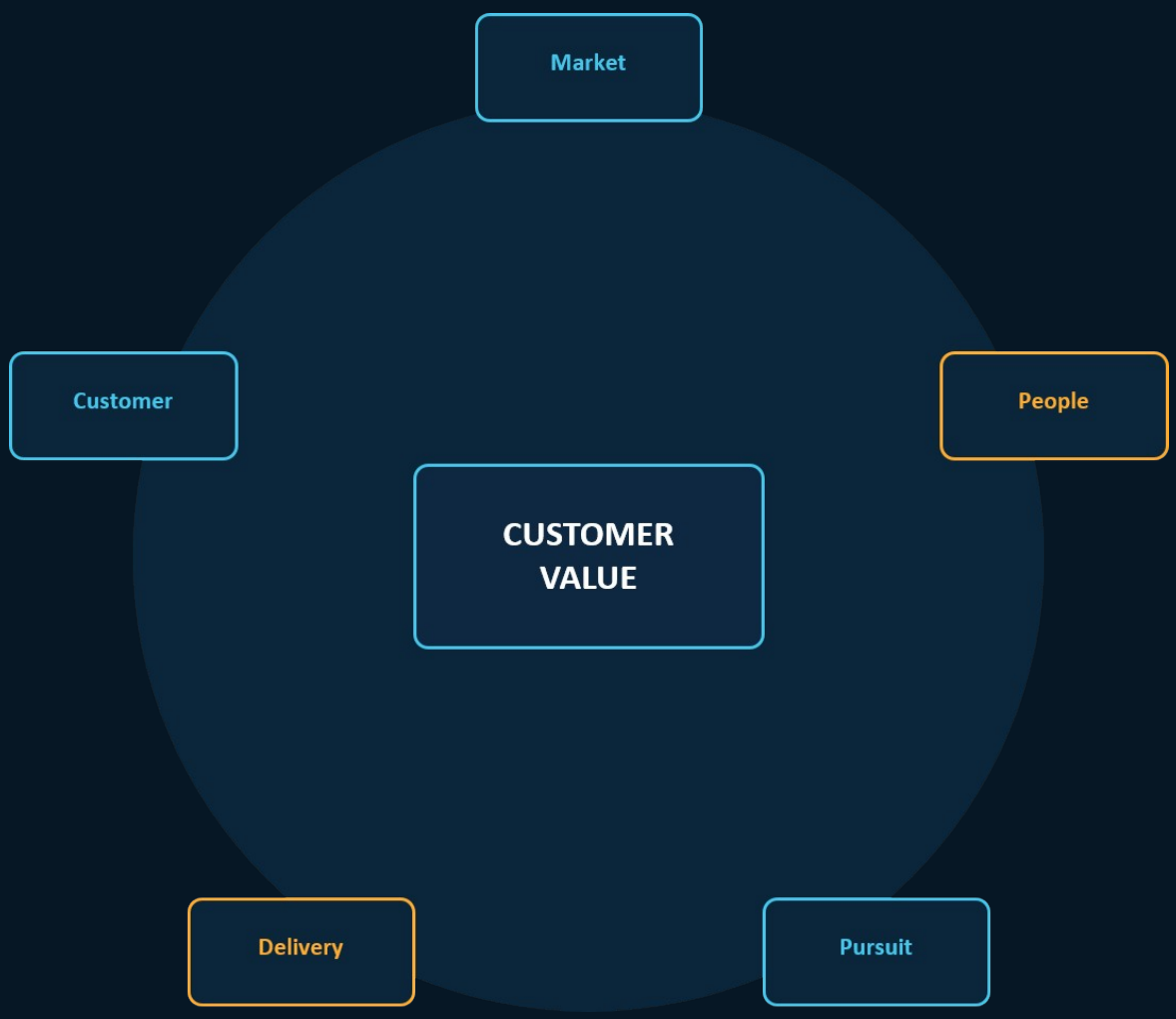
Pilot before scaling.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Teams can use the model without needing a large transformation office.

A commercial system that learns

The disciplines reinforce each other. A gap in one stage rarely stays there — it surfaces as cost, delay or risk further down the line.



WHY IT MATTERS

A single hero cannot compensate for a weak operating system.

PRACTICAL TEST

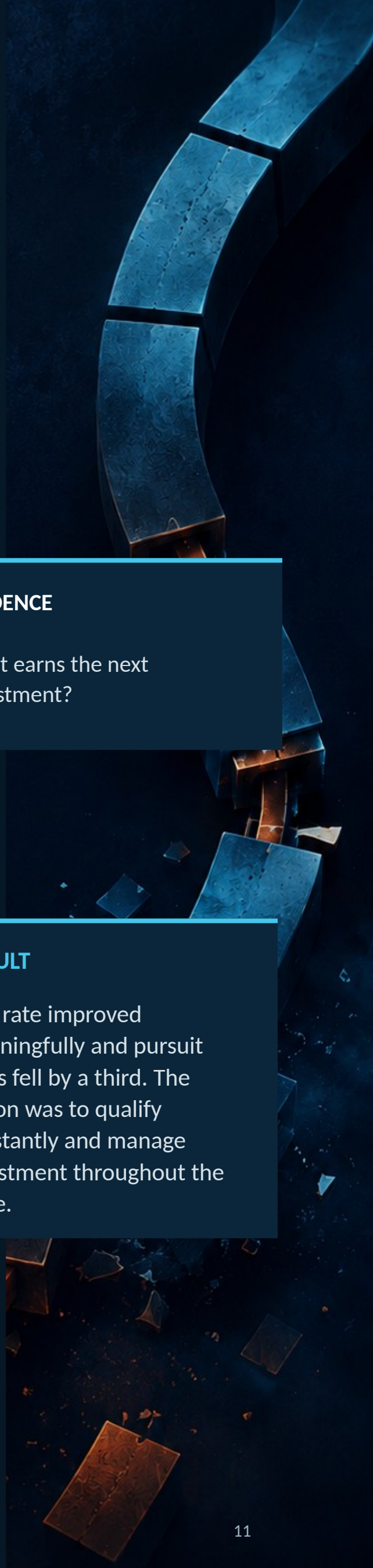
Trace the constraint through the customer lifecycle.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Leadership can see where to invest, intervene or stop.

Part 1 - Market focus and buyer context

Select customers you can serve credibly before committing to demand creation.



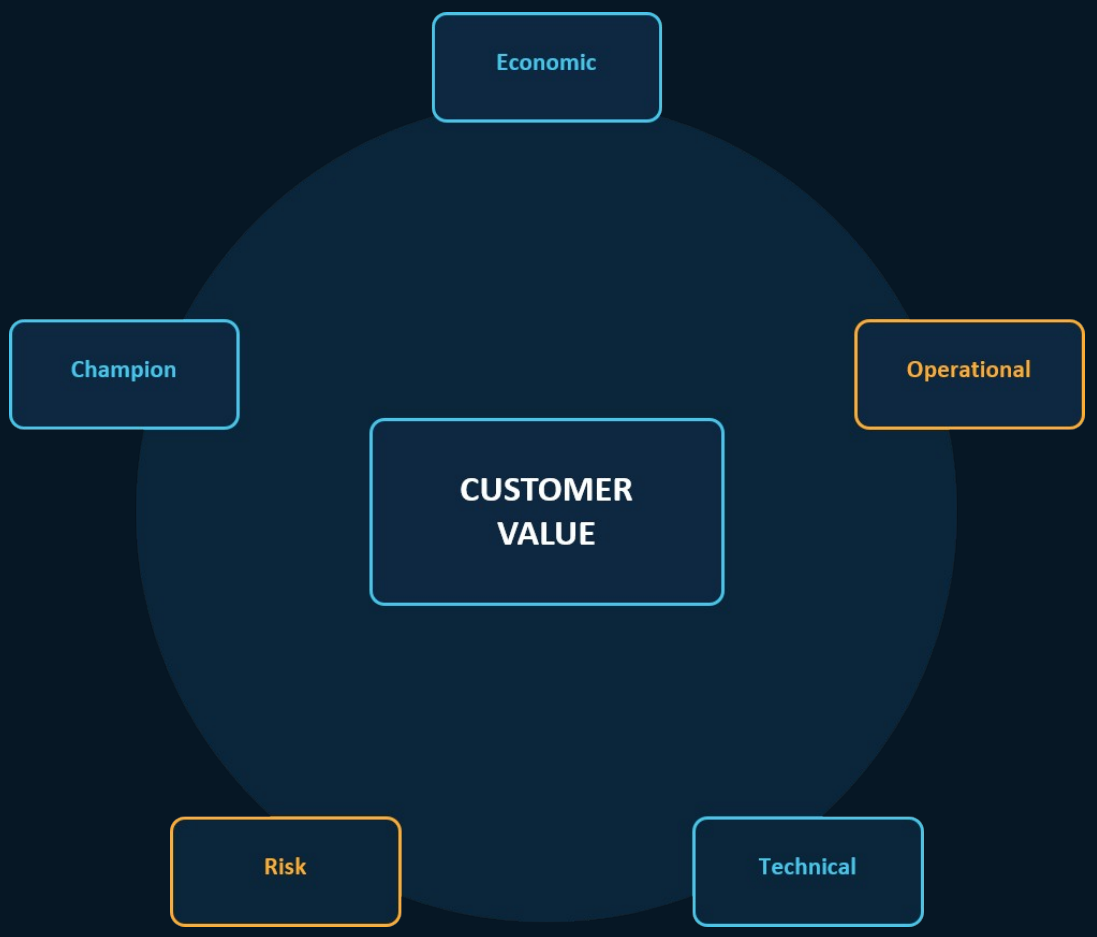
NEED	FIT	EVIDENCE
Is the need material?	Can we serve it credibly?	What earns the next investment?

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE	ACTION	RESULT
Reactive, weakly qualified pursuits tied up expensive specialists for months, often with no return.	I introduced an ideal customer profile (ICP) and consistent qualification gates throughout the pursuit. Specialist effort followed stronger customer evidence.	Win rate improved meaningfully and pursuit costs fell by a third. The lesson was to qualify constantly and manage investment throughout the cycle.

The buyer is a buying group

The group may research, compare and challenge your claims before the seller is invited in.



94% **of surveyed B2B buyers reported using large language models in their buying process***
*Source: 6sense, B2B Buyer Experience Report (2025). See page 58.

WHY IT MATTERS

A technical product pitch is not a sales strategy.

PRACTICAL TEST

Write for the vertical and the person who will read the asset before you're in the room.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Each audience sees the value and risk relevant to them.

Before pipeline

The commercial decision starts before an opportunity becomes a forecast number.



WHY IT MATTERS

Poor focus creates expensive, low-quality demand.

PRACTICAL TEST

Can we name the problem, buyer, trigger and proof?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A named-account hypothesis with a credible reason to engage.

ICP decision scorecard

Score customer fit before committing specialist capacity.

Dimension	Question	Score
Problem	Is the business problem material and evidenced?	0 to 5
Strategic fit	Does the use case align with the proposition and roadmap?	0 to 5
Commercial fit	Can the customer buy at a viable value, term and margin?	0 to 5
Delivery fit	Can the solution be implemented and supported credibly?	0 to 5
Buying conditions	Is there access, sponsorship, urgency and a realistic process?	0 to 5
Growth potential	Is there defensible expansion or wider strategic value?	0 to 5

HOW I USE THE SCORE

0 No evidence or unacceptable fit 1 Weak 2 Partial 3 Credible 4 Strong 5 Validated against current evidence

Score each dimension using live evidence. A fatal constraint overrides the total score. Choose pursue, nurture, reshape or stop; record the reason and next evidence needed.

WHY IT MATTERS

Focus protects capacity and improves the quality of demand.

PRACTICAL TEST

Score a live account and name the fatal constraint.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The score informs pursue, nurture, reshape or stop.

MY APPROACH

Customer focus in practice

Use proven customer value to guide account selection and new-market hypotheses.

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE

Broad targeting can overlook what existing success tells us. New markets also need a credible case for customer value.

ACTION

I start with customers we already serve well, then test similar opportunities. For new sectors, I research needs, develop a value hypothesis and tailor the approach to industry and buying role.

RESULT

This focus achieved substantially higher contract value and a stronger win rate. It also helped create the conditions for sustained double-digit annual growth and greater customer lifetime value.

WHY IT MATTERS

A target list needs a defensible value hypothesis.

PRACTICAL TEST

Compare the opportunity with where the business already succeeds.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A clear reason to pursue, with evidence relevant to each buying role.

Part 2 - Align the business. Reward the outcome

Align the decisions that shape behaviour across the customer lifecycle.

01

ALIGN

Agree the growth contribution.

02

EVIDENCE

Make progress visible.

03

REWARD

Incentivise the work that matters.



The shared growth plan

The board, CEO and functional peers need the same view of contribution, timing, capacity, ownership and intervention.

ONE PLAN, FOUR MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS

01	CONTRIBUTION	What must acquisition, expansion and renewals deliver?
02	TIMING	What evidence shows progress before revenue lands?
03	RESOURCES	What capacity and dependencies are required?
04	INTERVENTION	When do we invest more, adapt or stop?

WHY IT MATTERS

Enterprise growth needs patience with evidence, not patience without a plan.

PRACTICAL TEST

Put the assumptions and dependencies in writing.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Leaders challenge the plan early and resolve constraints quickly.

Make the timescale credible

Progress must be visible before the commercial result appears.

01	02	03	04
BASELINE	**EVIDENCE**	**LEADING SIGNALS**	**OUTCOME**
Current conversion, retention, margin and capacity	**Customer milestones, decision progress and delivery readiness**	**Pipeline quality, buying-group access and adoption**	**Revenue, retention and profitable growth**

WHY IT MATTERS

Long cycles require leading evidence, not wishful forecasts.

PRACTICAL TEST

What should be true 30, 90 and 180 days from now?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The board can see progress and act before the number misses.

Compensation should reinforce the motion

Reward the work and outcomes the business needs.

INTERNAL TEAM COMPENSATION OPERATING MODEL

01	WORK	What the role must do
02	MEASURE	What evidence shows progress
03	REWARD	What behaviour and results the plan reinforces
04	REVIEW	What needs recalibration

Compensation incentivises the motion.

WHY IT MATTERS

A comp plan can reward the wrong motion & behaviours.

PRACTICAL TEST

Trace incentive weight to the priority work and outcome.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Internal teams know what matters, how they contribute and are incentivised.

One lifecycle, shared accountability

Make ownership visible from market focus through expansion.

Commercial outcome	Accountable leadership	Contributing capabilities
Market and pipeline creation	Revenue leadership	Customer insight, product, marketing, partnerships
New-logo acquisition	Revenue leadership	Solutions, delivery, finance and legal
Onboarding and adoption	Customer leadership	Sales, delivery, product and service management
Renewal and retention	Customer leadership	Revenue operations, service and executive sponsors
Expansion	Shared	Sales, solutions, product, service and delivery teams
Pricing and commercial governance	Revenue leadership	Finance, legal, delivery and customer leadership
Lifecycle data and reporting	Shared	Revenue operations and finance

WHY IT MATTERS

Handover gaps create customer risk and hidden commercial cost.

PRACTICAL TEST

Name the accountable leader and required evidence at every stage.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

One account view survives acquisition, mobilisation, adoption and renewal.

MY APPROACH

Accountability without bottlenecks

I adapt the structure to the work, the team and the scale of the business.

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE

Too many decisions flowing through one leader create bottlenecks and weaken daily ownership of critical work.

ACTION

I give direct reports clear functional accountability and establish a regular management rhythm. I generally aim for no more than six direct reports, adapting this to business size and the support available.

RESULT

The structure is designed to give each function daily focus while leaving me time to coach, support and intervene. I assess it through decision speed, ownership capacity and performance.

WHY IT MATTERS

Ownership needs time and capacity behind it.

PRACTICAL TEST

Which decisions still wait for the leader unnecessarily?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Functional heads act daily, with clear escalation and support.

Part 3 - Customer lifecycle value

Treat acquisition and installed-base growth as one connected customer journey.



LAND	MOBILISE	ADOPT	RENEW / EXPAND
A credible case for change	Deliver the promise	Demonstrate value	Qualify the next decision

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE

Value, trust and customer context can be lost between new business, delivery and account management. Ambiguity at handover puts confidence at risk.

ACTION

I involve delivery in final scope and commercial discussions, resolve ambiguity early and agree success measures. Where complexity warrants it, I keep new business involved for 6–12 months and develop a joint account development plan (ADP) before a phased transfer.

RESULT

The result is a continuous customer experience, with clear ownership of value realisation, retention and expansion. I judge the handover by the success of the promised customer outcome, not signature alone.

ONE LIFECYCLE

Three motions.
One customer value path.

LAND

Create a credible reason to adopt.

→

EXPAND

Find the next material value proposition.

→

RETAIN

Prove value before renewal becomes urgent.

VALUE EVIDENCE

Adoption – outcomes - service health - executive confidence

WHY IT MATTERS

Installed base is often the most fertile market.

PRACTICAL TEST

Can the account team evidence the next value proposition?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Renewal and expansion are planned outcomes, not late-stage firefighting..

A practical installed-base rhythm

Cadence varies by account tier; the disciplines remain visible.

Moment	Management question	Required output
Mobilisation	Have the promises, assumptions and success measures survived the handover?	Named owners, baseline, milestones and risks
Value review	Is the customer adopting the solution and realising the expected outcome?	Evidence of use, value, service health and agreed actions
Account planning	Where are the material risks, relationships and opportunities?	Tiered account plan, stakeholder map and priorities
Renewal readiness	What must be resolved before the commercial decision?	Renewal plan, risks, options, timetable and negotiation route
Expansion	Is there a new, important requirement that you are well placed to solve?	Qualified opportunity, business case and coordinated deal team
Executive sponsorship	Where can senior sponsorship change access, confidence or pace?	A proactive defined purpose, owner and required outcome

WHY IT MATTERS

Value, risk and expansion signals appear between renewals.

PRACTICAL TEST

Run the rhythm against a live account and record the evidence.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The team sees risk early and expansion is grounded in a real customer need.

Part 4 - People and capability

Build the capacity and enablement behind the commercial number.

CAPABILITY

What work must be done?

CAPACITY

Who can do it?

ENABLEMENT

What helps them perform?



FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE

A sound growth strategy struggles when skills, capacity, enablement or team culture cannot support it. Overloaded, inexperienced or incapable people cannot sustain performance.

ACTION

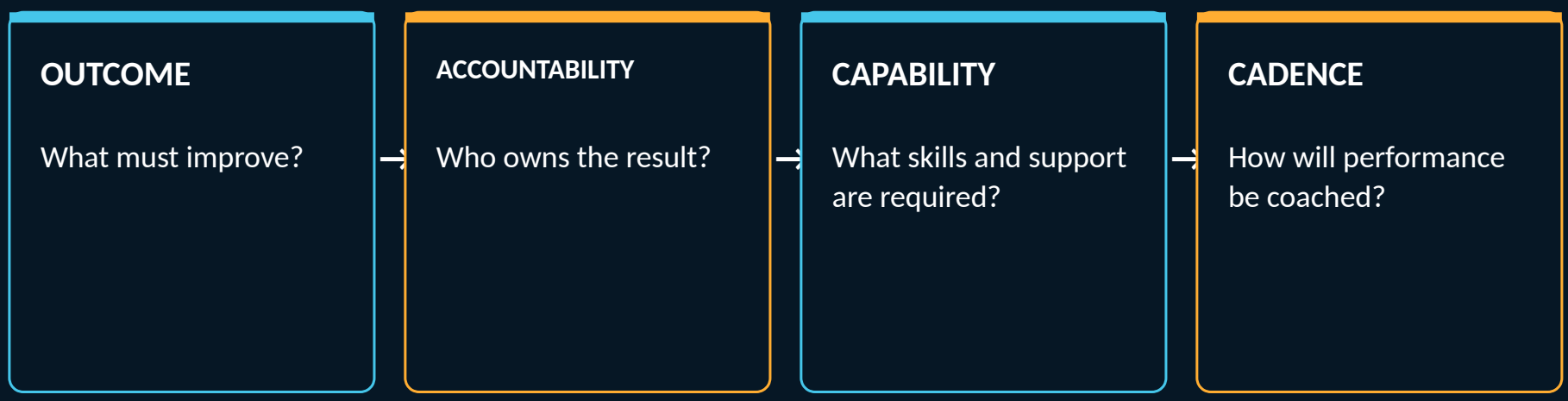
I hire for experience, coachability and a performance mindset. I align goals, coaching, tools and working practices, check capacity across functions and address performance gaps through time-bound improvement plans.

RESULT

This approach aims to create a unified team with clear standards and the support to meet them. I judge success through field performance, customer outcomes and sustained performance improvement.

Design around the work

Titles vary. Critical outcomes and decision rights still need clear ownership.



Hiring follows diagnosis

Do not recruit a title to compensate for a system weakness you have not defined.

WHY IT MATTERS

Meaningful growth and customer value should be driven by everyone across the function.

PRACTICAL TEST

Map the work, ownership and dependencies before hiring.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The organisation can explain how each capability contributes to customer value and business goals.

Outcome-led sales assets

Every asset should make the customer outcome clearer, more credible and easier to act on.

SHAPE DEMAND

Create relevance before the meeting

Website and digital content · Pitch decks · Product and services brochures · Thought leadership

SHAPE AND WIN

Turn customer need into a credible decision

Executive summaries · Value cases · Bid / proposal templates · Battle cards · Estimation and pricing tools · Case studies

COMMIT AND DELIVER

Carry the promise into execution and value

Statements of work · Contracts · Service-level agreements (SLAs) · Onboarding packs · Quarterly business reviews (QBRs) - account plan - CRM and approval records

ONE CUSTOMER-OUTCOME THREAD

The same narrative should survive every hand-off

01 UNDERSTAND the context	02 STATE what matters	03 SHOW how work changes	04 PROVE with evidence	05 MEASURE success clearly

WHY IT MATTERS

A buyer may judge the business through an asset before meeting the seller.

PRACTICAL TEST

Can a CFO, operator, technical evaluator and procurement lead each find what matters?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every asset uses the same customer language, proof, assumptions and success measures.

The rhythm of leadership

Clear direction. Space to contribute. Support to succeed.

EMPATHY | ACCOUNTABILITY | CONSTRUCTIVE CHALLENGE | ENJOYMENT

TWICE A YEAR

Set the direction

Agree priorities, achievable goals, responsibilities and standards.
Invite ideas and constructive challenge.

EVERY MONTH

Forecast and commit

Test the forecast, agree actions and resource needs.
Make ownership and follow-through clear.

REGULAR REVIEWS

Coach the person and the performance

Review pipeline and hold one-to-ones on performance, wellbeing, ambitions and barriers.

DAY TO DAY

Support, recognise and enjoy

Coach on major bids and client engagements; equip people to succeed. Celebrate wins and build team relationships.

ALIGNMENT ACROSS THE BUSINESS

Keep teams, peers, leaders and shareholders aligned on strategy, priorities, commitments and the support needed to deliver.

WHY IT MATTERS

People perform best with clarity, trust and the right support.

PRACTICAL TEST

Can people explain the priorities —and ask for help or challenge them?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

High standards, shared ownership and a team that enjoys succeeding.

Part 5 - Pursuit decisions that earn investment

Commit scarce and expensive expertise progressively and test the route to a customer decision.



TARGET	QUALIFY	SHAPE	COMMIT
Why this account?	Why this opportunity?	Why this solution?	Why now?

MY EXECUTION APPROACH

CHALLENGE

Complex opportunities can consume substantial time and expense before the business has enough evidence to justify the pursuit.

ACTION

My approach is to test customer fit, buying conditions and delivery confidence at each stage. I increase specialist investment as evidence strengthens and reshape or stop weak pursuits.

RESULT

This approach improved capacity use, clarified pursuit economics and lifted win rates significantly. I assess performance through win rates, pursuit costs and the quality of customer engagements and outcomes.



The end-to-end process

Each stage earns the next investment through customer evidence.

Stage	Buyer outcome	Evidence	Exit criterion	Lead
1 Target	A reason to consider change	Account, market and trigger research	Account fits the ICP and there is a defensible reason to engage	Sales and marketing
2 Discover	The problem and desired outcome are understood	Stakeholder conversations and problem evidence	Material problem, consequence and urgency are confirmed	Sales
3 Qualify	Both sides can judge whether continued effort is warranted	MEDDPICC evidence and pursuit economics	Critical qualification gates are met	Sales leadership
4 Shape	A credible solution and value case	Specialist input, options, scope and business case	Customer validates fit, value and success criteria	Sales and solutions
5 Validate	Technical, delivery, security and commercial risk are tested	Demonstration, proof, assurance and delivery review	No unresolved blocker prevents a buying decision	Cross-functional deal team
6 Commit	A shared route to decision and signature	Mutual action plan, negotiation and paper process	Owners, actions, dates and approvals are confirmed	Sales and customer sponsor
7 Close and mobilise	The decision becomes an executable commitment	Contract, SOW, purchase order, baseline and handover	Delivery accepts the scope and the customer accepts the mobilisation plan	Commercial and delivery
8 Realise value	The expected outcome is adopted and evidenced	Adoption, service and value reviews	Progress is measured and renewal or expansion is justified	Customer and delivery leadership

WHY IT MATTERS

Stage names do not create discipline; evidence, entry and exit criteria do.

PRACTICAL TEST

Ask what the buyer has confirmed, not what the seller has completed.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The deal team knows the next decision, owner, evidence and stop condition.

Qualification as a risk lens

Metrics, Economic buyer, Decision criteria, Decision process, Paper process, Identify pain, Champion and Competition (MEDDPICC).

1	METRICS / PAIN	What measurable consequence makes action urgent?
2	POWER	Can the economic buyer be reached?
3	PROCESS	Are criteria, decision steps and paper paths confirmed?
4	CHAMPION	Who helps the decision move?
5	COMPETITION	What alternatives are real?

WHY IT MATTERS

A total score must not disguise a missing critical gate.

PRACTICAL TEST

Identify the unknown, owner and next evidence date.

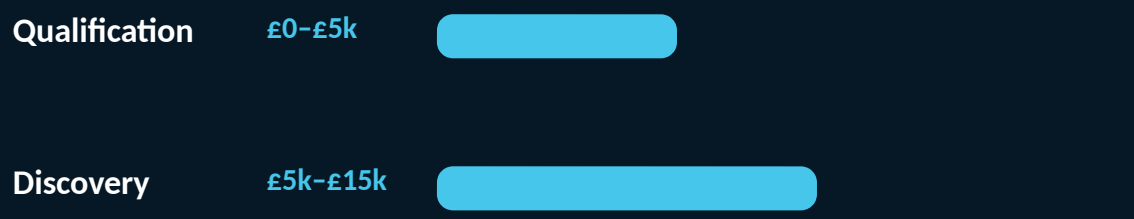
WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Leadership can explain why the pursuit continues or stops.

Invest progressively. Learn relentlessly.

A complex pursuit investment is a portfolio decision, not a badge of ambition. The model below illustrates typical spending bands across the activities that consume the most time in a major bid. One credible approach is to record each person's hours on a timesheet, multiply those hours by their fully loaded hourly cost, then add external costs incurred in supporting the pursuit.

PROGRESSIVE PURSUIT INVESTMENT



Commit more only when the evidence earns the next stage.

WHY IT MATTERS

Qualification protects scarce specialist capacity and limits cost creep.

PRACTICAL TEST

Does the next investment buy evidence or merely activity?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Pursuit cost is visible, comparable and learned from.

The true cost of pursuit

Five pursuits. Two customers. One recovery calculation.

1 ACQUISITION SPEND

£40k	£40k	£40k	£40k	£40k
WIN	WIN	NO WIN	NO WIN	NO WIN

£40k average spend per pursuit

All five pursuits count, including those lost.

£200k

TOTAL ACQUISITION SPEND ÷ 2 WINS

£100k

Customer acquisition cost (CAC)

Assumption: the £200k includes all acquisition costs, including unsuccessful pursuits.

2 ACQUISITION PAYBACK PER CUSTOMER

£100k

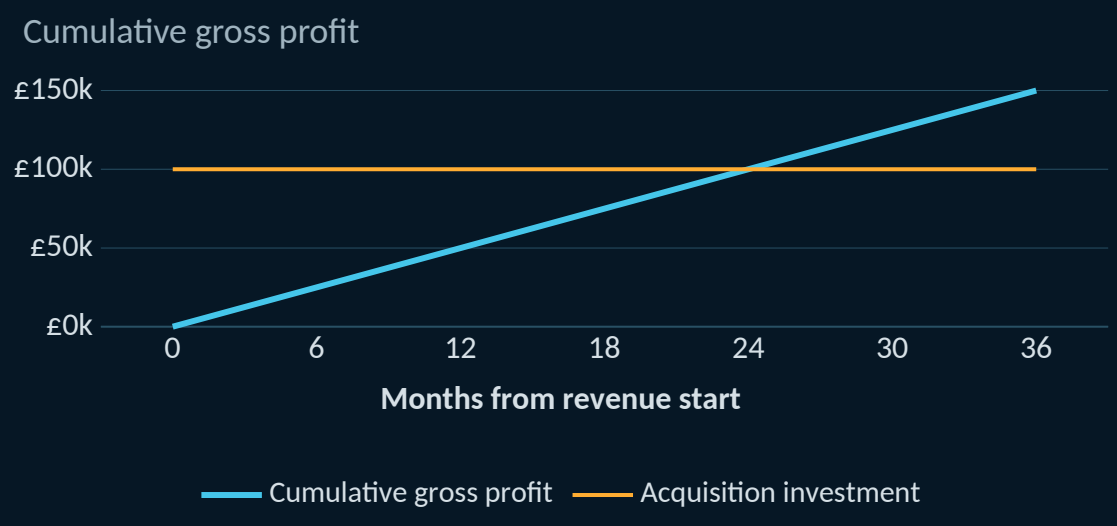
Annual recurring revenue (ARR)

50%

Gross margin

£100k

Customer acquisition cost (CAC)



24

MONTHS TO RECOVER CAC

£100k × 50% ÷ 12

= £4,166.67 gross profit per month

£100k ÷ £4,166.67 = 24 months

Illustrative steady revenue and margin. Cash timing and delivery risk need separate checks.

DEAL PROFITABILITY CHECK

Price and term

Gross margin

Delivery and support cost

Pursuit cost and CAC

Capacity and risk

WHY IT MATTERS

Payback alone cannot establish full deal profitability.

PRACTICAL TEST

Are costs, cash timing and delivery assumptions clear?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Contribution, payback and capacity justify the commitment.

Make the client decision easy for them to defend

The reader may never meet you. The bid must still communicate relevance, benefit, confidence and control.

THE ART OF CURATING A WINNING BID

EXEC SUMMARY

Outcome, why now, why us in their language

→

VALUE CASE

Measures, options, economics and time to benefit

→

SOLUTION

Delivery, testing, onboarding, optimisation and maintenance

→

RISK

Assurance, dependencies, governance and control

→

APPENDIX

Technical depth on demand

WHY IT MATTERS

A polished bid that addresses the client's needs upfront, in their language, supports an informed and defensible commitment

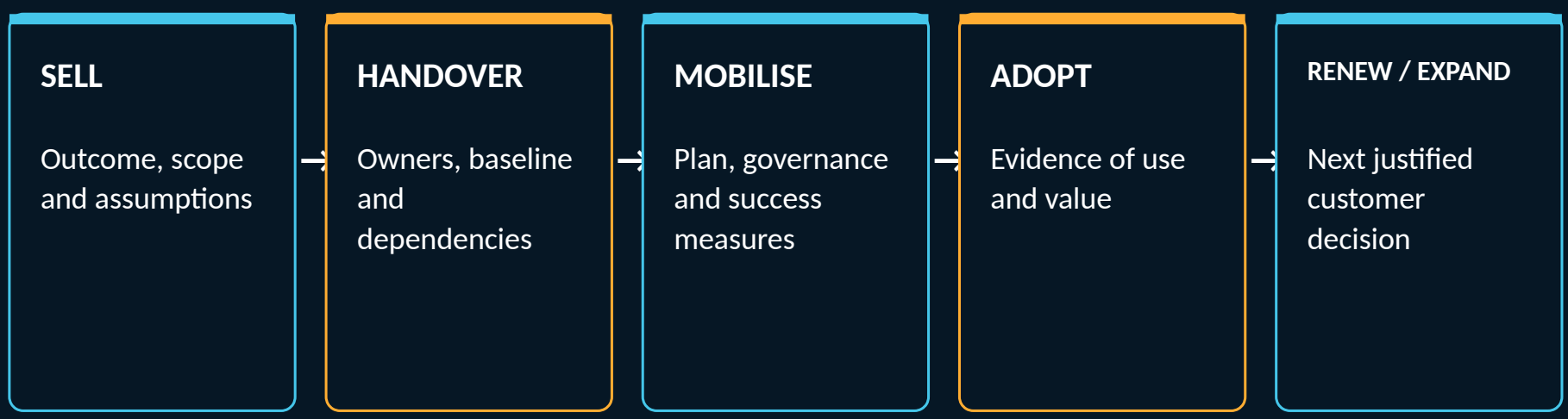
PRACTICAL TEST

Can an unfamiliar reader understand what, why and how on the first page in 60 seconds?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The submission feels relevant, credible and easy to circulate internally.

The sale is not complete at signature



WHY IT MATTERS

Delivery is part of the commercial promise.

PRACTICAL TEST

What would delivery challenge before accepting the handover?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The customer knows what success means and who owns it.

Keep the promise intact through handover

The commercial promise needs to survive the transition into delivery.

THE HANDOVER CONTROL SPINE

01	CONTRACT	What was agreed?
02	SOW	What will be delivered?
03	BASELINE	How will value be measured?
04	GOVERNANCE	Who resolves drift?
05	VALUE REVIEW	What proves progress?

WHY IT MATTERS

Signature is a transition, not an endpoint.

PRACTICAL TEST

What would delivery refuse to accept as written?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Scope, owners, assumptions and success measures survive into delivery.

Part 6 - AI for commercial performance

Start with the work, protect judgement and prove the contribution.

TASK

What is repetitive?

ASSIST

What can AI improve?

CONTROL

What must a person decide?

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE

Tender responses depended heavily on subject-matter experts (SMEs), with fragmented collaboration, slow approvals and uneven quality under tight deadlines.

ACTION

I implemented an artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled bid platform linked to our SharePoint knowledge base. It supported first drafts, collaboration and quality review, with SME approval retained for validation where relevant.

RESULT

First drafts were produced in minutes rather than weeks. Consistency, bid capacity and efficiency improved, with less rework. The team had more time for strategy, optimisation and alignment with customer requirements.

Start with the work, not the technology

The opportunity is to reduce routine effort and reveal risk without outsourcing accountability.

ROUTINE TASK SUPPORT	CRM capture - research - RFP drafting - QBR preparation
DECISION SUPPORT	Forecasting - sentiment - churn risk - account planning
CONTROLLED SUPPORT	Pricing - SOWs - contract review

WHY IT MATTERS

AI value depends on workflow, data quality, compliance, and review cost.

PRACTICAL TEST

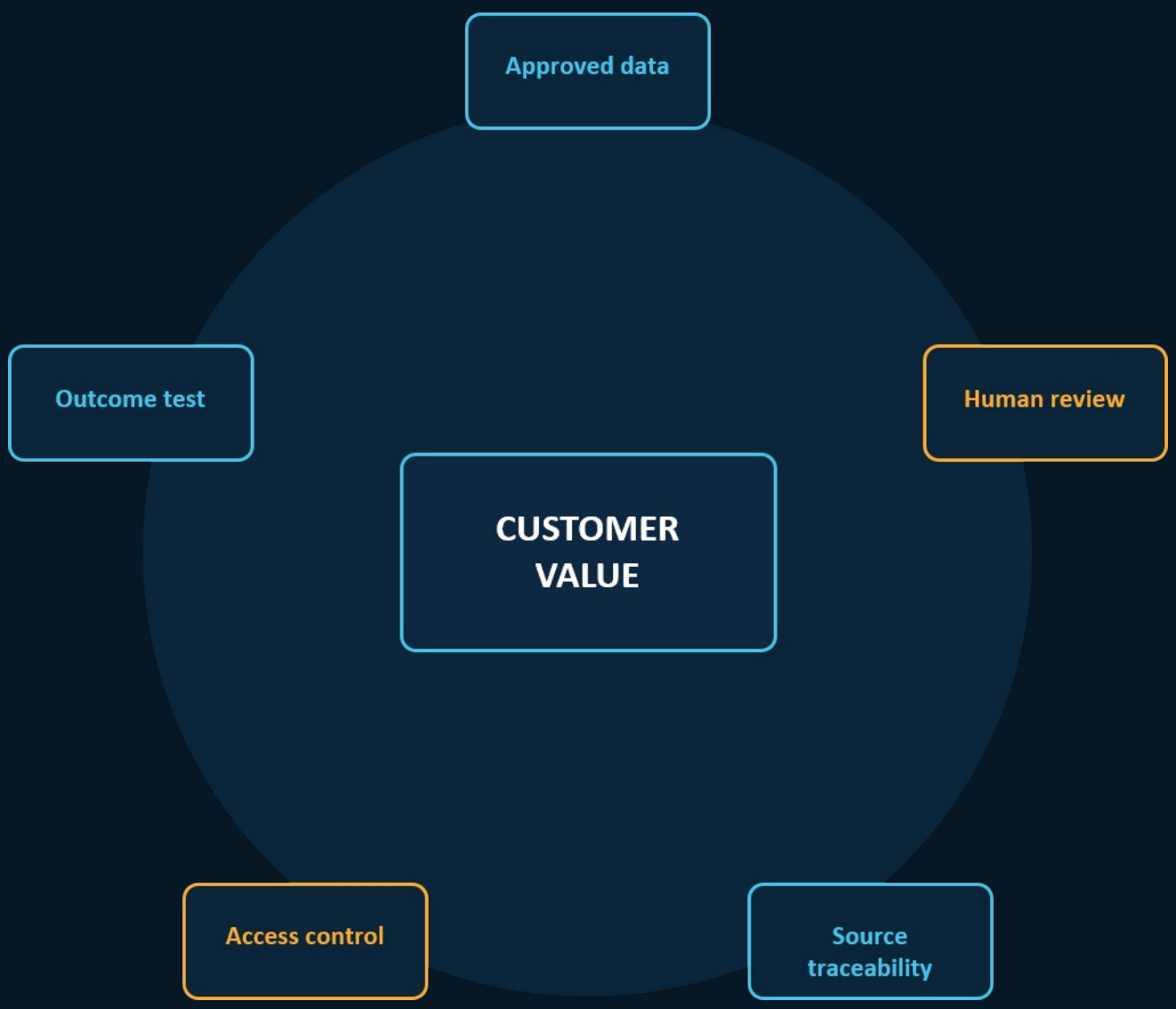
Pilot one real workload with a clear baseline.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The team knows what AI does, what it does not do and who decides.

Useful AI needs visible guardrails

The model should reduce work without reducing judgement.



WHY IT MATTERS

The risk is not only hallucination; it is unchallenged confidence.

PRACTICAL TEST

Can the user verify the source, output and next action?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every workflow has an owner, control and measurable benefit.

Part 7 - Forecasting with reliable insight

Make progress, uncertainty and intervention visible.



EVIDENCE

What has the customer confirmed?

CONFIDENCE

What remains uncertain?

ACTION

What changes before the next review?



FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE

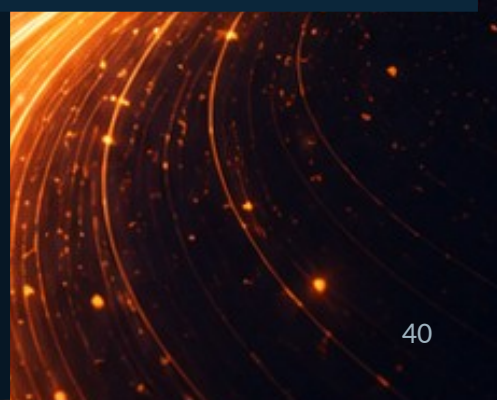
Weak qualification, inconsistent sales stages and poor customer relationship management (CRM) discipline left forecasts dependent on seller confidence. Reviews often repeated data without advancing deals.

ACTION

I tightened qualification, defined objective stage criteria and used automation to support focused data capture. Deal reviews established the real position, remaining risks and agreed next actions.

RESULT

The approach brought clearer accountability, defined entry and exit criteria in each stage and a forecast grounded in deal evidence. I judge it through forecast accuracy, slippage and whether reviews lead to progressive action and improved outcomes.



Forecast categories

Categories are working conventions; evidence makes them useful.

Category	Meaning	Minimum evidence
Pipeline	Qualified opportunity, but not expected to close in the current forecast period	Problem and fit established; next step and owner recorded
Upside or best case	Could close in the period, but one or more material risks remain	Evidence supports the date, with named risks and actions
Commit	Leadership is prepared to plan on the deal closing in the period	Critical qualification gates, customer actions and paper process are confirmed
Closed	Won or lost outcome recorded	Commercial result and relevant learning captured

WHY IT MATTERS

A forecast should record uncertainty, not hide it.

PRACTICAL TEST

Ask what the buyer has done, not what the seller believes.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Forecast category, evidence, owner and next action or prediction align.

Forecasts improve when inspection improves

The review is a working decision, not a reporting ritual.

WEEKLY	Deal evidence and next actions
MONTHLY	Coverage, conversion and slippage
QUARTERLY	Capacity, retention and economics
STRATEGIC	Market, proposition and investment

WHY IT MATTERS

A forecast should trigger action, not merely record confidence.

PRACTICAL TEST

What changed, what is now true and what decision is required?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Leaders gain confidence in the numbers, see exceptions early and intervene with context.

Part 8 - Understanding growth and profitability

Read growth, retention, execution, margin and acquisition cost together.

GROWTH

Acquisition and expansion

RETENTION

Customer value protected

ECONOMICS

Margin, cost and payback

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE

Deal margin alone misses the cost of lost pursuits, the time to recover acquisition investment and the value of the wider customer relationship.

ACTION

I combine customer fit and qualification with the Rule of 40, customer acquisition cost (CAC), payback and customer lifetime value. I work with finance to agree cost boundaries and reporting.

RESULT

In my experience, tighter focus and qualification have supported double-digit improvements in win rates. Reading the economics together helps identify waste and where further growth investment is justified.

A balanced leadership scorecard

No single metric can represent the commercial system and its health.

View	Measures	What it answers
Whole-engine growth	Net new ARR; total ARR or recurring-revenue growth; revenue growth	Whether the business is growing overall
New business	New-logo ARR or bookings; qualified pipeline created; win rate; sales cycle	Whether the land motion is producing efficient growth
Installed-base health	Net revenue retention (NRR); Gross revenue retention (GRR); renewal rate; expansion; contraction; churn	Whether customer value is being realised, protected and grown
Execution	Forecast accuracy; stage conversion; slippage; deal age; quota attainment	Whether the operating process is predictable
Economics	Gross margin; CAC; CAC payback; Magic Number; Rule of 40	Whether growth is commercially and financially sustainable
Customer and delivery	Adoption; value milestones; service health; time to value	Whether the promise sold is becoming a customer outcome

WHY IT MATTERS

Growth without retention or margin can be an expensive illusion.

PRACTICAL TEST

Review every view together before changing investment.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Leadership can diagnose the system, not just celebrate a number.

Read the economics together

Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) is the profit measure used below.

RULE OF 40

Annual revenue growth % + EBITDA margin %

A combined view of growth and operating profitability. See the next page for definitions and limits.

CUSTOMER ACQUISITION COST (CAC)

Acquisition spend ÷ new customers acquired

Shows the cost of winning a customer. Include unsuccessful pursuits and allocate costs consistently.

CAC PAYBACK

CAC ÷ monthly recurring gross profit per customer

Shows how long gross profit takes to recover acquisition investment.

CUSTOMER LIFETIME VALUE (CLV) DRIVERS

Retention, expansion, service cost and gross margin

These are value drivers, not an additive formula. Estimate expected lifetime contribution using stated assumptions.

WHY IT MATTERS

Growth, margin and customer economics need to be read together.

PRACTICAL TEST

Use matching cohorts and periods. Count pursuit cost once.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Investment decisions reflect contribution and recovery, as well as revenue.

RULE OF 40

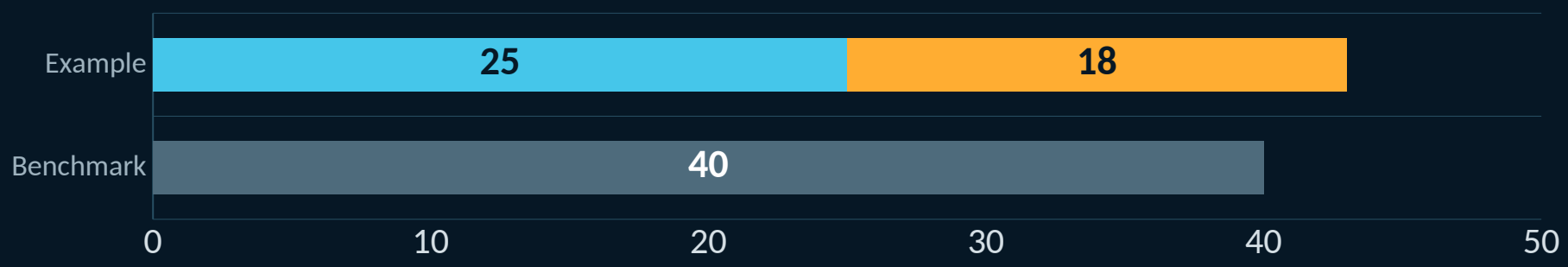
The Rule of 40

Balancing growth and profitability in software as a service (SaaS).

Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA)

25% + **18%** = **43**

Annual revenue growth | **EBITDA margin** | **RULE OF 40 SCORE**



Illustrative score: 43. Three points above the 40-point benchmark.

> 40	**EXCEEDS THE BENCHMARK** Strong combined growth and profitability. Check that it is sustainable.
= 40	**MEETS THE BENCHMARK** Growth and margin reach the target. Does the balance fit your strategy?
< 40	**INVESTIGATE THE GAP** Investment phase or weaker performance? Identify the cause and a credible plan to improve.

A KPI in SaaS

Product and sales investment often precedes subscription revenue. This KPI helps judge whether growth justifies the pressure on profitability.

MY APPROACH Read the score alongside retention, acquisition payback and cash.

WHY IT MATTERS

Balances investment in growth with profitability.

PRACTICAL TEST

Same period and margin? Relevant to your business model and maturity?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

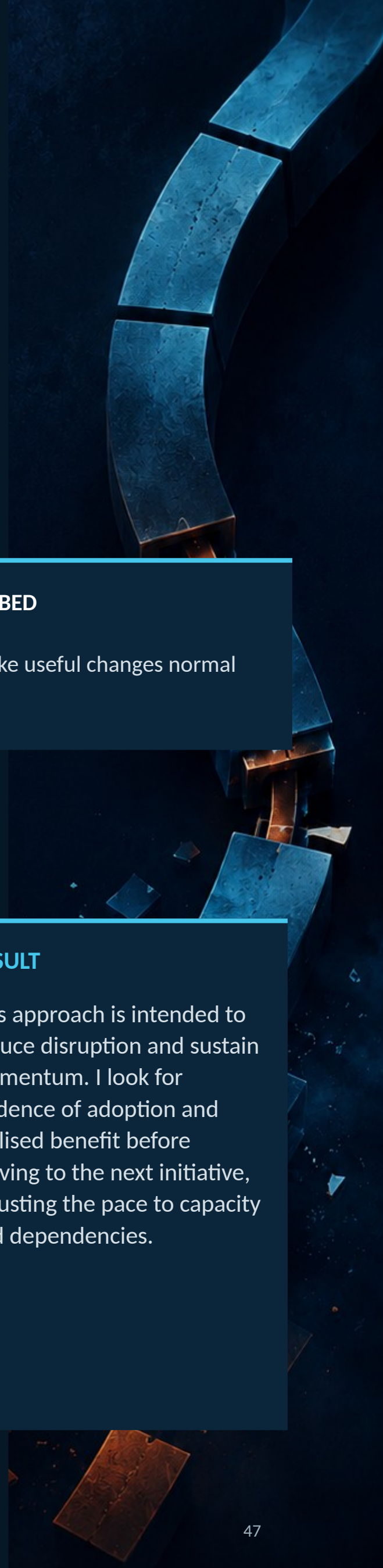
40+ supported by retention and cash, or a credible plan to close the gap.

EBITDA margin = EBITDA ÷ revenue × 100. Some versions use free cash flow margin.

Sources: ChartMogul; Bessemer Venture Partners

Part 9 - A manageable operating rhythm

Set a pace your business can absorb and sustain.



BASELINE	PILOT	EMBED
Understand the current position	Test a small number of changes	Make useful changes normal

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGE	ACTION	RESULT
Trying to change too much at once created burden, fragmented execution and distracted teams from their day-to-day priorities.	I baseline performance with the team and leadership, prioritise a small number of improvements and appoint a champion and pilot group. I establish a minimum viable product (MVP), then support adoption before optimising or expanding.	This approach is intended to reduce disruption and sustain momentum. I look for evidence of adoption and realised benefit before moving to the next initiative, adjusting the pace to capacity and dependencies.

30–60–90 PLAN

From diagnosis to adoption

The pace should reflect capacity, dependencies and sales-cycle length.

01

DAYS 1–30

DIAGNOSE

Baseline the scorecard, lifecycle, capacity and constraints.

02

DAYS 31–60

DESIGN

Choose two or three changes and co-design the artefacts.

03

DAYS 61–90

PILOT

Run the new cadence on live work; learn and correct.

04

AFTER DAY 90

SUSTAIN

Review adoption, evidence and the scale decision.

WHY IT MATTERS

Change sticks when people can use it in live work.

PRACTICAL TEST

What evidence will tell us to continue, adapt or stop?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The organisation has a tested operating model and a clear next decision.

Adoption is a management discipline

Avoid repeated redesign before teams have had enough time to use the model properly.



WHY IT MATTERS

A framework becomes valuable when it changes behaviour and delivers the desired outcomes.

PRACTICAL TEST

Review adoption, exceptions and customer evidence on a standing cadence.

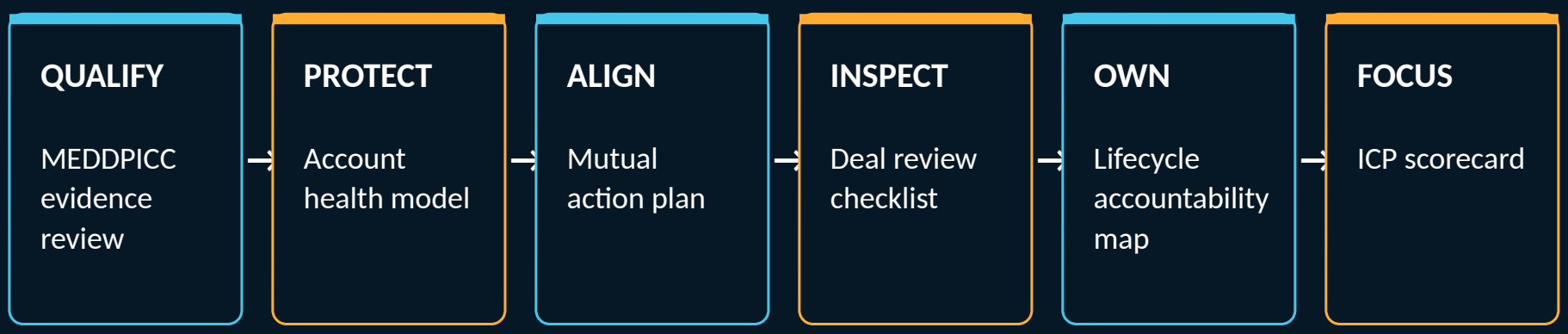
WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The model evolves from evidence, not from constant reinvention.

REFERENCE

Tools that make judgement & decisions easier

Use the tool that matches the decision and scale the formality to the cost of being wrong.



WHY IT MATTERS

Tools are operating and efficiency aids, not bureaucracy.

PRACTICAL TEST

Does the tool improve the next decision? Can technology and automation improve the work and the outcome?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The team and the business understand how the tool improves efficiency and success, with clear measures to demonstrate the benefit.

MEDDPICC evidence review

Element	0 Unknown	1 Partial	2 Confirmed	Commit treatment
Metrics	No quantified impact	Seller estimate	Customer validates measure and baseline	Required before commit
Economic buyer	Unknown	Identified	Directly engaged or access agreed	Critical gate
Decision criteria	Unknown	Inferred	Validated with customer	Required before commit
Decision process	Unknown	Partially mapped	Stages, people and dates confirmed	Critical gate
Paper process	Unknown	Assumed	Procurement, legal and security path confirmed	Critical gate
Pain and implication	Unconfirmed	Problem described	Material consequence and urgency confirmed	Required before commit
Champion	No credible advocate	Supportive contact	Influential advocate actively helps the decision	Critical gate
Competition	Unknown	Alternatives assumed	Alternatives and status validated	Required before commit

WHY IT MATTERS

Unknowns create pursuit risk and wasted capacity.

PRACTICAL TEST

Record the evidence date and owner for each critical gate.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Critical gates are confirmed before the next major investment.

Account health model

Weights are a starting design, not a validated churn model.

Factor	Weight	Measure	Evidence	Cadence
Usage and adoption	30%	Actual use against contracted value; depth; trend	Product and customer data	Monthly
Value realisation	20%	Progress against agreed business outcomes	Value plan and customer review	Quarterly
Service and delivery	15%	Incident severity, backlog, delivery confidence	Service and project records	Monthly
Stakeholder coverage	15%	Relationship breadth, sponsor access, engagement trend	CRM and account review	Monthly
Commercial position	10%	Renewal timing, payment, terms and contraction signals	Contract and finance records	Monthly
Sentiment signal	10%	Customer feedback and themes; AI signal where governed	Survey, meetings and tickets	Monthly

WHY IT MATTERS

Aggregate health can hide a critical sponsor, service or renewal risk.

PRACTICAL TEST

Score the account with written evidence and a trend.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The team proactively sees the risk, owner and intervention before renewal.

Make the next decision shared and visible

01 Customer outcome and success criteria

02 Decision criteria, buying process and target date

03 Technical, security, commercial and legal steps

04 Evidence, meetings, approvals and dependencies

05 Named owners and dates on both sides

06 Known risks, escalation path and effect of missed dates

07 Review cadence and single source of truth

08 Mobilisation actions after signature

WHY IT MATTERS

Shared plans expose drift before it becomes surprise.

PRACTICAL TEST

Review actions, dates and dependencies at every material change.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Both sides know the next action, owner and consequence of delay.

Two simple scorecards make choices visible

LIFECYCLE ACCOUNTABILITY

01 **TARGET**
Revenue leadership

02 **QUALIFY**
Sales leadership

03 **MOBILISE**
Customer leadership

04 **RENEW**
Customer leadership

05 **EXPAND**
Shared

ICP SCORE

Problem	Material and evidenced
Strategic fit	Proposition and roadmap
Commercial fit	Value, term and margin
Delivery fit	Implement and support
Buying conditions	Access, urgency, process

WHY IT MATTERS

Good governance makes ownership and attractiveness visible together.

PRACTICAL TEST

Score a live account and challenge the evidence.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The team knows who owns each stage of the lifecycle and why the account merits investment.

Start with the challenge that matters most

You do not need to change everything at once.

I wrote this playbook to help make better commercial decisions, build stronger customer relationships and turn growth ambition into disciplined execution.

Use it in full or take the sections that resonate with your situation. Adapt the detail to your business, your services and the customers you serve.

If you would like to discuss a challenge, test an approach or explore how I could help, please get in touch directly.

Jonathan McCulloch

linkedin.com/in/Jonathan-McCulloch



What the terms mean

Reference 1 of 3. Definitions are also introduced when terms first appear.

Ideal customer profile (ICP)

The account characteristics and buying conditions that make your offer a strong commercial and delivery fit.

Why it matters: Focuses demand creation and protects specialist capacity.

Customer acquisition cost (CAC)

The defined cost of acquiring a new customer, including an allocation of unsuccessful acquisition effort.

Why it matters: Reveals whether winning customers uses capital and capacity efficiently.

Annual recurring revenue (ARR)

Recurring contract revenue expressed as an annual amount, excluding one-off fees.

Why it matters: Separates the recurring revenue base from projects and other non-recurring sales.

Net revenue retention (NRR)

Recurring revenue retained from the opening customer cohort, including expansion and subtracting contraction and churn.

Why it matters: Shows whether existing customers are growing in aggregate. Excludes new customers.

Gross revenue retention (GRR)

Opening-cohort recurring revenue retained after contraction and churn, excluding expansion.

Why it matters: Shows how much of the existing revenue base is protected before upsell masks losses.

What the terms mean

Reference 2 of 3. Definitions are also introduced when terms first appear.

Customer lifetime value (CLV)

Expected customer contribution over the relationship, using explicit margin, retention, expansion and cost assumptions.

Why it matters: Helps judge acquisition investment. State whether acquisition cost is deducted in your definition.

Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA)

An operating earnings measure; its margin is EBITDA divided by revenue.

Why it matters: Adds profitability context to growth, but does not show cash generation or capital needs.

Free cash flow (FCF)

Typically operating cash flow less capital expenditure; state the definition used.

Why it matters: Shows cash available after operating and capital requirements. It is a different basis from EBITDA.

Minimum viable product (MVP)

The smallest usable version of a proposed change that can test its value in practice.

Why it matters: Allows adoption and benefit to be tested before more effort goes into refinement.

What the terms mean

Reference 3 of 3. Definitions are also introduced when terms first appear.

MEDDPICC

Metrics; Economic buyer; Decision criteria; Decision process; Paper process; Identify pain; Champion; Competition.

Why it matters: A qualification framework for exposing buying risk and missing evidence, not a substitute for judgement.

Magic Number

A sales-efficiency measure comparing annualised incremental recurring revenue with prior-period sales and marketing spend.

Why it matters: Provides a directional efficiency signal. State timing, margin treatment and the chosen formula before benchmarking.

Rule of 40

Annual revenue growth rate plus a stated profitability margin, using consistent periods and definitions.

Why it matters: A useful software-sector heuristic. Interpret it with service mix, retention, cash and acquisition economics.

CAC payback

Months needed for recurring gross profit to recover customer acquisition cost under stated assumptions.

Why it matters: Shows recovery speed; actual cash timing and delivery risk still need separate attention.

Evidence behind the operating choices

Research informs the principles. The frameworks remain practical management choices to calibrate against local data.

Select a source title to open the original publication.

01 Edelman–LinkedIn, B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report (2024)

02 LinkedIn and Ipsos, The Trust Advantage (2025)

03 6sense, B2B Buyer Experience Report (2025)

04 McKinsey, Building marketing and sales capabilities to beat the market (2015)

05 Brynjolfsson, Li and Raymond, Generative AI at Work

06 Winning by Design, Customer Success Operating Model (pp. 15–16)

WHY IT MATTERS
Evidence is directional unless the source supports a causal claim.

PRACTICAL TEST
Check assumptions against your market, data and customer outcomes.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE
The playbook stays credible because it distinguishes evidence from prescription.

SOURCE LINKS CHECKED 25 SEPTEMBER 2026