GTM RESEARCH REPORT · OCTOBER 2026

Same Team, Different Game

How AI Is Reshaping the Sales–Marketing Relationship

Kickstand + Pavilion

A joint study on AI adoption, alignment, and trust across sales & marketing teams. Produced by Kickstand in partnership with Pavilion.

00 INTRODUCTION

Every GTM leader has sat through this meeting.

Sales says the leads aren't ready. Marketing says sales isn't working the leads they already have. Someone proposes a shared KPI framework. Everyone nods. Fast forward a year, and the same meeting happens again.

AI was supposed to end that loop — shared data, faster insight, fewer handoffs where information gets lost. For many GTM teams, that promise is paying off: they report being more aligned, more trusting, and more confident than they were two years ago. But for a meaningful group, AI never touched the old tension. ***It just gave both sides new material to argue about.***

What separates those two groups has surprisingly little to do with which tools got purchased. It comes down to how deep the adoption actually goes — and whether anyone was ever put in charge of making it work.

WHAT THIS REPORT TRACES

01	02	03	04	05	06
Alignment	Shared Tooling	Trust	AI Missteps	Relevance	Governance

From the alignment numbers on the surface down to the governance questions bubbling underneath.

AT A GLANCE

The headline numbers

Six findings that reset the sales–marketing conversation for the AI era.

87%

of GTM professionals say their sales & marketing teams are aligned

7 in 10

say alignment has improved since adopting AI tools

192%

how much more likely light AI users are to call themselves misaligned

67%

say cross-functional trust has improved over the past two years

40%

hesitate to act on AI insights from the other function's tools

49%

have a clearly designated owner of AI performance across both teams

The alignment everyone doubted

Every GTM leader has a story about sales and marketing not getting along — two teams, one number, and a standing assumption that the other side is the reason it isn't higher. But the aggregate data paints a different picture than the war stories.

87%

of GTM professionals say their teams are "very" or "somewhat" aligned

12%

report actual misalignment

THE DIVIDE RUNS THROUGH AI USAGE ITSELF

+78%

Heavy AI users — daily tools embedded across workflows — were **78% more likely** to call their teams "very well" aligned.

+192%

Light AI users — limited, still in "pilot" mode — were **192% more likely** to call themselves "somewhat" or "very" misaligned.

Same tool. Same company size. Same market. But a completely different experience depending on the ***maturity of a company's AI integration.***

THE ADOPTION-DEPTH DIVIDE

One split explains almost everything

Heavy, longer-tenured AI users show up as the most aligned and confident group at nearly every turn. Light, newer users show up as the most strained.

HEAVY AI USERS

Daily, deeply embedded, multi-year

+102%

more likely to say AI improved alignment significantly

+105%

more likely to report "very" high trust in their counterpart

+59%

more likely to have joint AI-ownership structures in place

+72%

more likely to say AI is increasing their function's value

LIGHT AI USERS

Limited, inconsistent, still piloting

+192%

more likely to call their teams misaligned

+133%

more likely to report low trust overall

+118%

more likely to have no designated AI owner at all

+113%

more likely to not understand their own attribution model

All figures are relative to the survey average. Nearly every organization owns AI tools — it's the depth of use that separates the two groups.

The gains aren't marginal

The alignment that a vast majority of teams are seeing since adopting AI isn't a rounding error — it's a step change most GTM leaders can feel.

7 in 10

say alignment has improved since adopting AI

31%

say it has improved "significantly"

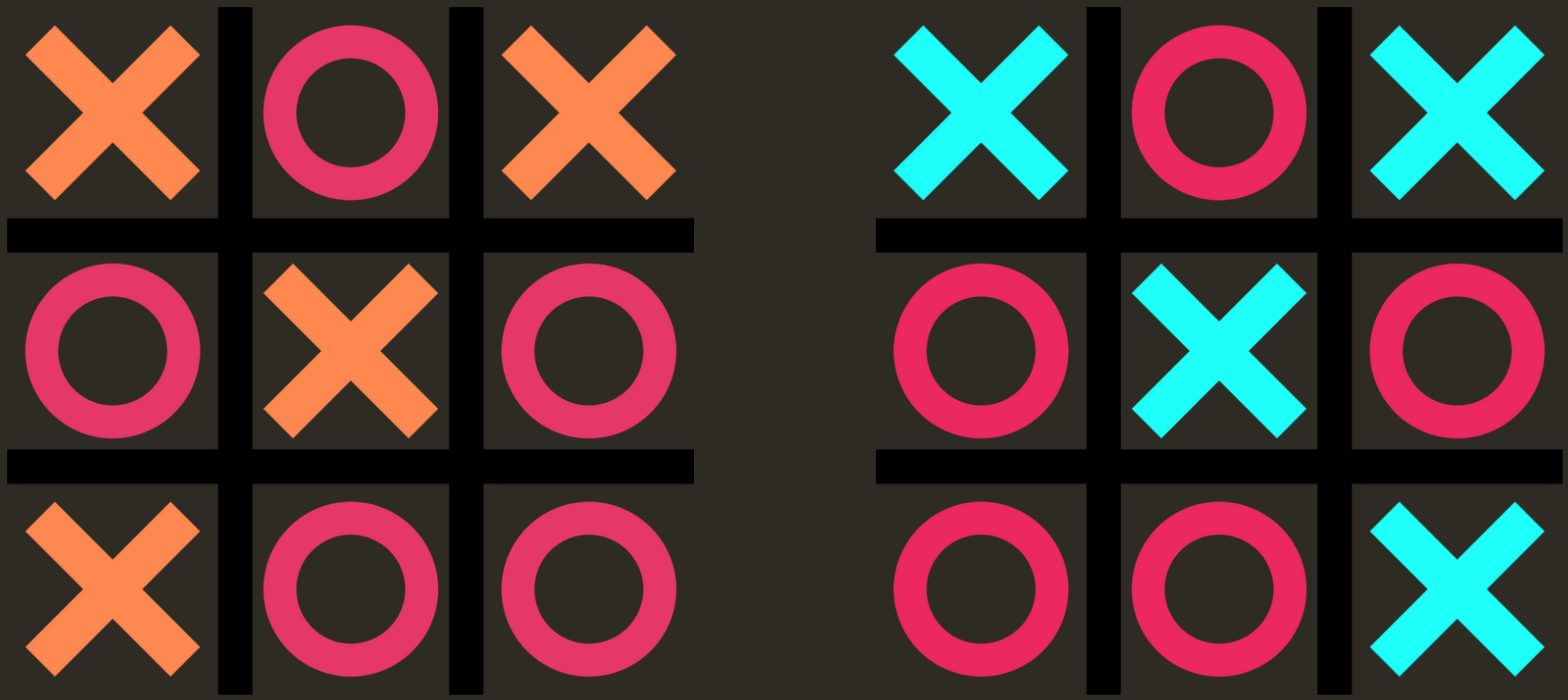
11%

say it got more complicated or worse

THE ADOPTION PARADOX

Marketing and sales teams using AI lightly were **55% more likely** than average to say alignment got more complicated or significantly worse since adopting the tech. Meanwhile, heavy AI users were **102% more likely** to say it improved significantly. ***The technology is identical — the outcome is anything but.***

The pattern reinforces itself. Teams already "somewhat misaligned" were **136% more likely** to say AI made things worse; teams already "very well aligned" were **107% more likely** to say it made things significantly better.



AI didn’t cause the split between sales and marketing. It’s amplifying whatever split already existed before the tool was ever procured.

Time in the seat matters. 76% of organizations have used AI in sales or marketing for at least a year — but only 11% have three-plus years behind them. Very well-aligned teams were 82% more likely to be in that veteran group.

Everyone signed the same definition (then read it differently).

91%

say they share a formal definition of a qualified lead

40%

still say lead-quality disagreements are a recurring source of friction

A shared definition is what most teams assume settles the fight over what counts as sales-ready — and heavy AI users were **53% more likely** to strongly agree it exists. But it doesn't settle much: 40% still report friction, and UK teams were **33% more likely** than US teams to say it persists.

Everyone signed off on the same definition. They just never agreed on how to read it — and the shared tools meant to close those gaps only made the gaps easier to see.

Same dashboard, divided verdicts

The intuitive read is that shared tooling produces shared understanding. Instead, AI removed the argument over whose spreadsheet was right — and replaced it with an argument over whose *interpretation* of the model should carry more weight.

WHEN SALES & MARKETING SHARE THE SAME AI PLATFORM

say each function reads the same model outputs differently
39%

say shared tooling introduced brand-new disputes
34%

struggle to establish accountability for bad outputs
33%

often disagree about the validity of the data
29%

WHEN THEY RUN SEPARATE OR MINIMALLY INTEGRATED SYSTEMS

operate from effectively different versions of the truth
57%

can't reconcile outputs across systems — a real friction source
43%

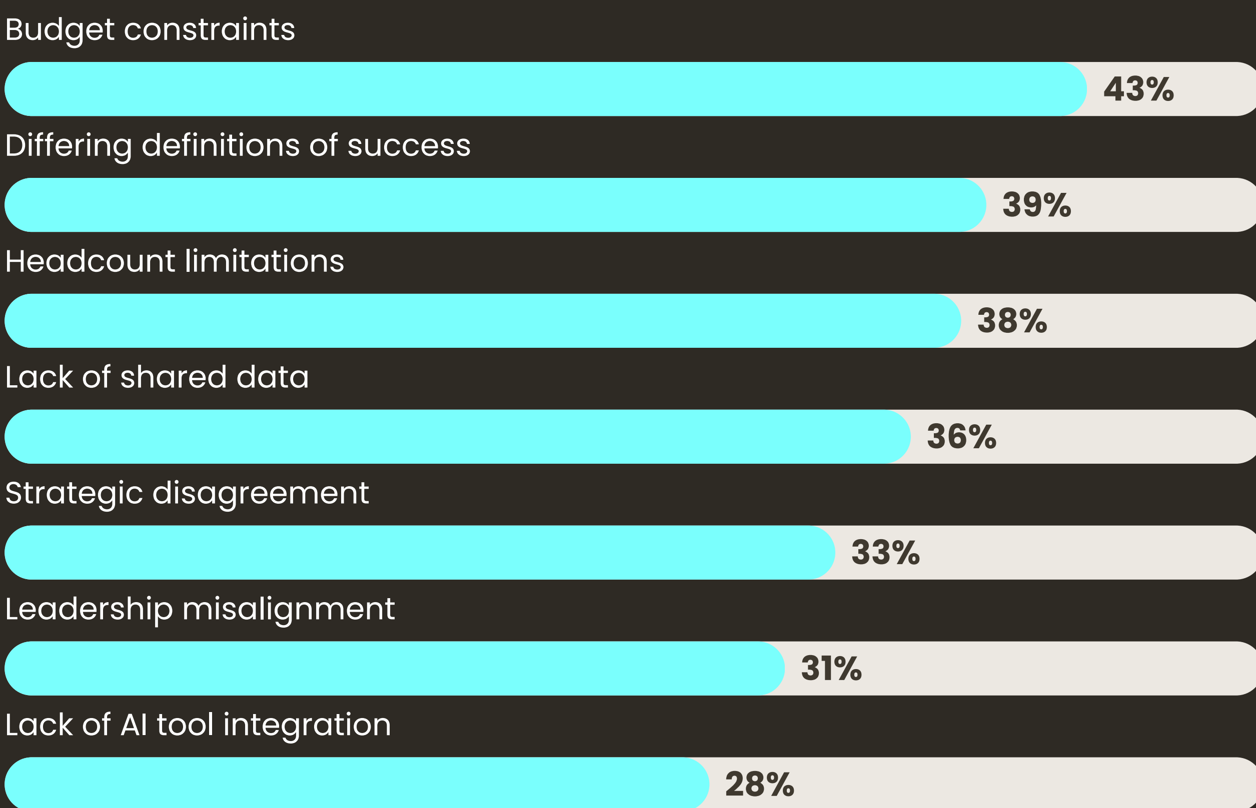
can't build a shared picture of performance at all
18%

*Marketing feels more exposed either way — **36% more likely** than sales to say accountability is hard to pin down when shared tools go wrong.*

The barrier isn't the technology

A common assumption is that better technology produces better alignment. But when leaders named what actually gets in the way, technology ranked dead last.

TOP BARRIERS TO SALES–MARKETING ALIGNMENT



THE SUCCESS-DEFINITION PARADOX

88% of teams say they already have agreed-upon KPIs both functions are held to — yet nearly **2 in 5** still name "differing definitions of success" as a top barrier. Light AI users were **62% more likely** to disagree they even have shared KPIs at all. ***AI can't sign a budget approval — and it can't turn KPIs on paper into shared priorities.***

Trust is beating the odds

The disagreements so far aren't proof that AI destroyed trust. They're proof that AI exposes how much trust did — or didn't — already exist between functions. So is the relationship actually getting worse?

7 in 10

report high trust in their counterpart function

26%

of them say that trust is "very" high

6%

report low trust

TRUST BETWEEN FUNCTIONS

Heavy AI users were **105% more likely** than average to report "very" high trust in their counterpart.

Light AI users were **133% more likely** to report low trust overall — the adoption-depth split turning up again, this time in a relational layer instead of an operational one.

Companies with 10,000+ employees were ***85% more likely*** than average to report trust that skews low — which tracks with the coordination overhead that comes with scale, and more cooks in the kitchen.

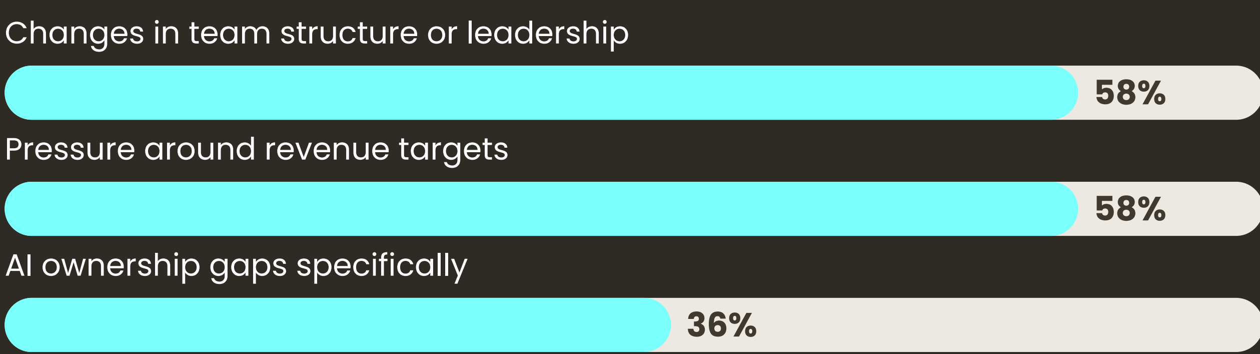
HOLDING — AND ACTUALLY GROWING

The number that should reset the conversation

67%

say trust between sales and marketing has **improved** over the past two years — with 24% of them saying it improved significantly. Only **8%** say it declined.

AMONG THE 8% WHOSE TRUST DECLINED, THE CAUSE IS AS ORGANIZATIONAL AS TECHNOLOGICAL



GOODWILL OVER GOVERNANCE

Nearly half of teams seeing improved trust (**46%**) handle AI friction only as it comes up — with no formal process behind it. Just **27%** have real joint-ownership structures ready before friction escalates.

Even the leading cohort is running on goodwill, not infrastructure — and even when trust does erode, it's due to far more than technology alone.

WHEN TRUST DOESN'T TRANSFER TO THE TOOL

They trust each other.
Not each other's machines.

40%

are less likely to act on AI insights when the other function owns or configured the tool

3 in 5

have manually overridden or disregarded the other function's AI recommendations outright

That sounds like territorialism — until you look at why

The reasons look far more like professional discernment than turf war. Marketing was **42% more likely** than sales to say an AI recommendation felt misaligned with strategy, and **50% more likely** to say past AI recommendations had proven unreliable — making marketing the more skeptical evaluator of sales's AI output.

The distinction is easy to miss but hard to overstate: the two functions generally trust each other. What they don't yet trust is each other's ***machines*** — a narrower, more fixable problem than a broken relationship.

When AI stumbles, teams don't turn on each other

72%

of organizations had a notable AI-related pipeline failure in the past 12 months

8 in 10

say they treat AI friction as a shared problem to solve, not a fight to win

WHEN AI MISSTEPS, WHO OWNS IT?

Accountability is shared between both functions
31%

Marketing owns AI input & lead quality (and says so most)
24%

Sales owns working the AI-generated leads (and says so most)
20%

The most common failure runs downhill from shallow use: light AI users were **32% more likely** to report a poorly scored lead set — the failure most directly tied to under-resourced AI use.

AI IS DOING ITS JOB

79% say AI tools meaningfully improved pipeline quality; **82%** say the same for speed-to-close — so teams don't have much to fight about.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY VOID

Companies with 10,000+ employees were **154% more likely** to say no one is accountable when AI work fails. The bigger the org, the easier accountability slips.

THE COST OF SCATTERED OWNERSHIP

Even shared problems need a named owner

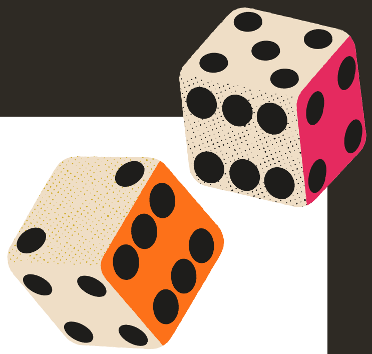
Teams increasingly treat AI friction as a shared problem — but far fewer have actually put someone in charge of it. Where ownership is missing, the cost shows up in the numbers.

49%

have a clearly designated owner of AI tool performance across sales and marketing

16%

have no designated owner at all — light AI users were **118% more likely** to be in this group



WHEN NO ONE OWNS IT, FRICTION FOLLOWS

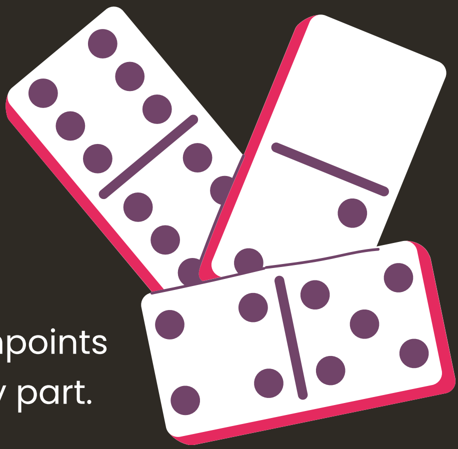
Nearly 2 in 3

under-governed teams trace a real misalignment event back to the ownership gap.

Among teams without clear ownership, **14%** say the absence of an owner definitely contributed to a misalignment event in the past 12 months — and another **49%** say it probably or possibly did.

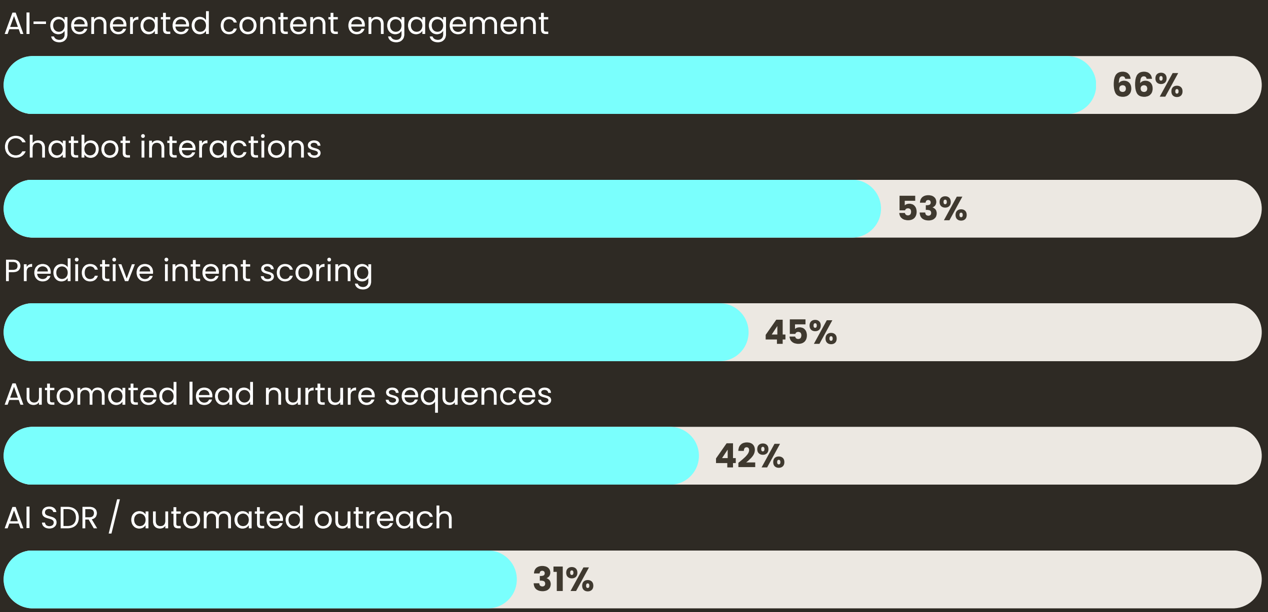
THE ATTRIBUTION SORE SPOT

AI is in the model. The argument is still open.



Most organizations have already woven AI-assisted touchpoints into their attribution models. Getting them in was the easy part.

AI TOUCHPOINTS NOW IN ATTRIBUTION MODELS



1 in 4

don't fully understand how their own model accounts for AI activity — and **68%** of them have gone on to question the validity of attribution reports as a result.

Marketing feels the strain most — ***46–81% more likely*** than sales to strongly agree with each measure of AI attribution friction, likely because it owns most of the upstream data these models run on. ***You can't win an argument about a black box you've never fully opened.***

AI is changing how teams see themselves

FADING OR FLOURISHING?

39% are concerned AI is reducing their function's perceived value. Yet **27%** believe the opposite — and heavy AI users were **72% more likely** to say so. Deep adoption buys confidence; shallow adoption buys doubt.

52%

feel new pressure to prove their function's value — marketing 52% more acutely

50%

have noticed resentment over which function benefits more from AI

WHO HAS BENEFITED MORE FROM AI?

46%
Roughly equal

25%
Marketing more

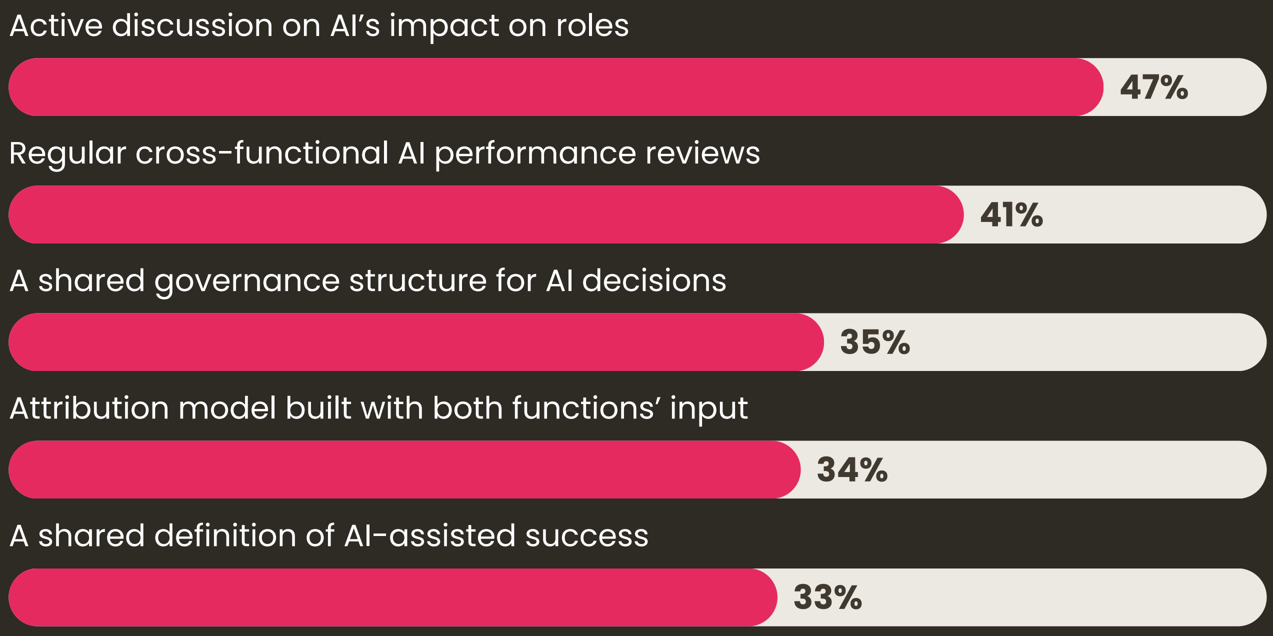
24%
Sales more

Zoom out and GTM leaders put the real problem on people, not process: ***63%*** say relationship dynamics — not technology — are the primary barrier, and ***56%*** say unspoken competitive dynamics undermine it.

It comes back to depth and ownership

Nearly every split this report traced — alignment, trust, accountability, attribution, identity — comes back to two variables: how deep adoption goes, and whether anyone was formally put in charge. Most organizations still haven't built that infrastructure.

SHARE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT HAVE BUILT EACH STRUCTURE



Who has the final call? Still up for grabs.

When the two disagree on an AI recommendation, ***47%*** say sales has final authority and **42%** say marketing does. The near-even split matters less than the takeaway: teams with defined governance consistently report stronger alignment and greater confidence.

CONCLUSION

AI wasn’t a complete fix for the sales–marketing problem. But it didn’t cause it, either.

It did what any powerful tool does inside an unstructured relationship: it amplified whatever was already there. Teams that went deep on adoption and built real ownership around it are more aligned and more trusting than they were two years ago. Teams that adopted lightly, recently, or without governance are the ones carrying the friction the industry conversation has really been describing all along.

The path forward isn’t more technology.

It’s the slower, less glamorous work of building ownership, governance, and a shared definition of success — so two functions can use the same tools together instead of against each other. The score is starting to show these teams can play the same game.

Let’s talk.

Want to see where your sales and marketing teams land on the adoption-depth curve — and what to build next? Start a conversation with the Kickstand and Pavilion teams.

Kickstand is a global marketing agency offering a data first approach to PR and services that include media and analyst relations, research, content, crisis communications, and influencer marketing, Kickstand helps build well-defended market leaders in some of today’s most innovative industries including mobility, robotics, AI, cybersecurity, fintech, insurtech, supply chain and logistics, sales and marketing tech, and eCommerce.

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Pavilion is a private membership community for senior go-to-market executives in B2B tech and SaaS. Founded in 2016 as Revenue Collective, Pavilion serves more than 10,000 members worldwide with peer groups, education, events, and research.

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METHODOLOGY

Pavilion's Same Team, Different Game survey was conducted from May 20th - June 15th, 2026. We surveyed 603 full-time employees in the U.S. and U.K. who work at a B2B company with 500 or more employees. Respondents held a director-level or above role in sales or marketing and were directly involved in GTM strategy, pipeline decisions, or revenue reporting. The survey was conducted at a 95% confidence level with a ±4% margin of error.