CCO PERSPECTIVES

Rethinking Revenue and Customer Leadership in the Agentic Era

Why enterprise value is increasingly created after the sale

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The Structural Problem

The most energy-consuming debates in enterprise software are rarely about strategy. They're about structure: how revenue, customer, and product leadership get organized to create and compound customer value.

Most companies say they're built to retain and grow customers. Look at where the budget, headcount, and executive attention actually go, and you get a different answer.

The revenue that determines enterprise value today is created after the sale. Most companies still pour their attention and dollars into acquisition. That's the structural problem, and it's not new. I've watched it play out across a decade of revenue and customer leaders trying to solve it.

In conversation after conversation with revenue, customer, and product leaders, the pattern repeats. Companies keep trying to force fundamentally different revenue motions into a single leadership structure: acquiring customers, delivering on what was promised, and growing what's already won. The org chart changes. The titles change. The pressure to consolidate revenue under one leader never goes away, because the structure keeps forcing different problems into the same model.

This is a point of view, not a survey of best practices. I'd rather be argued with than agreed with politely.

Here's the premise. Acquisition, Delivery, and Growth are three distinct revenue motions, each requiring different skills, incentives, and operating rhythms. Align them and they reinforce each other. Misalign them and coordination becomes the job, and the customer feels it before the business does.

The metrics make this visible. For most of the last decade, enterprise software rewarded new-logo growth and built its org charts around that reward. That era is over. As acquisition gets more expensive and markets mature, buyers and investors are paying closer attention to the quality of the installed base and the economics that follow the sale.

Gross Revenue Retention measures the durability of that base before expansion enters the picture. Net Revenue Retention builds on it by showing whether retained customers are spending more. Strong NRR sitting on weak GRR is expansion masking churn, and sophisticated buyers read that gap as a diagnostic. The foundation has to hold before expansion means anything.

AI raises the stakes further. As agents become users and per-seat pricing gives way to usage-based and outcome-based models, revenue stops being protected by an annual contract. It moves with realized value, period after period. Cost per outcome, value realized per dollar, agent task success, time-to-value: these become part of the commercial conversation, and retention stops being a renewal event. It becomes a verdict the product has to earn every billing cycle.

> *Value gets created after the sale, while too many companies still organize, fund, and reward as if the sale were the finish line.*

All Three Pillars Carry Revenue

Acquisition generates new logo ARR. Delivery generates services revenue and creates the conditions that make retention and growth commercially possible. Growth generates recurring revenue, expansion ARR, and the compounding value of a customer who keeps deepening the investment.

The counterargument is tempting: a dollar is a dollar, so put it all under one executive. One throat to choke. It sounds clean on a slide. It rarely survives contact with how the work actually gets done.

The skills required to win a new enterprise customer aren't the skills required to retain and grow one. Acquisition runs on prospecting instinct, competitive positioning, and the ability to create conviction with a buyer who's never heard of you. Retention and growth run on organizational memory, relationship continuity, and patience across stakeholder layers that didn't exist a year ago. Different operating rhythms. Different incentives. Different comp plans.

Collapse these motions into one performance frame and Acquisition wins every time. It's immediate, visible, and quota-driven. A renewal that isn't yet at risk loses the calendar fight against a deal closing this quarter, not because the leader is careless, but because that's what the system rewards.

The damage shows up late. Retention and growth erode quietly until GRR exposes it, by which point the structure that caused the problem is entrenched and the valuation has already absorbed the discount.

Distributing accountability differs from diffusing it. Done right, each pillar owns the outcome it's actually positioned to influence. Shared accountability without that clarity is, in practice, no accountability at all.

Pillar One: Customer Acquisition

Charter: bring the right customers into the business. Apply the same discipline to fit that the organization applies to forecast and close. Build a pipeline that supports predictable growth and gives every downstream motion something solid to build on.

Acquisition is built for market expansion: competitive displacement, pipeline quality, bookings, disciplined conversion. Its accountability is new logo ARR and the quality of what gets committed at close.

A bad-fit logo isn't just Delivery's problem to inherit. It enters the base as churn risk, and churn shows up first in GRR, the number valuation rests on. That's why cohort quality belongs in Acquisition. The best leaders I've seen are measured on what endures, not only on what closes.

Acquisition's job ends at signature. Everything after that requires knowledge, instincts, and customer context that live somewhere else.

Pillar Two: Customer Delivery

Charter: turn customer commitments into operational outcomes. Carry technical context from evaluation through deployment and early value realization. Generate services revenue, delivery margin, and the customer readiness that makes retention and growth possible.

Delivery sets the trajectory. Customers who reach value quickly renew differently, expand differently, and need far less hand-holding than customers who struggle through implementation.

This is a revenue function, not a cost center wearing a services hat. Professional Services generates bookings, utilization, and margin, but its bigger contribution is the quality of the installed base it builds. A customer who exits implementation with realized value and executive confidence is worth more than one who merely reaches go-live, and that gap shows up in the next renewal conversation whether anyone planned for it or not.

Pre-Sales and Solutions Engineering belong in Delivery, not Acquisition. Whatever gets promised during evaluation becomes the blueprint for deployment, and when the same technical expertise carries that context forward, the gap between promise and delivery narrows. AI makes this non-negotiable: data realities emerge late, use cases shift after go-live, integration problems surface in the field. That thread from evaluation to value realization can't survive a handoff between strangers.

MIT's GenAI Divide research found that most enterprise AI initiatives fail to produce measurable business impact, and the reason usually sits in integration, adoption, and the operational change nobody budgeted for. The forward-deployed engineer model exists for the same reason: pre-sales and post-sales are one technical conversation, and the expertise closest to the customer environment should stay on the work through deployment.

Governance, change management, and process alignment sit inside Professional Services for the same reason. Go-live is a milestone. Success is whether the customer actually changes how work gets done. Onboarding closes out the pillar by moving customers from implementation to operational independence, then handing them to Growth without losing momentum.

Pillar Three: Customer Growth

Charter: protect and grow the installed base. Translate realized value into renewals, expansion, and advocacy. Own the long-term commercial relationship with continuity and strategic intent.

This pillar carries GRR, NRR, and expansion ARR, in that order. Protect the base first. Grow it second. The best post-sale organizations are built to compound revenue, not merely preserve it.

Most customer success organizations accumulated responsibilities over the years that never belonged to them. Adoption belongs with Product. Support belongs close to Engineering. Strip those out and what's left is a focused Growth organization with one mandate: turn customer value into commercial outcomes. When GRR underpins valuation and NRR drives growth, that organization becomes one of the most direct levers on enterprise value, full stop.

Winning the deal was never enough. Customers now have to see, measure, and justify the value of their investment continuously, and this pillar owns that proof.

Account Management owns the relationship: executive alignment, evolving priorities, spotting growth opportunities before a competitor does. Value Management owns the evidence: measuring whether the outcomes promised at sale actually show up, then turning that into the business case for renewal and expansion. Activity metrics don't cut it anymore. Customers want proof of business impact. Renewal Management owns retention, and renewals are commercial negotiations, not administrative events. They require preparation, authority, and someone accountable for the outcome, which is exactly what too much preventable churn is missing. Customer Advocacy owns market leverage. Reference customers, advisory boards, and peer communities strengthen competitive positioning and lower acquisition costs, and advocacy is what value delivered looks like from the outside, rather than a campaign you run.

Expansion follows from all of it: trust, outcomes, and account knowledge accumulated over time. Get account management, value realization, and renewal discipline right, and expansion stops being a separate sales motion and becomes the natural next conversation.

Two Functions That Cut Across All Three

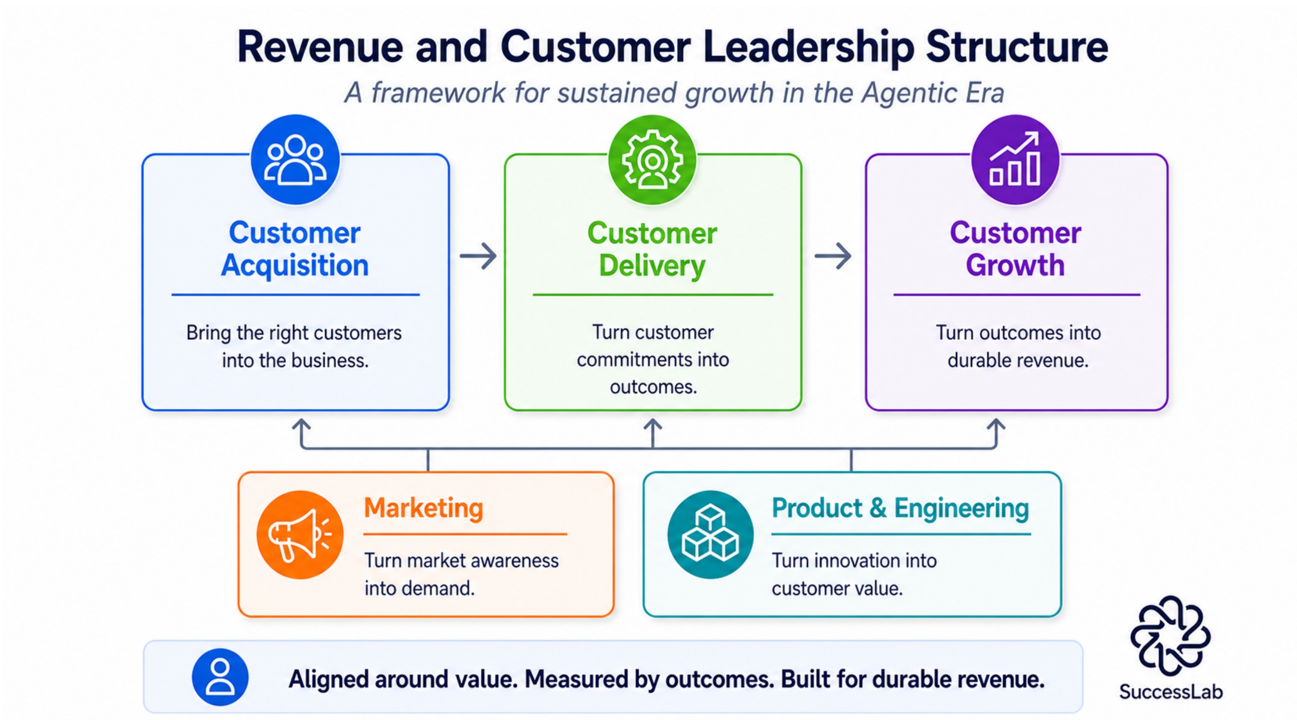
Acquisition, Delivery, and Growth make up the customer-facing revenue organization, but they're not the whole company. Two functions cut across all three pillars without belonging to any of them: Marketing, and Product & Engineering.

Marketing shapes the pipeline Acquisition inherits, strengthens the value narrative Growth depends on, and turns customer advocacy into proof for the next acquisition cycle. A marketing function limited to top-of-funnel demand gen is leaving its highest-leverage work on the table.

Product & Engineering answer the question everything else depends on: does the product reliably deliver meaningful outcomes at the quality and scale the market expects? A product that's intuitive and valuable strengthens Acquisition, speeds up Delivery, and fuels Growth. A product that's hard to adopt or easy to leave puts a tax on all three, and no amount of customer-organization effort fixes a product that doesn't deliver.

Two capabilities belong closest to Product & Engineering, not to the customer organization. Product Adoption belongs with Product, because low adoption is a product signal before it's a relationship problem. Sitting it inside the customer org tends to produce more human intervention. Sitting it with Product turns the same signal into roadmap input, which is where it actually gets fixed. Customer Support belongs close to Engineering for the same reason: every ticket is a product-quality signal before it's a service event, and at scale, support volume shows exactly where the product is creating friction in production.

The reporting line can vary by company. What can't vary is the connection. Adoption signals have to inform what gets built. Support signals have to inform what gets fixed. Both need to land with leaders who actually have the authority to act on them.



Where This Leaves the CRO and the CCO

Once Acquisition, Delivery, and Growth are distinct, executive accountability gets a lot clearer.

The CRO owns the revenue system, and that role no longer ends at new-logo sales. A modern CRO understands how the three motions work together: implementation quality shapes retention, renewals get earned long before the renewal date, and expansion depends on value that was already delivered.

The CCO leads the customer organization, Delivery and Growth together, because both determine what happens after signature. That mandate is commercial and operational at once: implementation quality, services revenue, renewal readiness, customer value, expansion. In a market where retention and growth economics drive valuation, the CCO does more than protect revenue. They turn acquired revenue into revenue that compounds.

Whether the CCO reports to the CRO or directly to the CEO carries less weight than people think. Both models work, provided the mandate is clear, the authority is real, and the CRO actually understands the customer organization rather than treating it as a black box.

The risk is putting all three pillars under one executive without distinct mandates, metrics, and leadership depth. It rarely works, because Acquisition pressure is immediate and visible while Delivery quality and Growth discipline erode quietly, right up until retention exposes the damage. The organizations that get this right distribute accountability on purpose: the CRO owns the revenue system, the CCO owns the customer organization with real commercial and operational authority, and Product & Engineering own whether the platform actually delivers on what customer-facing teams promise.

Compound or Compete

This is an argument for alignment, not separation. Acquisition, Delivery, and Growth are distinct leadership contexts that succeed or fail together.

The dependencies run in a straight line. Acquisition sets the expectations Delivery has to meet. Delivery creates the readiness Growth depends on. Growth produces the proof that makes the next acquisition more credible. Product decides whether adoption gets earned or forced. Support shows where the product creates friction. Marketing turns delivered value into market confidence. Strengthen one pillar and the whole system compounds. Misalign one and the damage travels across the entire customer lifecycle.

That’s why "one throat to choke" failed in practice. It concentrated accountability without distributing the capability to act on it, forced different revenue motions into the same leadership context, and let Acquisition win by default almost every time.

The fix is distributed accountability, not fragmented ownership: each pillar measured on the outcome it can actually influence, all of it pointed at the same customer value and business outcomes.

Which leaves CEOs with one question that's hard to dodge. If enterprise value is increasingly created after the sale, have the leaders responsible for post-sale outcomes actually been given the authority, structure, and resources to deliver it? That question is structural, not procedural.

I'd genuinely like to hear from CEOs, and from revenue, customer, product, and engineering leaders who've fought with these trade-offs directly. Where does this match what you're seeing, and where would you push back?

Omid Razavi is the founder of SuccessLab, an advisory and community brand at the intersection of AI transformation and enterprise customer leadership. He publishes CCO Perspectives, organizes the SuccessLab Executive Forums and Roundtables, and advises revenue and customer leaders across the enterprise software industry.