SAUCE · PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

THE COST NOBODY BUDGETS FOR.

A practitioner's guide for profitable businesses that don't have time for an ecosystem.

§ 00 CONTENTS

TWELVE SECTIONS

§ 00 THE CASE

PRACTITIONER'S OPENING

YOUR BEST PERSON QUITS TOMORROW.

How much walks out with them? Not their salary. Not their replacement cost. 42% of what they know lives nowhere but in their head.

The routing decisions. The client relationships. The “ask Sarah, she knows.” Gone. SHRM puts the cost of replacing one key employee at 50–200% of their salary, 5 to 12 months of lost productivity, stalled projects, and re-learning. None of it appears on a P&L.

And the departures are just the visible damage. Every week your team is intact, knowledge workers still spend roughly half the week searching for what's already known. More than half of “new” work is re-solving what was already solved.

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS ABOUT

The fix. Not AI. Not digital transformation. Moving institutional memory out of heads and into systems, and everything downstream of that one move.

§ 01 SARAH, IN DETAIL

SARAH IS YOUR OPERATIONS MANAGER.

Sarah makes $65,000. She has been here four years. None of what she knows is written down.

Which carrier to call when the load board says one thing and the customer says another. That the Tuesday close requires the spreadsheet to be saved *before* the macro runs, not after. The vendor who'll take a phone call at 9pm. The tab named “DON'T DELETE.”

In the six months after she leaves, her absence costs $32,000 to $130,000. Not on any line item. It shows up as overtime, as the customer whose handoff dropped, as the close that slipped a quarter, as the new hire who took five months to ramp instead of two.

That's one person, one piece of the operation. Multiply by the four others who each hold a different piece, and you have the shape of the problem.

Sarah is a composite. The numbers are not.

FIGURE 01

$65K

SALARY

$32K–$130K

SIX-MONTH COST OF DEPARTURE

METHOD

SHRM 50–200% replacement multiple × $65K. Conservative mid-market, six-month window.

§ 02 THE WORKED MODEL

PORTABLE · YOUR SALARY BAND

FROM ONE SARAH TO A FIVE-PERSON ESTIMATE.

The numbers above scale linearly. In most mid-market operating companies, the operating knowledge is held by a small number of irreplaceable people: the operations manager, the senior tech, the AR lead, the controller, the field foreman. Run the same math against each of them.

ROLE	SALARY	LOW · 50%	HIGH · 200%	6-MO MIDPOINT
Operations manager	$65K	$32K	$130K	$81K
Senior technician / foreman	$85K	$43K	$170K	$107K
AR / billing lead	$58K	$29K	$116K	$73K
Controller	$110K	$55K	$220K	$138K
Top salesperson	$95K	$48K	$190K	$119K
Five-person key-bench exposure	**$413K**	**$207K**	**$826K**	**$518K**

METHOD · SHRM 50-200% · 6-MO WINDOW · NO EXIT-VALUE IMPACT

WHAT THIS NUMBER IS

A first-order estimate of what walks out the door if one irreplaceable person leaves. Conservative: it excludes exit-value impact, customer churn beyond six months, and the second-order cost of overworking the people who stay.

WHAT THIS NUMBER IS NOT

A retention budget. The fix is not to pay each of these people more. The fix is to move the knowledge out of their heads and into a system they don't have to be in the room to operate.

§ 03 FOUR FIGURES · FOUR SOURCES · CONVERGENT

CITED · INDEPENDENT

01

42 %

of what your best employee knows lives nowhere but in their head.

PANOPTO / YOUGOV · WORKPLACE KNOWLEDGE & PRODUCTIVITY REPORT · N = 1,000+ U.S. WORKERS

02

20 HRS / WK

spent searching for what is already known across your tools.

COVEO · RELEVANCE REPORT · WORKPLACE EDITION · 3.6 HRS/DAY AVERAGE

03

58 %

of “new” work is re-solving a problem someone else already solved.

PANOPTO RESEARCH · WORKPLACE KNOWLEDGE & PRODUCTIVITY REPORT

04

5–12 MONTHS

to recover from a single key-person departure.

SHRM · SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT · TURNOVER COST RESEARCH

05 · AI

95 %

of AI pilots never reach production, almost always because the underlying data and process architecture wasn't ready.

VOICE OF THE ENTERPRISE · ENTERPRISE AI ADOPTION SURVEY SERIES

READING THE GRID

Four independent studies converge: most of what runs a business is undocumented, most of the day is spent recovering what already exists, and a single departure takes the better part of a year to absorb. The fifth figure is why AI on top of that mess fails.

§ 04 THE ARGUMENT

EVERYTHING WE BUILD IS DOWNSTREAM OF THAT ONE FIX.

The five figures on the previous page are not five problems. They are one problem, measured five ways. Operating knowledge that should live in a system instead lives in heads.

Pick whichever pillar fits the symptom. Underneath, the work is the same: move the knowledge out of one head and into a system the next hire can read on day one. AI is downstream. Reporting is downstream. The buyer's diligence pack is downstream.

That is why this guide is called *The Cost Nobody Budgets For*, not *The Five Pillars*. The pillars are the surface. The cost is the root.

THE ONE-LINE VERSION

ARCHITECTURE, NOT APPS.

Apps come and go. Architecture is the layer that lets you swap, add, retire, and still trust the numbers in the meantime. It is the difference between a stack and a system.

A NOTE ON THE ORDER

The pillars are walked in the order they tend to break in a real business: AI is loudest, data is foundational, integration is the daily tax, automation is the recovery, security is the insurance. Read them in any order; we wrote them in this one.

§ 05 WHICH FIGURE GOVERNS WHICH PILLAR

FIVE PILLARS · ONE ROOT

ONE STAT PER PILLAR. ONE FIX PER STAT.

01	AI Adoption	95% of AI pilots never reach production.	VOICE OF THE ENTERPRISE
02	Data Architecture	42% of what your best employee knows lives in their head.	PANOPTO / YOUGOV
03	Software Integration	20 hrs / wk spent searching for what is already known.	COVEO
04	Workflow Automation	58% of “new” work is re-solving problems already solved.	PANOPTO RESEARCH
05	Digital Security	5–12 mo to recover from a single key-person departure.	SHRM

HOW TO USE THE MAP

If a single figure on this page is the one that sounds like your business, jump to that pillar next. The pillars are independent enough to be read standalone, and pricing is the same across all five.

01 / AI

AI ADOPTION.

95%

of AI pilots
never reach production

AI that actually does the work. Built on your data. Plugged into your day. No demos that go nowhere.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE.

- **Operations copilots.** The chat happens inside the system the operators already use. Not a tab.
- **Document automation.** The 30-minute proposal becomes a 30-second draft your reps still edit.
- **Inbox triage.** Email categorized, drafted, queued. You approve. The model never sends without you.
- **Decision support, not replacement.** The model surfaces the option. The human still picks.

WHERE IT GOES WRONG.

Most pilots fail because they were demos: a chat box bolted onto nothing. Our rule: AI sits *inside* the operating system. Reads your data, writes back to your systems, owned by the same people who own the rest of the stack.

THE QUESTION TO ASK

Is the model wired to my real data, or is it a standalone demo?

If the answer is “standalone,” the project will join the 95%. Insist on a thin, real, useful integration before the polish.

PRICING BOTH DOORS

BUILD · DOOR 01

$1,500 FROM

RUN · DOOR 02

$150 / MO

02 / DATA

DATA ARCHITECTURE.

42%

of what your best employee knows lives in their head

Your numbers in one place. The spreadsheets, the systems, the notebook on the desk. One source of truth your team actually uses.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE.

- **One warehouse.** A single place your numbers live. Not a dashboard. A floor underneath the dashboards.
- **Entity resolution.** Six systems each call your biggest customer a different name. We resolve them to one record.
- **Source-of-truth modeling.** Each field has a defined owner and update rule. The dispute layer named, not hidden.
- **Reporting that updates itself.** The weekly numbers stop being a person.

WHY IT MATTERS FIRST.

AI fails on bad data. Reporting fails on bad data. Decisions fail on bad data. Data is the foundation under every other pillar, even when the engagement starts as "just an AI thing." We build the smallest, fastest source-of-truth that answers the question on the table.

THE QUESTION TO ASK

If my analyst quits today, can the next person rebuild the Tuesday report by reading something?

If the answer involves "ask Karen," you have a data architecture problem disguised as a reporting problem.

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03 / SOFT

SOFTWARE INTEGRATION.

20 hrs/wk
spent searching for what is already known across your tools

Your tools, finally talking to each other. Fewer logins. Fewer open tabs. One stack instead of forty subscriptions you forgot you were paying for.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE.

- **CRM ↔ accounting ↔ ops.** The customer record matches everywhere it lives. The invoice you sent matches the deal you closed.
- **Vendor consolidation.** Forty subscriptions become twelve. The exits are documented before the on-ramps.
- **API hardening.** When a vendor changes the contract, the change is contained, not catastrophic.
- **SSO across the stack.** One login. One offboarding. One audit trail.

THE PRINCIPLE.

No rip-and-replace. We connect what you already run: Salesforce, HubSpot, Stripe, QuickBooks, Notion, Airtable, Google, Microsoft. We integrate; we don't resell. Time savings show up inside the first month.

THE QUESTION TO ASK

How many systems hold a copy of the same customer record today?

If it's more than two, you are paying for the same data twice and reconciling it by hand.

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04 / FLOW

WORKFLOW AUTOMATION.

58%

of “new” work is re-solving problems already solved

The work that always needed you, doesn't anymore. The routine runs itself. Your team handles the decisions that matter.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE.

- **Repetitive ops, removed.** The same five-step process that ran sixty times a week, now runs by itself.
- **Approval chains, defined.** Who signs off, in what order, with what fallback if they're out.
- **Handoffs, instrumented.** Sales to ops. Ops to finance. Each handoff has a checklist that knows when it was completed.
- **Audit trail, free.** Every run leaves a log. Every log is queryable.

WHERE HUMANS STAY.

Repeat work, run by machines. Judgment, kept by humans. We don't automate decisions that need a human in the loop. The result: more time for the work nobody else can do, less time on what should have stopped needing a person years ago.

THE QUESTION TO ASK

How much of last week's work was something we already did the week before?

The Panopto 58% figure says: more than half. If you don't recognize that in your own week, look harder.

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05 / SEC

DIGITAL SECURITY.

5–12 mo
to recover from a single key-person departure

The basics, done right. Logins, backups, access, posture. The boring stuff that costs you the deal when the next buyer looks at it first.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE.

- **Identity & access.** Every person, every system, every permission, on one map. Off-boarding takes minutes, not weeks.
- **Backups that actually restore.** We test the restore. A backup that never restores is a hope.
- **Vendor risk.** A small, honest list of who has access to what, reviewed quarterly, not annually.
- **Diligence-ready.** When the buyer or insurer asks, you have the answer.

SIZED FOR MID-MARKET.

Not enterprise security theatre. Mid-market operators don't need a SOC team; they need the boring fundamentals done right, on a budget that matches the business. It's also an exit-value lever: buyers discount sloppy diligence, insurers raise premiums on it.

THE QUESTION TO ASK

When someone leaves, how many systems does the IT person have to remember to disable?

If the answer involves more than ten minutes or a printed checklist, your offboarding is your single largest insider-risk surface.

PRICING BOTH DOORS

BUILD · DOOR 01

$1,500 FROM

RUN · DOOR 02

$150 / MO

§ 11 HOW WE ENGAGE

PICK ONE, OR BOTH · SAME OPERATORS BEHIND BOTH

TWO DOORS. NO LOCK-IN.

Pick one, or both. Same operators behind both doors. Same pricing on every pillar. Never a multi-year commitment.

01 / CUSTOM PRODUCTS

YOU OWN IT

FROM

$1,500

Fixed-scope build. You own the code, the data, and the infrastructure. 50/50 deposit and delivery. One-time engagement, no upper band. Discovery call defines scope.

WHAT YOU WALK AWAY WITH

SOURCE CODE	In your repo. Your name on the license.
INFRASTRUCTURE	In your cloud account. Your billing, your control.
HANDOFF DOC	A runbook your next dev can read on day one.
OFF-RAMP	Written before the on-ramp. No exit fees.

02 / MANAGED SERVICES

WE RUN IT

FROM

$150 / MO

We run it. You don't. Monitoring, sync, dashboards, reporting, and the patches when a vendor changes an API. Month to month.

WHAT RUNS WHILE YOU SLEEP

MONITORING	If it breaks, you hear it from us first.
PATCHES & UPGRADES	Vendor API changes, library bumps, kept current.
MONTHLY DIGEST	What ran, what changed, what to watch.
CANCELLATION	One month notice. No claw-back. Code stays yours.

LESS SPRAWL. MORE CONTROL.

You get your time back.

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