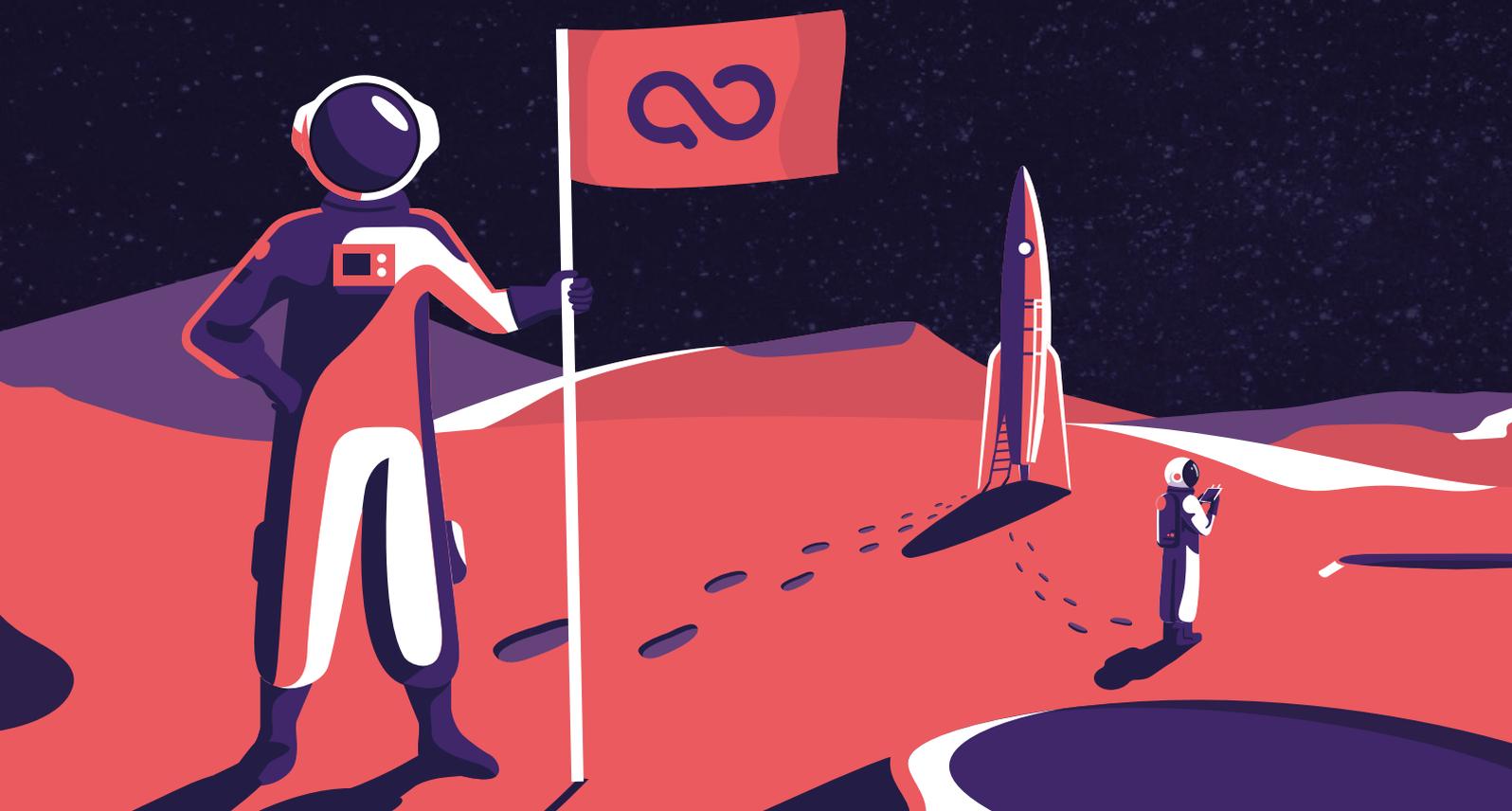


Retail Store Productivity: the next generation.



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Big idea: To significantly improve store productivity, retailers need a system-wide, business-wide approach, with unified technology at the center.

Why it matters: Retail businesses are heavily siloed, but being able to work up, down and across the organization frictionlessly is now more critical than ever.

Why retailers need to urgently focus on productivity.

Chart 1. Retail productivity growth over last 30-years (%)



Source: U.S. BLS, excluding non-retail stores

Big idea:

Despite all the recent innovation, store productivity has been far lower in this decade than previous ones and is the biggest issue retailers need to fix.

Why this matters:

In the long run productivity is everything, in the short and medium term it's the only way to combat a current environment of inflation, interest rates and labor tightness.

The pandemic has hidden something. Over the last 15 years, retail has not been able to grow as productively as the 20 years before.

This comes at the same time as retail's going through the biggest transformation in its history. Moving from exclusively within four walls (where 99% of viewing and purchasing happened) to a much more broad and complex environment. Retailers need to acquire and engage their customers across many channels and employ multiple fulfilment methods to allow them to buy how they want, where they want, when they want.

The goal for any retailer has to be to embed this more complex business operating model into more productive operations.

“

You can see the digital age everywhere but the productivity statistics.”



CONSUMER AND RETAIL GROUP

Why productivity urgently matters.

“Productivity isn’t everything but in the long run it’s almost everything” Paul Krugman, Nobel Laureate.

High inflation, high interest rates and tight job markets have put severe pressure on P&Ls. Simultaneously the higher cost of living is stopping retailers passing on these costs fully to consumers.

The only option retailers have is to increase productivity at a rate sustainably higher than any erosion they are seeing.

A potential golden age falling short.

“You can see the digital age everywhere but the productivity statistics” – Robert Solow.

The last 15 years have seen a boon in technology. Retailers have more data and more potential tools at their disposal than ever before.

Yet speak to the front line in retail and they feel more overwhelmed with activities to be done and more disengaged than ever before. More processes, more data, more systems, more reports, more tasks have them running to stand still.

It’s time for retail to refocus on not just expanding, but also building a productive business.

A simple formula to follow.

Thankfully productivity is a simple formula to consider: a numerator and a denominator.

$$\text{Productivity} = \frac{\text{Total output}}{\text{Total input}}$$

- Numerator = the output: what has been achieved?
- Denominator = the input: how many hours have been worked?

This report will explore how retailers can influence both elements of this productivity equation. It also dives deeper into how some more forward-leaning retailers are already tackling productivity in retail's most challenging areas.

Tackling both sides of the productivity formula – using data.

Big idea:

Better use of current data in the field is one of the retail's biggest opportunities to drive more output and reduce excess work.

Why this matters:

Companies send out 40 – 150 reports and 100s of tasks to Managers each week. Despite spending up to 50% of their time on admin, performance is only improving at random and workload is only increasing.

In the last 12 months Quorso has interviewed retailers responsible for >358k stores and >\$3.66trn of sales to diagnose the issue, "what's stopping retailers being more productive?"

Most retail headlines have been focused on the need for automation to reduce store labor – robots to help re-stocking, cashierless "just walk out" technology, etc.

There is, however, an opportunity closer to home...your data.

Retailers have more data than ever before, more ability to understand scientifically, where to improve their businesses and drive productivity. But so far they aren't doing it, why?

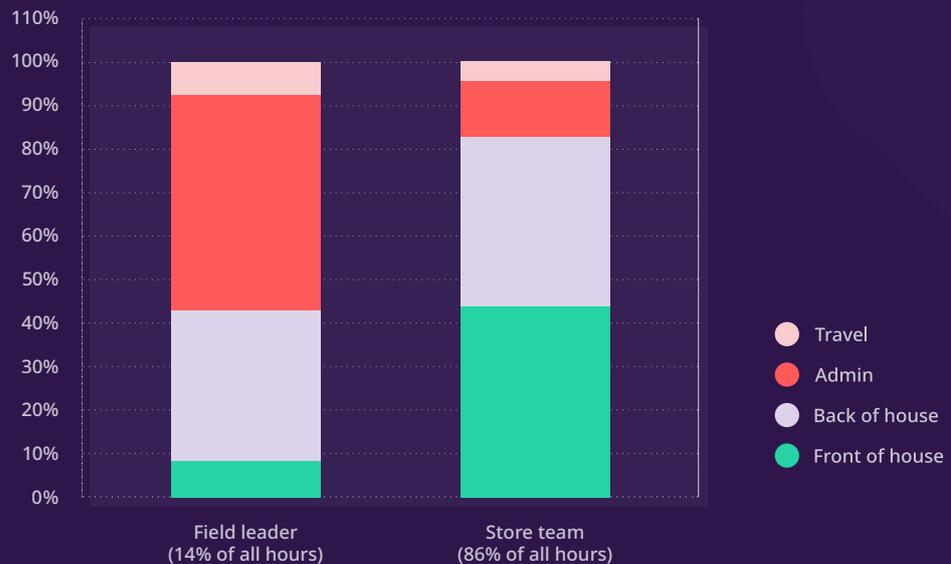
Stop treating your field teams like analytics engines.

As the amount of data and tasks in retail has exploded, the standard response has been to send it all to the field and ask them "figure it out". The range of reports in the companies we surveyed averaged 57 with a range from 40 – 150.

As Chart 2. shows, Store and District Leaders can be spending up to 50% of their week trying to understand where to focus and what to do. Time that's not spent coaching teams or helping customers (the things we employed them for).

But data can help both drive more output and reduce excess work when used right.

Chart 2. Split of field leader and store leader time on activities



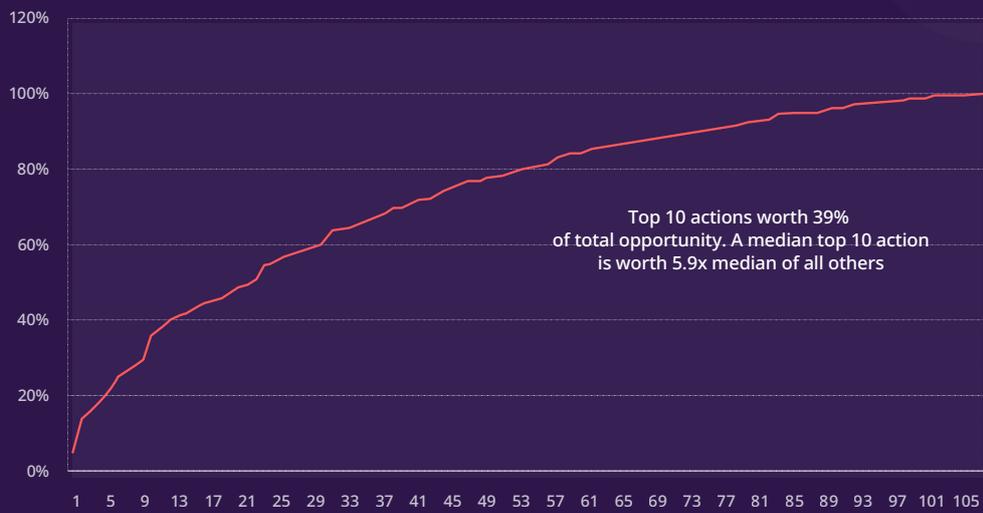
Source: Quorso Surveys

Prioritization – the key to driving more output.

Quorso analyzed how many different opportunities, (defined as performance of an actionable KPI being below expectations), an employee could potentially tackle each week, based on the data they're sent. The answer is a staggering 130 – beyond anything one person could be expected to work on.

But not all opportunities are created equal. The core challenge to driving output is picking the right opportunities to fix from all this data.

Chart 3. Example cumulative value of all actionable opportunities



Source: Quorso data

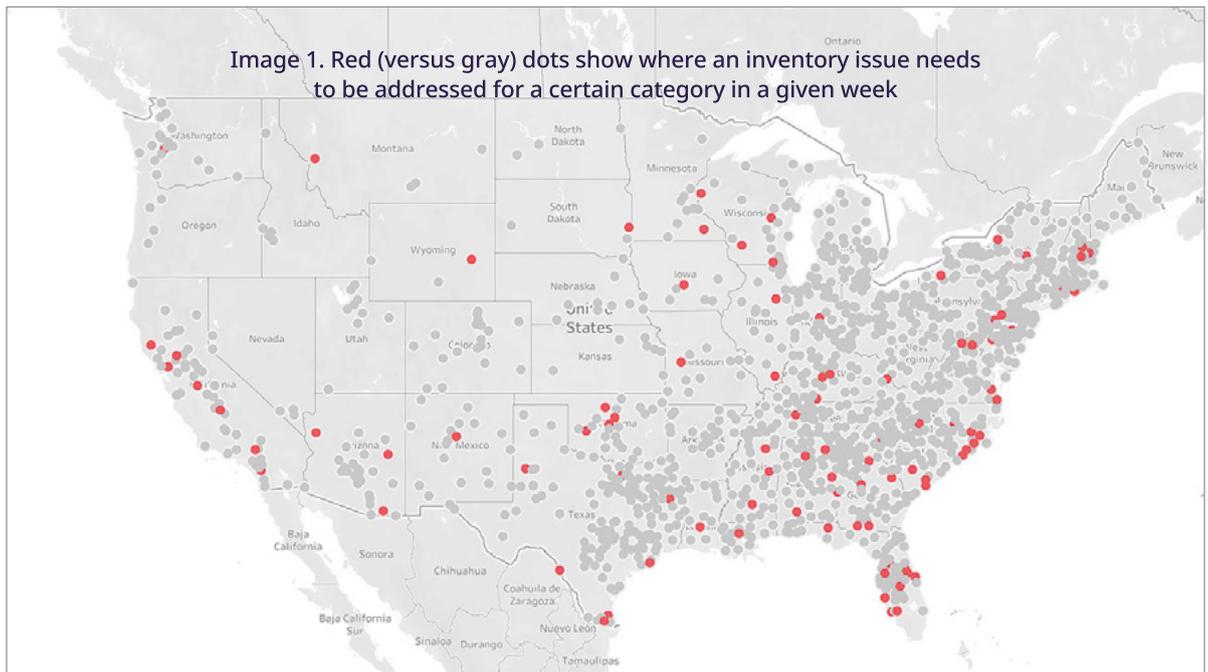
Chart 3. shows the value of prioritizing the right information. Data from our customers shows that the top 10 issues in each store have 3.5x – 7.5x more value than the next 50. So the top 10 account for 36 – 52% of the potential value that store can work on.

To see any improvements in performance, prioritizing and fixing the right things in each individual store is key.

Moving towards personalized performance at scale.

Given how valuable prioritization is, why do retailers continue to send out 100s of reports and communications per week?

A core reason is that every individual filed leader has different priorities. All the information is useful. However, it is only useful to certain individuals, some of the time. The red (versus gray) dots in Image 1 show where, in a ~2,000 store retail chain, an inventory issue needs to be addressed for a certain category in a given week. Everyone will get the report for all categories, but it will only be relevant for <5% of recipients, and that 5% will be different every week.



Remove excess work.

Helping field teams with the analytical challenge of prioritization is essential and would unlock 15-50% of their time depending on your current status quo. It is also critical to retaining these employees. As noted in our article “Why Field Leaders should be your focus in 2023”, experienced employees are leaving at an alarming rate.

But there are a number of processes in retail that remain highly manual and verification based.

- Stock checks
- POG review
- VM / promotional display checks
- Compliance checks
- Pricing checks
- Cash reconciliation
- Goods receipt

The greatest opportunity in retail will always be how to make processes in the store more efficient and less time-consuming. As Chart 2. shows, the labor executing these tasks is ~85% of your total field labor cost.

The most radical, data-driven transformation is process simplification. We’ve seen, for example, how changing inventory processes to exception-based, or verifying promotion compliance with data, can help unlock millions of dollars for retailers (covered later in this report).

Make work count.

Analytics and data can ensure even the most mundane retail processes – the ones few, if anyone, enjoys – still drive performance every day.

We’ll take a look at how data can help in areas like inventory, sales and compliance. But first, how can you distribute information to the field in a smarter way, improving prioritization and reducing excess work?

Data-informed alerts – a secret key to unlocking productivity.

Big idea:

Sending targeted, relevant, data-informed alerts rather than mass reports and tasks boosts focus and drives better results.

Why this matters:

Data-informed alerts are being used to tackle some of retail's biggest challenges.

Driving productivity in stores come down to three crucial components:

- a. Prioritizing the most valuable information to act on
- b. Removing excess work to ensure action happens as frictionlessly as possible
- c. Embedding this in a scientific system of measurement and learning

Standard, mass reporting fails to achieve any of these. Data-informed alerts are the next evolution, designed specifically to power store productivity.

Instead of receiving broadcast information and tasks, Field Leaders and teams only receive personally relevant information to ensure they take the most impactful actions.

Alerts consist of:

1. Prioritized insight.

Granular insights using artificial intelligence, show Field Leaders not only where but also how, to make the most impactful decisions.

2. Intelligent workflows.

Data-powered workflows use crowd-sourced best practices to help Field Leaders take fast, effective action.

3. Measure impact.

Granular tracking of whether fixing an issue has led to performance improvement helps build scientific learnings into an organization.

See how data-informed alerts can help tackle some of the most important issues in retail:

- Inventory management
- Driving sales
- Fixing labor and operational challenges





Inventory Management – moving to a data-informed, exception-based approach.

Big idea:

Inventory accuracy doesn't need more processes or tech, it needs better use of existing data.

Why this matters:

Inventory inaccuracy has been ~65% for the last decade and costs retailers 4-8% of sales annually, whilst also having Balance Sheet consequences. The introduction of products like RFID as well as labor-heavy correction processes haven't helped. But an exception-based, data-led approach can.

Inventory accuracy is a foundation on which all retail is based. Demand forecasting, order management, the ultimate end customer experience, all rely on accurate and timely inventory management.

Yet inventory accuracy is notoriously difficult in retail, and becoming more so with the rise of omnichannel. Independent surveys over the last decade continuously show that, especially in large complex stores, inaccuracies can be found in ~65% of stock counts.

To date, retailers have used two methods to fix inaccuracy:

1. **Labor heavy processes** – a highly time consuming, banal activity for associates to perform e.g. stock counts. Processes that can also lead to greater inaccuracies due to greater manual interventions
2. **Preventative measures** – e.g. RFID to reduce counting or check-out errors, or tags on high-value items. However, these technologies have proven expensive, especially with fast-selling goods

Here at Quorso, we think there is a third way, cheaper and less time-consuming than either of these methods, while leading to better outputs and thus far more productive.

A data-informed, exception-based approach to inventory accuracy management.

There are good reasons why inventory accuracy will never be 100%. Retail is a physical activity. Damages occur, theft occurs, human errors occur. Even with corrective and preventative measures employed, inaccuracies will still occur.

An exception-based approach to inventory inaccuracy isn't looking to achieve 100% accuracy, but to alert on:

1. Where patterns of behaviour suggest that inventory is highly likely inaccurate
2. The value of fixing this outweighs the cost of doing so

Here's an example of the process we used to drive exception-based inventory accuracy at a large national retailer:

1. Understanding expected behavior.

The original focus was on high-volume SKUs with an appropriate value, so that any labor investment would be outweighed by the value from fixing the inventory inaccuracy. We looked at how those sales of those SKUs were expected to perform in each store, based on cohorts of stores like them.

2. Building out logic to highlight exceptions.

Using data science, we looked to see where patterns suggested an exception based on sales behavior, inventory on hand and overall volatility.

This reduced the number of SKUs to check from the full Stock Count of 100s to typically 5-7 high priority SKUs, saving hours of labor per week.

3. Informing field team through a simple experience.

Simple, clear communications to the team are essential for action. Rather than hiding the exceptions in volumes of reports, very clear alerts to the responsible team were necessary to ensure focus and confirm that action had been taken.

This clear, direct communication further reduced the labor time required.

4. Tracking impact and refining.

By measuring the success of each alert and adjusting accordingly, we were able to continuously refine our logic and improve our impact. Initially, our hit rate on required adjustments was <50%, but it is now above 90%. Unexpected benefits were also unlocked, such as releasing millions of dollars of phantom inventory.

Rethink your inventory management approach in 2023.

As we go into a more complex retail environment, inventory management is only getting harder. But the solution doesn't have to be more manual processes or large investments in e.g. RFID or computer vision. Instead it might be right under retailers' noses – using your own data smarter.

Exception-based inventory management processes can be used to:

- Reduce inventory stock processes
- Identify phantom inventory blocking replenishment
- Understand where inventory checks aren't occurring
- Understand price erosion
- Understand where stores, supply chain and merchandising are mismatched e.g. where stores are overstocked
- Reduce shrink by highlighting problem areas
- Maintain a more accurate inventory record
- Identify next-best store to send excess inventory
- Reduce markdowns

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Data-informed alerts drive sales your CFO will sign off on.

Big idea:

To drive productivity, Store Ops team initiatives can't just focus on cost, they need to drive revenue.

Why this matters:

Store Ops teams will be pushed to focus on costs, but there are two parts of the productivity equation and sales is just as important, with just as much potential.

Any Store Ops initiative, especially now, needs CFO buy-in. But there's a secret that everyone in Store Ops who has taken a business case to the CFO knows.

They don't think Store Ops initiatives can drive sales.* (*beyond further store openings)

Typically this is just included as a "soft factor" in any proposal initiative.

But in a world where productivity growth is essential, Store Ops teams need to look for the low hanging fruit when it comes to driving sales.

In our work with retailers, we've found that there are three core areas where taking a more data-informed approach can unlock at least a 100 bps sales uplift for any business.

1. Better execution of new product launches.

New promotions, product launches and pricing changes are a fundamental part of driving sales in store. Yet as is well known, executional compliance remains very low. Task completion is neither an accurate signal of actual completion, nor that an initiative has been implemented correctly. Retailers have to rely on highly manual checks to follow up.

Adding a data-informed approach helps by giving better contextual reminders throughout the sales lifecycle. Here's an example of an approach we took with a national specialty retailer on a new product launch:

- *Is it set-up correctly?* Alert stores which have not sold any SKUs in the new range and request realtime feedback. Through this, we discovered 62% of stores had issues in the first week, either through product not being received or third-party teams not setting up the displays, allowing immediate rectification
- *Is it working as expected?* After the initial launch, alerts were based on underperformance vs forecast. We were able to pinpoint launches that still weren't operating as expected and capture learnings on how to fix them, getting compliance up to 90%+ within 3 weeks
- *Where can we optimize further?* Post-launch, alerts continued to be triggered by underperformance vs comparable stores in this new product range, but only when the opportunity was significantly valuable

2. Drop offs.

In high-velocity retail stores, something is always going wrong. The question is: are you noticing and fixing it quickly enough?

Drop-offs are items we analyze that have rapidly dropped off from expected sales patterns. Ultimately these will always get noticed and fixed. However, the longer it takes to fix them the greater the degree of lost sales.

By using data-informed alerts, our data shows drop offs typically see a return to trend, (rather than continued underperformance), recovering 25% more sales over the next 4 week period. Chart 4a. shows visually how this occurs.

3. Structural opportunities.

The final area a data-informed approach can drive sales is structural opportunities, by identifying areas in the store that are under-indexing vs peer stores. This is especially valuable when stores have the ability to experiment and e.g., a certain presentation change they've made may be detrimental but doesn't get picked up for months.

Data-informed alerts can spot this breakaway by identifying the poor performers much faster, and then sharing contextual best practice from the leading stores (i.e. what training techniques a fashion retailer is using at the fitting room to help staff better attach accessory products).

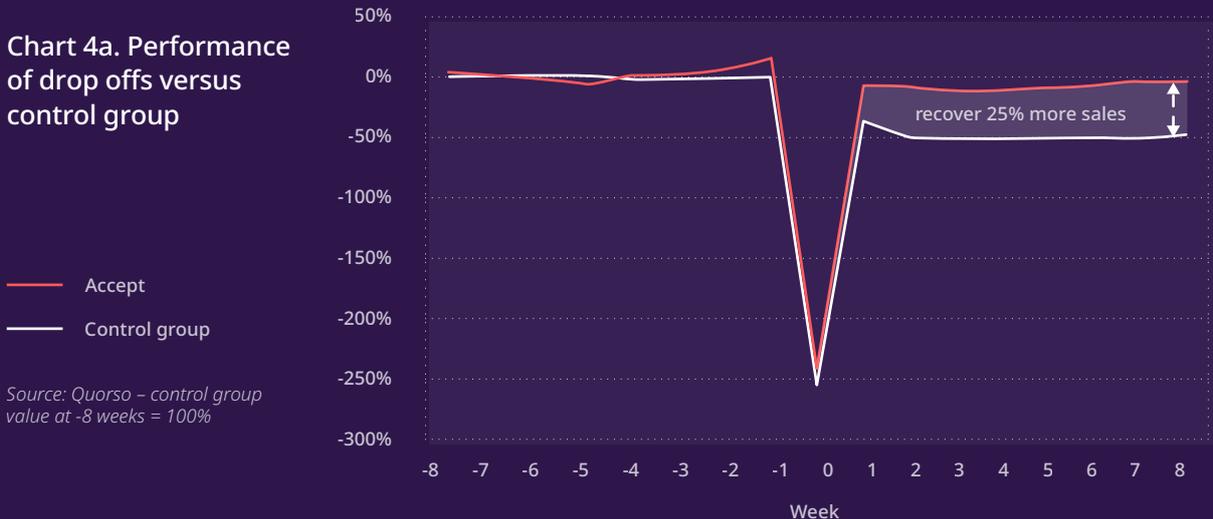
We've typically found that structural opportunities in sales lead to 6.3% of sales uplift when suggested to stores.

Being more scientific about sales.

The beauty of a more data-informed approach is it builds more scientific learnings into the organization. Crowdsourced knowledge is shared organically about which actions drive impact and which don't.

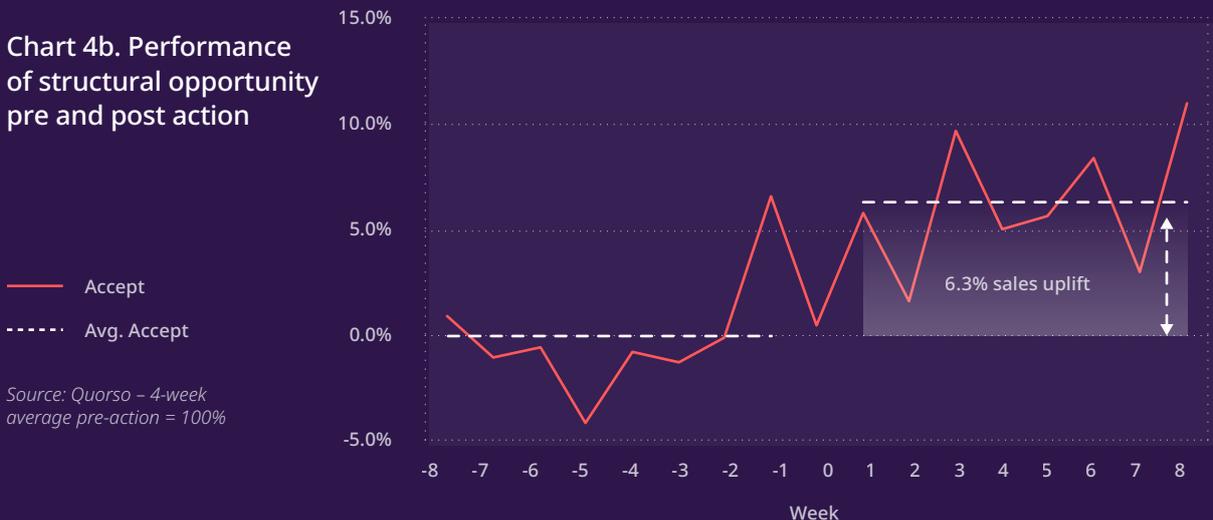
So your CFO won't just be excited by the immediate ROI of such an approach, but the ongoing benefits over time as well.

Chart 4a. Performance of drop offs versus control group



Source: Quorso – control group value at -8 weeks = 100%

Chart 4b. Performance of structural opportunity pre and post action



Source: Quorso – 4-week average pre-action = 100%

Data-informed alerts to coach Field Leaders to fix labor and operational challenges.

Big idea:

Data-informed coaching solves an important retail paradox. How can I drive more autonomy and decision making into stores while also ensuring the consistency that a prescriptive approach allows.

Why this matters:

The very largest retailers are moving away from being overly prescriptive to how stores should run, driven by the need to motivate employees and be more local in decision making. But retailers still need to capture the benefits of network standardisation and brand consistency.

For over 20 years, Store Ops teams have continuously tried to make retail more standardized and uniform, at its most extreme, planning out entirely the activities of a store minute by minute.

Whilst this provided initial benefits like process standardization and brand consistency, such a prescriptive approach is starting to show cracks.

Stores more than ever need to adapt to local needs and challenges, requiring decision-making at a more local level. Managers and teams are revolting against being treated like compliant robots and want to be freed to be the type of empowered team Sam Walton used to talk about.

So should retailers fully let the reigns go?

Such an approach would remove the benefit of cross-network optimization and reduce the consistency of brand and experience that customers want.

So is retail in a forced choice?

The promise of data-informed, personalized coaching.

At Quorso we have seen that the value lies actually in a middle ground – providing data-informed alerts to employees that are designed by the center to guide their focus, while still giving them a degree of autonomy on how to take action.

Rather than prescriptively telling employees to do certain tasks, we instead send alerts to the right person at the right time, highlighting what is going wrong, with guidance sourced from the whole network on how best to fix it.

The nuance here can be seen in the following example. Rather than prescriptively telling a store team to clean the store floor every morning, (something a well-drilled team does automatically and will get frustrated by having to check off daily), instead show them that their CSAT scores on cleanliness have been trending down over the last 4 weeks and ask them to focus on it.

To demonstrate the breadth of these types of coaching alerts, we are focusing on the following ones with a national convenience chain:

- **Identifying trends where management coaching is needed** – Which managers are always submitting late schedules, not allocating labor to budget, or letting conversion drop in the evenings?
- **Understanding where employees need upskilling** – Which new product areas are underperforming because of lack of training? Which individuals struggle to build baskets or sell attachment items at the checkout?
- **Getting ahead of employee/manager issues** – Which employees have hit absence thresholds and are at risk of leaving? Who has been staffed 12 days in a row and might need a break?
- **Understanding where operational issues are** – Which stores are opening late/closing early, not completing compliance reports, allowing check-out times to balloon, or not getting self-checkouts repaired on time?

Because alerts are data-informed, and only received when relevant, despite the 80+ different use cases, no manager receives more than 11 highest priority alerts per week.

Chart 5. below shows how compliance improves over time when stores are sent data-driven operational alerts.

There is clear gap in performance between those acting on alerts and those in the control group (approx. 17%). 'Critical Alert Incidence' is the number of times a store was outside the SLA of a critical KPI, rebased to week 1 = 100%.

Chart 5. Number of times a store was outside the SLA of a critical KPI alert, rebased to week 1=100%



Source: Quorso data

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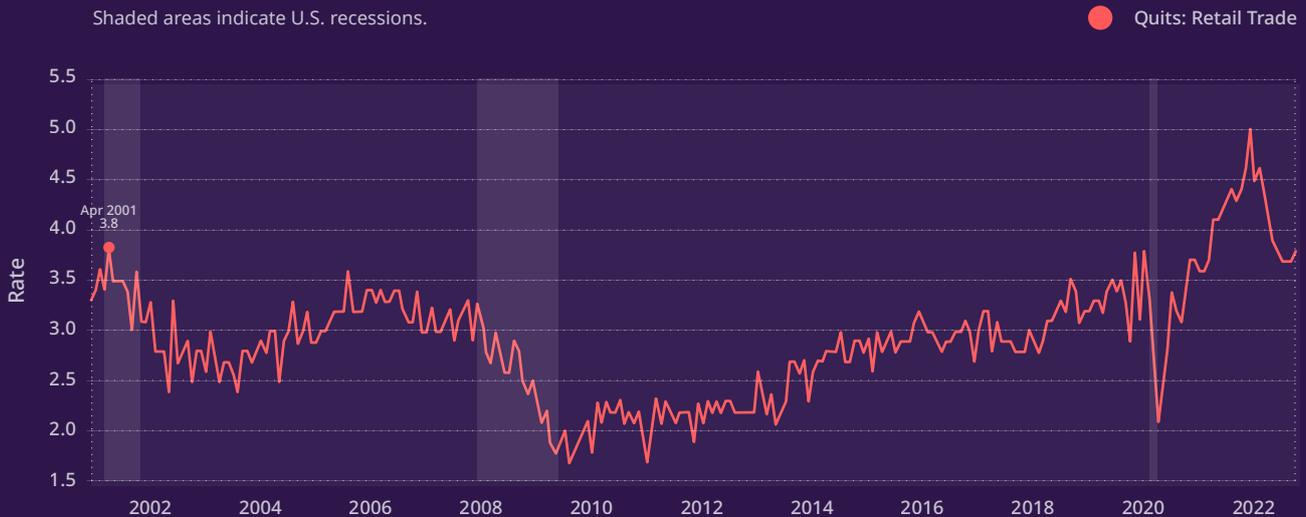
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This approach connects humans and data together with unquestionable effectiveness. It follows the principle of chessmaster Gary Kasparov, who explains that an augmented human trained by AI will outperform a grandmaster, or a computer, on their own.

It's time we helped all our field leaders become grandmasters.

Why Field Leaders should be your focus in 2023.

Chart 6. Total retail quits seasonally adjusted (%)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Big idea:

Retail employee turnover spiked in 2022, its levels remain high but not outside of historic trends. It's the relative increase in manager turnover that's creating serious issues.

Why this matters:

District and Store managers are the lynchpin of the business – a vital cog between strategy and execution. They drive productivity, results and engagement. Losing them is majorly impacting retailer's businesses.

Retail has always had a lot of negative press for being a high turnover industry.

In many ways it can do better, but there are good reasons why it has such high turnover and the industry provides a lot of societal benefits by being so:

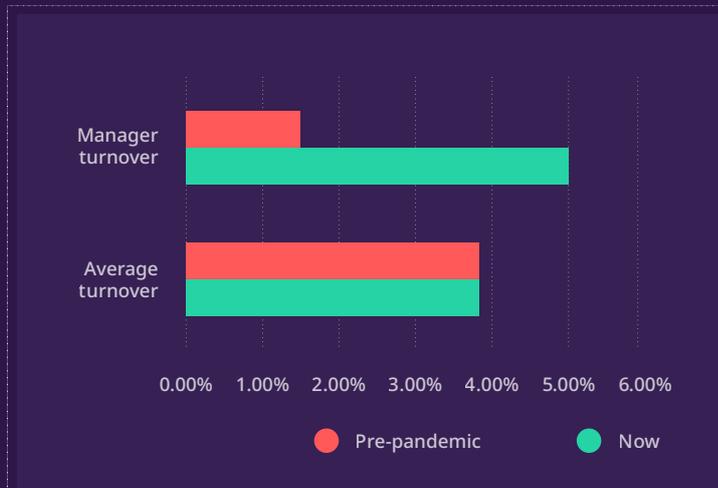
- Retail's seasonal nature allows 6 out of 10 Americans to gain employment in retail at some stage
- Retail offers more part-time and short-term employment than any other sector, giving many families much needed flexibility
- It is the highest employer of young people, giving them important foundational careers

The turnover spike post-pandemic seems to be moderating. But when you look at the type of turnover there is one cohort that is seeing big issues...your Field Leaders.

The worrying trend of lost Field Leaders.

Managers typically are some of the stickiest people within the organization. But despite average industry turnover returning to pre-pandemic levels, Field Leader turnover remains 3.6x higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Chart 7a. Retail turnover by cohort



Source: JOLTS, Vox, Gusto

Chart 7b. Stable retail workers by age group

Age group	% stable workers
14 – 18	41.9%
19 – 21	50.1%
22 – 24	57.8%
25 – 34	67.1%
35 – 44	73.8%
45 – 54	78.4%
55 – 64	82.1%
65 – 99	82.5%

Source: NRF

There are several reasons why retailers should really care about this.

1. Loss of institutional knowledge.

Your average Field Leader has 20+ years of institutional knowledge and often an unrivalled understanding of the store and business. Factoring in new recruitment and onboarding time it can take over 12+ months to get this knowledge back into a store.

2. Lack of engagement.

Field leaders drive performance of the store, they motivate their teams and they spot and fix issues that need resolving. Engaged Field Leaders have stores that are 10-20% higher performing than unengaged Field Leaders.

3. What this conveys.

Ultimately we need to ask why Field Leaders, a vital part of retail's business, are leaving? Many are burnt out from way too much pressure from the growing demands of retail, especially in the last couple of years.

A vital link.

As one SVP Ops recently said to Quorso, "I am more worried about Field Leaders than any other part of the organization, they are the vital link between our strategy and what we do day-to-day on the ground."

Look after them.

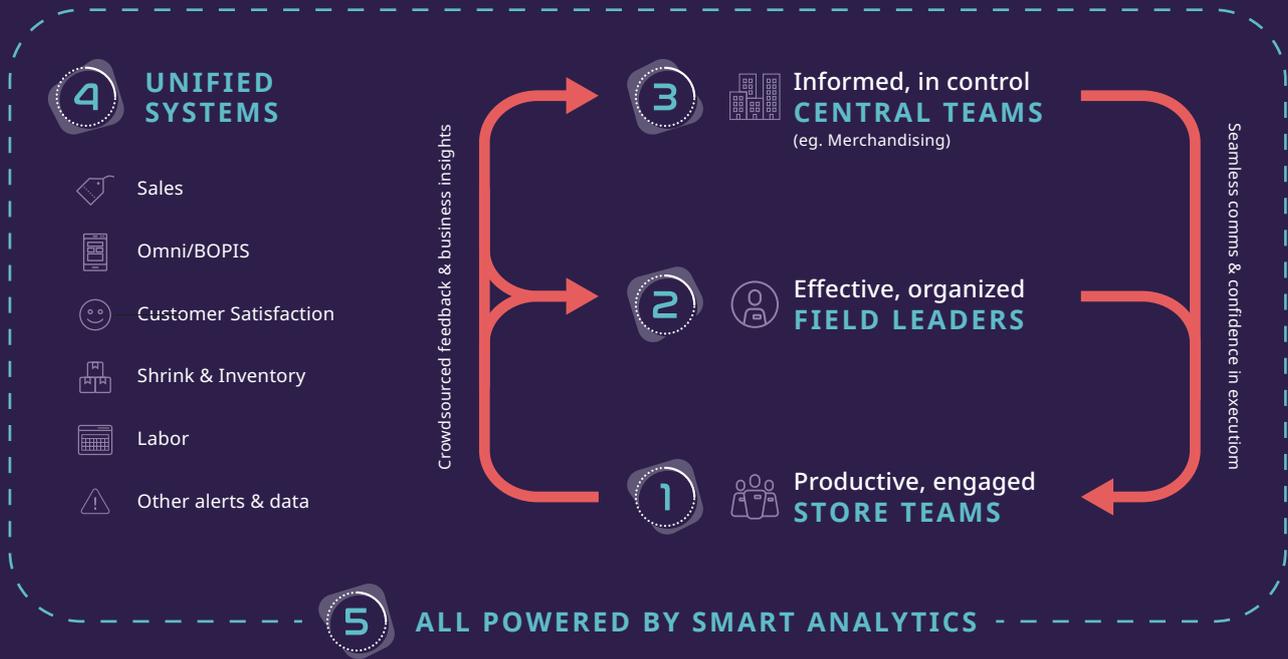
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Quorso's Vision for Store Operations



A Future Vision for Store Operations.

Big idea:

To significantly improve store productivity, retailers need a system-wide, business-wide approach, with unified technology at the center.

Why this matters:

Retail businesses are heavily siloed, but being able to work up, down and across the organization frictionlessly is now more critical than ever.

We stated at the start of this report that improving productivity is a key challenge for retailers in the near term and will be the core differentiator in the medium run.

Here at Quorso we think there are five key areas Store Operations must focus on to deliver seamless productivity.

1. Productive, engaged Store Teams.

Store Teams need to move from programmatic, box-checkers to business leaders who, with the right tools and support, are focusing on their own most valuable activities every day. Quorso data shows that prioritizing the right actions is 3.5 - 7.5x more valuable than taking random actions.

Instead of making teams feel like it's groundhog day, showing them the actions they can take to improve and the impact they have when they do so, is key to driving future store engagement and productivity.

2. Effective, in control Field Leaders.

Field Leaders are overwhelmed with too much information and comms, spending over 6 hours a week trying to understand what they need to do next.

Tools need to help them plan their week, know which stores and teams to focus their attention on, and understand what to prioritize during each store visit.

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3. Central Teams who are in the loop.

Information in retail is often a one-way communication from center to field. Finding out what is really happening requires highly manual checks and boots on the ground.

Instead, Central Teams want bubbled up insights that help them make better strategic decisions for the field. To send merchandising to the most valuable locations, to be warned early of any process challenges, to understand from the field what is driving performance. They also want to make sure best practices are disseminated effortlessly across departments, rather than being kept in silos.

4. Unified Systems.

Retail has grown in a frankenstein approach with different systems brought in to track specific data or assist specific use cases. In order to understand interdependencies and avoid the current challenges of teams needing to go to multiple places for information, systems need to be unified and streamlined.

5. All powered by smart analytics.

In a world where a chatbot can write better poetry in seconds than most humans, it is madness that we are still asking so many employees to do heavy analytical work. Augmenting teams and systems through the power of smart analytics is essential to improving decision-making.

The three core ways that data should be used to support every employee:

- Data-driven personalized priorities – to focus them on the right actions
- Intelligent workflows – to guide them towards the best solution
- Measured impact and insights – to help them continuously learn and improve

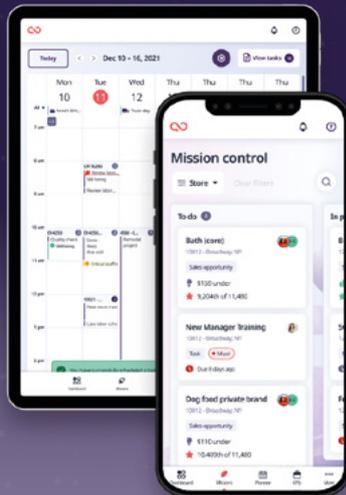
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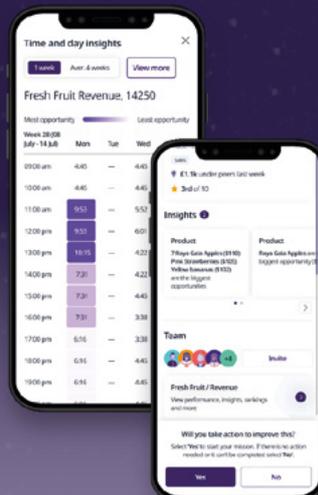
Quorso **improves store productivity** by helping field leaders to...



FOCUS

Quorso turns mass data into personal, daily priorities.

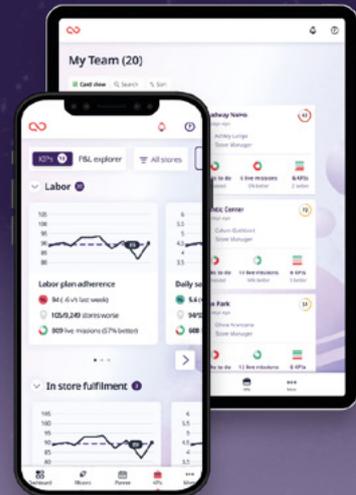
Field leaders know which stores to visit and what actions to take to drive improvement.



FIX

Quorso uses crowdsourced insights to guide action.

Field leaders solve issues fast and learn best practices.



FOLLOW UP

Quorso measures the impact of every action.

Field leaders see what works, know who to coach and celebrate their wins.

Quorso has shown us how to be smarter with data. Not only does it tell field leaders where the problem is, it provides key insights to help diagnose the issue and find a viable solution."

– Jessie Thomas
Snr Director of Store Operations



Quorso is unique in the marketplace. It combines best-in-class analytics with an intuitive workflow, helping our field leaders take the right actions to improve store performance."

– Zak Brining
SVP, Corporate Store Operations



Engagement has been extremely high from day #1. The Quorso interface is packed with information, yet simple and intuitive to use, making it easy for Store Managers to make decisions and take action."

– Michael Diedrich
VP, Store Operations



Contact us.

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Ready to take your store productivity to another planet?

- Book a [demo](#) to see how Quorso's data-driven alerts could work for you – quorso.com

