



# Developers and Sales, Sitting in a Tree

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The management at Kloia didn't want to hire salespeople and expected all engineers to do sales. They wanted this, because they were an idealist company that believed in taking responsibility and being active in defining what they get to work on. When this approach didn't work, they tried different approaches to create a balanced sales process that featured dedicated salespeople, management and senior engineers.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Increasing sales without hurting your company culture is hard. It is not uncommon to see companies that increase their sales volume by persuasively saying Yes to projects they can't deliver reliably. Such stretched commitments put a lot of strain on the engineering teams who are responsible for delivering these projects. That strain is not sustainable. It hurts the company culture irrevocably, it invites cutting corners, and it legitimizes being dishonest to customers about what one can do.

The founders at Kloia, a small IT consulting firm, have seen this play and explicitly wanted to stay away from it. They wanted to increase sales and wanted to do it in a way that would not hurt the company culture.

I joined Kloia in 2018 as a Digital Transition Consultant. I assessed the process maturity of potential clients, and openly told them whether the tools/services they asked for would actually create the results they wanted. Due to my background in product development and design, I helped with marketing efforts such as setting the tone of voice and a visual cleaning up of the brand. I also helped with consulting sales for large clients, as I had previous experience in working with large corporations at a management level.

In this report, I will share how the team at Kloia used shorter feedback loops, experiments, and flexible organizational roles to find a more effective sales approach. Kloia was founded upon fluid roles: everyone did software development, DevOps, PM, sales... This approach worked really well for delivering projects, but it was a disaster for sales. As a customer relationship manager in this journey, I will share 5 major take-aways, talk about current challenges, and hopefully inspire you to courageously experiment in your organization.

## 2. KLOIA RISES: A DEN OF ENGINEERS

Kloia is a small company in London delivering DevOps, cloud, architecture and software development services. The company was founded in 2015. As of 2021, it has around 30 full-time employees and roughly 20 part-time collaborators, most of them in Istanbul.

Kloia works with companies of any size and it has experience in a variety of sectors—from banking to public infrastructure. A typical engagement with Kloia starts with an assessment phase, followed by parallel workstreams on training, infrastructure-building, software development and process/organizational consulting. The engagements last weeks, months, or years, based on the clients' needs. To give you an idea about the nature of their work in different sectors and companies, here is a sample of past projects:

- ING is a leading international bank. Kloia came in as contracted consultants in a green field project, assessed the current bottlenecks, and delivered a next-gen microservice orchestration framework.
- Huawei is an international telecoms company that sells hardware, software and services. Kloia worked with their R&D lab in Istanbul to design a healthier software development process, and baked the principles in this process into their continuous delivery pipeline.
- Lego is a Danish toymaker. Kloia assisted them in optimizing their DevOps flows and radically increased build performance.
- Flo is an IoT company that delivers smart water infrastructure. Kloia have architected a DevOps pipeline to help them streamline their IoT development by implementing Kubernetes on AWS.

- GoDataFeed is a product listing management company that helps e-commerce vendors improve their marketplace performance. Kloia modernized the legacy architecture to a serverless architecture and improved scalability and maintainability of their platform.

Kloia's founders had strong opinions about software development and IT work. In their past jobs, they had to undertake a fair share of "IT monkey jobs": Low-value work that was a byproduct of bad business processes or work that could be easily automated and be forgotten. For them, DevOps practices and modern tools eliminated monkey jobs, and they represented a better way of building software that is fit for the modern era.

So they set out to build an engineering company that exemplifies the modern software engineering practices—not a commodity IT company that installs software and provisions servers. They hired experienced engineers who have suffered from monkey jobs in the past and offered them the opposite environment. When they hired juniors, they made sure that they were computer engineering grads with rigorous training and screened for experience in design and implementation, or managing live systems with critical traffic. Hiring only engineers was a point of pride for the founders and a genuine differentiator against the competitors.

In the rest of the report, I will talk about four cycles that Kloia went through to figure out a healthy sales approach for an idealist small IT company. These cycles weren't planned. The team started the next cycle only when they found out that the current cycle didn't work. Let's start with the first cycle: Engineers doing sales.

### 3. CYCLE 1: ENGINEERS DOING SALES

Kloia consisted only of engineers between 2015 and 2017. The small team size and the exclusive focus on quality engineering implied three things:

1. Everyone was an engineer, so everyone did software development, QA, DevOps, project management, and sales.
2. People took on different responsibilities based on their strengths, not titles.
3. The distribution of these responsibilities among team members changed in every project and client.

In this approach, engineers were expected to do sales. However, engineers aren't the first group of people that come to mind when talking about success in sales. This is a generalization, but the introverted nature of computer engineering education is not usually geared for training highly empathetic, charismatic individuals who are excellent at making connections with people. The experienced engineers at Kloia were geeks above all and they were fine with this identity. Their focus was on the technical quality of their work and the reputation they would get from delivering technically impressive results. They were confident about the satisfaction they will create at the end of the project. Therefore, managing how the customers felt about how the work was delivered was not a priority.

Despite this lack of social skills, the first sales by engineers were very successful at Kloia. The founders and the first employees leveraged their own networks to spread the word and find prospects. Because the team was made of experienced engineers, it was fairly easy to book introduction meetings based on old connections.

Bringing top quality engineers to introductory sales meetings had an incredibly positive impact on the customer perception. Every competitor had a separate sales team that would approach prospect companies. Kloia stood out among them. During the first prospect meetings, they would introduce themselves as "the company without a sales team." They would tell the client that they are all engineers, and that they will be the ones that the client will be working with during the project. This perception opened many doors for Kloia.

One of the biggest benefits of having engineers do sales was getting very fast and accurate answers to clients' questions. A competing sales team had to go back to their engineering team when the client asked technical questions. This gap in knowledge created an advantage for the Kloia team. These technical questions were usually the deciding factors for the contract. A competing team of salespeople would have to do three or more meetings to get the answers from their engineers and relay them back to the customer. In contrast, it would take Kloia two or three meetings to close a deal.

Bringing engineers into the sales process also set them up for success during the project. For example, getting engineers who are going to do the integration work for the tool involved in the sales cycle showed them the rough spots ahead and gave them time to think about solutions. This head start gave them a lot of advantage on day 1, which resulted in much faster, higher quality integrations. It was that superhuman illusion: "How can they know so much about what will work and what won't?" It is because they had time to think about it, try it out and arrive with a set of possible solutions.

After two years, Kloia's small team of 10-15 engineers started competing against big label consulting firms in bids and won them due to their very high-quality work. But then, things got harder.

### 3.1 Challenge: Torn Between Engineering and Client Relations

The success during the first two years brought in more clients, hence required more hires. These new hires were also high-caliber engineers. They were hired for their technical prowess and flexibility in coming up with solutions for demanding clients. During their hiring process, they were briefed about the everyone-does-everything nature of work at Kloia. The candidates expressed that they were fine with it, as long as the non-engineering tasks did not overrun engineering responsibilities.

The engineering responsibilities always stayed ahead of non-engineering responsibilities. However, over time, it became clear that very few hires enjoyed sales and client relations. The biggest complaint was the difference between the nature of non-engineering tasks versus engineering tasks. Engineering tasks are clearly defined, they can be solved with discrete steps, and you can determine whether you have reached the desired done state. Non-engineering tasks such as sales, however, are loosely defined, require more personal interpretation, and a state of success may not be the same for all parties involved.

A good example for this would be a long-running contract process that has gone through multiple changes in scope, vetted by different managers each time, and finalized through a final fight with the procurement department. While this process is very natural for a salesperson, many Kloia engineers despised these rounds.

In light of this, Kloia management adjusted who would be involved in the sales cycles. They knew that some team members were more inclined towards the non-engineering tasks, whereas others were purely focused on technical execution. Taking this into consideration, they slowly took away the sales responsibilities from more technically inclined engineers. After this change, only the founders and a few engineers were tasked with chasing clients, making new proposals, and interacting with prospects.

This change in responsibilities solved the morale problem, but it was not scalable at all. The 3-5 people who were taking on the sales responsibilities in addition to their engineering workload were struggling to close current prospects and attract leads. Unfortunately, this shortage led to an increase in the most demoralizing aspect of sales: the engagement that never ends. There was a notable increase in the long-running, ambiguous engagements with potential clients that go nowhere. This increase was due to the lack of time on the person responsible for the sale, as they now needed to look after more clients and prospects.

At this point, it was clear that company growth aspirations could not be met with a small number of engineers who were willing to be involved in the sales process. As a result, Kloia management decided to get some external help.

## 4. CYCLE 2: SOME SALES ACTIVITIES WERE OUTSOURCED

The world is filled with examples of IT companies who are not made up of engineers doing sales. Some of them have their internal sales teams, some outsource their sales to a network of commissioned salespeople, to an external team, or get listed in a referral network. Some companies combine these approaches.

Kloia management was not open to any of these approaches due to their ideals. Hiring a sales team would be the exact opposite of what they were rooting for during their first successful years. They thought that finding salespeople who are as technically savvy, as the current engineers would be extremely hard. Training them would take too much time and effort. This problem would be more serious with external parties and commissioned salespeople, as these providers usually work with multiple parties, carry different business cards, and know just enough about the companies they are representing to survive a sales call.

Kloia wanted well informed, dedicated, maybe even devoted solution finders who would be with the client before, during, and after the sales process. However, it was clear that building an engineering team with such capabilities was not feasible for Kloia. Yet Kloia benefited from having engineers be a part of the sales process, so they wanted to keep that model as much as possible.

As an experiment, they wanted to see if they could keep engineers in the sales process by only outsourcing portions of sales. To see if this is possible, they segmented Kloia's offerings into three types:

1. Consulting: Short, very focused projects that require highly specialized knowledge or experience. Kloia's consulting projects usually consist of 1-3 senior engineers, they last several weeks.
2. Services: Medium to long engagements where Kloia engineers work on the client software or make significant changes to the infrastructure. Kloia's services projects usually consist of 3-10 engineers from multiple levels of expertise, they last multiple months, even years.

3. Tools: Short to medium length engagements where the client licenses a tool from a vendor that Kloia has partnered with (such as AWS, Rancher, or Humio) and Kloia integrates the tool on the client's systems. Kloia's tool integration projects can take between days or months, depending on the complexity of the tool and the clients' infrastructure.

Selling each of these different types of work required a different level of technical expertise. Selling consulting and services projects required a deep understanding of the project domains. For consulting sales, demonstrating this knowledge during the sales cycle showed that Kloia had the expertise and that it would have a consulting rate attached to it. For services, working with the client at a deep technical level during sales meant that the scope of the project was well understood and the pricing was done with precision. This precision was critical for diffusing the cost and schedule overrun risk for both Kloia and the client, hence increasing the chances that Kloia would deliver a successful project on time, within budget, with high quality.

Selling tools, on the other hand, was a different approach. The tools that Kloia partnered with were very advanced DevOps tools, but the tool vendors had ample documentation and training about their offerings. Anyone with some familiarity of IT sales could pick up these training materials and be up to speed about the capabilities of the tool, how it is being used, how it stacks up against the other tools in the space and its pricing. Compared to consulting and services, there was not much that the engineer was adding to the conversation during a tool sale.

Therefore, management decided to work with external sales representatives for tool sales. The priority was given to the most complex and comprehensive tools (such as release management or container orchestration) as complex tool sales took longer than simpler, more focused tools. Over the course of a year, Kloia worked with multiple salespeople in different geographies to outsource its tool sales. This setup was essentially an external distributed sales team, made up of independent salespeople that work on commissions.

In addition to outsourcing tools sales, management also invested in inbound marketing. Founders of Kloia were well known in the industry so they had a lot of incoming requests for work. This flux of requests were great qualified leads that were much easier to work with. The sales conversations were brief, and the outcomes were swift—even in negative outcomes. The management wanted to scale this stream of potential work because the time spent on actively chasing the client went down significantly. They invested some of this time into creating content that would pull in new leads. It was made mandatory for any Kloia employees to share their knowledge and present their technical savviness in blogposts, social media, webinars and conferences.

It was around this time I joined Kloia. I was one of those engineers who really didn't like sales. To me, sales was partly deception. I assume that is because I have been on the deceived side of sales conversations in the past. It was hard for me to think of other ways to do sales and still be profitable. Luckily, I was given the freedom to connect with the customer without having to worry about sales quotas. After all, doing sales in this model was not about just getting a customer to say yes; it was also about delivering what you promised them, personally. I was surprised to see how well it went! Within my first 6 months I was able to close, with other colleagues' help of course, around \$100,000 worth of sales. Not bad for a single person who didn't have previous sales experience!

This fluid, hands-on, low process environment was so much fun! Kloia was my first small team experience after 10 years in e-commerce and finance. I was close to my colleagues, we didn't have any red tape, and we had immediate access to the customers. During sales meetings, I felt how the aura of "we are talking sales now, but we are the same people that will work on the project" helped in acquiring customers. As a small team, everyone on the team did everything to their best ability, and we acquired great customers we were proud of.

#### 4.1 Impact

Outsourcing tools sales to experienced salespeople freed up the engineering time. We were fortunate to work with experienced salespeople who were much better at closing, so revenue went up.

We then wanted to expand what worked with tools into services, but it didn't work. We worked with two prospect/lead companies but their performance was not where we wanted it to be. Both companies brought in a great number of leads, but the leads were not qualified. Some of them were looking for something very specific that we didn't have, but the sales representative didn't catch this nuance because they were not technical. Some of them were excited about what we could offer, but their requirements exceeded our capacity by magnitudes. Rescoping their project into something we could deliver took a long time, and in some cases, the client has moved on. We therefore kept the external salespeople focused on tool sales only.

Inbound marketing activities turned out to be extremely helpful too. Instead of having to introduce ourselves during client meetings, the prospects would recognize us and say, “Oh I attended your Docker talk in DevOpsDays.”

The combination of engineers doing sales, external salespeople, and inbound marketing everyone happy. Engineers enjoyed more focused time. Management was happy because they maintained Kloia’s valuable technical reputation. Two key clients were acquired through outsourced salespeople. Revenue increased around 120% that year.

#### 4.2 But then a trust issue surfaced

Right at the time when we thought we found the sweet spot, a trust issue surfaced. One of the sales agents we worked with for a specific tool turned out to be hiding their engagement with us during their meetings. They were hoping to find new clients and take them directly to the tool vendor, bypassing us, therefore increasing the commission they would receive. We found out about this when one of their potential clients contacted us for a competing quote. It was an embarrassing moment for the sales agent, and parting ways was swift.

There were no monetary losses, yet this was a big let down. This abuse of trust created a lot of “I told you so” discussions internally. One solution to prevent this kind of abuse was a closer monitoring of the external sales agents’ activities with potential leads. However, this tracking required a lot reporting and checking for each potential client meeting. Avoiding client-level bookkeeping was the primary reason for outsourcing the sales in the first place. The management didn’t want to double-check something that was outsourced. So they took the big step, broke the “company without the sales team” motto and hired a full-time salesperson.

### 5. CYCLE 3: A DEDICATED SALES TEAM WAS FORMED

Hiring a salesperson was completely against the “we are all engineers” angle, but we were willing to try and see if we would have better closing rates. After a brief search we found someone with expertise in selling tools and software services in multiple geographies. When he started, he just took the ball and ran with it! He was an experienced salesperson and he brought in very fundamental sales assets that we missed as a group of engineers. He had a great contact list, he had active clients in areas we wanted to expand to—and he made use of every bit of his advantage. His patience with demanding clients was an example for all of us.

He was fully onboard within two months, and he handled all day-to-day sales operations. We were so thankful because he took over everything we dreaded in sales with grace. The revenue was going up and we had time in our hands.

#### 5.1 Impact

In about six months we saw a 70% increase in sales. Having someone with extensive sales experience also improved the way that we approach the clients and how we identify opportunities in the market. Moreover, a dedicated salesperson was better positioned to detect new business opportunities. His presence in the company meetings encouraged us to think about new venues for collaboration, new tools that we can partner with, and ideas for new lines of business.

#### 5.2 But then, there was a mismatch in sales expectations

In the first few months, management was quite happy with the sales numbers and we were glad that we didn’t have to worry about sales. However, after some point, the team started receiving two disturbing types of work:

- 1) Work so small that even delivered on time, would not make any impact on the client side. For example, setting up a very common tool on the client’s behalf. This is a very small piece of work, so it was easy to sell and take a step towards a sales quota.
- 2) Work so big that we would need to assign engineers full time for 5+ days just to understand the scope of work. For example, completely changing the cloud provider of a large enterprise. This was lucrative because the sales commission would be huge.

Both types of work brought the team morale down. Small, trivial projects took away the focus of the team and their job satisfaction. The hit-and-run type of sales can bring good revenues, but these engagements do not necessarily mean happy customers. In some cases, the client claimed that they didn’t get what they were promised. These clients ended up demanding more work at the end of the project without pay, which created extra work for the team to clear up. Large proposals made people worry about going back to the old days where we spent days with a prospect to get nothing at the end. Our salesperson, however, was motivated to

sell whatever he can because he received commissions for each sale. To be fair, his behavior was not a personality trait—it was due to how he worked in the past.

To change this, we had an honest, open conversation where the engineers and our salesperson voiced their concerns together. It was a very constructive conversation, but it started very tense. One of the managing partners, upon sensing the increasing heat, suggested that anyone making a comment should mention the event that triggered their comment, what they think happened, and what they would want to have happened. The manager then called on the people involved in the event and asked them the same question. This exercise identified a lot of misunderstandings. For example, meeting sales quotas weren't more important than preserving the way that the company delivered projects. Most of the engineers hated sales, but they didn't hate our salesperson or how he asked for technical details. The need for an internal discussion before sending a proposal vary from client to client, sector to sector, technology stack and so forth.

This meeting was a pivotal point in balancing short-term revenue with long-term success and company culture. The benefits of having a separate sales function were clear, but removing the engineers completely from the process did not yield desirable outcomes. The management started thinking about a model where engineers would be back in the game.

## 6. CYCLE 4: SALES AND ROLES-WITH-SALES-INFLUENCE

Overall, the management wanted an informed sales process that was quick to conclude. When only engineers did sales, the process was very informed but not always quick. It also had impact on morale. When only salespeople did sales, the process moved quickly but the technical precision was low. So we looked at how we can spread out sales back within the engineering team without doing the same mistakes as we did in Cycle 1.

To avoid the low morale that long sales processes might create on the engineers, we decided that all sales processes would be led by a salesperson—either internal or external. This implied that a salesperson would be responsible for introducing the company, identifying possible solutions to discuss with them, and tracking where they are in the sales process. People with sales experience are naturally good at these fundamental sales tasks whereas some of our engineers were not happy with the long process.

We identified five groups of people within the company that are responsible for sales.

1. Salespeople: A salesperson is responsible for the entire sales cycle. They can get help from other groups during the sales process, but they are the ones responsible for introductions, making offers and following up with prospects.
2. Partners/Management: The company partners and the upper management are expected to take part in sales. In fact, they are the perfect sales profile for Kloia: they have the soft skills, they have the technical background, they know about the business, and they can seek potential clients and initiate sales proactively. However, this group is not easy to scale and has more important responsibilities that serve the company.
3. Capability heads: Kloia has five capabilities: DevOps, Software Architecture, QA, Software Services, and Assessment. Each capability head is expected to take part in sales. Unlike partners, they are not expected to initiate sales. Usually, a salesperson has an introductory meeting with the client and then the related capability heads are called in for the subsequent meetings as necessary. The capability head takes the lead during the sales process until the offer phase. The salesperson takes over at that point and works with procurement.
4. Customer relationship/Success managers: Relationship managers are responsible for the satisfaction of the clients in the long term. I am one of these people at Kloia. We check in with the client periodically to see how we are doing and to hear any concerns. Due to the nature of our role, we are exposed to problematic aspects of long projects at a high-level, and manage the internal communications at Kloia until a solution is found. This exposure helps us anticipate risks ahead of time. When a potential client has concerns about these risky areas, relationship managers are brought in to the sales meetings. We answer clients' questions, talk them through possible scenarios and share our previous experience in the field. Similar to capability heads, relationship managers are not responsible for concluding the sales process.
5. Some engineers: While many engineers didn't enjoy the sales process, some engineers enjoyed having a lot of influence on the scope of their projects from the beginning. These engineers were involved in the sales process after the introduction meetings.

We have been using this model for about year now. At the moment, we feel that we found a balanced approach where everyone is responsible for what they are comfortable with.

### 6.1 Current challenges

We are quite happy about the day-to-day flow of the sales pipeline, but two major topics are coming up frequently during our meetings. The first one is the incentives. Having commissions per sale is a tricky model because it encourages quantity over quality. In the past, our salespeople received commissions based on the revenue they bring. We changed it to a higher percentage of commissions on profit, but that was not completely fair to them. If the salesperson brings in a superb lead, signs them on, but the engineering team ignores the client, why should the salesperson be responsible for it?

In our current model, anyone who brings in a lead gets a small percentage of the profits. If they are also involved in the sales process, they get a bigger percentage. In addition to these, 20% of each project's profit is distributed to the project team as bonuses based on their performance. It is too early to say whether this approach makes sense, but so far we are quite hopeful about it.

Our second challenge is scaling the team. Kloia management loves salespeople with an engineering background. We are currently debating whether hiring a good salesperson and training them in the technical topics is easier than hiring strong engineers and involving them in sales. Traits like self-confidence and empathy cannot be learned by taking classes. Similarly, having a keen engineering mind takes years of practice doing the hard work in the field and it cannot be learned through a technical certification program. We are weighing the ups and downs of each approach, and seeing where new hires would feel closer to.

## 7. LESSONS LEARNED

Here are the lessons we learned as we tweaked our sales process.

### 7.1 There are right and wrong times for sales to be involved

Kloia has always encouraged its engineers in taking ownership and getting involved with all aspects of a project. We encouraged all sales roles to do the same. However, we realized that there are right and wrong times for sales to be involved.

We identified two types of meetings that sales should be involved after the project starts. The first one is the kick-off meetings at the beginning. Their involvement at the beginning tells the customers that they were not there only to sell something and leave— that they care about the project itself.

The second one is the major milestone meetings at the end of the project phases, even if they are very technical. Their direct involvement in these closure meetings allow them to hear how the customer responds to the completed work and see if we could provide other products or services to the client. Hearing this information first-hand helped them foster a more natural connection with the technical decision makers, because they were a part of the discussion as the need emerged and not parachuted in as the salesperson when the opportunity appeared.

While the involvement of sales in kick-offs and milestone wrap up meetings is valuable, there are meetings where their presence can be questioned. We found out that sales presence in technical deep-dive sessions during the project can be perceived negatively. Unlike technical wrap-up meetings, technical deep-dives during the project are times when engineering teams from Kloia and the client come together to find a solution to a challenging problem. Because salespeople lack the technical skills to contribute to those conversations, their presence in technical meetings during the project has been perceived as looking for an opportunity to do a product upsell, as opposed to trying to solve a problem. There was a similar sentiment in salespeople joining organizational conversations with executive sponsors, where resource planning was discussed.

### 7.2 Things work well when sales care about customer success too

We found out that many of our clients chose us over other competitors because we do not focus on just getting a Yes to a contract. We offer flexibility in scope of work, staffing, payment terms and contract terms so that we have a good relationship with our customers. People in sales roles at Kloia are responsible and empowered to strike this balance. Bringing in our most senior staff to sales meetings is a manifestation of this principle.

When salespeople care about customer success, the quality of the project increases. We remind people in the sales roles to keep their radars open for potential new value for the clients. When the client talks about a problem in a sales context, we ask the people working in the sales roles to let the Delivery Manager or the

relationship manager know about the issue immediately. This stance reminds the customer that we genuinely care about their progress.

### 7.3 One person leads the project, and that is not the salesperson

Caring about the customer success does not mean that the salesperson is in a project lead role. Salespeople take an active role, but they are not the leads for the project. Each project at Kloia has a Delivery Manager (DM). DMs are like architects/leads with project management skills. They are responsible for the project schedule, scope, and quality. Unlike project managers, DMs are expected to steer the technical aspect of the project. Unlike product owners of today, they are not expected to relay requirements between teams.

We make it clear to the client that Delivery Managers, not the salespeople, are responsible for the ultimate success of the projects. This stance protects the salespeople against unfair discussions in a sales context. In the past, we have had clients who avoided talking about minor issues during the project but later packaged them as major deal breakers during contract renewal talks. By making it clear that project issues should be addressed with the DMs, we give the salespeople a clean scorecard in front of the clients. Where needed, relationship managers connect with the clients to make sure that salespeople are not pulled into these discussions.

### 7.4 Incentives should be towards long-term customer and employee satisfaction

We are quite happy with our current sales incentive model—a mix of sales commissions and profit sharing for everyone involved in the project. This model seems to be working and we are not taking projects that are too small, too big, too simple, or too complex.

Where needed, management intervenes in the sales process to change the scope of the project to make it realistic and rewarding for Kloia employees and the client. In cases where the client doesn't accept the new scope, we stop the sales process. The engineering input acts as a gate, and ensures that only meaningful and challenging work is pursued. This approach did not exclude projects with small scope. As long as the project is challenging and rewarding for both parties, we work with the customer.

We feel that the engineering team is not overwhelmed with low value requests, and the sales team is pursuing stronger client relationships instead of just meeting sales quotas.

### 7.5 Two personal learnings

I was known to be a perfectionist in my early career. It got milder around 2017, and witnessing the sales process at Kloia helped me shed a few layers.

By now it should be clear that some of these approaches we tried were suboptimal, and in hindsight, hindered the early growth of the company. But none of them killed the company. The team focused on trying something that makes sense us, and patiently kept trying to see if it took us in the direction we wanted. There was a lot of benchmarking and asking around for best practices, but we did not define our success by someone else's performance. I am sure there were better, more structured, better performing sales teams in our competitors. But our goal was not to become the best sales team; it was to be the engineering-focused company that solved problems that mattered. I learned that it was perfectly fine to be imperfect, as long as we progressed towards our bigger goal.

This journey also taught me that a different sales approach is possible. I learned that sales don't have to be deceptive. I learned that incessant cold calling, sending pestering messages, stalking people on LinkedIn to pressure them to choose you over others is not the only way to get a client. It was perfectly fine to present them with your quality work, treat them with respect, and give them time to consider your offer. Honesty and good quality work always won business, and I am glad to have be a part of a team that values that.

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Looking back into the past and sifting through memories to write a report that gives credit where it's due is hard. It is harder to do that during a pandemic with delayed vaccines, infuriating government decisions and losses. I want to thank my wife Z for her incredible support and colleagues at Kloia for having me in their fun, warm, open, and supportive environment. And Rebecca, for offering her patient guidance and sharing bits of Oregon during our calls. *Thanks, Rebecca, I couldn't have done it without you!*