



State of Product Excellence

2024

500 product professionals reveal the processes that are disrupting flow — and opportunities for innovation

In partnership with





About Productboard

Productboard is the customer-centric product management platform that helps organizations get the right products to market, faster. Over 6,000 companies, including Zoom, One Medical, Cartier, Microsoft, and Korn Ferry, use Productboard to understand what customers need, prioritize what to build next, and rally everyone around their roadmap. With offices in San Francisco, Prague, and Vancouver, Productboard is backed by leading investors like Dragoneer Investment Group, Tiger Global Management, Index Ventures, Kleiner Perkins, Sequoia Capital, Bessemer Venture Partners, and Credo Ventures.

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About Products That Count

Products that Count is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that helps everyone build great products. It celebrates product excellence through coveted Awards that inspire 500,000+ product managers and honor great products and the professionals responsible for their success. It accelerates the career and rise to the C-suite of >30% of all Product Managers globally by providing exceptional programming – including award-winning podcasts and popular newsletters – for free. It acts as a trusted advisor to all CPOs at Fortune 1000, and publishes key insights from innovative companies, like Capgemini, SoFi, and Amplitude, that turn product success into business success.

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It's Time to Get Product Managers Out of Toil

The stakes are higher than ever to get your new feature or product launch right—the first time.

Among failed startups that were surveyed post-mortem, neglecting to “serve a market need” was cited as the number one reason for failure in a staggering 42% of cases ([CB Insights](#)).

But it's also harder than ever sitting within the product org today.

Amidst the pressure, making important product decisions has become an arduous process. Compounding this issue are the antiquated, cumbersome tools that many product teams rely on; spreadsheets and slide decks that are relics from a bygone era, ill-equipped to support the demands of modern product management.

Hoping to avoid risks and place the right product bets, organizations have created a cascading negative effect across the product management lifecycle. Decisions are taking longer, key stakeholders aren't aligned, and there is a lack of trust in user-based insights.

How do we know this? We surveyed nearly 500 product managers and leaders to uncover the stark realities of the challenges they face and how they currently operate. The findings of our survey underscore a pressing issue in the market: Product teams are hindered by structural barriers that impede their ability to succeed. From organizational setup and bureaucratic decision-making processes to outdated tools, these impediments contribute to unnecessary toil in everyday processes.

Amidst challenges, product managers maintain a strong drive for excellence and impact. Our survey underscores their resilience, highlighting their determination to excel despite obstacles. The thrill of making a difference and shaping the future propels many forward, even amid adversity. Now is an exhilarating time to be in product management, witnessing the unfolding of future possibilities. Optimism arises not just from acknowledging current challenges, but also from the potential for transformative change. As organizations strive to streamline their product management processes, a bright future emerges—a vision where product teams build products that truly resonate with users and improve lives.

This report will reveal the gaps in processes so that organizations can learn how to collect better customer insights, foster alignment between the product and company goals, and ensure proper, timely execution. Only then can they unlock the full potential of their product teams and drive innovation with agility and confidence.

“We’re seeing a shift in the role of product managers from inbound to more outbound. Not just focused on requests and prioritization, but more and more on how we sell it, engage with sales and customers, and drive strategy.”



Yasir Liaqatullah

Product Leader, Amazon
fmr. VP of Product, A10 Networks

Top 5 Insights at a Glance

Whether you're a well-known enterprise or scrappy startup, or an executive or individual contributor (IC), you're dealing with friction in your product management processes.

Across the board, product teams are struggling and feeling bogged down. They want to be agile and iterative, but they need to find ways to unblock their workflow and decision-making processes.

1

Achieving alignment on important decisions varies significantly across different company sizes.

Enterprises with more than 2,000 employees are struggling to make key product decisions quickly, with around 70% saying it takes 1–2 months or more.

Meanwhile, only 30% of mid-market orgs say that it takes that long. This is hindering large companies' agility to respond to market dynamics and stay competitive.

2

Around 60% of respondents indicate that their product initiatives are highly aligned with their company goals and objectives, while close to 30% report only moderate alignment.

There's a disparity in perception between leaders and individual contributors (ICs) regarding alignment, with 41% of leaders believing it's highly or fully integrated while just 31% of ICs agree.

3

Just 35% of respondents say their initiatives meet deadlines most or all the time.

Again, process issues seem more stark for larger orgs, with 29% of enterprises reporting that initiatives rarely or never meet expected timelines. Meeting project deadlines is critical for ensuring timely delivery of products and maintaining stakeholder trust. The low percentage highlights product management and execution challenges that need to be addressed to improve overall efficiency and effectiveness.

4

Only about a third are confident in the relevance of customer insights they collect.

Addressing this issue is crucial for informed decision-making and successful product development.

5

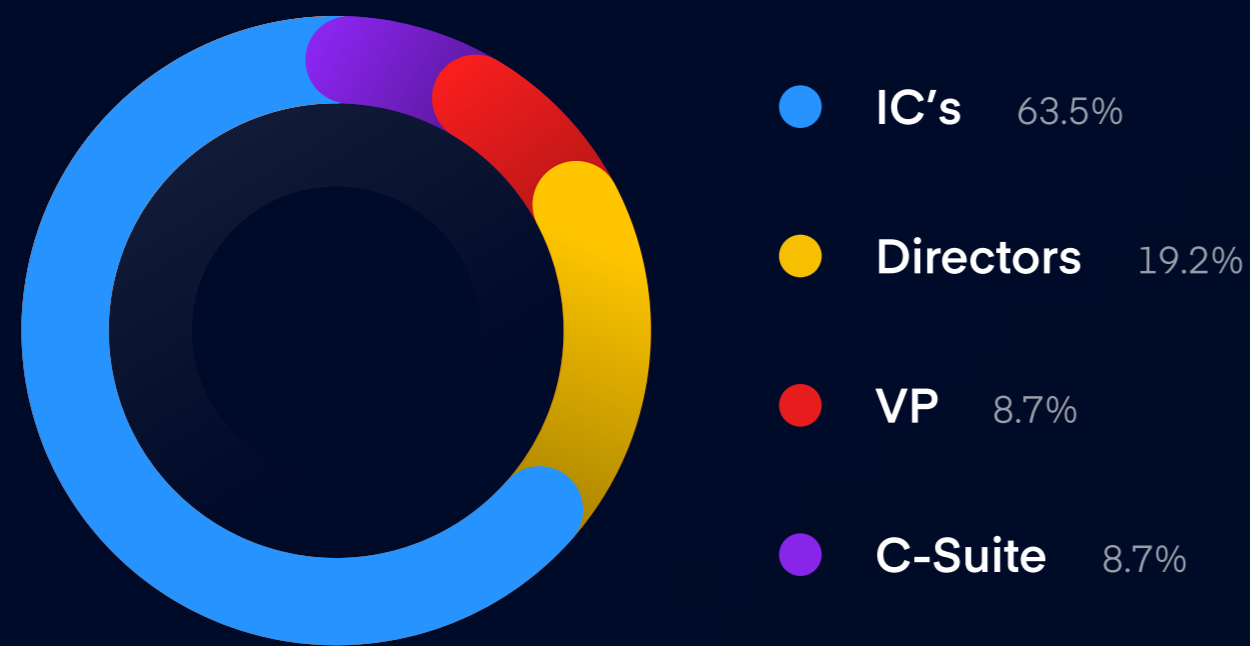
Product teams leveraging software purpose-built for product management (e.g., Productboard, Aha!) are on average reporting improved on-time delivery, predictability, and confidence in user insights compared to those using general-purpose (e.g., spreadsheets, slides) or project management (e.g., JIRA, Asana) tools. In fact,

46% of teams using purpose-built tools claim they are very or extremely confident in the relevance of insights collected, compared to 35% using general-purpose and 32% leveraging project management.

Survey Role & Firmographics

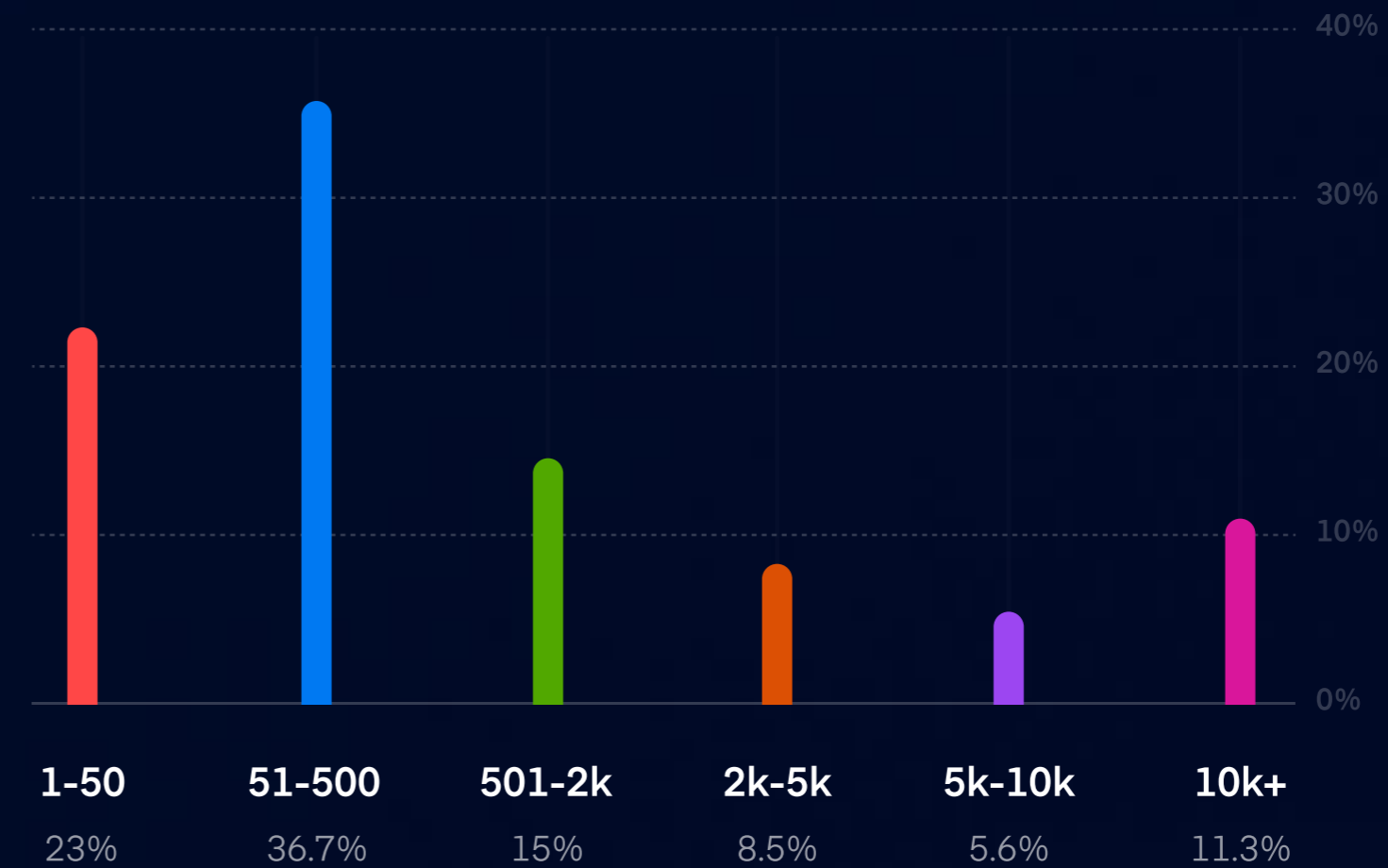
This year's survey of roughly 500 product professionals across a spread of different industries, company sizes, and seniority levels help provide a broader understanding of the product management landscape. More than one third of respondents are product leaders. They play a pivotal role in shaping the strategic direction of product development within their organizations. Their insights offer valuable perspectives on the challenges, trends, and opportunities facing the industry, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the current state of product management.





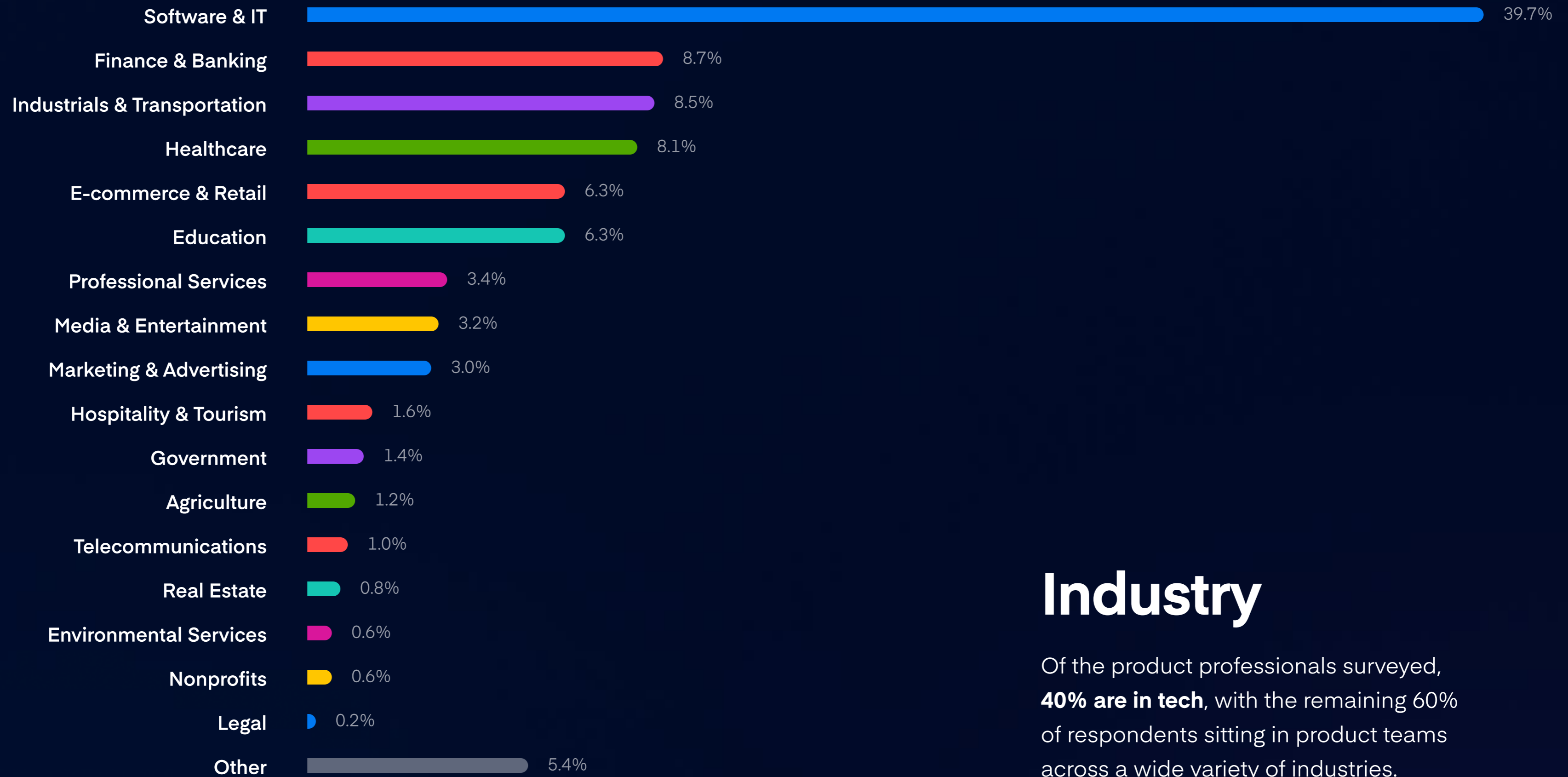
Seniority

While individual contributors (i.e. Product Manager, Product Owner, Product Designer, etc.) make up the highest percentage of those surveyed, **over 35%+ are Directors and above holding leadership positions.**



Company Size

Company size can significantly influence decision-making processes, resource allocation, communication structures, and agility in responding to market dynamics. We've captured insights from companies of all sizes, from small orgs of 50 or less to those working among more than 10,000 employees. **25% of respondents work at enterprises with more than 2,000 employees.**



Industry

Of the product professionals surveyed, **40% are in tech**, with the remaining 60% of respondents sitting in product teams across a wide variety of industries.

Solutions Used

In terms of tooling, **the majority (62%) use project management software (e.g., JIRA, Asana) for product management work.**

Only 13% are using software specifically designed for product management, being outnumbered by even general-purpose tools like spreadsheets and slide decks. This disparity underscores a significant gap between the tools available and those optimized for the unique demands of product management. The prevalence of general-purpose tools further highlights a pervasive reliance on makeshift solutions that may hinder efficiency and effectiveness in product development processes.



- **Software used to manage projects generally**

(JIRA, Asana, Trello, etc.)

61.9%

- **General purpose software tools**

(Spreadsheets, Word, Powerpoint, etc.)

22.0%

- **Software specifically designed for product management**

(Productboard, Aha!, ProdPad, etc.)

12.9%

KEY FINDINGS

Customer Centricity & Insights

There has been a fundamental shift from a product-centric to a customer-centric approach, recognizing that sustainable success hinges on the ability to deeply understand and fulfill the needs and preferences of users. Product teams are tasked with obtaining actionable insights that truly reflect the voice of the customer. A winning product or feature launch is one that current users are willing to adopt and potential customers are willing to purchase.

Despite the importance of collecting and managing customer insights, there remains a significant disparity between expectation and reality. Product teams continue to struggle in maintaining a comprehensive view of customer needs and preferences.

“Across teams — sales, analytics, product — everyone has differentiated needs and tools, so it becomes very difficult to stitch together a 360-degree view of the customer.”



Anshul Kummar

Senior Group PM, Paylocity

Satisfaction with Collection

Approximately **75% of respondents** express only moderate or slight satisfaction with the tools and methods used to collect customer insights. This is true regardless of company size, indicating widespread dissatisfaction.

Satisfaction with tools and methods used to collect insights

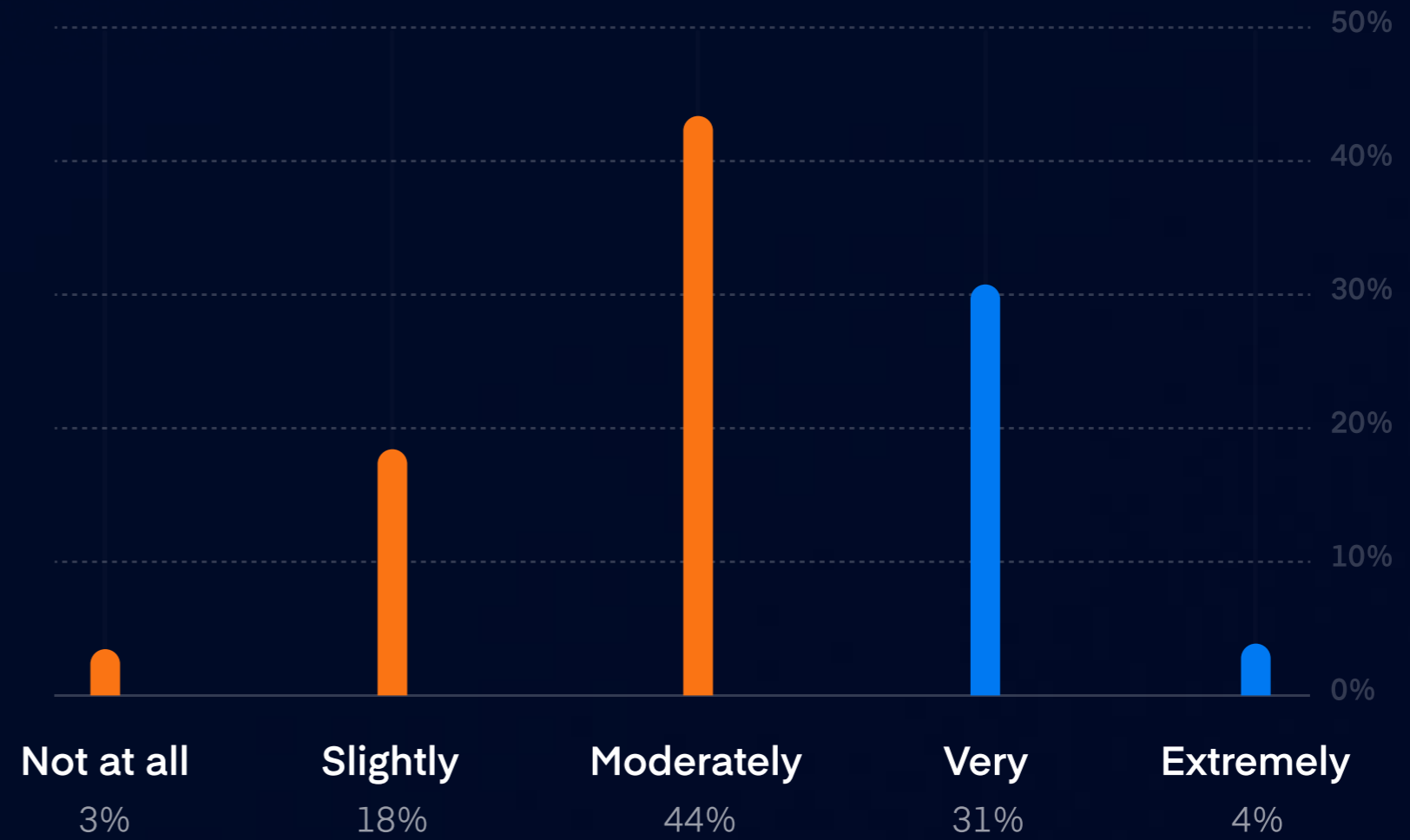


Confidence in Relevance

Only about a **third (34%)** of respondents report confidence in the relevance of the insights they collect, highlighting a critical area for improvement in data-driven decision-making processes.

At enterprises with 2,000+ employees, **product leaders exhibit less confidence in the relevance of insights compared to ICs.** 28% of leaders indicate they are “very” confident in the relevance of insights collected, while 34% of ICs have the same level of faith. This discrepancy suggests a need to enhance the flow of information and communication channels within larger orgs to ensure alignment and clarity regarding customer insights.

How confident are you in the relevance of the user insights you collect?



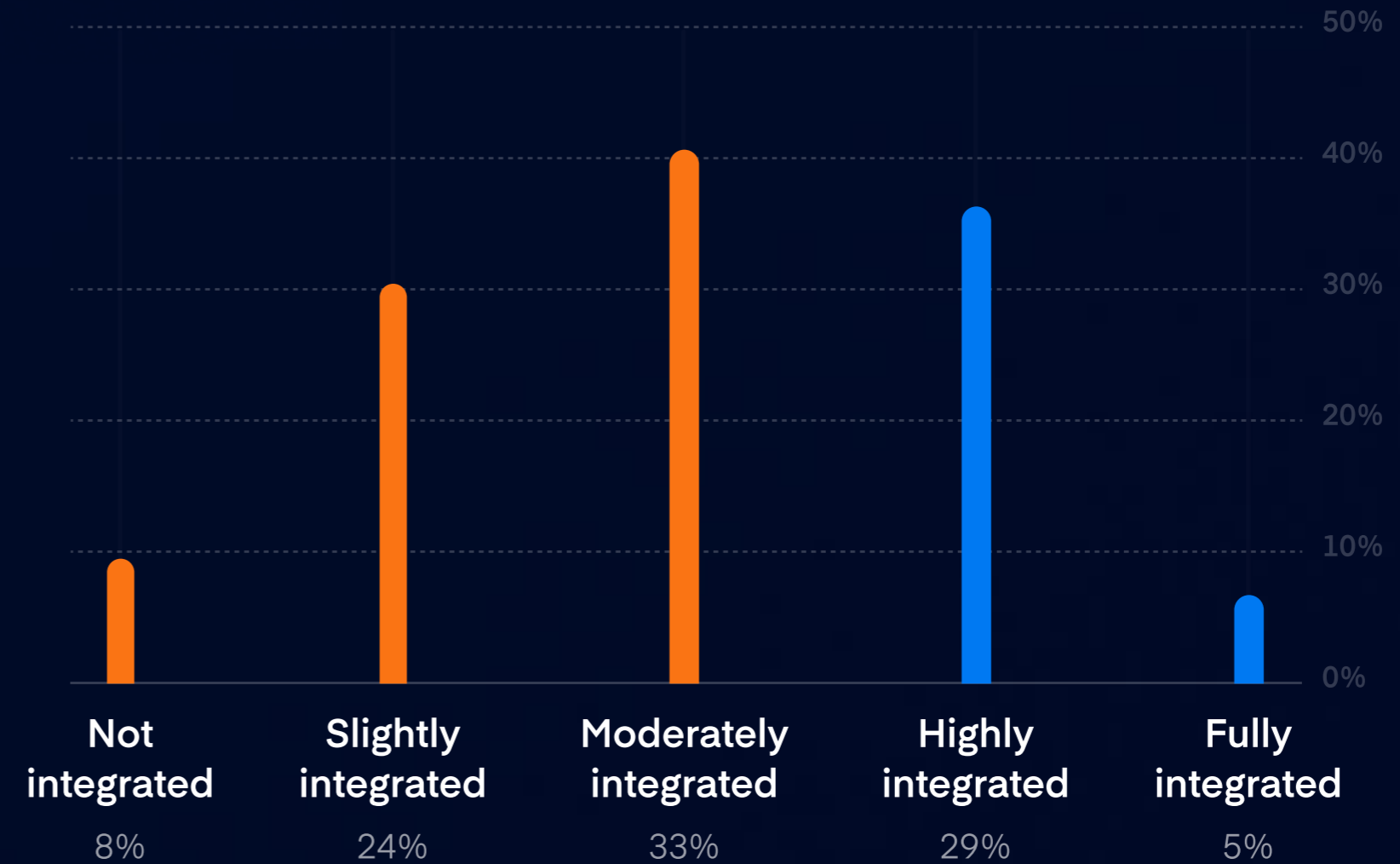
● IC's ● Leaders

Integration with Development

Only about a **third (34%)** say user feedback is fully or highly integrated into their development process.

There is a notable disparity between leaders and ICs in their perception of feedback integration, with leaders being more optimistic about the extent of integration. **41% of leaders think it's highly or fully integrated, but only 31% of ICs agree.**

How integrated is user feedback in your product development process?

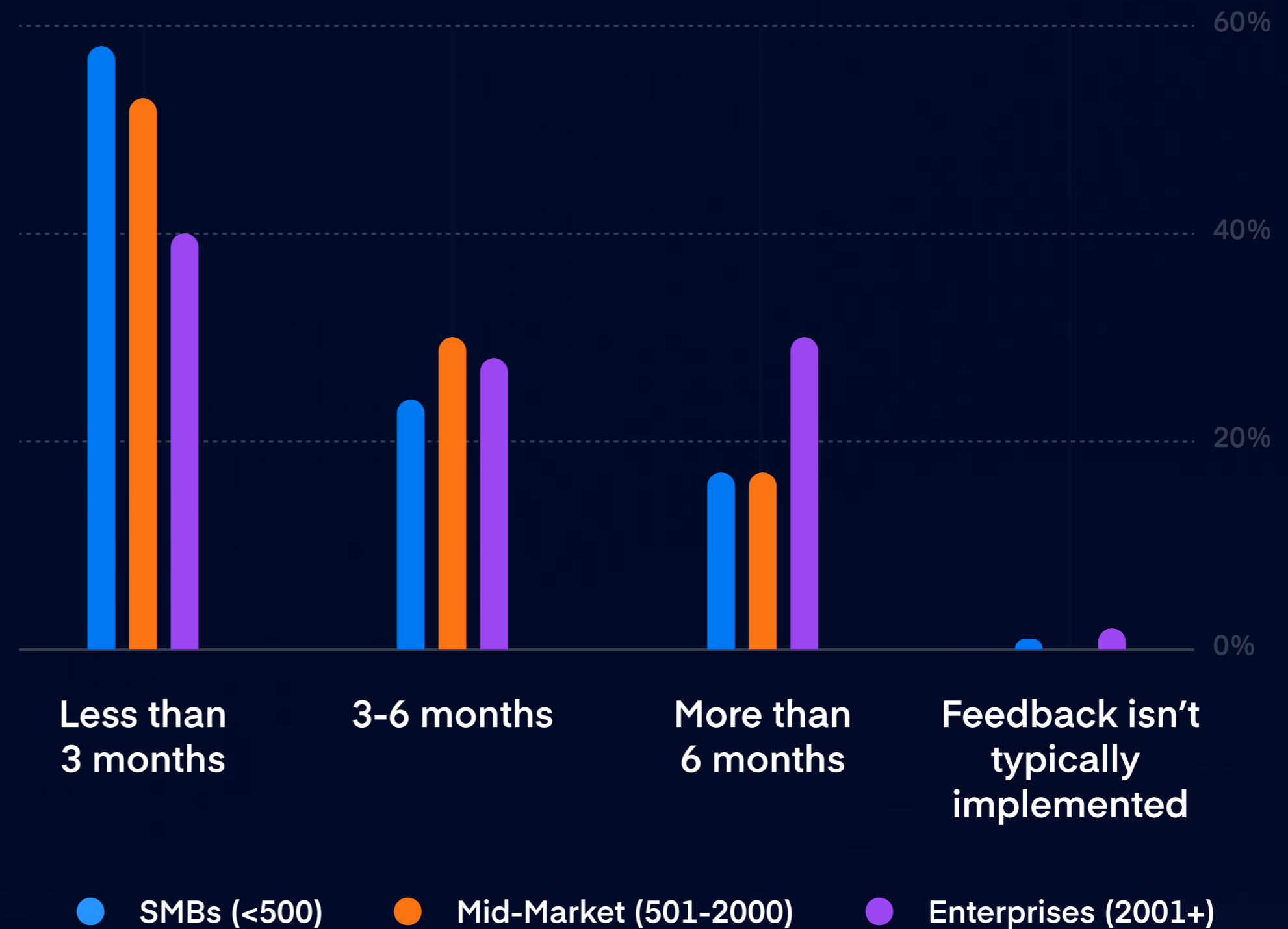


Agility in Response

Unsurprisingly, **smaller companies demonstrate greater nimbleness in implementing changes based on customer feedback**, with almost 60% of SMBs with less than 500 employees capable of making changes within three months or less.

In contrast, larger enterprises face challenges in responsiveness, with only 40% able to enact changes within the same timeframe and **30% reporting timelines exceeding six months**. This inflexibility in roadmap adjustments may hinder their ability to remain responsive to shifting market demands. In today's fast-paced environment, taking six months to incorporate feedback into your product may result in missed opportunities, eroding customer satisfaction and diminishing competitiveness.

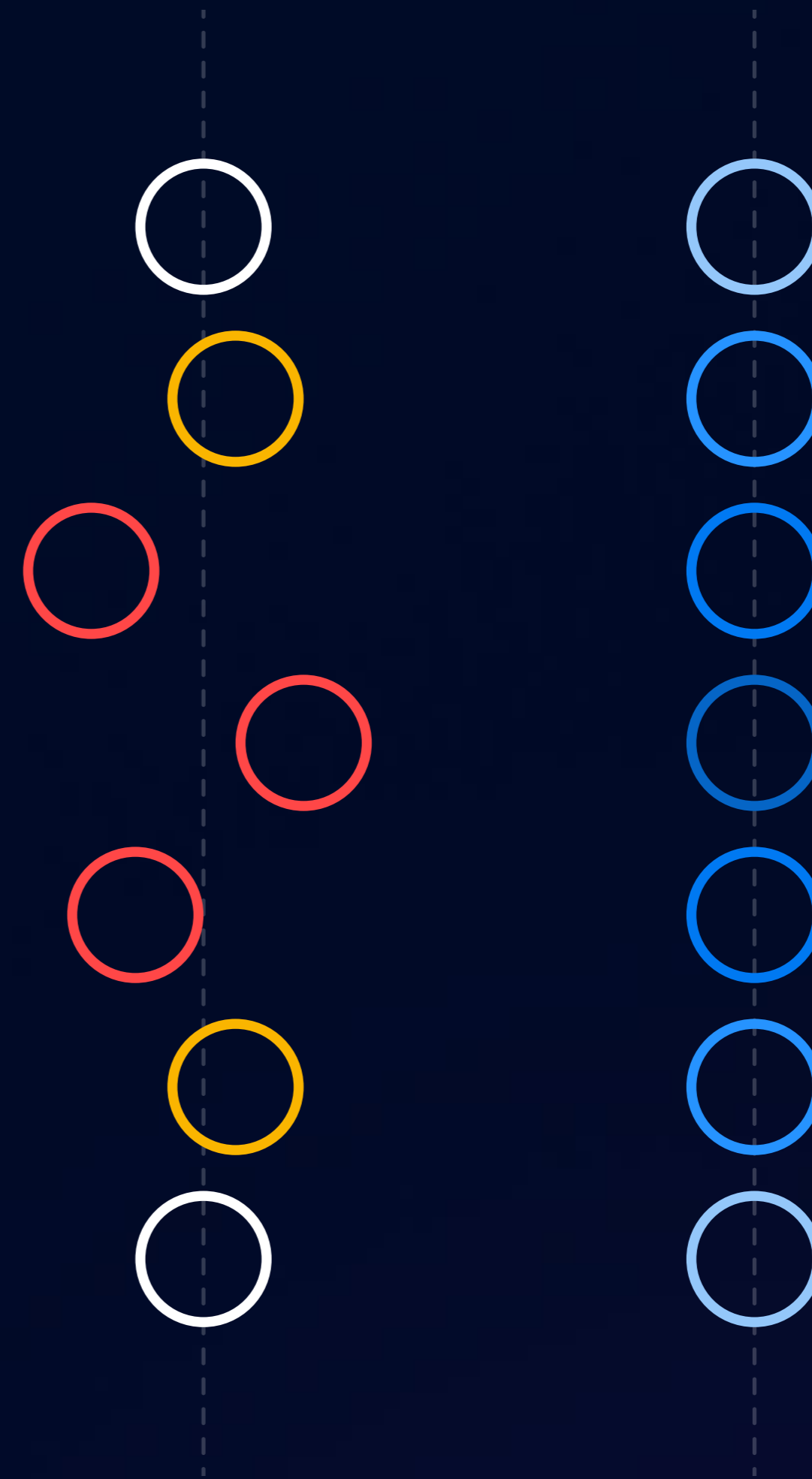
Average time to implement changes based on collected insights



KEY FINDINGS

Alignment

Companies live and die by the speed and quality of their decisions. It's important to achieve stakeholder alignment quickly to stay innovative, but doing so is particularly difficult for larger companies with more stakeholders involved. This means it can take months to align on key product decisions, which can significantly delay product development timelines and, as previously mentioned, impede agility in responding to market changes.



“I fight hard for that product-to-business alignment from the bottom to the top. I have to figure it out, build stories, and explain how it works. I want my team to understand that what they do every day is aligned with what the organization is doing. I also need leadership to see how our work fits in. It’s all about advocacy for my team.”



Tara Holwegner

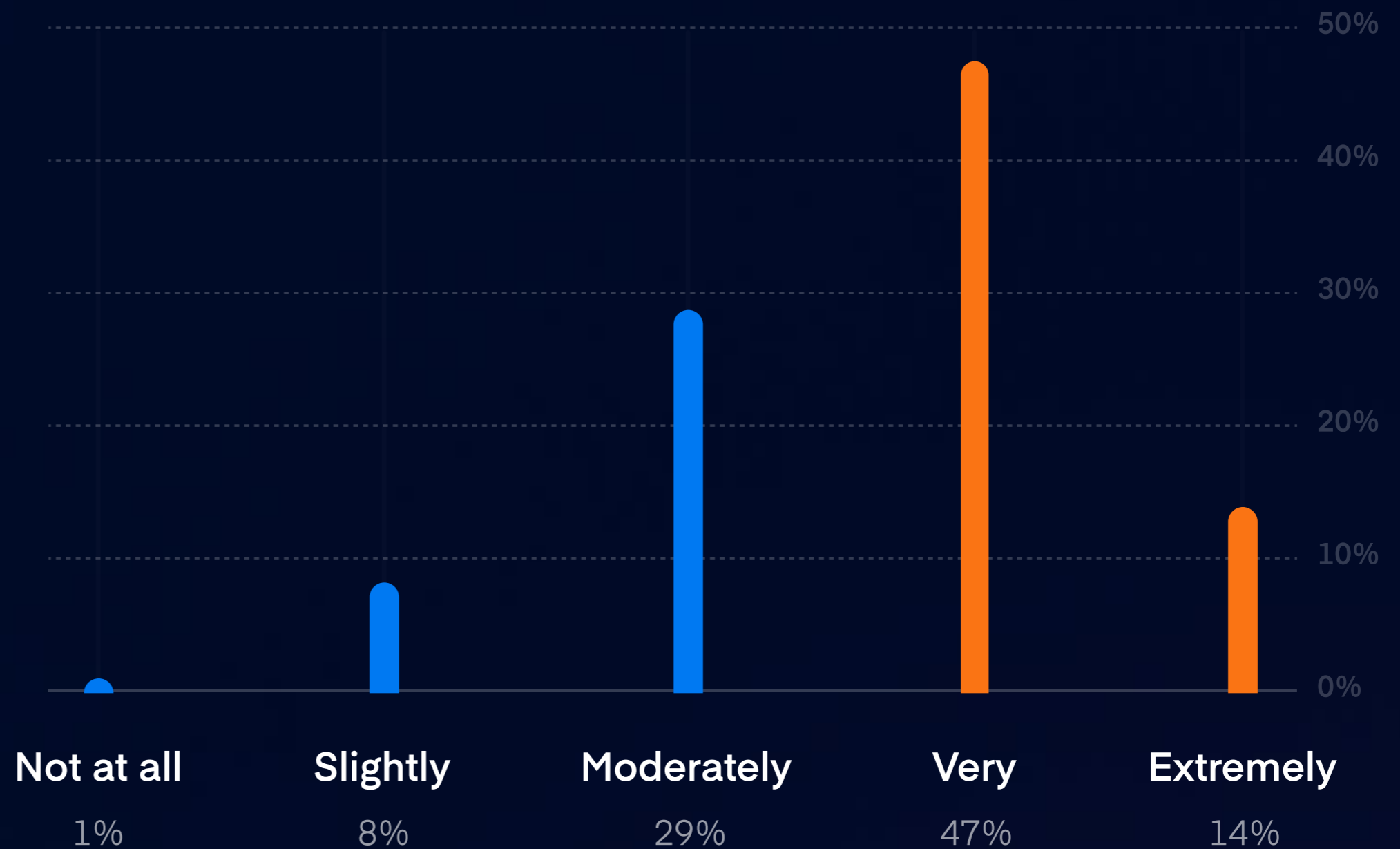
Product Leader, Life Cycle Engineering

Product-Goal Alignment

Your product needs to be aligned with your company goals and objectives. This ensures that resources are utilized effectively, drives organizational focus and cohesion, and ultimately maximizes the likelihood of achieving sustainable growth.

Unfortunately, **only about 60% of respondents say that their product initiatives are very or extremely aligned with their company goals and objectives.** Close to 30% only have moderate alignment. To ensure that every product initiative contributes directly to the overarching strategic vision of the company, there's a big opportunity for stronger top-to-bottom alignment between business goals and product development efforts.

How well do your product initiatives align with your company's goals or objectives?



Perhaps the outlook is not that bleak, however? Interestingly, leaders think their product initiatives are more aligned with goals than ICs. **The majority (70%) of product leaders indicate that they are “very” or “extremely” aligned, compared to 57% of ICs.** Leaders may have a more complete understanding of overarching company goals, while ICs might not always get the full context on how their work supports higher level objectives. There is an opportunity for leadership to help connect to dots better, communicating with ICs about how their work actually supports these objectives.

How well do your product initiatives align with your company's goals or objectives?

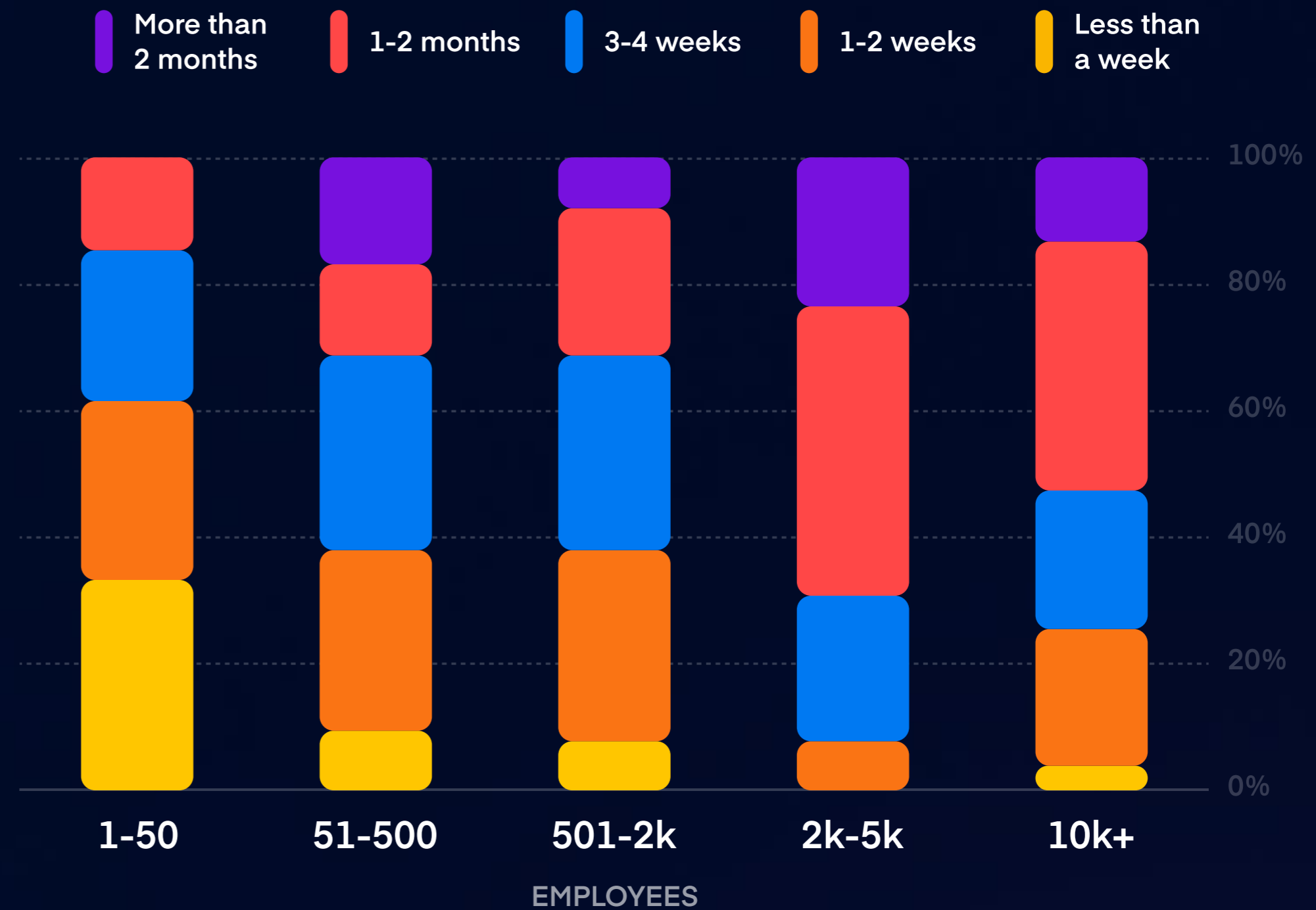


Time Required

Decision making speed is critical. How long it takes to achieve alignment with stakeholders on key product decisions can make or break your new feature launch or product update (and overall business success).

There is a really meaningful difference across company size. **Enterprises with more than 2,000 employees are spending too much time making decisions**, with around 70% saying it takes 1-2 months or more. Meanwhile, only 30% of mid-market orgs say that it takes that long. On the flip side, **one third (33%) of SMBs can make a product decision in less than one week.**

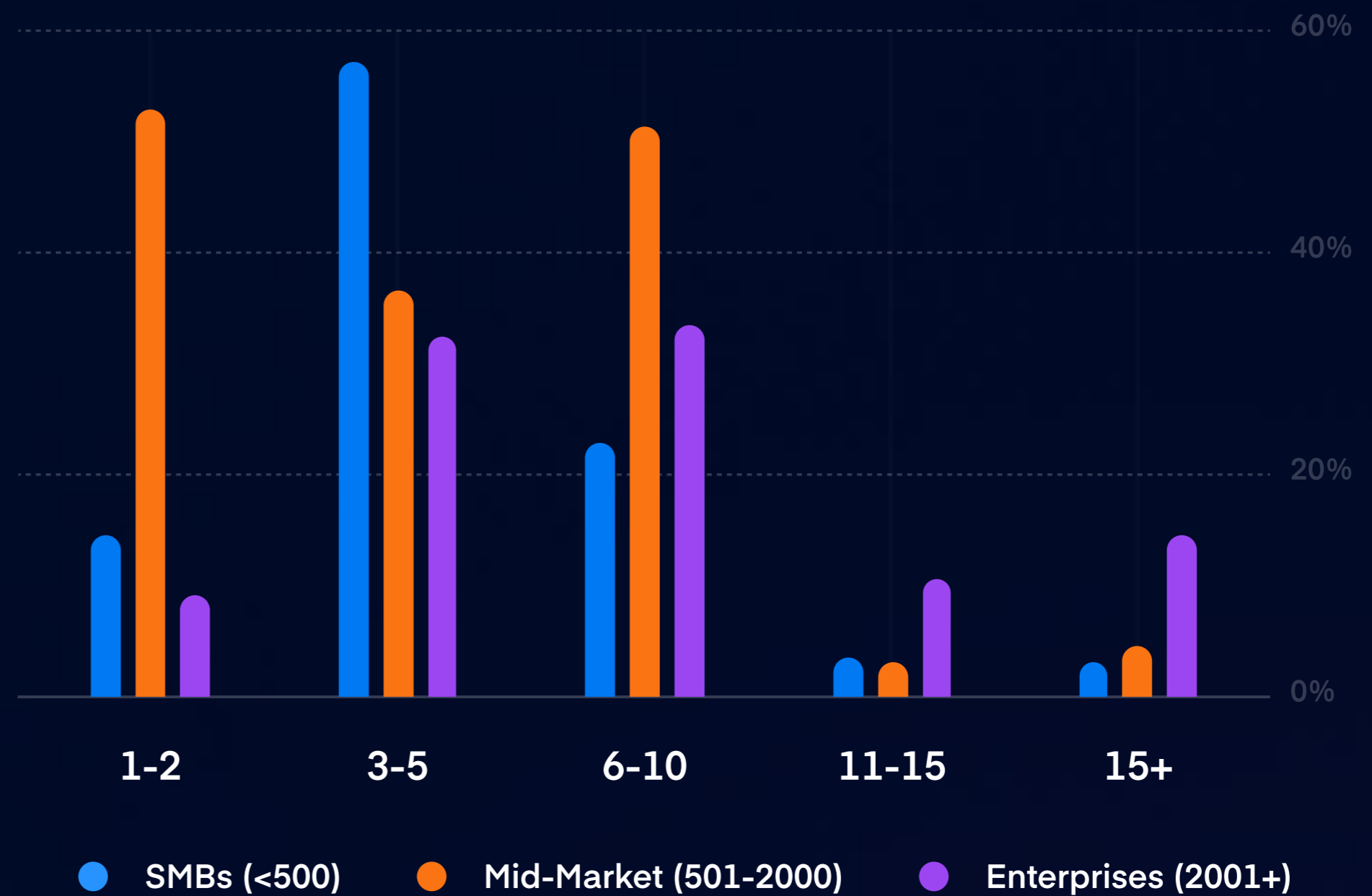
Average time to achieve alignment with stakeholders on key product decisions



Stakeholder Involvement

It may be easier to get alignment at SMBs since the majority (70%+) just have 5 or fewer stakeholders to align with. **At enterprises, the majority (57%) need alignment with 6 or more stakeholders.**

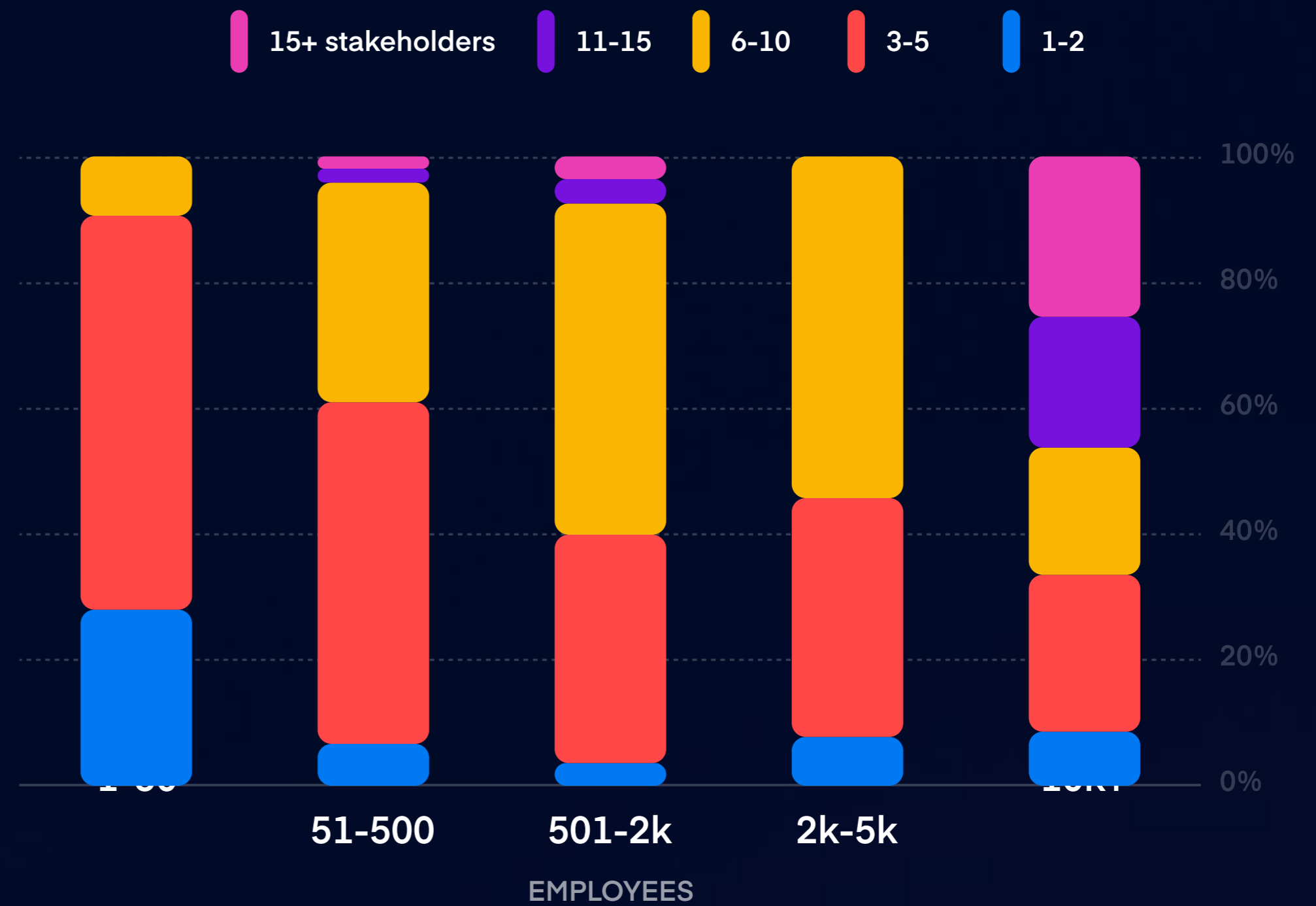
How many stakeholders are involved in aligning on key product decisions?



Stakeholder Involvement

At the largest companies (10,000+ employees), it's quite common to need alignment with 10+ or even 15+ stakeholders. **One in four respondents at companies with 10K+ employees need to align with 15+ stakeholders.**

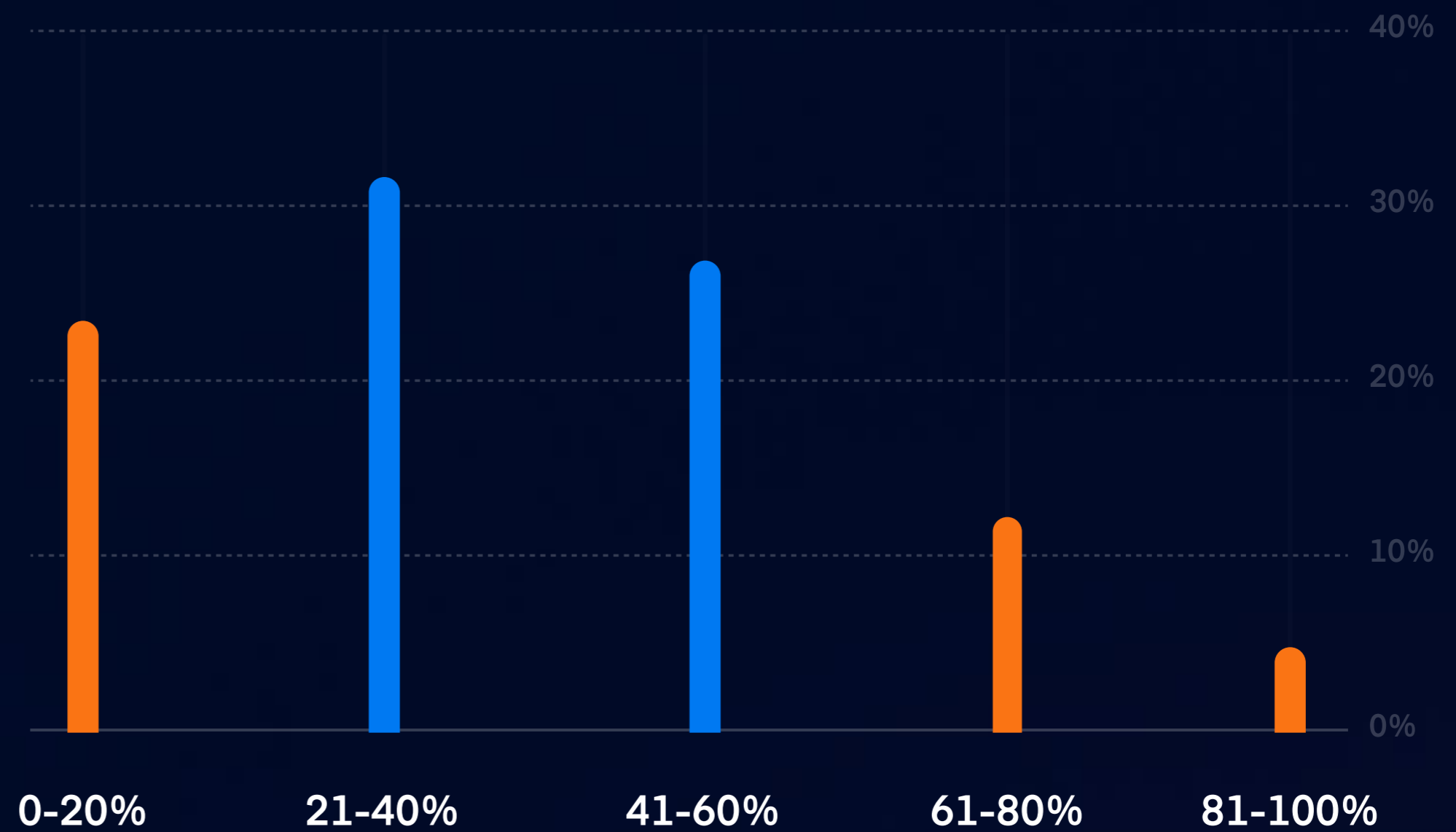
How many stakeholders are involved in aligning on key product decisions?



Scope Change

When stakeholders are not adequately engaged, there is a higher risk of misunderstandings, conflicts, and delays—ultimately leading to scope changes that can impact project timelines, budgets, and overall success. A majority (58%) report that **20–60% of initiatives change scope specifically due to suboptimal stakeholder engagement**. Product leaders should align with stakeholders early, at the point of ideation and insights gathering, to ensure that the product team secures buy-in and support throughout the product lifecycle.

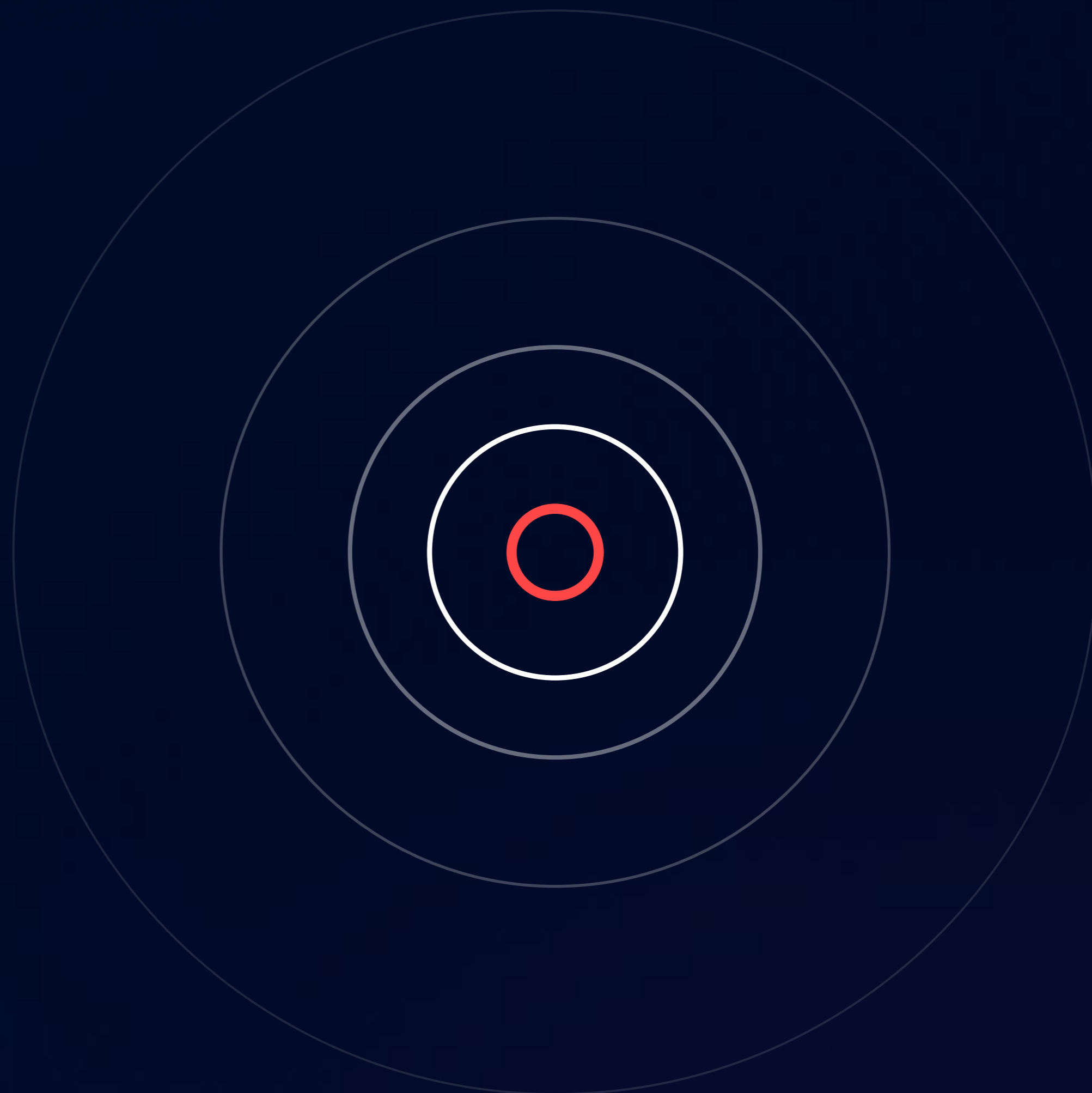
Estimate the percentage of initiatives that have undergone a change in scope due to suboptimal stakeholder engagement



KEY FINDINGS

Execution

Considering the process struggles around customer insights collection and stakeholder alignment, it's no surprise that executing on the necessary product deliverables has its roadblocks.

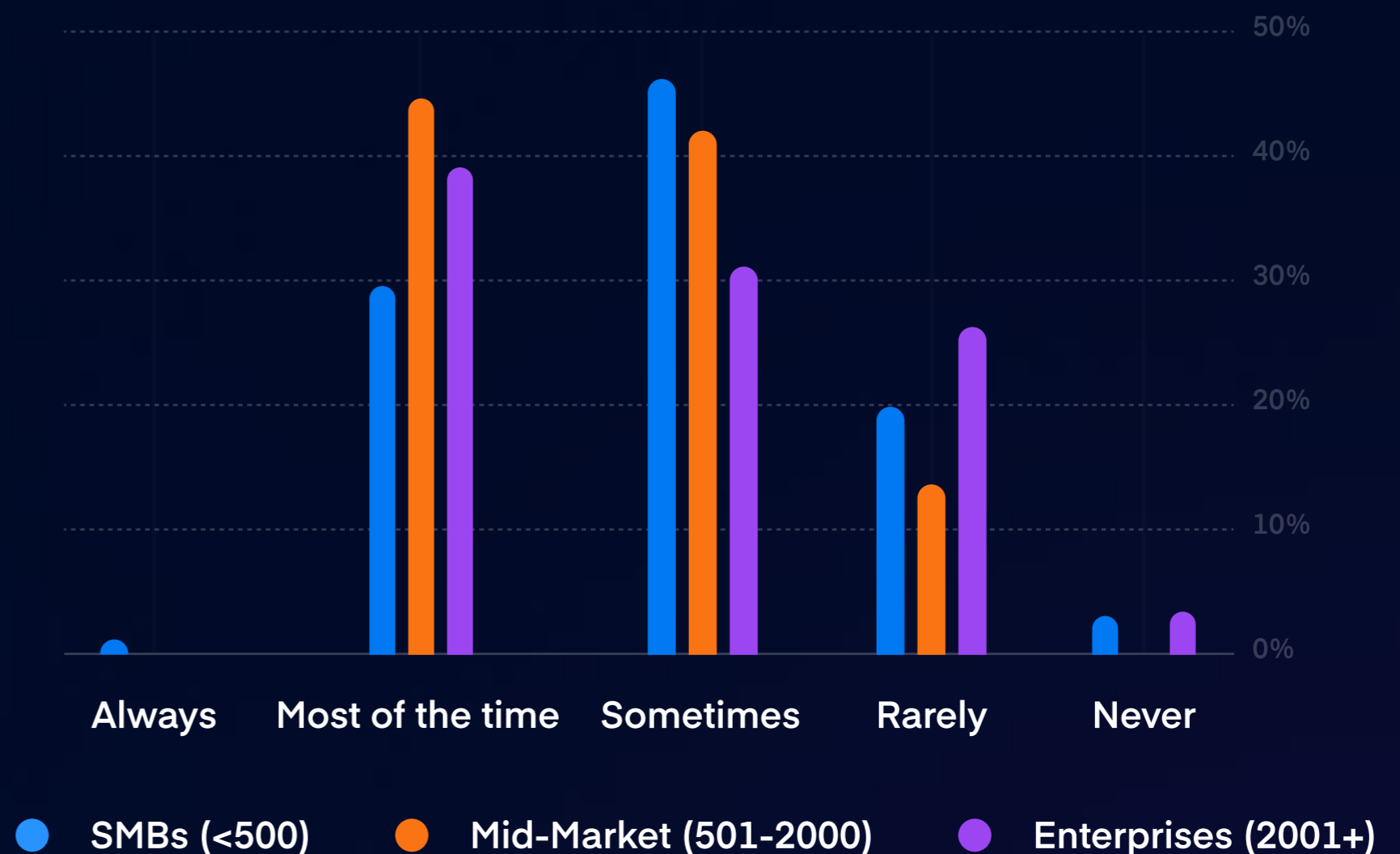
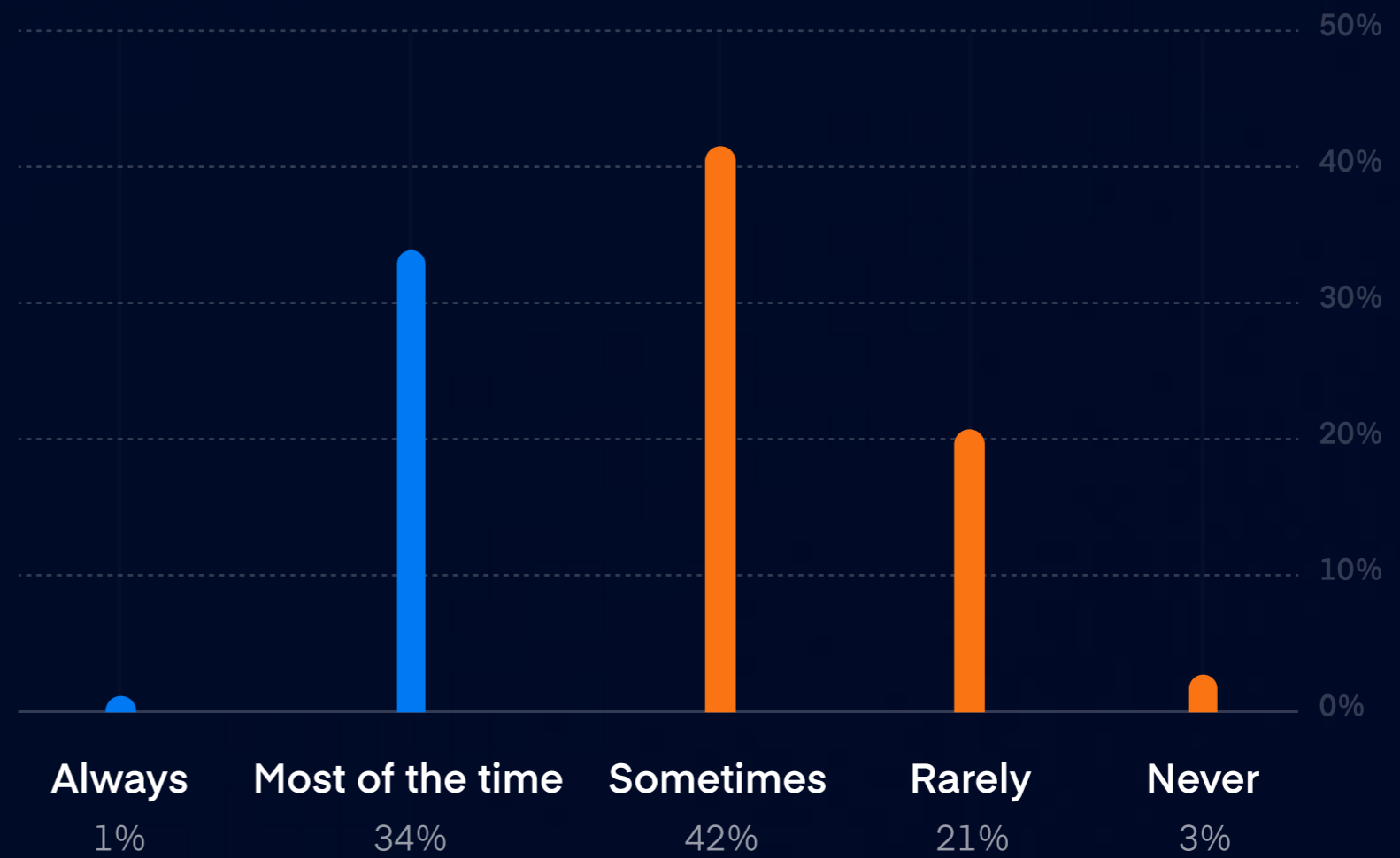


Meeting Deadlines

Across all company sizes, **only 35% of respondents say their initiatives meet deadlines most or all the time.** And nearly one quarter report that initiatives rarely or never meet expected timelines.

Once again, **the issue is more evident for larger enterprises. 29% of enterprises** claim that initiatives rarely or never meet expected timelines.

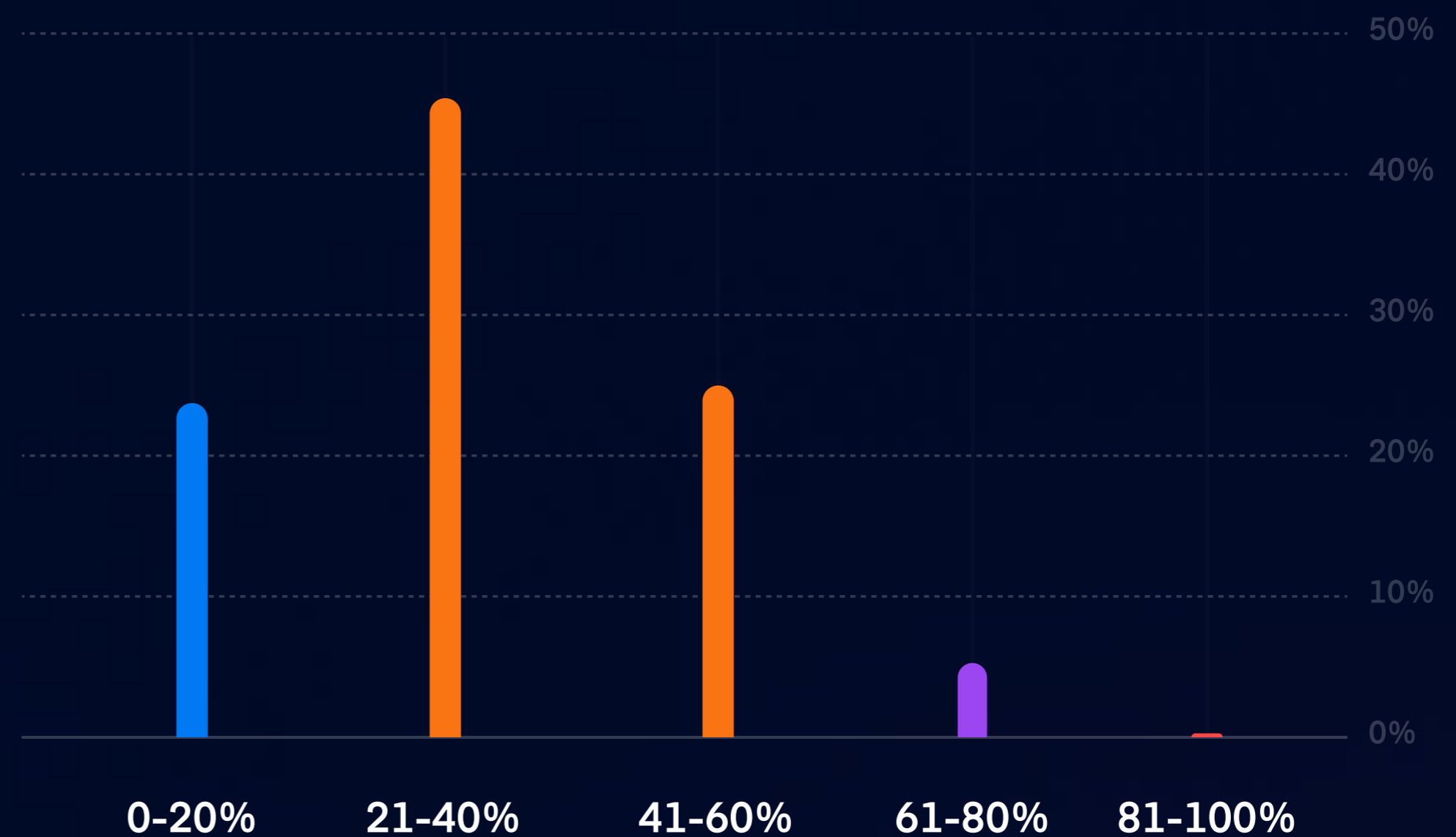
How often do your product initiatives meet their estimated completion timelines?



Unplanned Work

Only **23%** of respondents spend less than **20%** of their time on unplanned work or addressing unforeseen issues during execution. Spending **20–60%** of time on unplanned work is a lot, yet the majority (70%) do. Staying nimble and adaptable to new and emerging needs is important, but dedicating too much to activities that were not originally on the roadmap can hinder efficient execution.

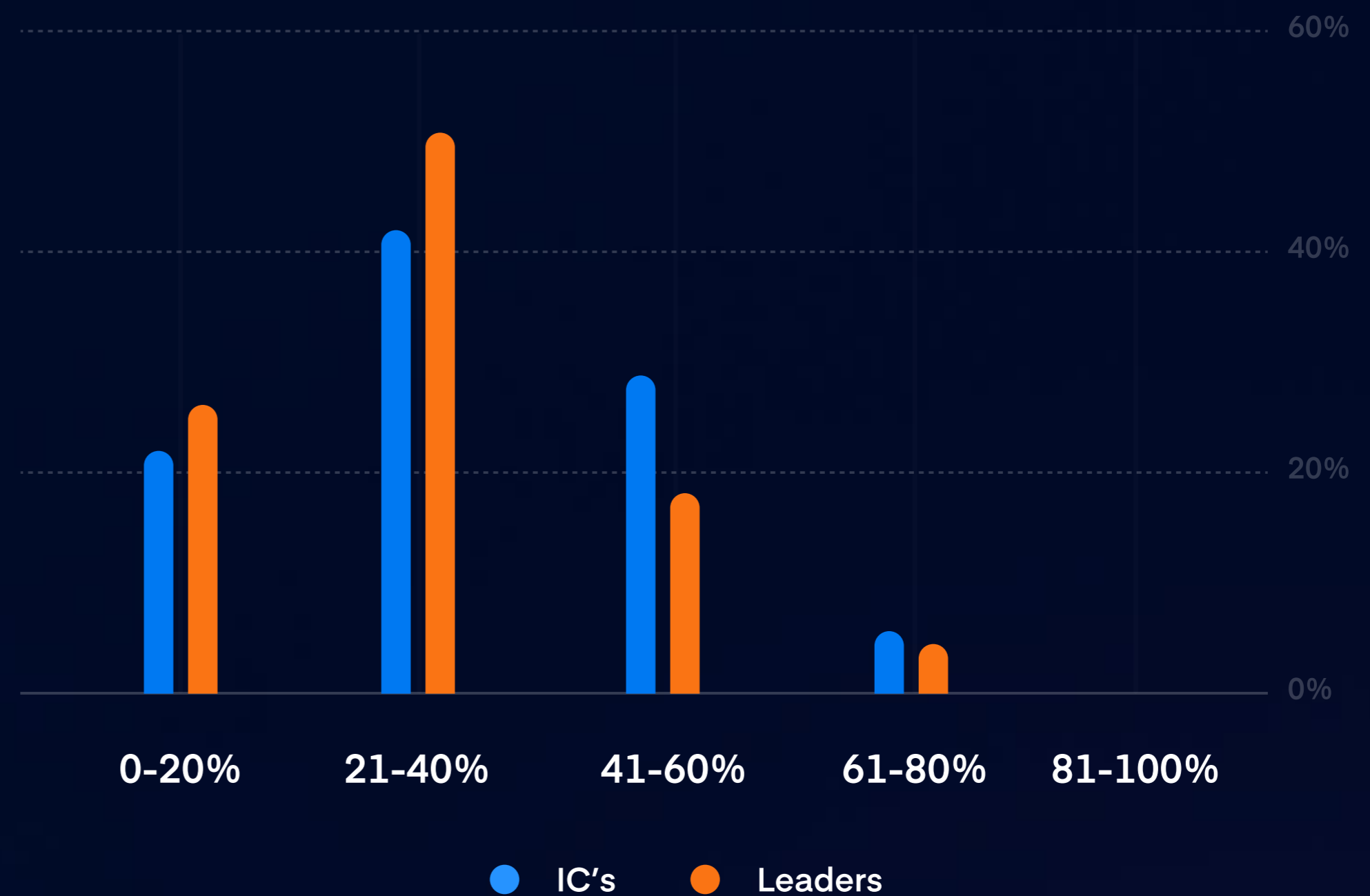
Estimate the percentage of time your team spends on unplanned work or addressing unforeseen issues during execution.



Unplanned Work

ICs report more unplanned work than leaders—probably because they feel the pain more. It’s possible that some leaders are too removed or unaware of the unforeseen issues that arise. More leaders think their team is spending 20–40% of their time on unplanned tasks, while more ICs claim they are actually spending 40–60% of their time.

Estimate the percentage of time your team spends on unplanned work or addressing unforeseen issues during execution.



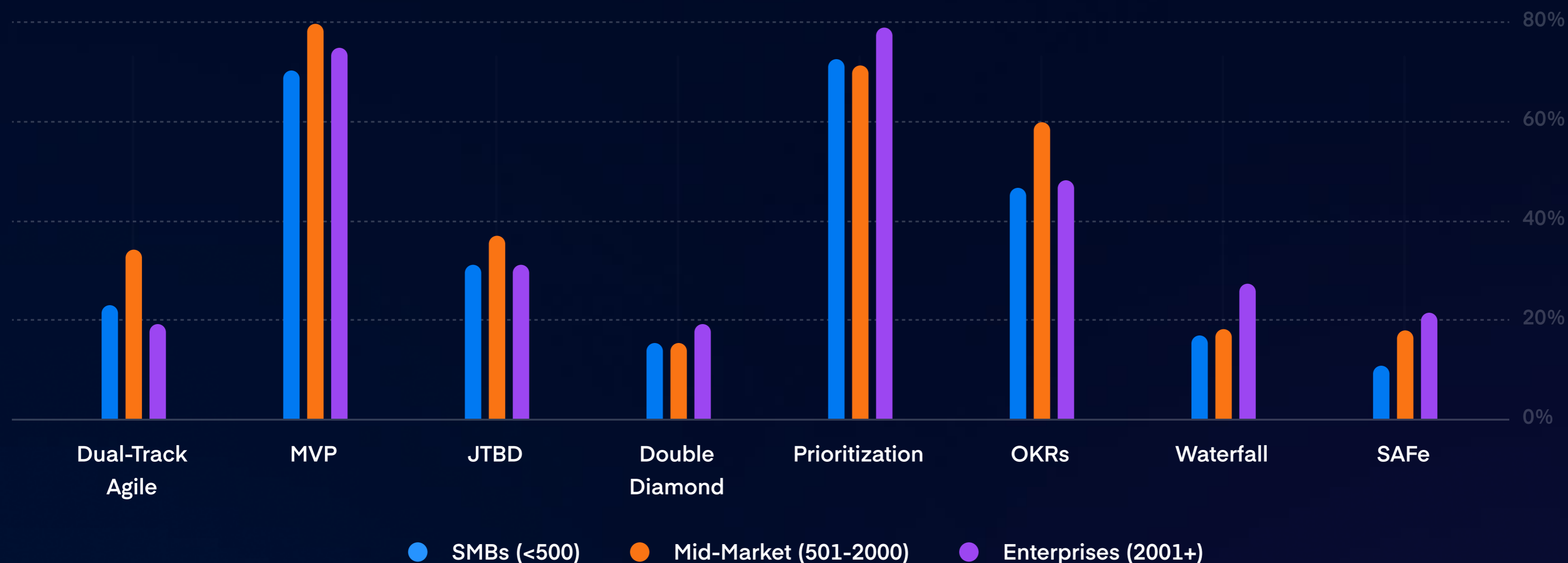
Product Management Frameworks

We also asked respondents about what product management frameworks they used. Unsurprisingly, most organizations are adopting agile methodologies like minimum viable product (MVP) and are also leveraging some sort of data-driven prioritization approach.

Popular methodologies like jobs-to-be-done, double-diamond, and dual-track agile are used pretty equally across SMBs, mid-market, and enterprises alike.

Yet as previous data shows, larger enterprises are facing more intense hurdles when it comes to meeting deadlines, aligning stakeholders, implementing changes based on customer feedback, and making product decisions.

It seems that incorporating the latest and greatest product management framework is not a silver bullet. Organizations still have to grapple with structural barriers and outdated tools. Speaking of tools...



“We’ve seen up to 50% efficiency gains as people have standardized and leveraged product management tools. We try to automate things and make sure the people doing the work have what they need to accomplish their goals in a streamlined way.”



Justin Leibow

Product Owner, EY

Enabling Technology & Tooling

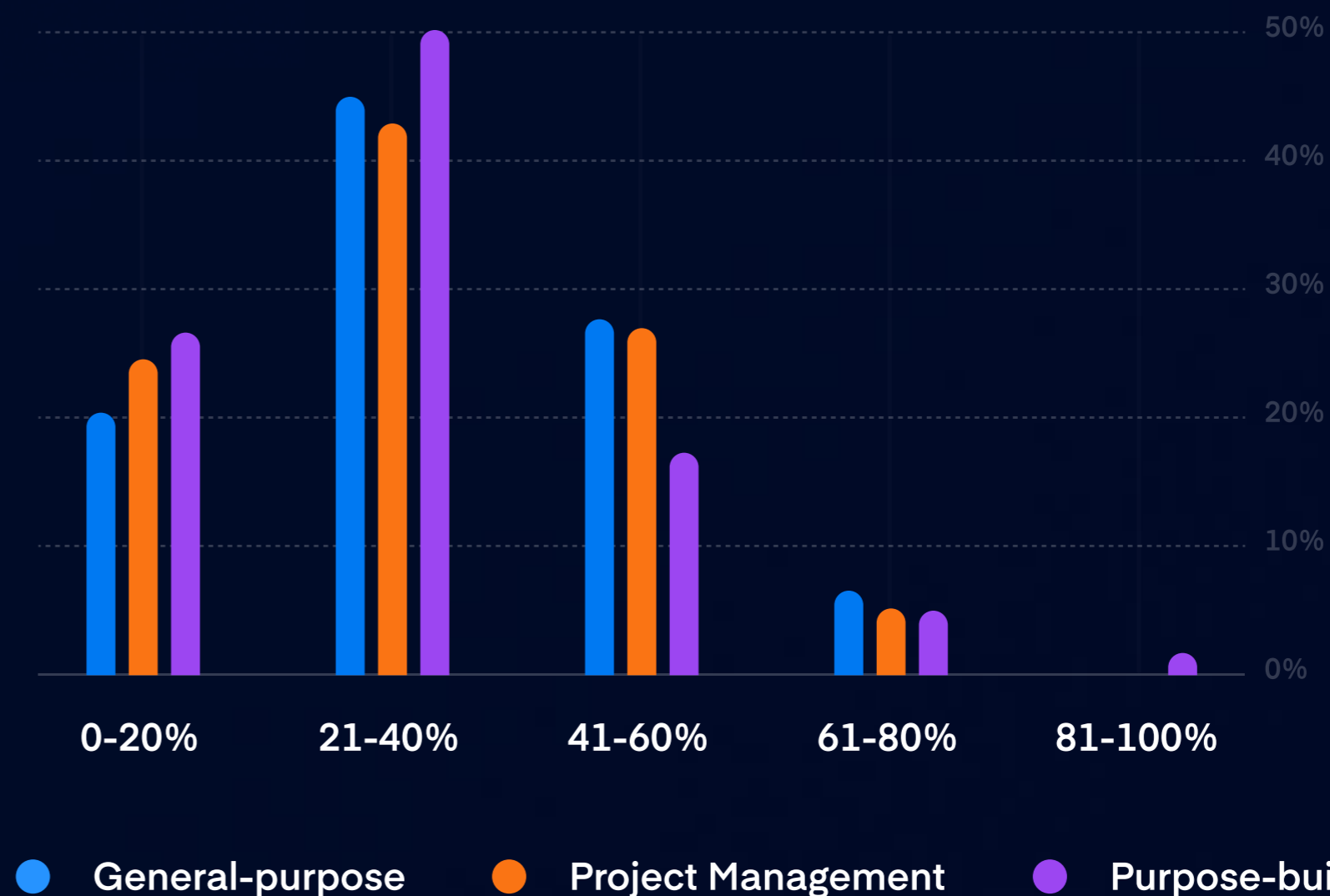
What do you equip your product team with to do their job? Among those surveyed, it's clear that emerging solutions like purpose-built product management tools are not yet being leveraged for product management needs.

As mentioned in the Demographics section, the majority (62%) use project management software (e.g., JIRA, Asana, Trello, etc.) for product management work. 22% use general-purpose tools (e.g, spreadsheets, Word, Powerpoint, etc.), and just 13% rely on purpose-built software.

Most product orgs do not yet use purpose-built tooling, but those that do are reaping the benefits.

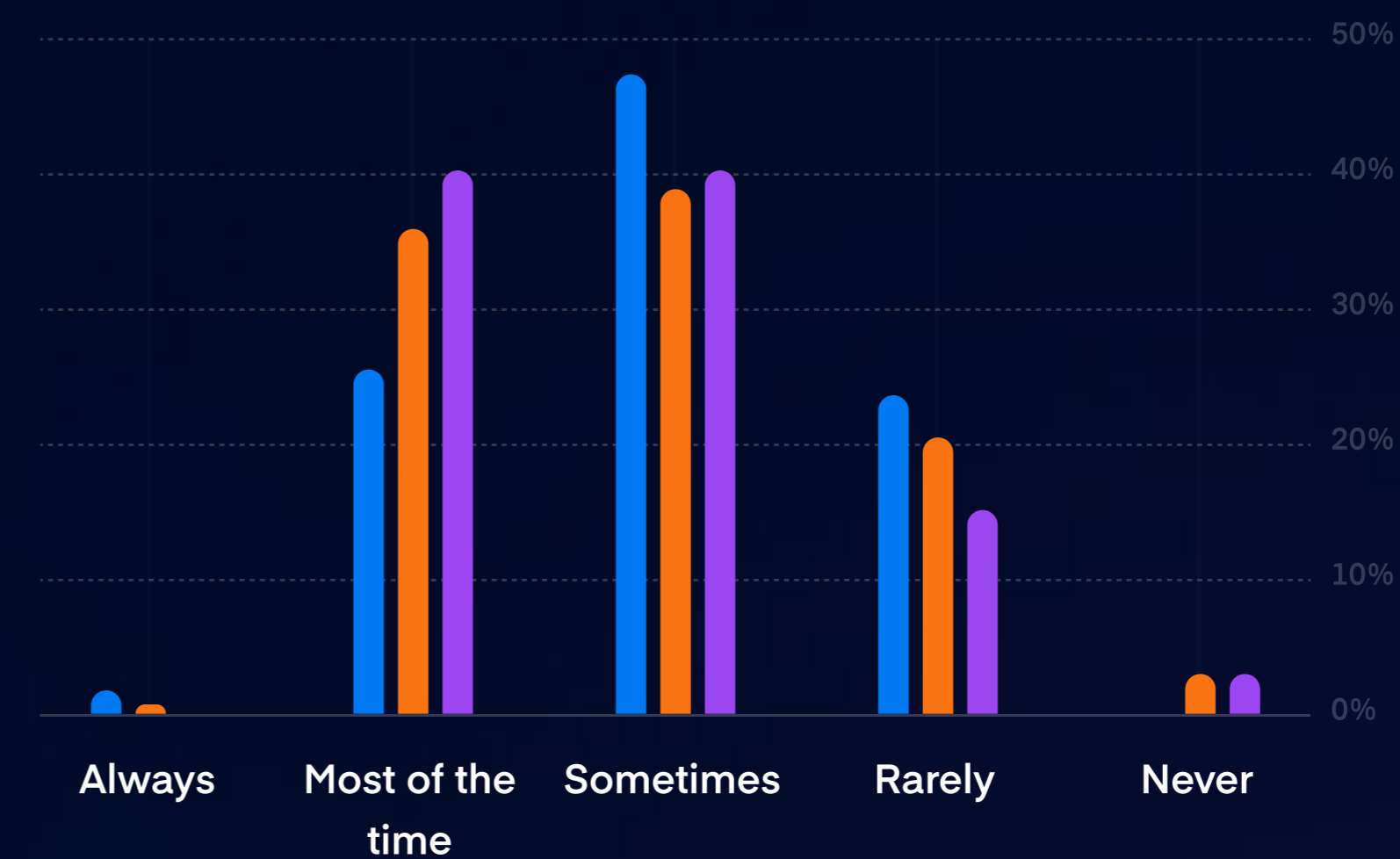
Unplanned Work

People using product management software are **more likely to report lower amounts of time on unplanned work or addressing unforeseen issues**. 55% of respondents who use general-purpose or project management tools claim that they spend a staggering 41–60% of their time on unplanned work.



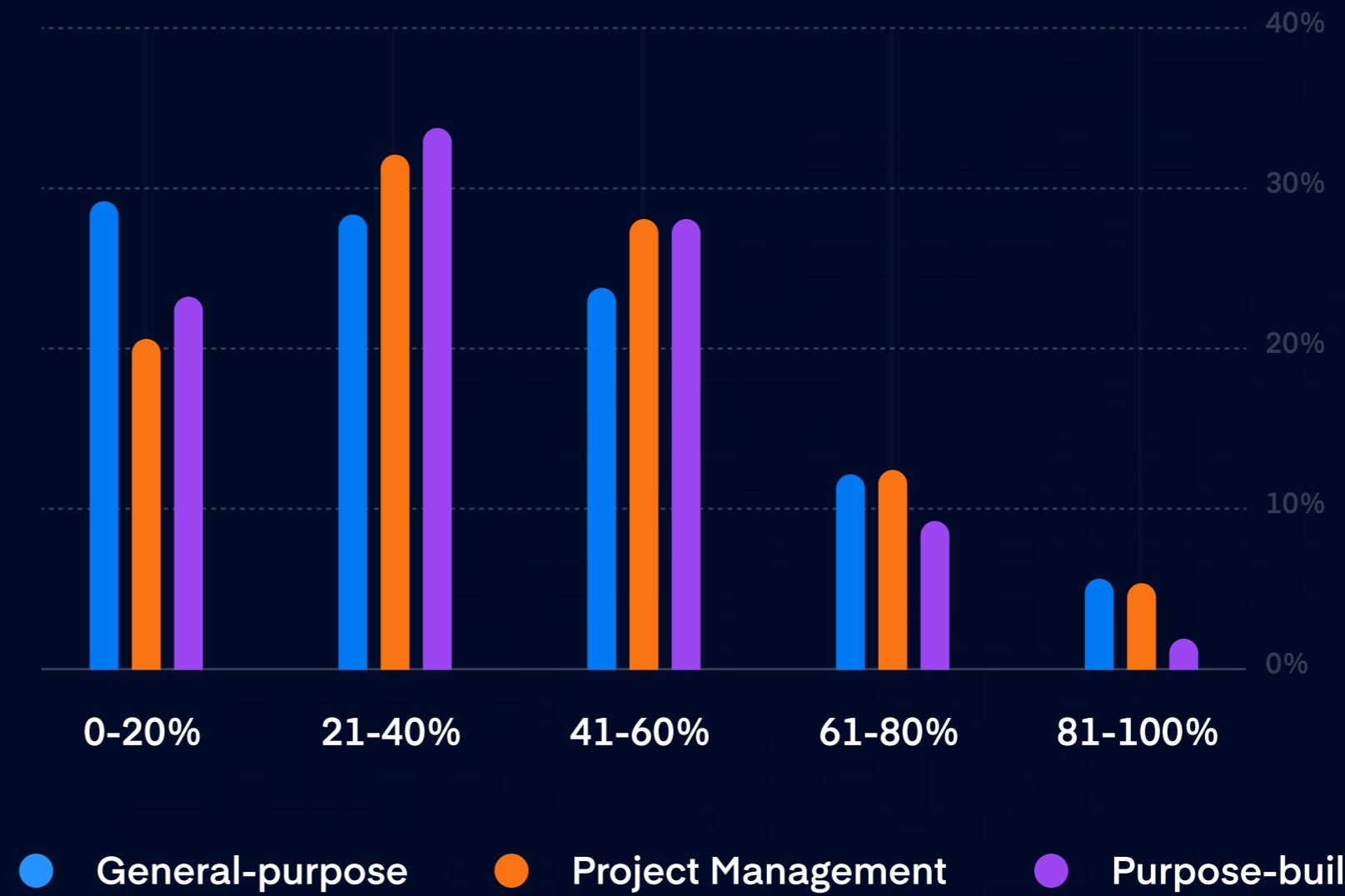
Meeting Deadlines

Those that leverage purpose-built tools are also more likely to report that **initiatives meet their completion timeline "most of the time" (41%)**, which is a far cry from the 26% that have the same outcome using general-purpose tools. Purpose-built product management software users are also the least likely to report "rarely".



Scope Change

Teams using purpose-built are **less likely to say that over 60% of their initiatives have changed scope due to suboptimal stakeholder engagement.**



Satisfaction with Execution

Teams using purpose-built are **more likely to say their internal stakeholders are very or extremely satisfied with product development execution.**



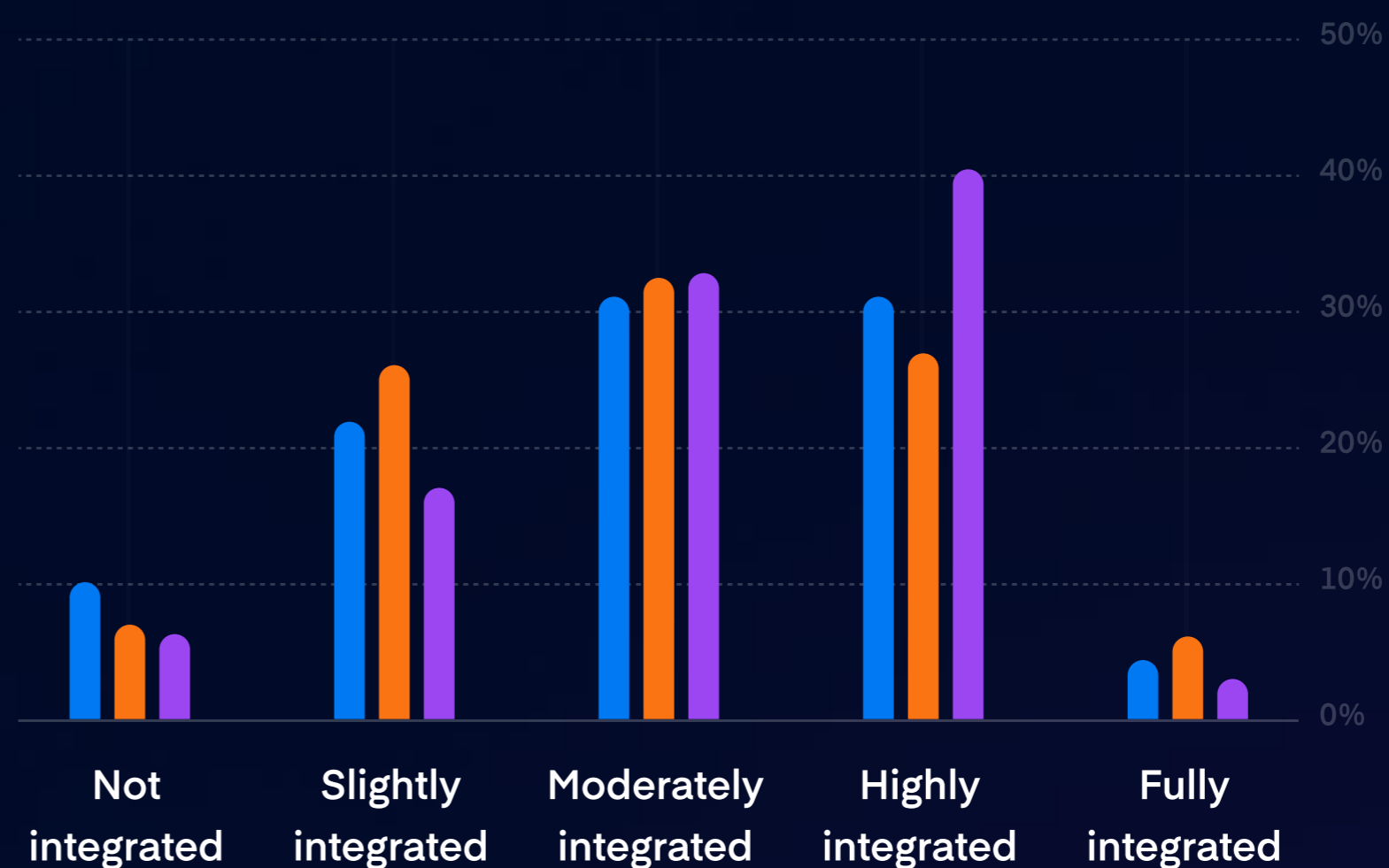
Confidence in Relevance

46% of teams using product management software are very or extremely confident in their customer insights. Interestingly, teams that rely on project management tools are even less likely (32%) to be very or extremely confident than those that use general-purpose applications like spreadsheets (35%).



Integration with Development

44% using purpose-built say their insights are fully or highly integrated into their development process.



Closing Thoughts: Lessons Learned

1 Product Management Challenges are Ubiquitous

Whether you're part of a large enterprise or a startup, an executive or an individual contributor, navigating product management complexities is a shared struggle. From decision-making delays to stakeholder alignment issues, the challenges are widespread, hindering the efficiency and agility of product teams across the board.

2 Alignment is Key, Yet Elusive

Achieving alignment between product initiatives and company goals remains a significant hurdle for many organizations. Despite its critical importance, only about 60% of respondents reported high alignment levels. Plus, disparities in perception between leaders and individual contributors underscore the need for improved communication and clarity regarding strategic objectives.

3

Purpose-Built Tools Drive Efficiency

Whether you're part of a large enterprise or a startup, an executive or an individual contributor, navigating product management complexities is a shared struggle. From decision-making delays to stakeholder alignment issues, the challenges are widespread, hindering the efficiency and agility of product teams across the board.

Productboard can be that tool

Achieving alignment between product initiatives and company goals remains a significant hurdle for many organizations. Despite its critical importance, only about 60% of respondents reported high alignment levels. Plus, disparities in perception between leaders and individual contributors underscore the need for improved communication and clarity regarding strategic objectives.

4

AI Must Be Embraced

With the potential to harness artificial intelligence, there lies an exciting opportunity to propel product management to new heights of efficiency and innovation.

Productboard's commitment to investing in this space signifies a promising future, where organizations can leverage cutting-edge technology in conjunction with purpose-built platforms to navigate the complexities of product development with agility and confidence. By embracing these advancements, organizations can empower their product teams to operate at their full potential, driving meaningful impact and shaping the future of product management.

“AI will have a big impact—creating automatic reports, identifying at-risk items, creating summaries, and more. It creates opportunities for outbound PMs to champion AI and play a central role in strategy. AI can accelerate disruption, but it can also be used by your competitors to replicate what you’re offering. Often, that disruption is not being acknowledged by the incumbent.”

**Yasir Liaqatullah**

Product Leader, Amazon
fmr. VP of Product, A10 Networks

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