

2 key traits for
successfully
navigating the
coronavirus crisis

2020
RESEARCH
REPORT



Agility



Curiosity

Why do some organizations fail in crises while others thrive?

The coronavirus pandemic is teaching us all hard lessons about resilience and adaptability, forcing individuals and organizations of all sizes to reckon with a deep, enduring crisis that threatens our lives and our livelihoods. How can you help your organization during this crisis? What makes or breaks your ability to thrive? We did the research to find out.



07

CHAPTER 1

The 2 traits most associated with success in the coronavirus crisis

14

CASE STUDY

Rhode Island's novel approach to tracking a novel virus

19

CASE STUDY

The town of Breckenridge acted swiftly to support small businesses

23

CASE STUDY

TripActions pivoted its business on a dime using customer feedback

30

CHAPTER 2

True value is found at the confluence of agility and curiosity

36

CHAPTER 3

3 tactics for fostering curiosity and agility in your organization

We're all facing new challenges in the "new normal"

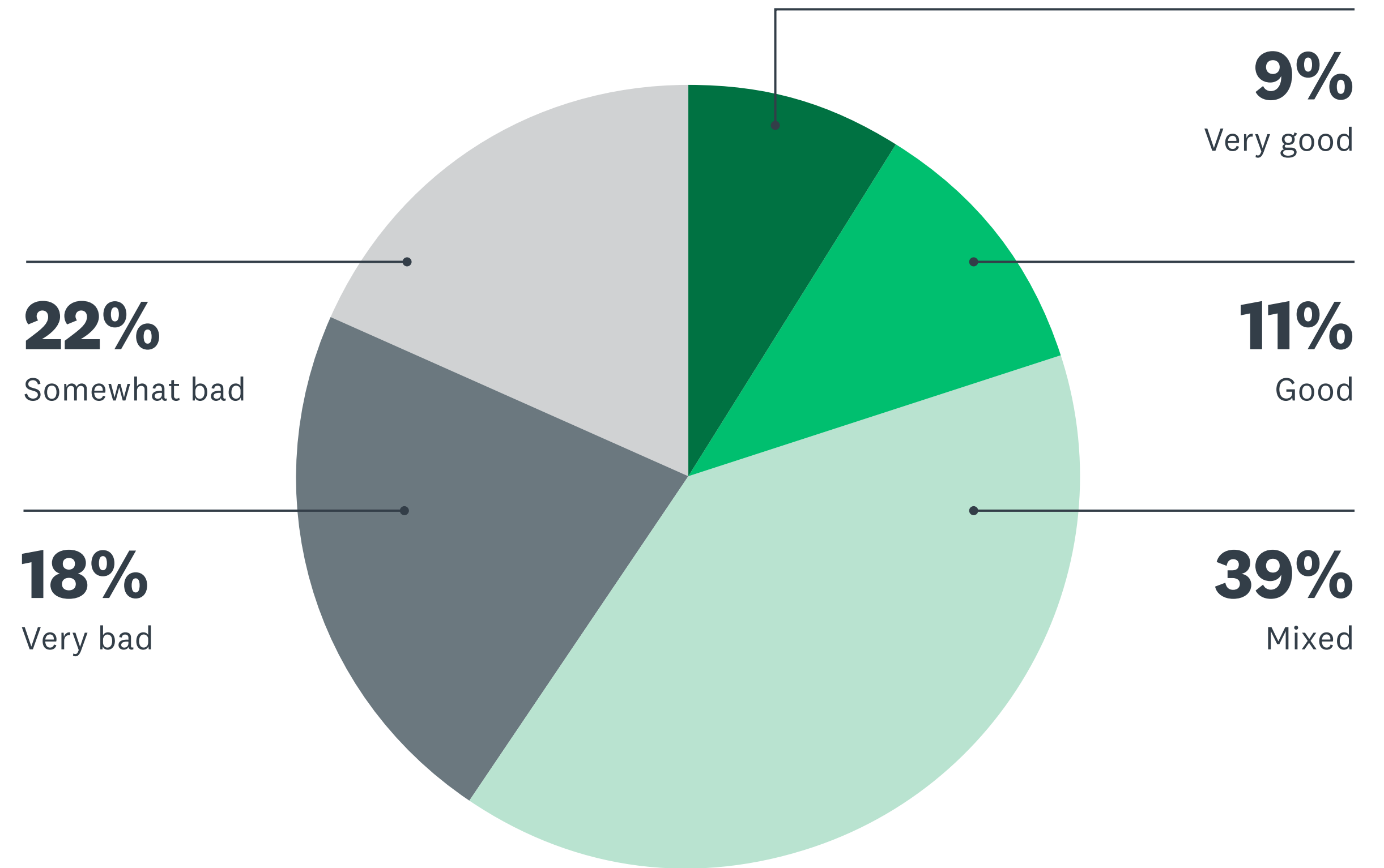


Only **1 in 5** Americans are optimistic about their economic prospects in the next year.



We're all facing new challenges in the "new normal"

In the country as a whole, do you think that during the next 12 months we'll have good or bad times financially?



We're all facing new challenges in the “new normal”



60%

The majority of Americans expect widespread unemployment and economic depression over the next 5 years.



But there's hope for finding ways to adapt

Some companies have been able to adapt to this new paradigm, and even thrive. We set out to uncover some of the traits and tactics shared by the organizations that are successfully navigating this crisis and those that are bullish about their futures.

Through interviews with early innovators and radical adaptors, along with 3,917 survey results from people across industries in the US, we discovered two key traits for navigating the coronavirus crisis, and potentially any crises that have yet to come.

*Respondents for this survey were selected from the more than 2 million people who take surveys on the SurveyMonkey platform each day. Data were weighted for age, race, sex, education, and geography using the Census Bureau's American Community Survey to reflect the demographic composition of the United States. The data was gathered from an initial survey of 3,275 respondents from June 12-16, 2020. In order to have sufficient sample for individual industries, subsequent polling from July 1-9, 2020 was conducted.



The 2 traits most associated with success in the coronavirus crisis

CHAPTER

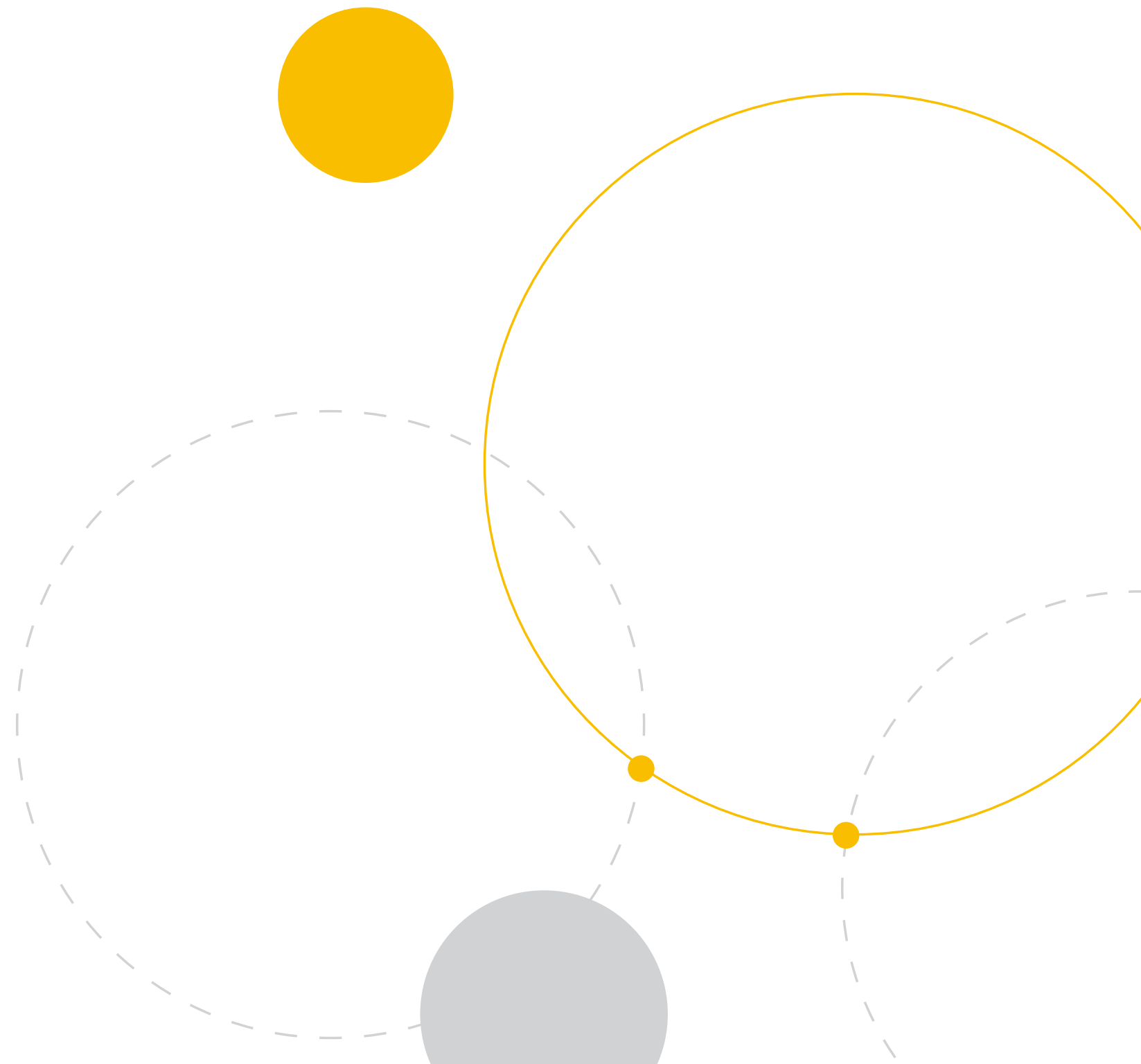
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Curiosity

The willingness to explore, and seek new opportunities and solutions by using data and feedback as a guide.

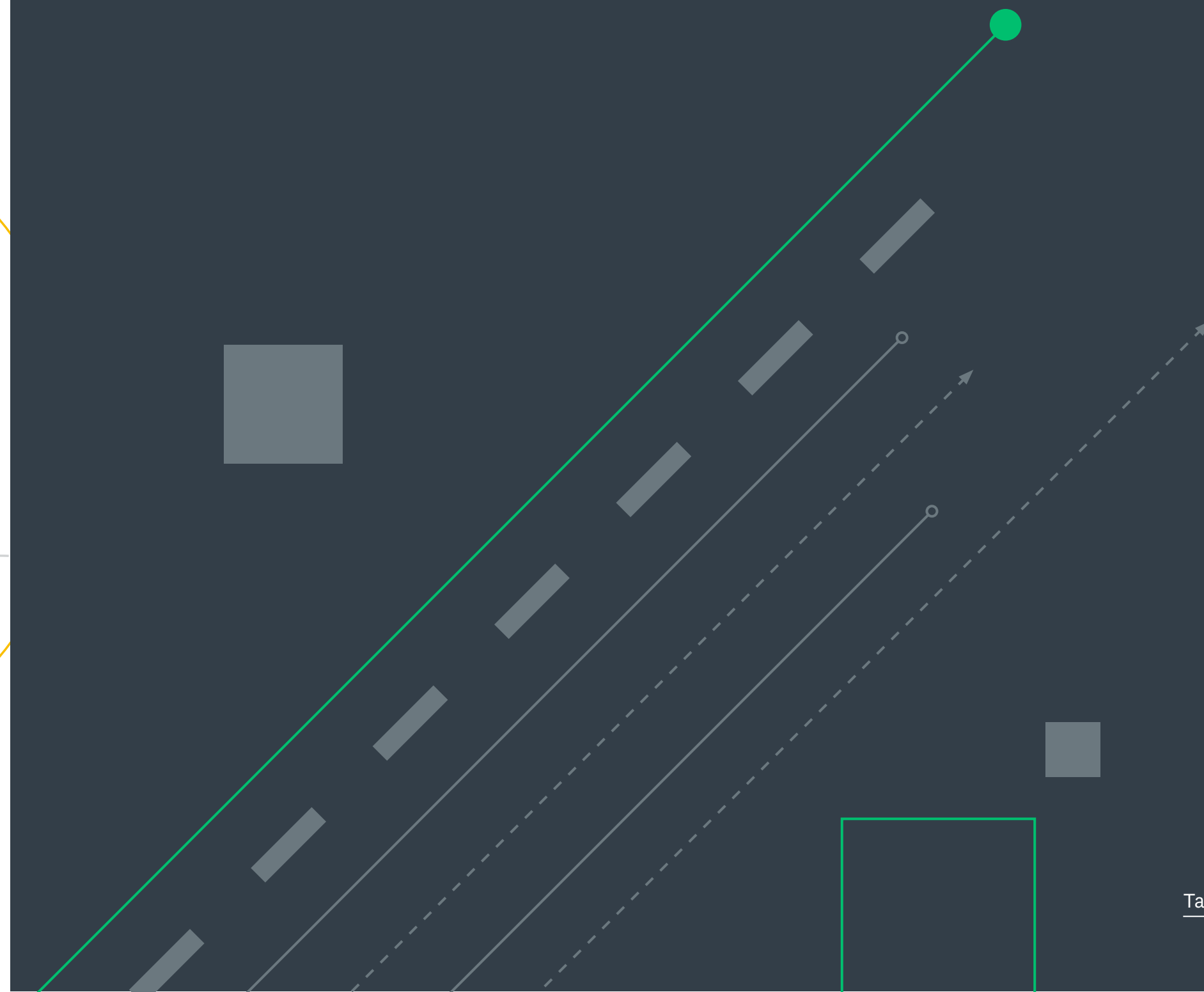
Curiosity helps you uncover new solutions, explore them, and ensure that they're the best course of action.



Agility

The ability and resolve to act quickly to adapt to new paradigms by fundamentally changing the established order.

Agility allows you to take bold, decisive action. It gives you the freedom and flexibility to pursue outside-the-box solutions, no matter how extreme they might be.



Without curiosity, even agile organizations are left rudderless. Without agility, curious organizations struggle to adapt quickly enough.



The organizations that build cultures and teams that foster both of these traits are the ones with the best shot at adapting to radical change—and the ones whose employees are most bullish about their organization’s future. The research and case studies in this report explore each of these traits, and how organizations can foster cultures and business models that encourage them.



Curiosity is at the foundation of innovation

The organizations that foster a culture of curiosity find new and creative ways of adapting to problems by synthesizing all the information they have available to them. This includes operational data like sales and revenue, and feedback from interviews, surveys, and focus groups.



Many organizations have curiosity in their DNA

59%

handle challenges by using creative ways to adapt to changing circumstances.

38%

stick to tried-and-true methods.



But when it comes to the coronavirus crisis, not everyone is using it

35%

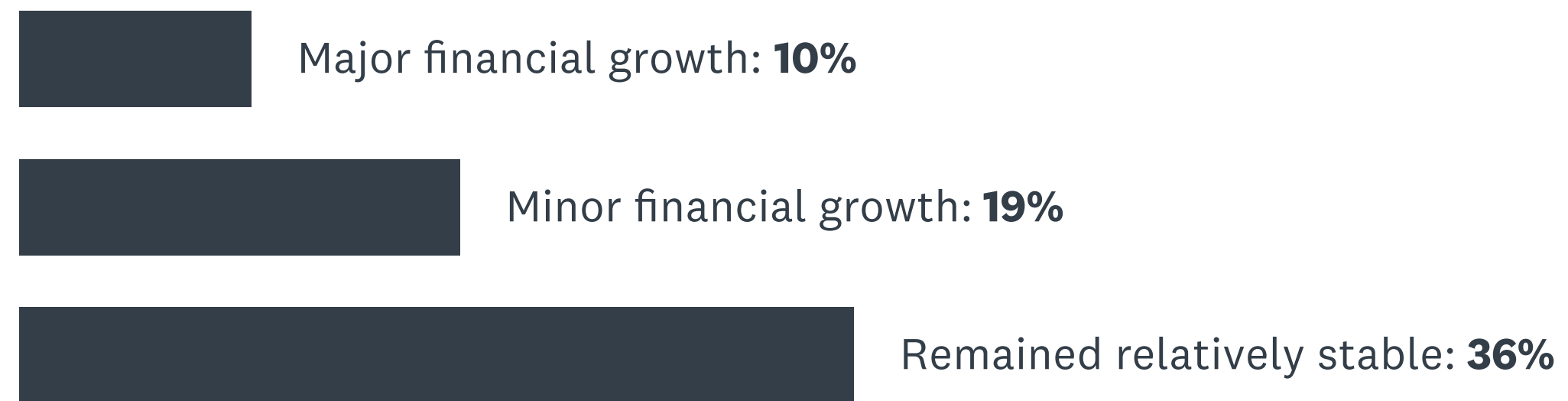
Only a third of organizations say they've collected feedback from customers and employees in response to the coronavirus crisis.




Collecting feedback is a critical tool for finding ways to successfully adapt to the “new normal”



Of those that said they gathered feedback from employees or customers to make decisions in response to the coronavirus crisis, **only 34%** reported a financial decline at their company.





There's no tried-and-true method for dealing with a global pandemic. We must all adopt curious mindsets in order to succeed in this new environment.





Rhode Island's novel approach to tracking a novel virus

The deck seemed badly stacked against the nation's smallest state during the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis: It sits just 150 miles from New York, the early epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the US, and its compact size and older population put it at higher risk for the rapidly spreading virus.

Yet the state's administration is mounting one of the fiercest responses to the crisis in the country, taking innovative and aggressive approaches to testing, contact tracing, and services for those affected by the virus.

In an interview with SurveyMonkey, Rhode Island's governor, Gina Raimondo, said a critical part of her state's success in the fight against coronavirus came from its voracious appetite for data and feedback.

"There's no one data source to watch. You have to track them all: symptoms, tests, hospitalizations, fatalities," Raimondo said. "This whole system is about constant information. If you're only paying attention to how quickly you double your hospitalizations, then by the time they're actually doubling, you're already going to be in big trouble."

Raimondo's administration constantly watches, absorbs, and acts on the data it receives to allow it to effectively allocate resources and adjust its virus response strategy in real time. A critical part of this data system is a survey the state sends

to 6,000 Rhode Islanders a week that helps health officials understand how many people are reporting symptoms, what symptoms people are experiencing, how quickly they develop, and whether they're isolating themselves.

"If someone is in quarantine or isolation and they have no ability to get food, they're very likely to break their quarantine to go to the grocery store and then that massively contributes to the spread of the virus," Raimondo said. "If we're surveying them and we know that, then we can react, deliver them food through one of our services, and they can stay home and not spread the virus."

The survey, which Raimondo sends from a SurveyMonkey Enterprise account with optional HIPAA-compliant features, feeds the data directly into Salesforce via the standard SurveyMonkey-Salesforce integration to allow health officials to easily monitor the progression of those who opt in to the program.





“We’re going to be living with this for at least a year—or for every bit of a year—until a vaccine is widely available. So whether it’s testing or contact tracing, or using surveys to get real-time feedback from your community, every investment we make now is worth it.”

GINA RAIMONDO

Governor
Rhode Island



Agility is essential for responding to volatility

Never has the axiom, “unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures,” been more relevant. Swift, bold action is a prerequisite for doing business in the time of coronavirus, and the organizations that are able to fundamentally change how they do business have the best shot at adapting to a fundamentally different paradigm. The trick is doing it wisely.

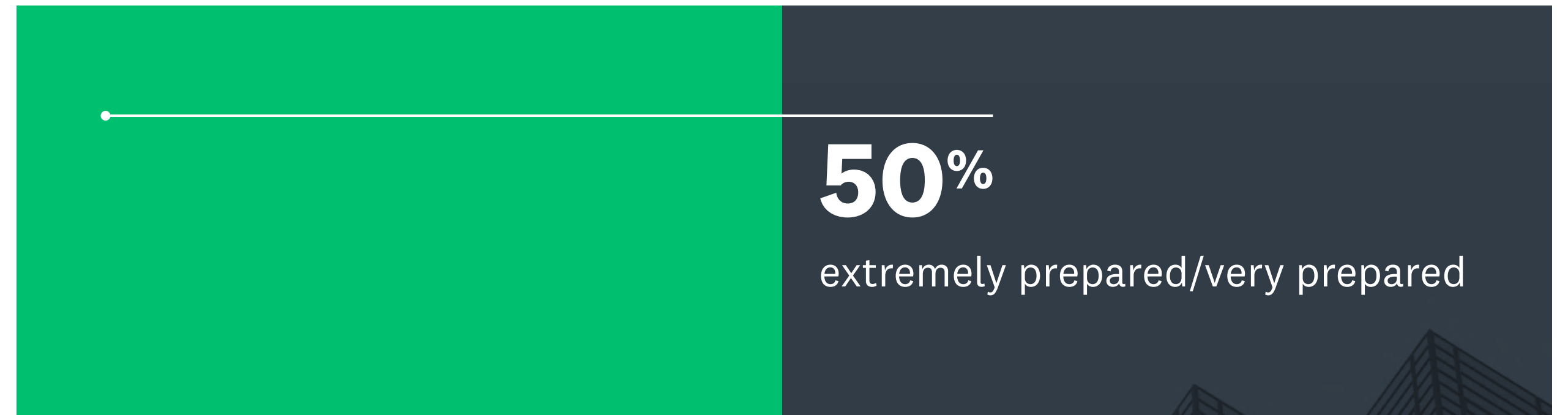


Do agile organizations really fare better in the coronavirus crisis?



Employees at agile companies are dramatically more likely to say their company can withstand an economic downturn.

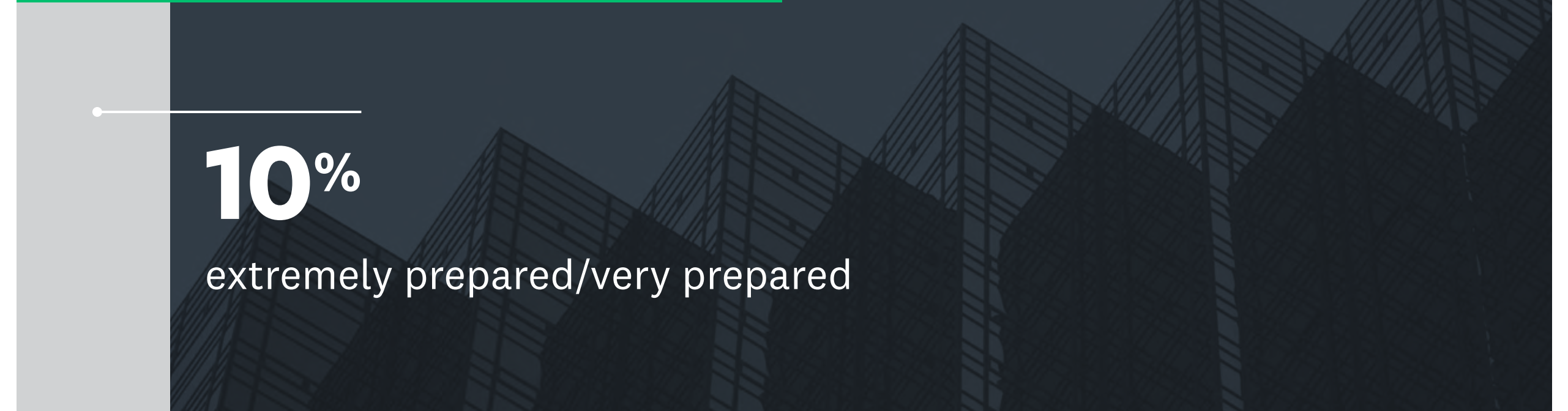
AGILE COMPANIES



50%

extremely prepared/very prepared

LESS AGILE COMPANIES



10%

extremely prepared/very prepared



Do agile organizations really fare better in the coronavirus crisis?



Employees at agile companies are also more than 2x as likely to say their business is doing better since COVID-19.

Is your company doing better or worse since COVID-19?

AGILE COMPANIES

28%

LESS AGILE COMPANIES

12%





The town of Breckenridge acted swiftly to support small businesses

Winter and early spring are key seasons for the town of Breckenridge, one of the premier ski destinations in Colorado. The coronavirus pandemic deeply affected visits to the town, where small businesses depend on tourism to make ends meet for the rest of the year.

Breckenridge town officials decided to take quick, proactive action to help these businesses. The council approved a \$1 million grant fund to help local businesses with rent support, working with the community development department to roll it out immediately. Applications from businesses immediately started rolling in and the town needed a way to quickly process them so they could offer support as soon as possible.

With the help of SurveyMonkey Apply, an online application management system, the town was able to get a full program live in just 4 days. Within 24 hours of launching, the town had 76 applications in progress, 16 in review, and 10 already approved for funding.

The program is already making a lasting difference. Since the program started, the Town of Breckenridge has been able to provide rent assistance to more than 200 local businesses in a matter of months.

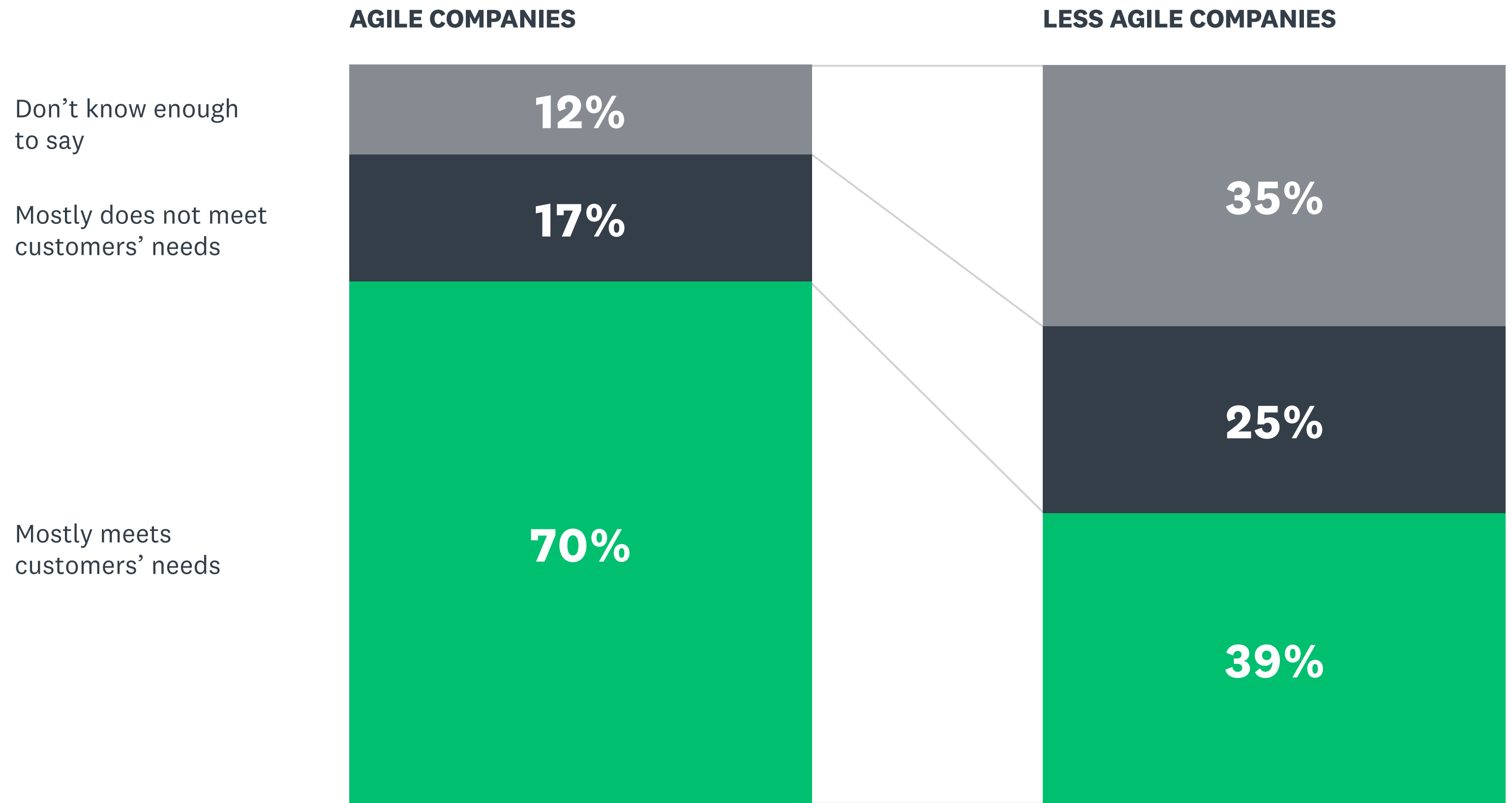
Learn more about how Breckenridge used [SurveyMonkey Apply](#) to react fast to the crisis.



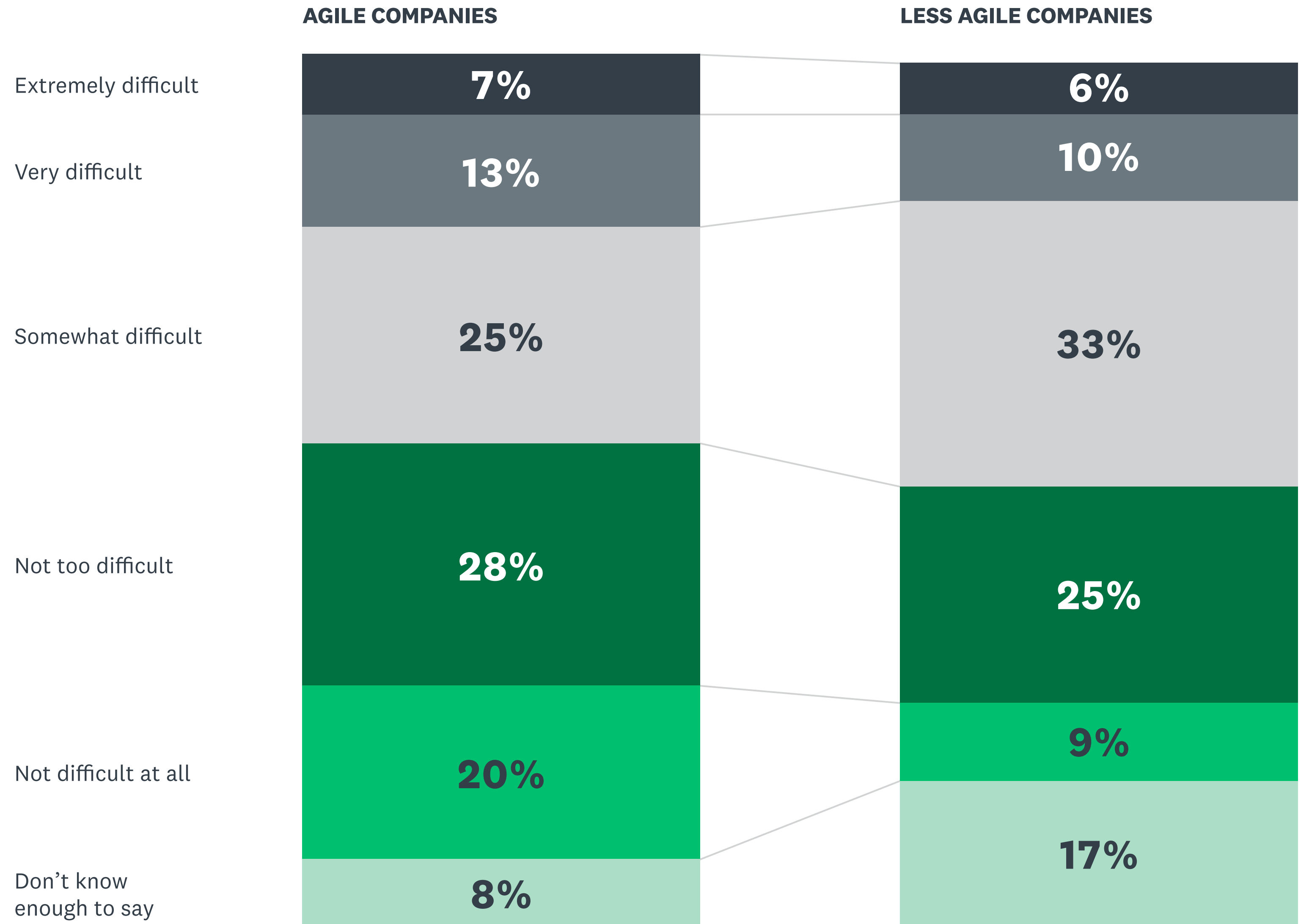
People who don't work at agile organizations are much less likely to say they're meeting customer needs.



People who don't work at agile companies are half as likely to say they meet customers' needs, and, perhaps most tellingly, a third don't even know if they are!



Furthermore, less agile companies have a much tougher time keeping customers.



In a volatile business landscape, agility is crucial for adding new customers—and retaining the ones you have.





TripActions pivoted its business on a dime using customer feedback

It wasn't that long ago, but it's easy to forget how frighteningly fast events were unfolding in late February and early March as federal, state and local governments began implementing lockdowns to protect their citizens from the spread of coronavirus.

"That was the moment for me where I thought, 'OK, we are going to drastically have to change our mindset and the way we're operating here,'" said Nina Herold, Chief Product and Operations Officer of TripActions.

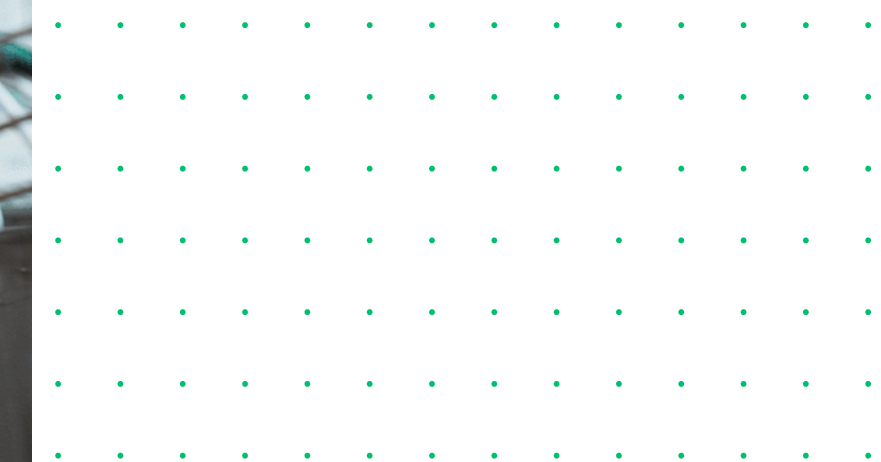
TripActions makes corporate travel and expense management software and could see, in real time, how many people using their service were currently traveling to places where outbreaks were occurring. This was critical information for TripActions' customers: finance leaders and travel, HR, operations and risk managers who were busy trying to keep up with where their employees were and how to keep them away from places where the disease was spreading quickly.

Within 48 hours, Herold's team had developed sophisticated dashboards to help their customers keep their employees safe. By telling customers where their employees were, had been, or planned to be in relation to the rapidly spreading disease, the dashboards, coupled with the industry leader's modern, flexible technology, helped travel leaders react quickly, formulate a response and adapt as needed based on each situation.

Meanwhile, TripActions' marketing department was hard at work. They rallied together to update their website, messaging, hundreds of customer emails, and more in order to be more useful for customers and to reflect an approach that thoughtfully addressed their needs during the crisis. They created new materials for their sales and customer success teams to work off of that would address the entirely new set of challenges enterprises and their travelers would face.

In the end, a complete rework of their site, messaging, and sales operations took 5 very long days to complete, including the weekend.

How did TripActions have the confidence to make such sudden and drastic changes to the way they ran their business? They built a culture around agility and being attentive, and curious, about customer solving customer pain points.





“As a startup, we’re used to reacting quickly, being very agile, and trying to see around corners,” Herold said. “We’re always going to pivot to what we know our customers are going to need.”

Before getting started, the first people TripActions contacted was its customer advisory board, who the company turns to for quick feedback, beta testing or to help understand the needs of their greater customer base.

“In a situation like this, where we don't have the time to do the user research or beta testing, we can actually just get our customers in a room with our product managers, designers, and engineers,” Herold said. “We can run a few things by them and see if it resonates, make sure it would be helpful and develop really quickly.”

Feedback from the board helped give them the confidence to move forward, and results from a SurveyMonkey survey sent to their customers gave them further validation they were on the right track.

“The thing customers in our survey said would make them most comfortable getting back to business travel was putting in place strategies and travel policies based on the spread of the virus,” Herold said. “It was clear that we were barking up the right tree and that this was something that would make both travelers and travel managers feel more comfortable.”

Some of the TripActions features that resulted from customer feedback include:

- » **Real-time COVID-19 reproduction numbers, CDC ratings and any local government restrictions** presented in both the Admin Dashboard and the booking search results to help travel managers and travelers assess the safety of travel.
- » **Automated unused tickets and waivers in the booking flow** to help enterprises ensure no travel budget is left on the table on their path to business recovery.
- » **Deeper policy controls to protect traveling employees while controlling costs**, like the ability to restrict travel by continent, country and city.

It hasn't all been easy for TripActions, which has also tightened its belt, laid off valued team members, and later secured additional funding to help weather the storm and invest in critical areas like Product to further support customers. Despite that, it's still been able to add more than 265 new customers during a time when business travel has all but halted.





“I think there’s plenty of companies that didn’t react as quickly and won’t be in as good a situation as TripActions coming out of this. But we’re going to get through this because we’re customer oriented, we listen to their feedback and quickly act on it.”

NINA HEROLD

Chief Product & Operations Officer
TripActions



Industry breakout: How different sectors approach agility and curiosity



Organizations across industries are finding ways to be agile in response to the crisis

80%

of those in technology, advertising and marketing, and airlines and aeronautics say their company adapts to change quickly.

56%

of those working at nonprofits say they've had to change strategy to adapt to the coronavirus pandemic.

17%

of people working in manufacturing have made updates to products and services.

13%

of people working in government say they've developed new products or services.



Industry breakout: How different sectors approach agility

- **The technology sector**, which includes companies like TripActions, often gets praise for its ability to adapt to challenges quickly. It was also the industry that had the highest chance of reporting updates to products and services or developing new ones.
- **Changing business strategy** may be more critical in some industries than in others. The standouts were entertainment and leisure, which had to grapple with an all-out stop to the tourism industry, and nonprofits, which occupy a sector that rely (at least in some part) on charitable donations during a time when belts are tightening.
- **Adapting quickly to challenges** is important for airlines and those in the advertising and airline industries. But as airlines clamor for bailout money and advertising spends at companies plummet, it seems as if some could have changed strategy along the way.
- **Updates to services** in government healthcare, and education in response to an outbreak have saved lives and livelihoods, and it's no surprise that they're the frontrunners in this category. But numbers in the 40s are actually surprisingly low for sectors with a duty to respond to the pandemic.

Agility

	INDUSTRY											
	Total	Adv. & Mktg.	Airlines & Aero.	Edu.	Ent. & Leisure	Food & Bev.	Govt.	Health & Pharma	Mftg.	Nonprofit	Retail & Cons. Goods	Tech.
Total adapt quickly	71%	80%	80%	77%	72%	78%	68%	77%	71%	71%	76%	80%
Changed business strategy	39%	42%	51%	49%	55%	40%	39%	43%	41%	56%	47%	42%
Updates/improvements to existing products or services	34%	38%	36%	40%	38%	35%	41%	43%	17%	32%	39%	49%
Dev. new products or services	23%	35%	33%	31%	26%	28%	13%	22%	20%	28%	29%	35%





Many organizations are using curiosity as their guide

81%

of those in technology say new ideas are mostly praised or rewarded in their company.

79%

of those in education say their organization uses new and creative ways to adapt to changing circumstances.

50%

of those working in government say new ideas are mostly praised or rewarded in their organization.

49%

of people working in advertising and marketing say their organization uses new and creative ways to adapt to changing circumstances.



Industry breakout: How different sectors approach curiosity

- **The technology industry** again got the highest marks in traits associated with curious cultures, beating out others in every category.
- **Praising and rewarding new ideas** is important for building a culture of curiosity, and most industries do a pretty good job at it, particularly entertainment and leisure, and technology. Government, on the other hand, apparently has a reputation for liking things the way they are.
- **Education**, which had to swiftly adapt to providing at-home schooling to millions of students, is the standout industry for finding creative ways to adapt to changing circumstances, beating out even the technology industry.
- **Sharing ideas with managers** is critical if you want the best ideas from your employees to float to the top. Healthcare and pharmaceuticals, along with technology, beat the pack in this category.

Curiosity, Creativity, Innovation

	INDUSTRY											
	Total	Adv. & Mktg.	Airlines & Aero.	Edu.	Ent. & Leisure	Food & Bev.	Govt.	Health & Pharma	Mftg.	Nonprofit	Retail & Cons. Goods	Tech.
Ideas are mostly praised or rewarded	69%	73%	74%	69%	75%	73%	50%	71%	64%	73%	74%	81%
Use new and creative ways to adapt to changing circumstances.	59%	49%	60%	79%	64%	64%	54%	68%	68%	69%	64%	72%
Feel comfortable sharing ideas with manager	44%	--	--	39%	41%	46%	37%	51%	47%	29%	47%	56%



True value is found at the confluence of agility and curiosity

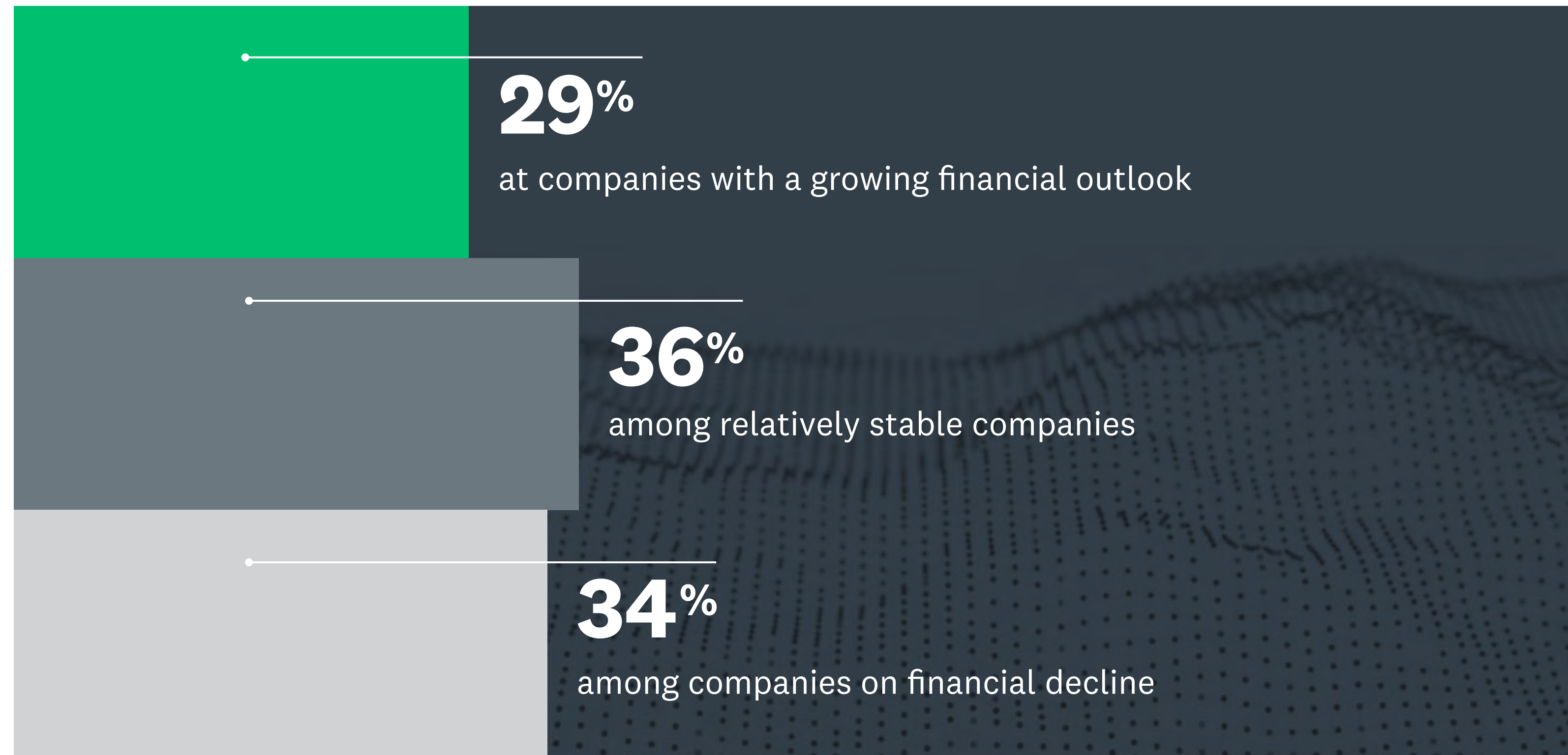
Companies like TripActions find success by deftly applying their curiosity and agility in tandem. They built curiosity into their company, using their customer advisory board and surveys, allowing them to quickly understand what their customers and future customers needed in these uncertain times. When the path forward was clear, their company was able to take bold, swift action to fundamentally change the way they do business.

CHAPTER

2



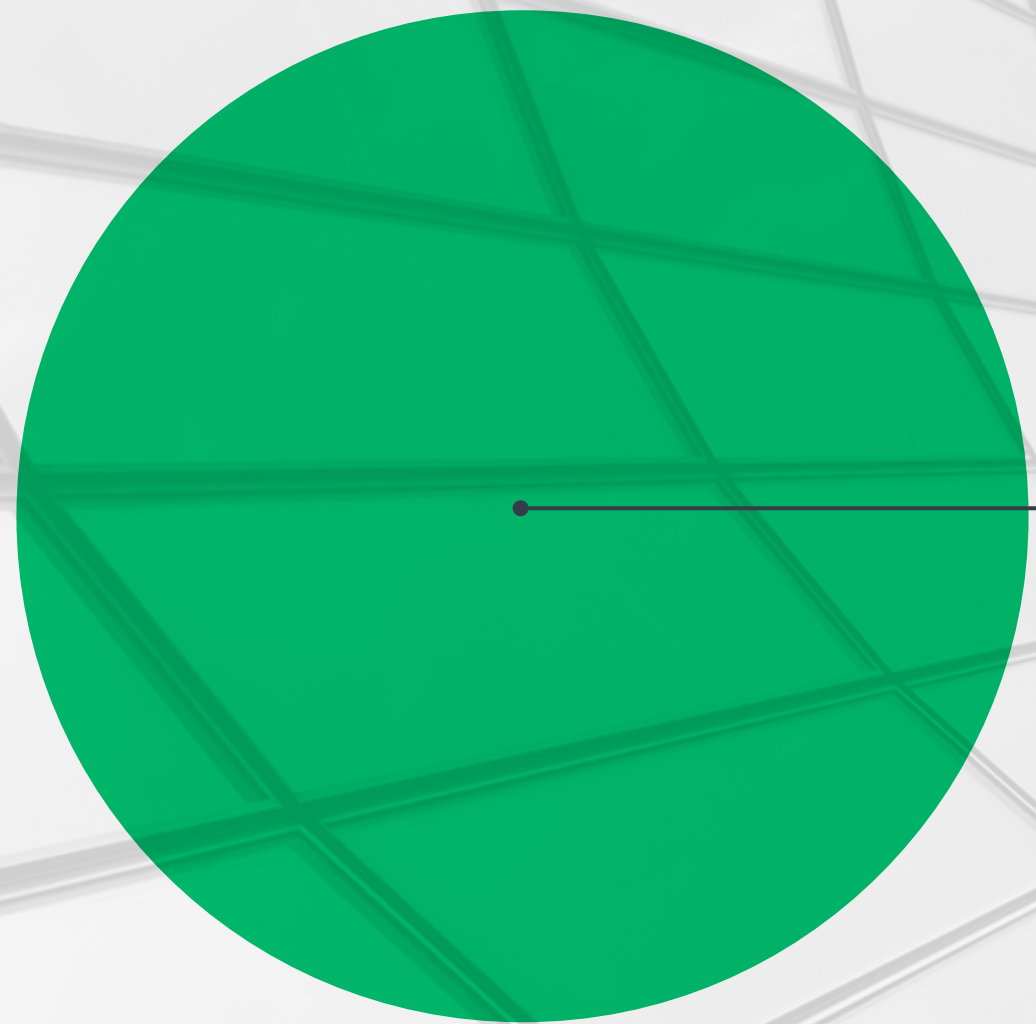
Collecting feedback alone isn't enough to be successful



Many companies that are growing gather feedback from stakeholders to make decisions, but many companies in decline do, too.

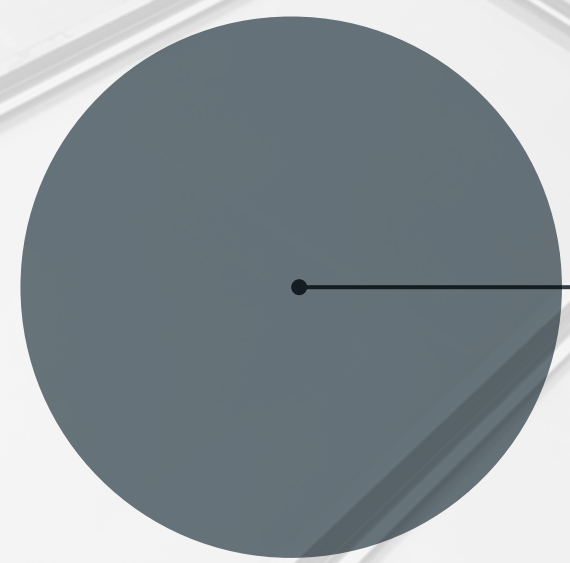


Curious companies and organizations take action all or most of the time on feedback they gather at twice the rate as companies that stick to tried-and-true methods.



58%

Creative problem solvers



31%

Stick to tried-and-true methods

Curious companies are far more likely to take action on feedback

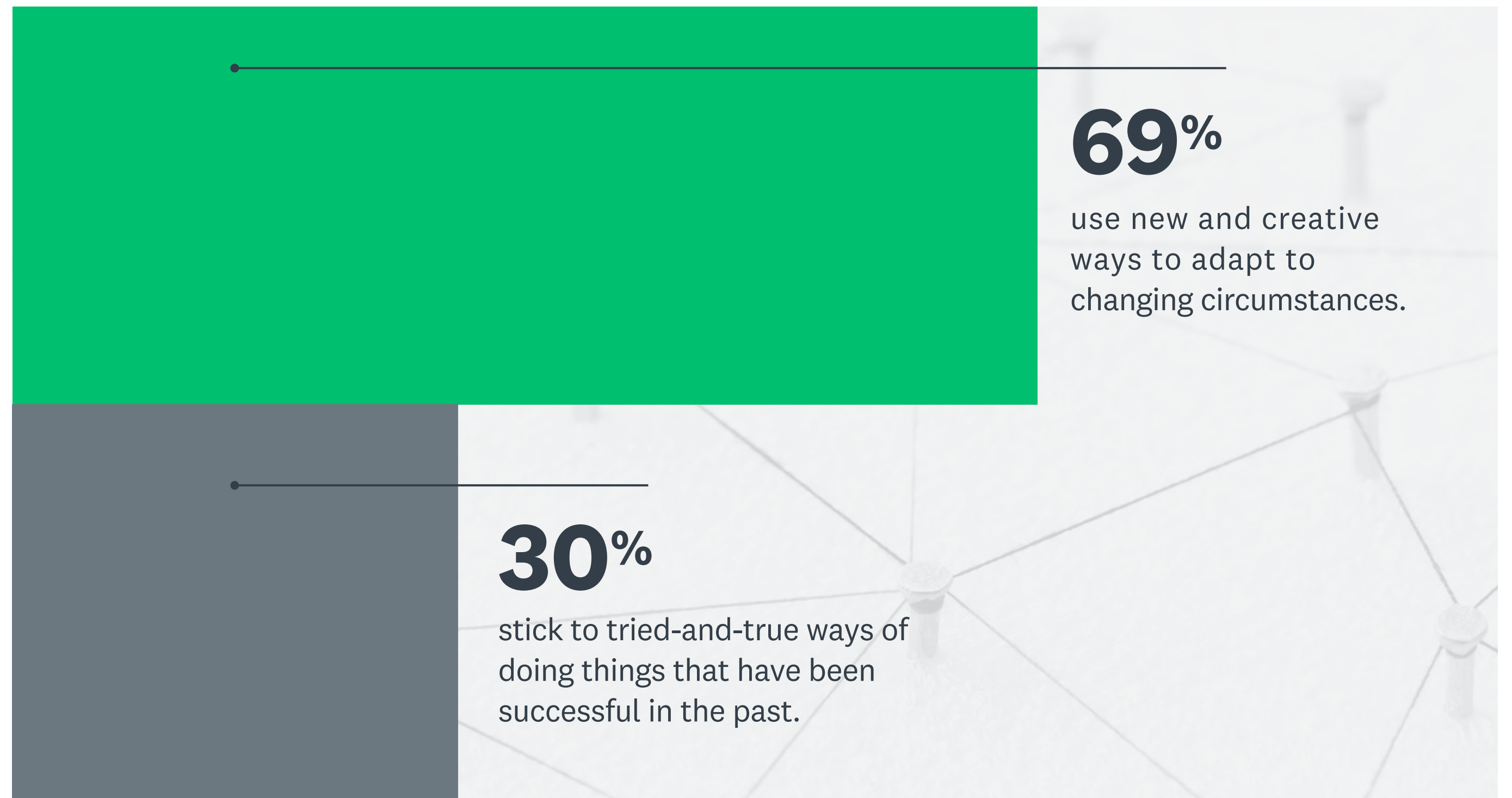


And agile companies are far more likely to have curious makeups



Employees at agile companies are more than 2x more likely to say the company finds creative solutions to problems—a key trait of curious companies.

AMONG AGILE COMPANIES



Agility and curiosity aren't traits that are limited to small startups



Agility and curiosity are commonly associated with startups, but employees at enterprise organizations can solve problems with creativity and agility, too.



AMONG COMPANIES WITH 1,001+ EMPLOYEES

75%

say they find creative solutions to challenges instead of sticking to tried-and-true methods.

81%

say they adapt very quickly or somewhat quickly to change in order to be successful.





GM thinks outside the box to make critical medical devices

The General Motors Company is probably not the first company that comes to mind when it comes to medical device manufacturing. Yet one of the world's largest automobile makers is hard at work constructing lifesaving ventilators.

Ventilators, which help those who are critically ill with coronavirus and other pulmonary diseases, were in short supply after the outbreak of the disease, to the point where states had to loan them out to neighboring states.

The shortage spurred a US Government contract for 30,000 ventilators to be constructed in a matter of months. GM, with its automobile part manufacturing plants around the world, is one of a few companies with the capacity to meet this demand, but not the expertise. The expertise came from a partnership with Ventec, a small Washington-based medical device maker, and the 2 companies set out to fulfill a \$489.5 million government contract for the ventilators.

Changing the finished product of an auto parts plant to lifesaving medical devices is probably about as hard as it sounds, but the companies managed to retool the plant, based in Kokomo, Indiana, for their needs and are on track to produce the devices for the national stockpile within about 4 months. The plant will continue to produce ventilators after its contract is complete, GM has said.



3 tactics for fostering curiosity and agility in your organization

CHAPTER

3

If curiosity and agility are so important to success during this crisis, and those in the future, how do you foster an environment at your organization where these traits can take root and grow among your employees?



Build a culture where creativity is celebrated

Encouraging creativity and innovation ultimately starts at the grassroots level. Every manager, director, and VP should try to build an environment where people aren't afraid to speak up and offer new ideas. The results of building a culture where creative thinking is not only encouraged, but rewarded, speak for themselves.

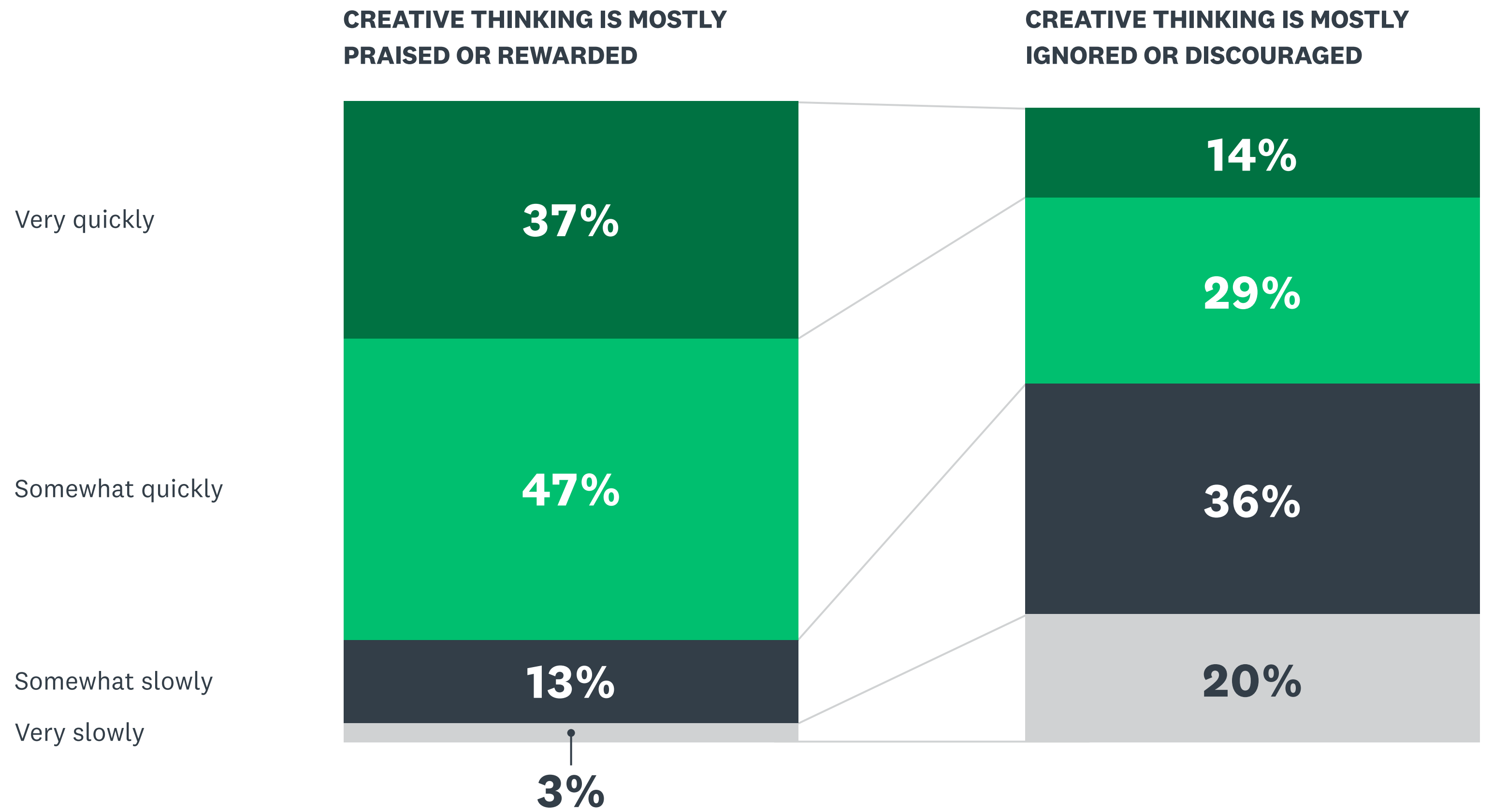


Companies that reward creative thinking are more agile.



84% of companies that praise and reward creative thinking adapt very or somewhat quickly to change. Only 43% of those that discourage creative thinking do.

How fast or slow would you say your company adapts to change in order to be successful?



Companies that reward creative thinking are more creative.



Companies that reward creative thinking are twice as likely to have cultures that use new and creative ways to adapt to changing circumstances.

Which statement best describes your company or organization, even if neither is exactly right:

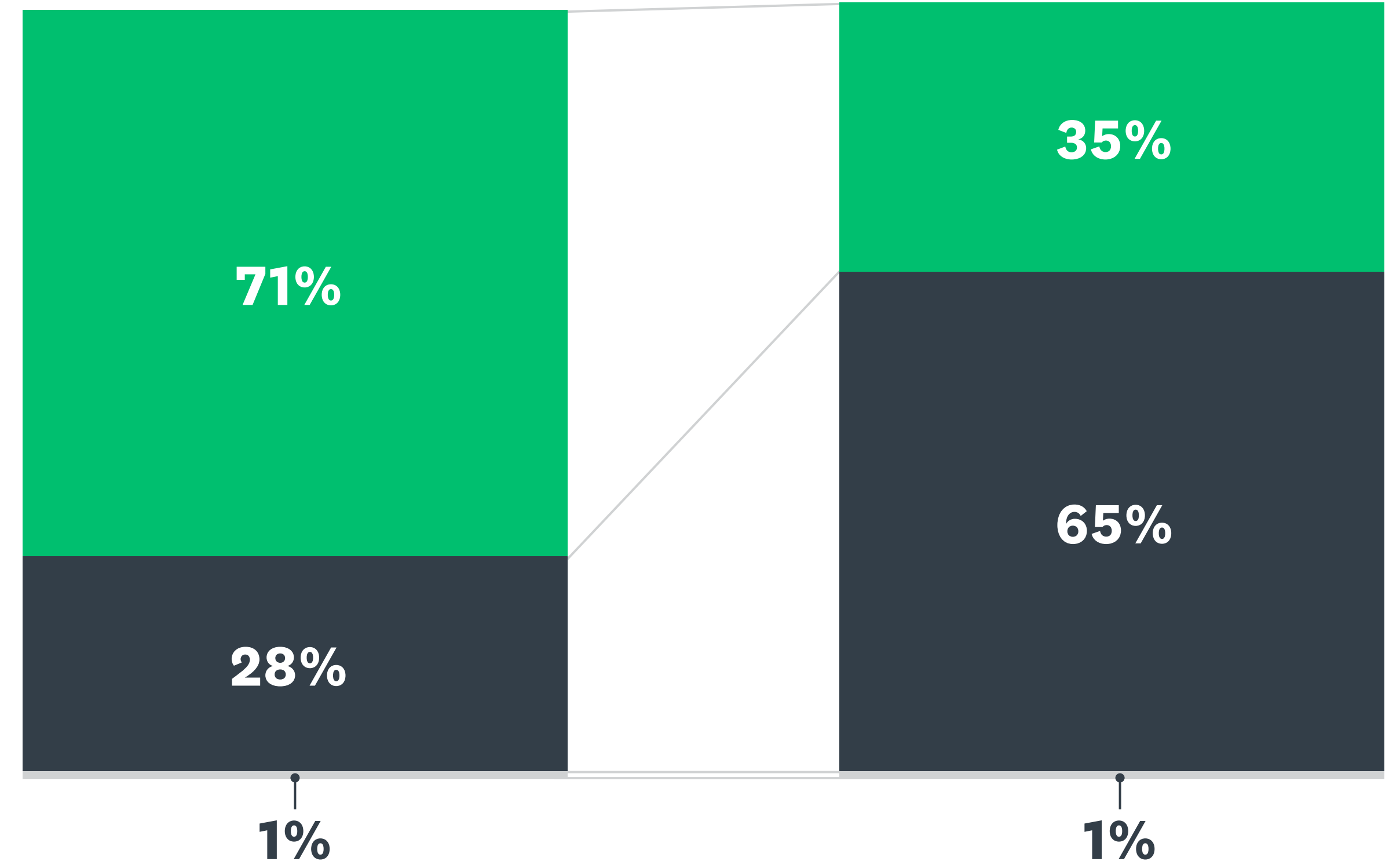
CREATIVE THINKING IS MOSTLY PRAISED OR REWARDED

CREATIVE THINKING IS MOSTLY IGNORED OR DISCOURAGED

Using new and creative ways to adapt to changing circumstances.

Sticking to tried-and-true ways of doing things that have been successful in the past.

No answer

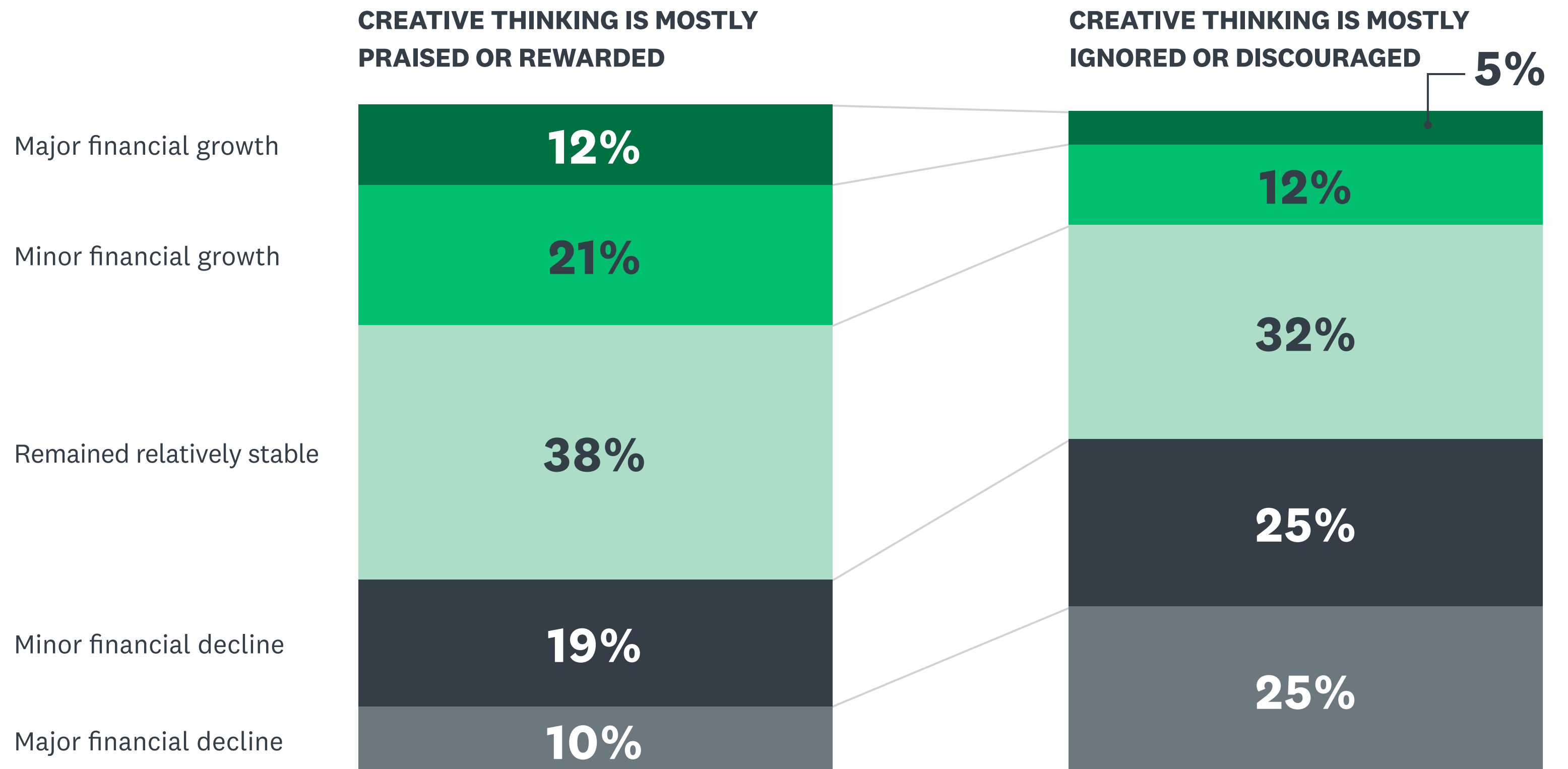


Companies that reward creative thinking are likely to find success in this crisis.



Companies that reward creative thinking are twice as likely to report major or minor financial growth.

When it comes to financial growth, how would you say the company you work for is doing now compared to last year?





Constantly collect feedback from all available sources

We live in a time when even the most widely accepted ideas about how to run a business are in a constant state of flux. Conventional notions about customer needs and product-market fit need to be completely re-examined under the lens of a new social and economic reality.

Gathering feedback, constantly and across multiple areas of focus, is critical to ensure we're taking the best courses of action as we navigate this new territory. Sending surveys and establishing customer advisory boards are two relatively simple strategies that can go a long way in understanding how people are coping in this moment.



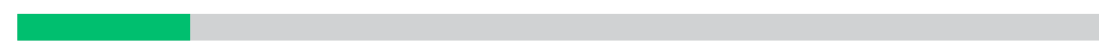
Collecting feedback keeps you in tune with your customers, and in turn keeps them happy.

Among those who collected feedback in response to the coronavirus pandemic, **3 in 4** said they're meeting customer needs.



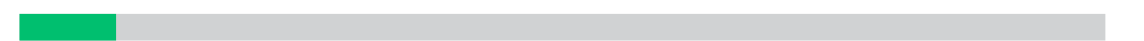
74%

Mostly meets customers' needs



16%

Mostly does not meet customers' needs

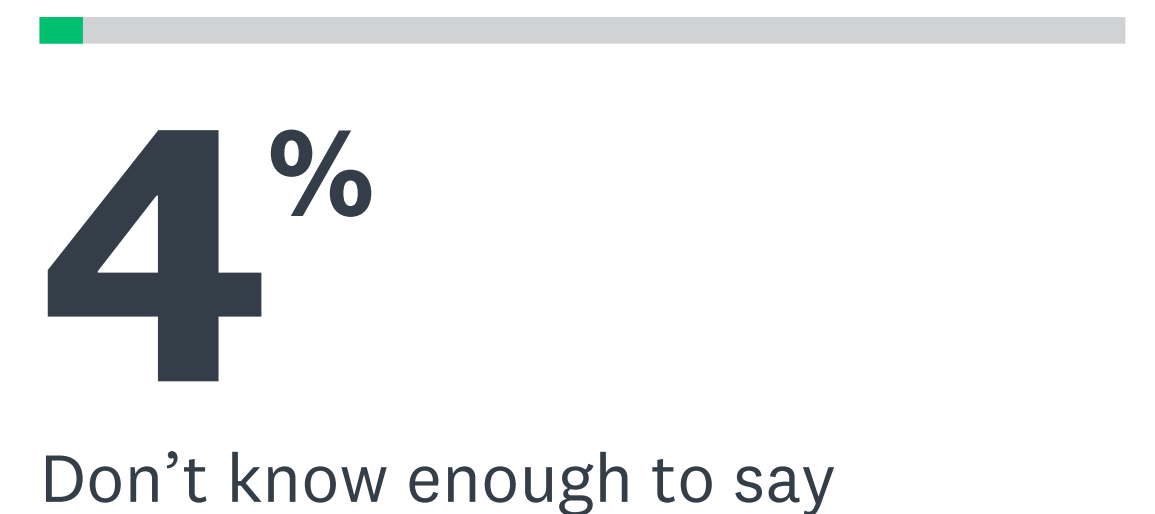
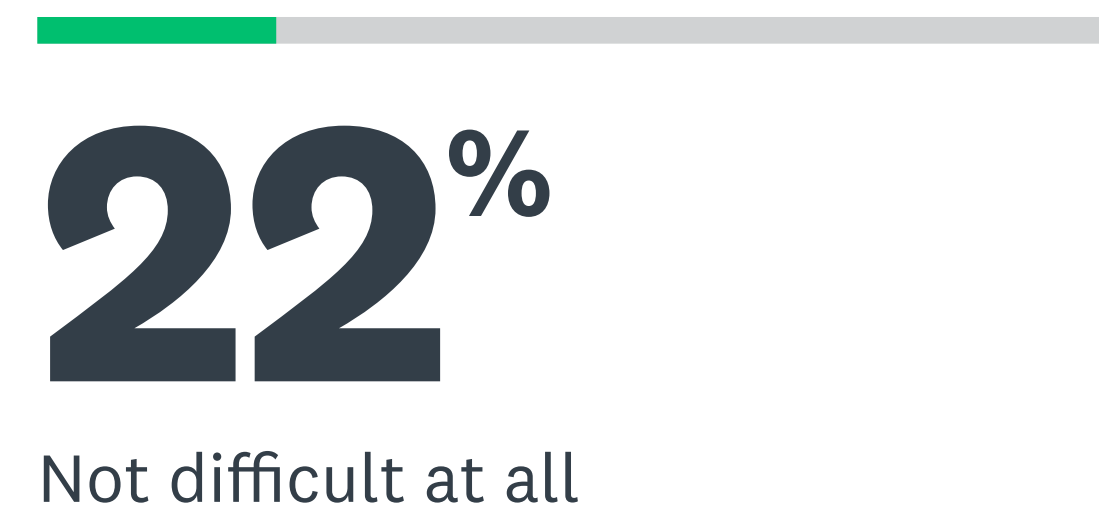
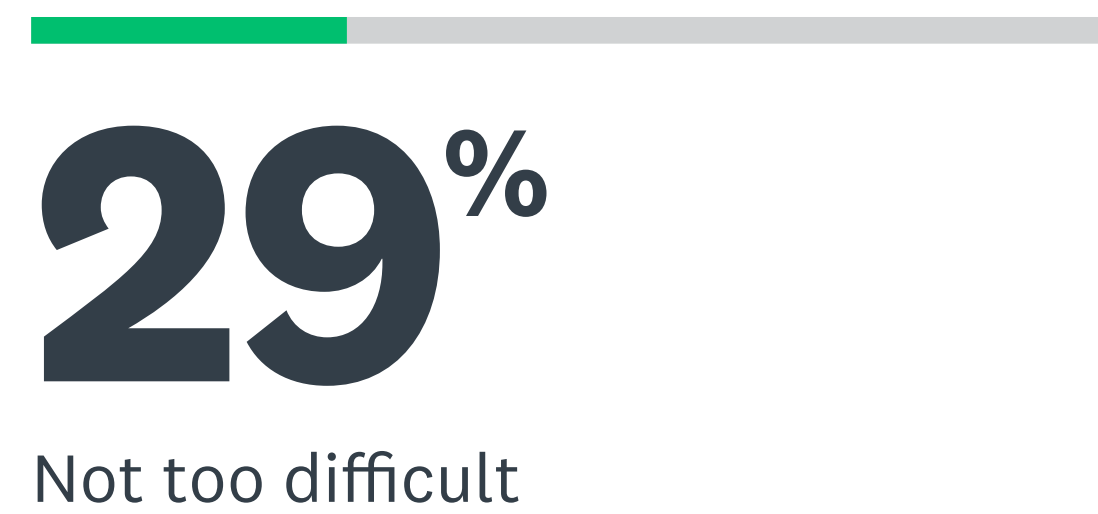
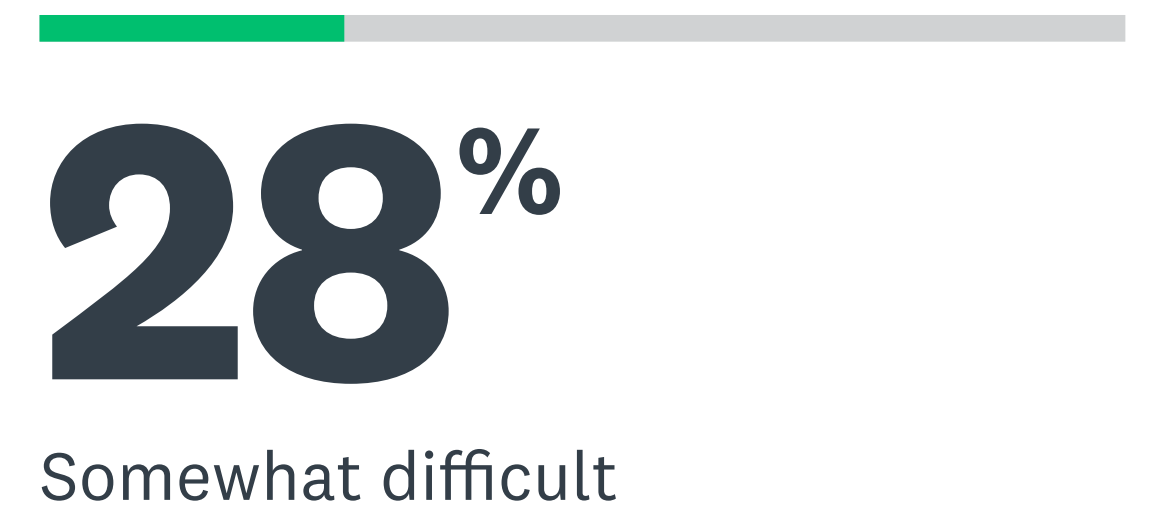
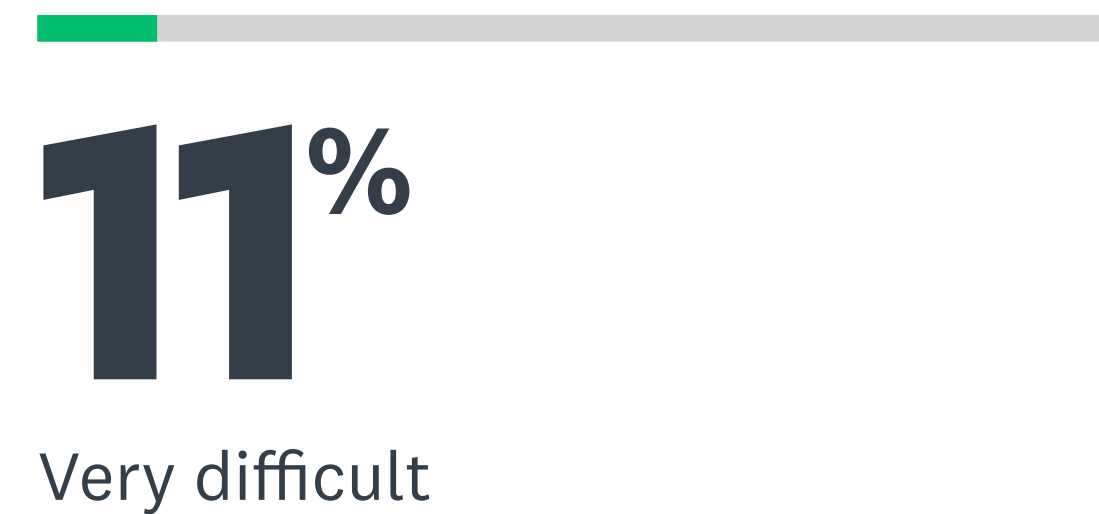
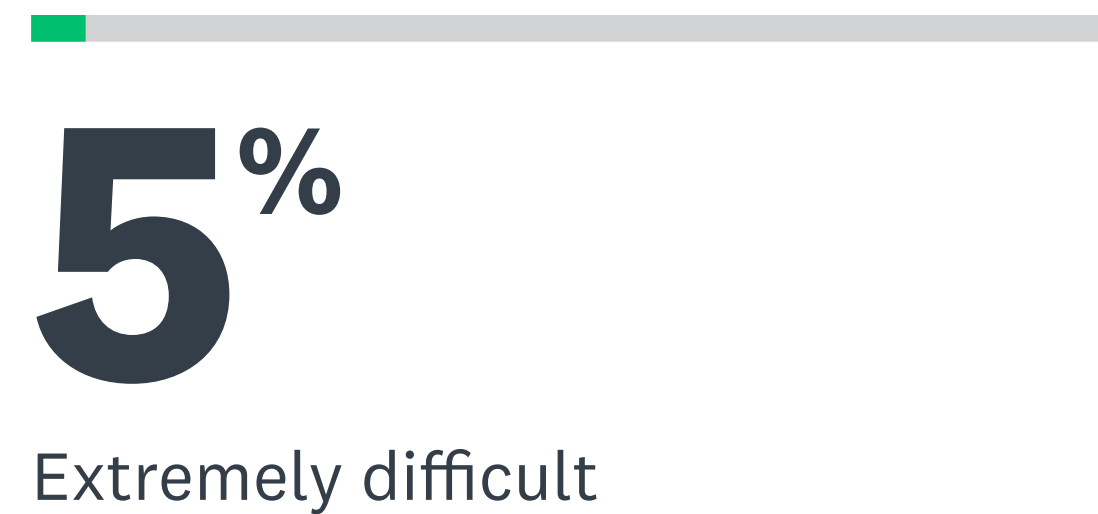
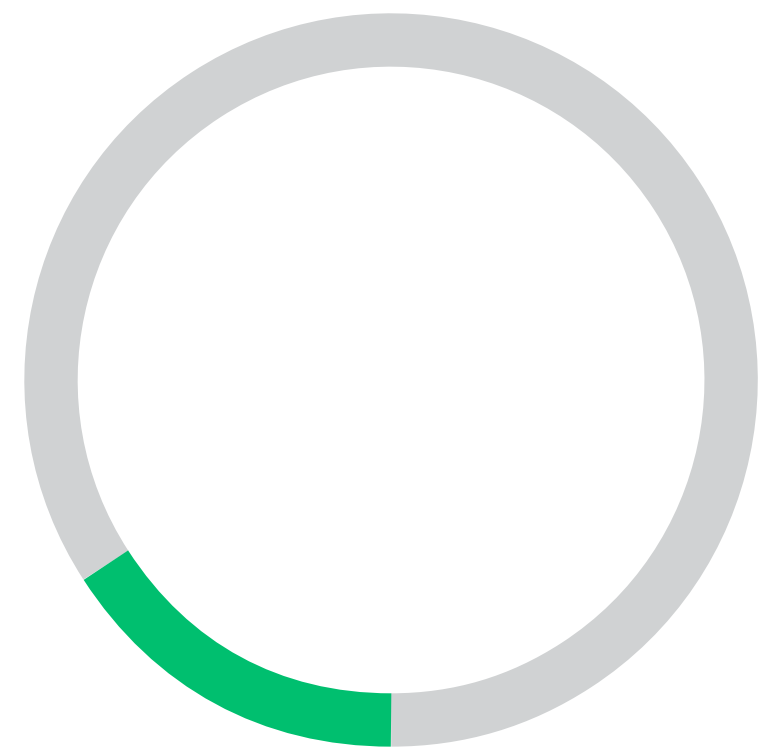


9%

Don't know enough to say



Collecting feedback keeps you in tune with your customers, and in turn keeps them happy.



0% No answer



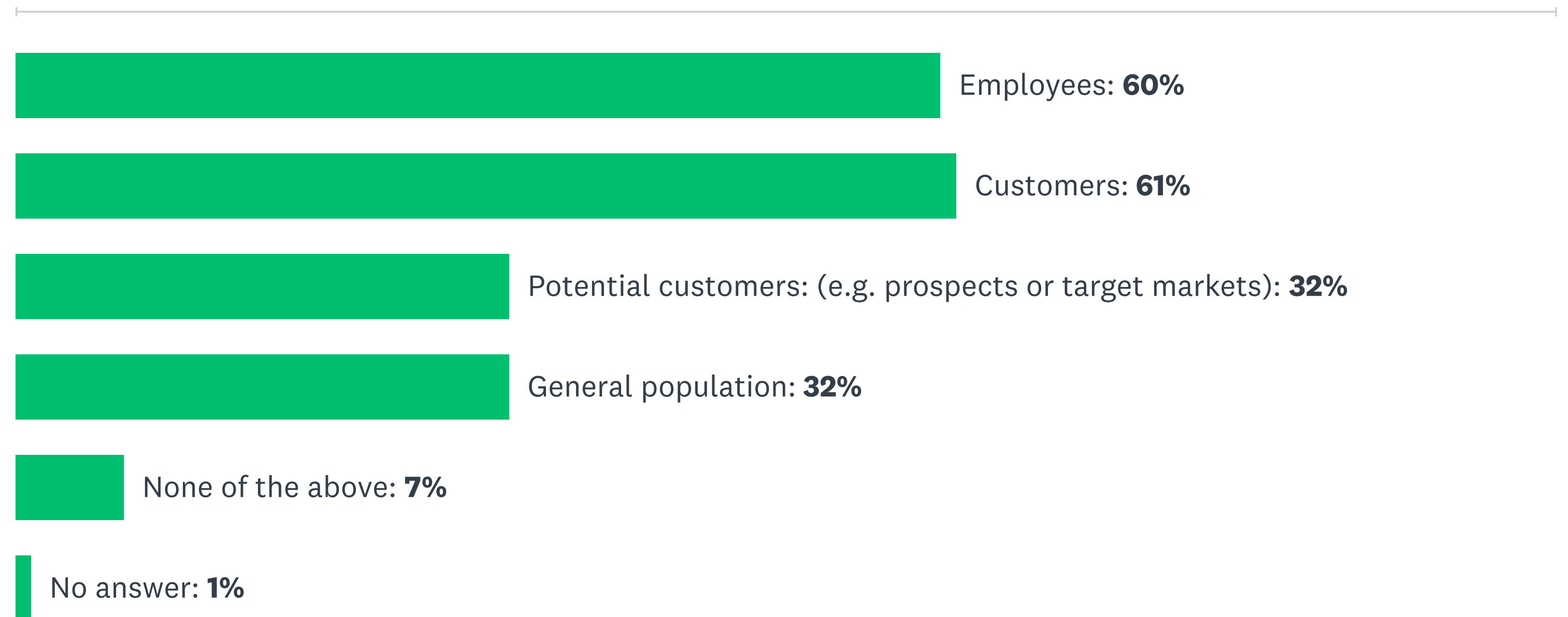
But too many companies are leaving critical feedback on the table.



While a majority of organizations collect feedback from customers and employees, most don't collect feedback from potential customers or the general public. How will you know if the updates you build or the products you develop will resonate with future customers, and not just current ones? Expanding your market research efforts is more important than ever as new demands surface.

1/3

Only about a third of companies collect feedback from potential customers or the general population.



Get the market research survival guide

Get data and practical tips from experts about how to build a DIY market research program to adapt to a changing market.



Take action on the feedback you gather

Once you've gathered the intelligence you need to formulate—or validate—your strategy for moving forward, the next step is to execute. It may seem obvious, but it's actually the step where many organizations falter.



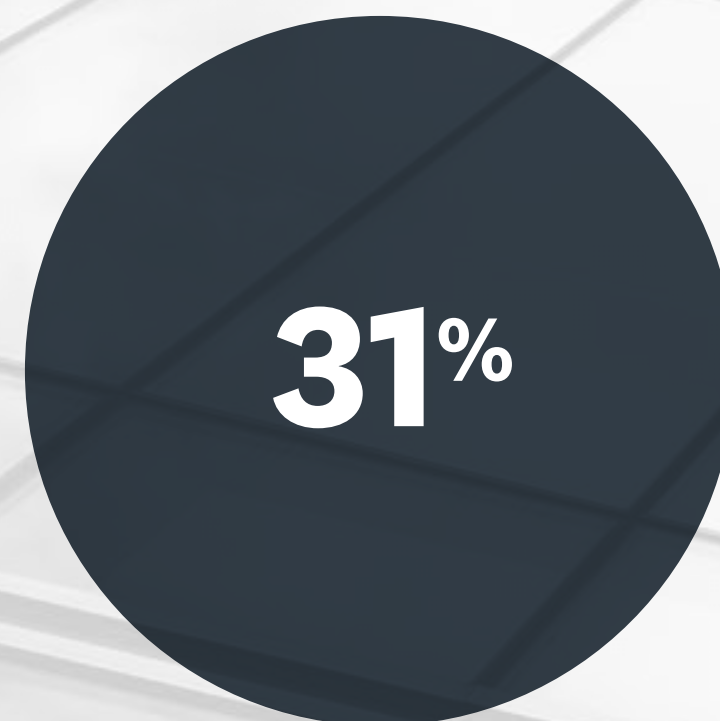
Collecting feedback is invaluable, but only if you act on it

49%

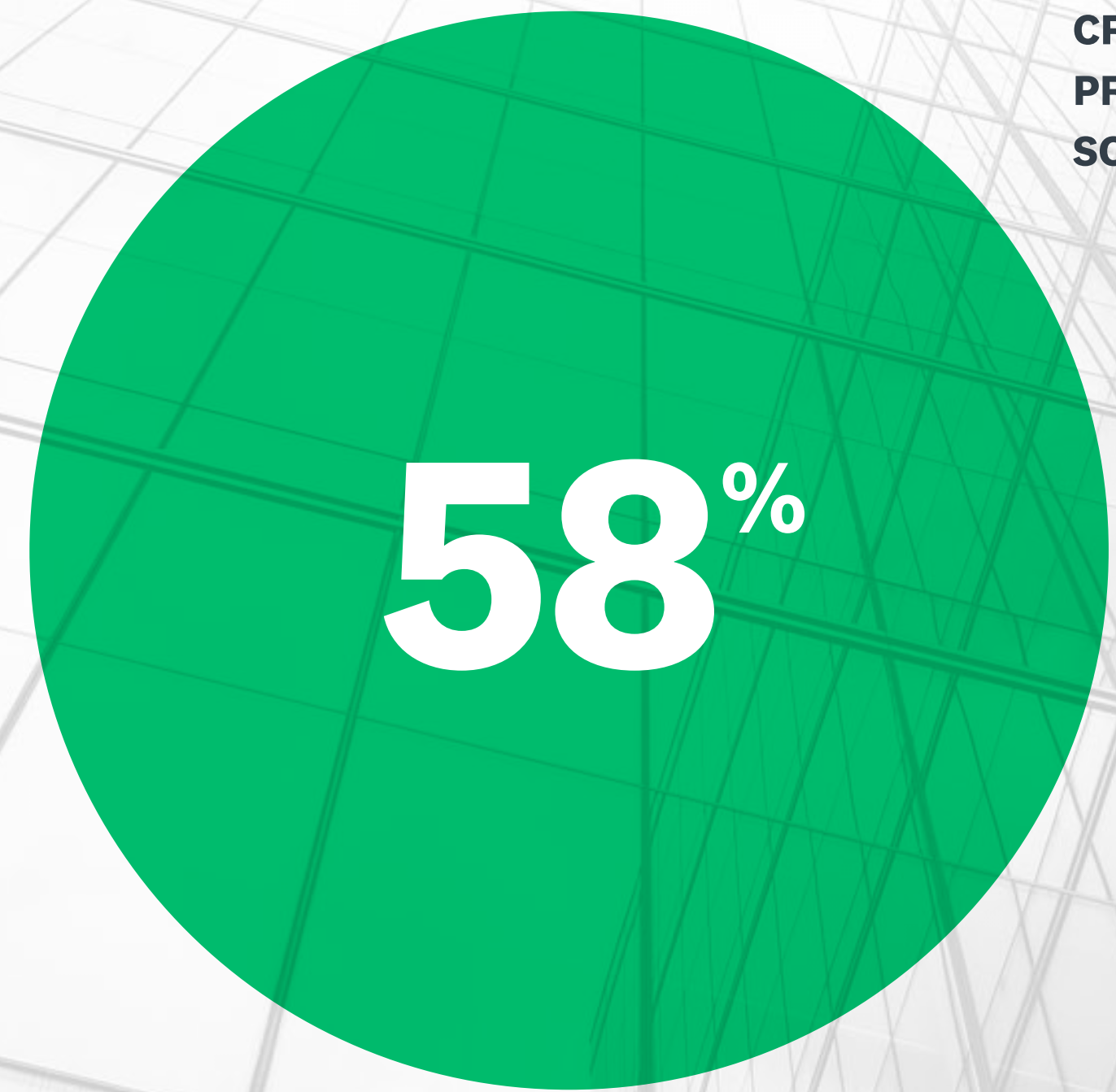
of people we surveyed said they're employed at companies that take action all or most of the time based on feedback they gather.



Curious companies and organizations take action on feedback they gather at twice the rate as companies that stick to tried-and-true methods.



STICK TO
TRIED-AND-TRUE
METHODS



CREATIVE
PROBLEM
SOLVERS



Companies who gather feedback are more likely to take bold action to combat the coronavirus crisis

Those who gathered feedback in response to the coronavirus were much more likely to change their business strategy, release updates or improvements to existing products and services, and develop new products or services.

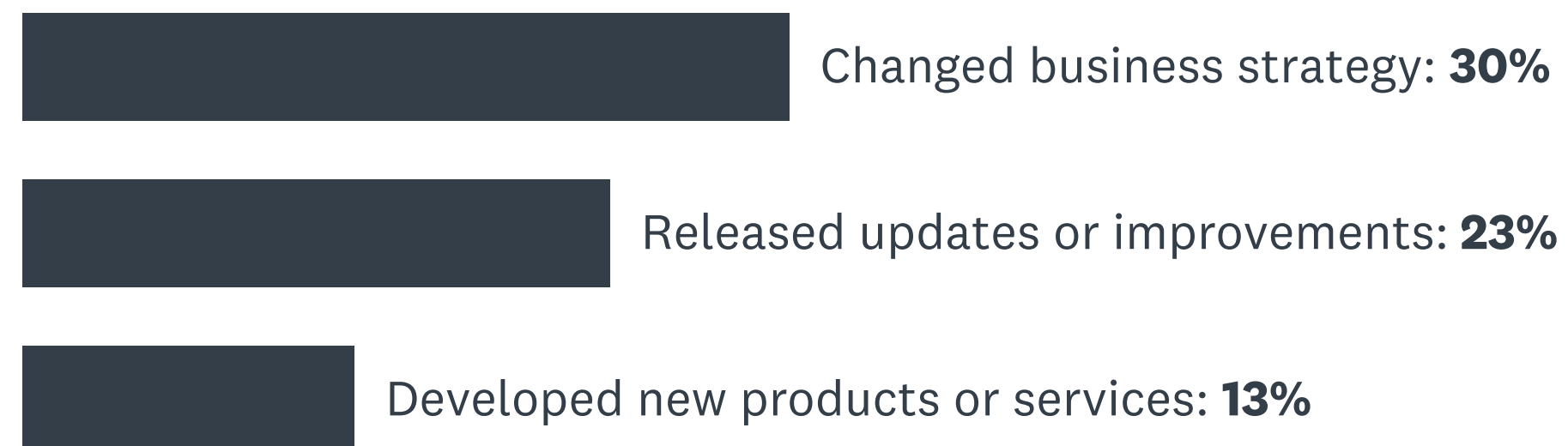
AMONG THOSE WHO COLLECTED FEEDBACK



AMONG ALL



AMONG THOSE WHO DON'T COLLECT FEEDBACK



Ready to get started?

Get a read on how your employees, customers, and constituents are coping with the crisis by using the survey templates and resources we created specifically to address the coronavirus. Or learn more about products and services SurveyMonkey has developed to help you track the spread of the disease, develop a safe return-to-work policy, and more.

[Start surveying](#)

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