

Government Business Council

Planning for a Robust Federal Workforce

A Candid Survey of Federal
Leaders

May 2014

Underwritten by:

monster[®]
Government Solutions

Purpose

As the federal government faces personnel cuts, skills gaps, and increasing budget constraints, it is more important than ever that agencies develop a long-term strategy for workforce planning. Under these pressures, federal agencies may benefit from using competency data to assist with strategic workforce planning and simultaneously encourage individual career development. To better understand how agencies are currently leveraging competencies to improve the effectiveness of executive branch agencies, managers, and individuals, Government Business Council (GBC) and Monster Government Solutions undertook an in-depth research study.

Methodology

To assess the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of federal leaders regarding employee competencies and workforce planning, GBC deployed a survey to a sample of *Government Executive*, *Nextgov*, and *Defense One* online and print subscribers in March 2014. The pool of 1,121 respondents includes those of GS-11 through 15 grade levels in over 35 departments and agencies.

In addition, to better understand how agencies are using information on competencies to assist workforce planning, GBC asked some survey questions to federal managers only. **Managers** are respondents that indicated they oversee one or more direct reports. Of these 513 managers, over three-fourths are GS-13 or above.

Table of Contents

1	Executive Summary	<u>4</u>
2	Respondent Profile	<u>6</u>
3	Research Findings	<u>10</u>
i.	Current State of Workforce Planning	<u>11</u>
ii.	The Role of Competencies	<u>16</u>
iii.	Empowering Decision Making	<u>26</u>
4	Final Considerations	<u>33</u>

1

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Managers rely on informal and incomplete information when conducting workforce planning

Significant numbers of federal managers report that their agencies lack standard policies and procedures related to workforce planning. Seventy percent of managers rely on informal methods—personal notes, whiteboards, blank spreadsheets—and 43 percent use template documents or spreadsheets when conducting workforce planning. Only 22 percent of managers leverage organizational-wide software or tools. Of all common workforce planning activities, managers are least confident in their ability to develop workforce resourcing strategies and align them to other organizational plans or individual employee development.

Gaps in competency data may be hindering workforce planning and managerial effectiveness

Competencies, defined by OPM as “measurable patterns of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully,” are an integral part of workforce planning. However, agencies lack formalized processes for collecting and updating data on employee competencies. Thirty-four percent of respondents report that their agencies do not gather data on competencies at all, while another 24 percent indicate that competency data is only collected through informal methods. A full 37 percent say that data on employee competencies is “never” updated.

Process improvements and better competency data would most improve workforce planning

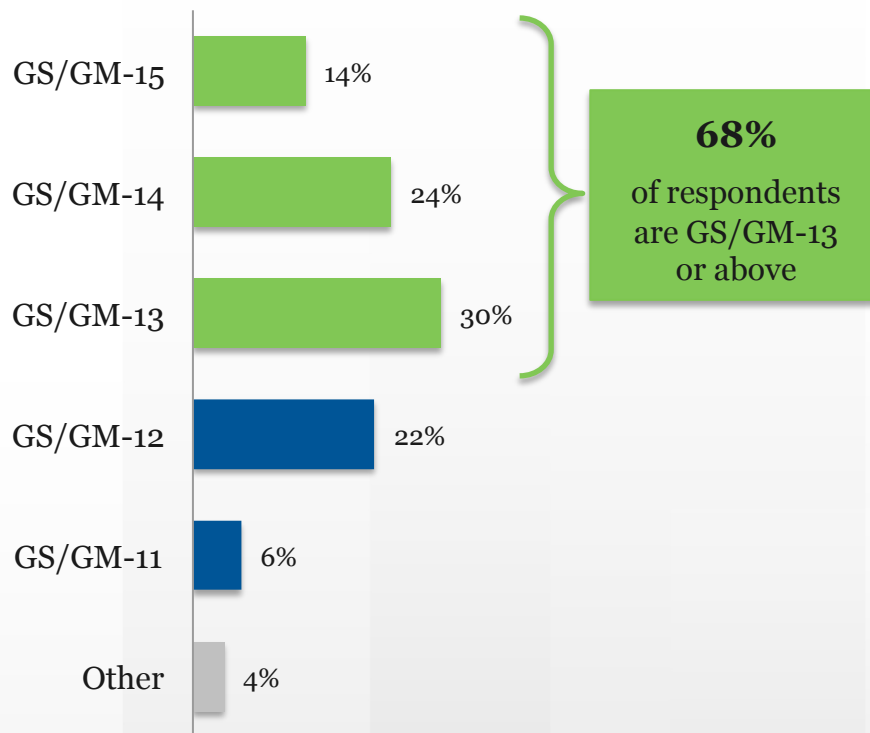
Greater information on competencies, along with uniform methodologies and policies, could most help federal managers tasked with workforce planning. Strong majorities of federal managers agree that up-to-date data on competencies could improve their ability to justify hiring additional personnel and assist in difficult staffing decisions.

2

Respondent Profile

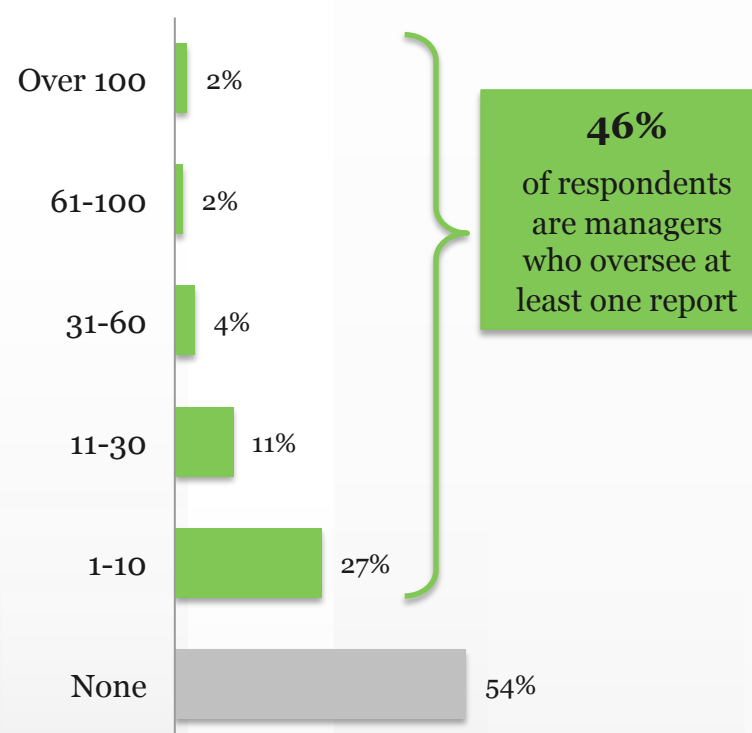
Survey respondents are largely senior federal leaders

Job Grade



Percentage of all respondents, n=1053

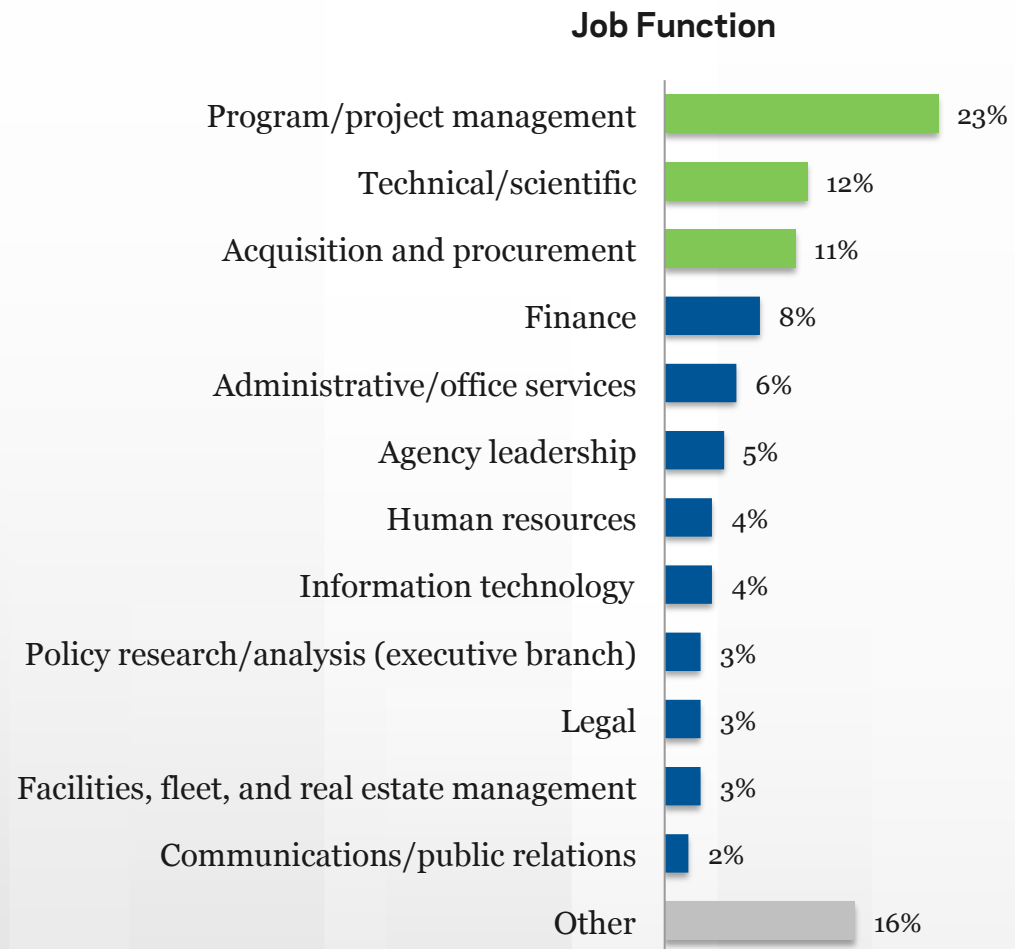
Reports/Oversees



Percentage of respondents, n=1121

Project management, technical fields, and acquisition are most common job functions

- ▶ Nearly half of respondents work in program/project management, technical/scientific fields, or acquisition.
- ▶ “Other” includes categories such as auditors and investigators, logistics, public health, and safety.



Percentage of all respondents, n=1053

Most Represented Agencies

Department of the Army	Department of Commerce
Department of the Air Force	Department of Energy
Department of Homeland Security	Department of Education
Department of Agriculture	Department of Labor
Office of the Secretary of Defense	United States Marine Corps
Department of Veterans Affairs	Department of State
Department of Health and Human Services	Small Business Administration
Department of the Interior	Office of Personnel Management
Department of Treasury	Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Department of Transportation	United States Agency for International Development
General Services Administration	Combatant Commands, Department of Defense
Department of the Navy	Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Congress/Legislative Branch
Environmental Protection Agency	Executive Office of the President
Social Security Administration	Government Accountability Office
Department of Justice	Central Intelligence Agency
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	Other independent agency

Agencies listed in order of frequency

3

Research Findings

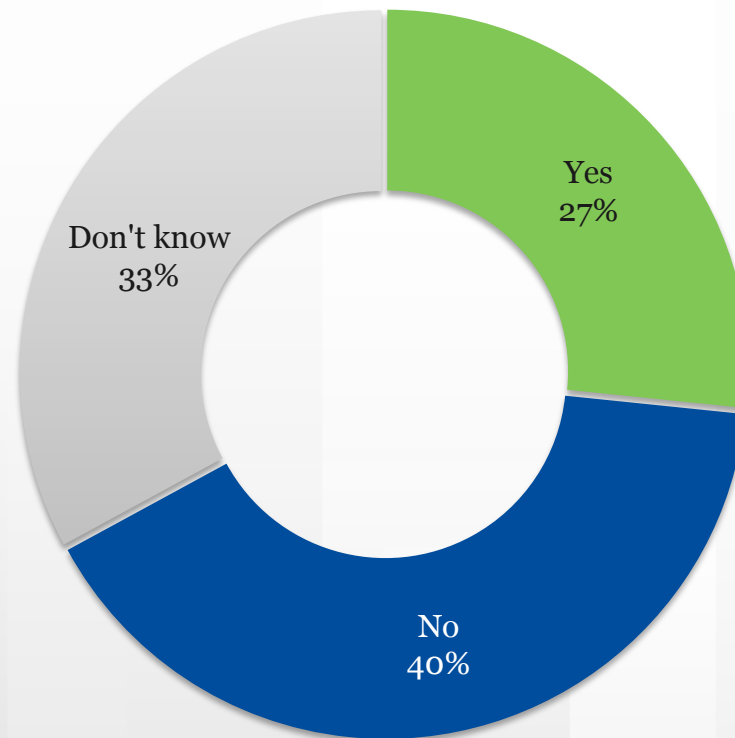
i.

Current State of Workforce Planning

Agencies currently lack standard workforce planning policies and procedures

Does your organization have standard policies and/or procedures for managers to follow when conducting workforce planning?

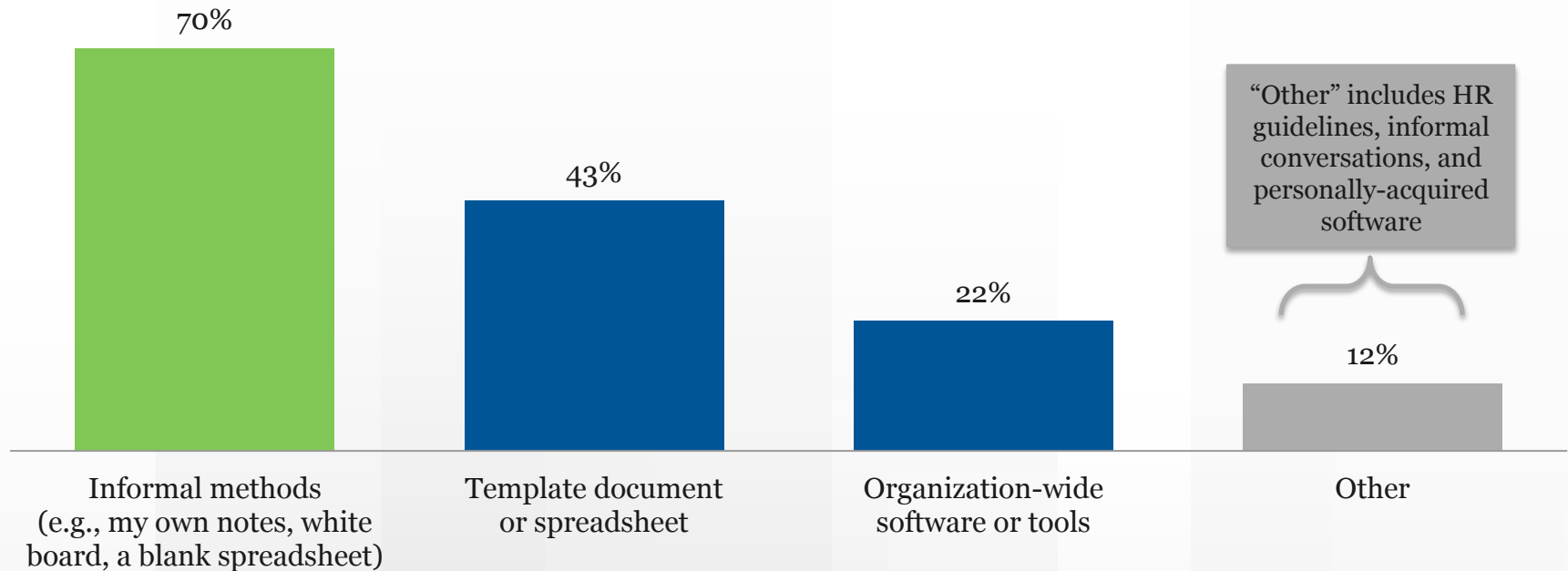
For the purposes of this survey, **workforce planning** refers to aligning human capital with organizational strategic goals.



Percentage of managers, n=479

Most managers rely on informal methods to conduct workforce planning

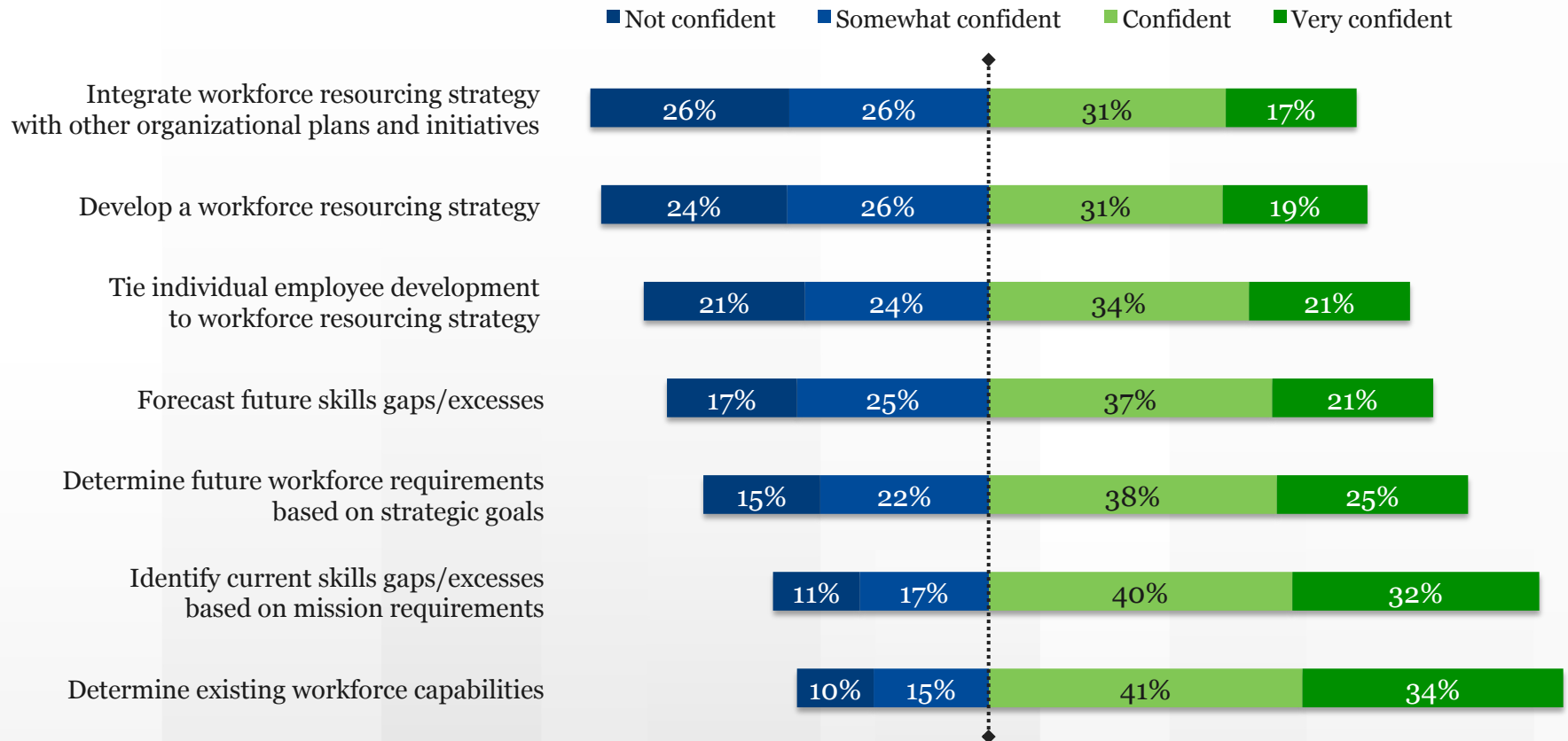
Which of the following do you use when conducting workforce planning?



Percentage of managers, n=352; respondents could select more than one answer

Managers feel least confident in developing and integrating workforce resourcing strategies

Confidence in performing common workforce planning activities



Percentage of managers, n varies 478-482

One survey respondent told us...

“ I am pretty much left to my own, limited devices to perform these activities since as an organization we lack an overarching framework, methodology, toolkit, and outcome measures to serve as the context in which to perform these activities. ”

ii.

The Role of Competencies

Understanding competencies is a key component of workforce planning

To understand what information agencies collect and utilize when conducting workforce planning and managing employee development, GBC asked respondents several questions regarding employee competencies.

OPM definition

The United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) defines a **competency** as “a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully. Competencies specify the ‘how’ of performing job tasks, or what the person needs to do the job successfully.

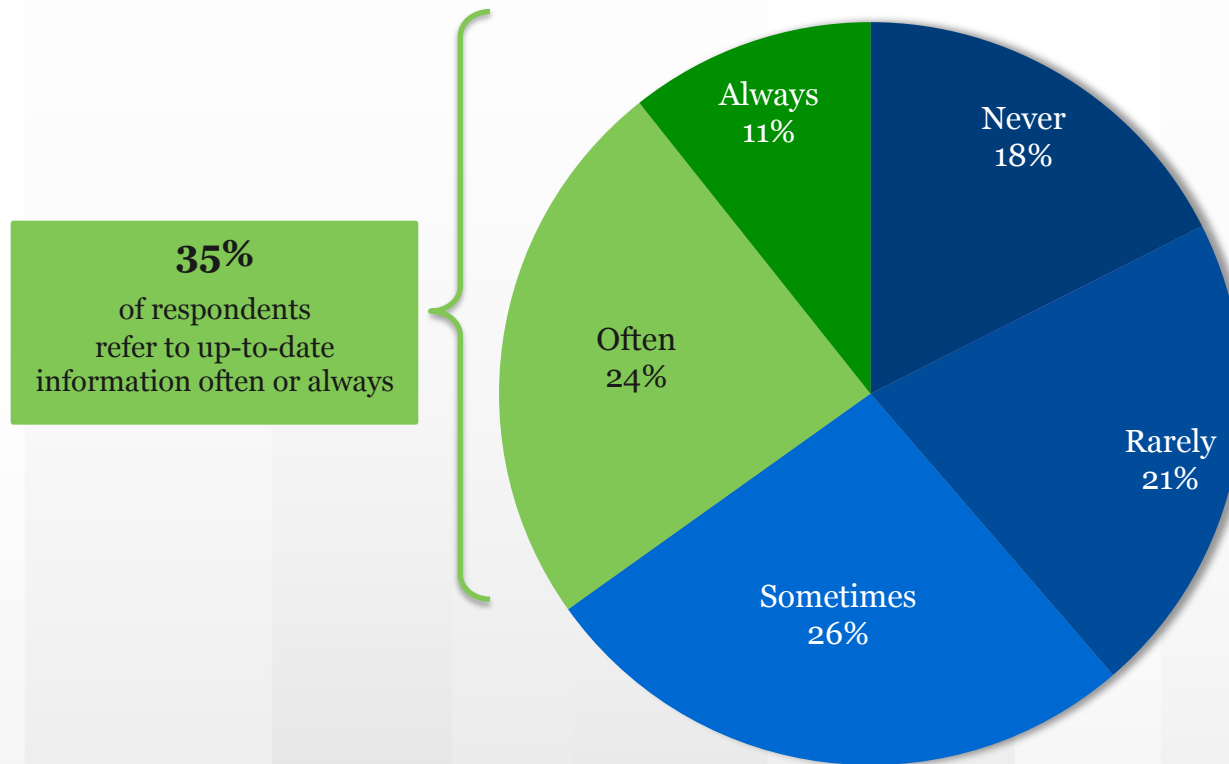
Competencies are used for:

- Assessing and selecting candidates for a job;
- Assessing and managing employee performance;
- Workforce planning; and
- Employee training and development.”

Source: Office of Personnel Management [website](#)

Few managers regularly refer to current data on competencies during workforce planning

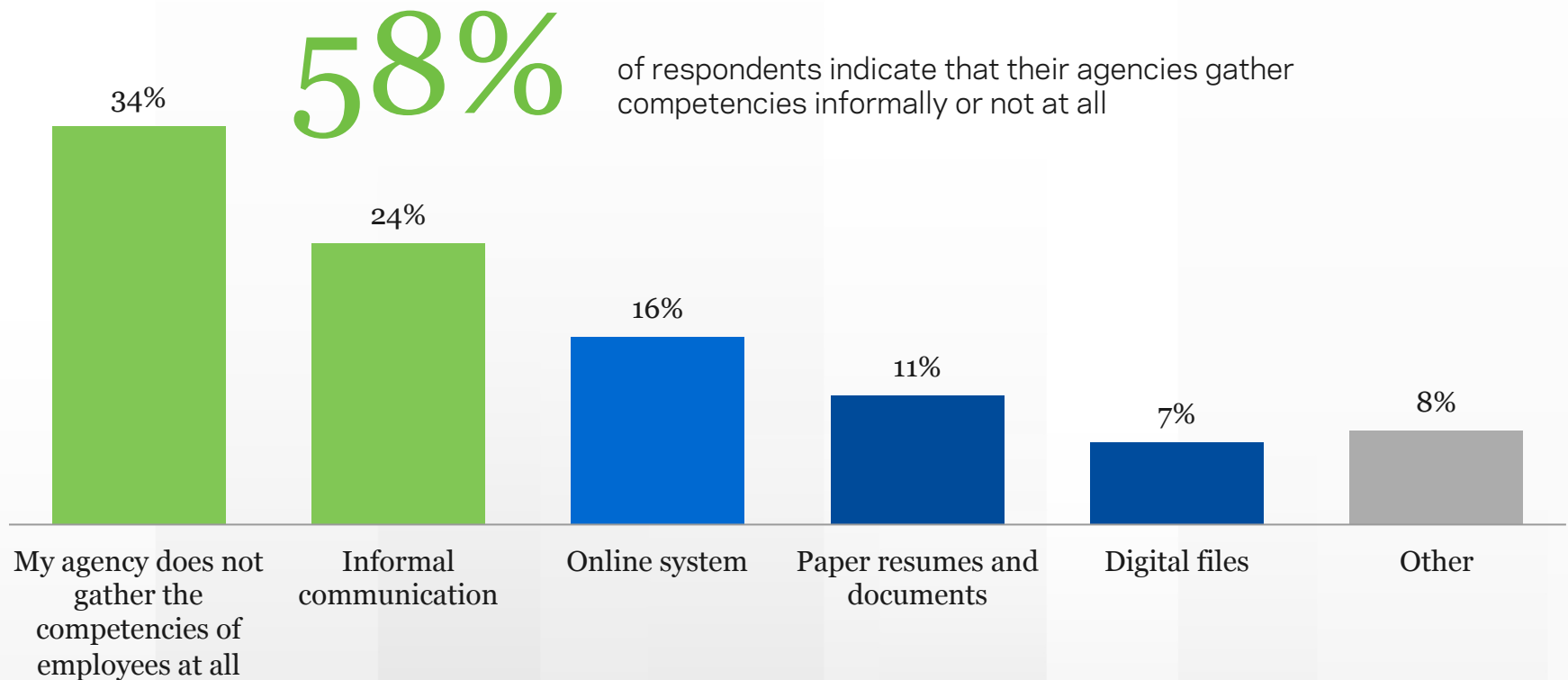
How often do you refer to up-to-date information on employee competencies when conducting workforce planning?



Percentage of managers, n=393

Agencies do not have the data to allow managers to act on competencies

Primary way in which federal agencies gather information on competencies



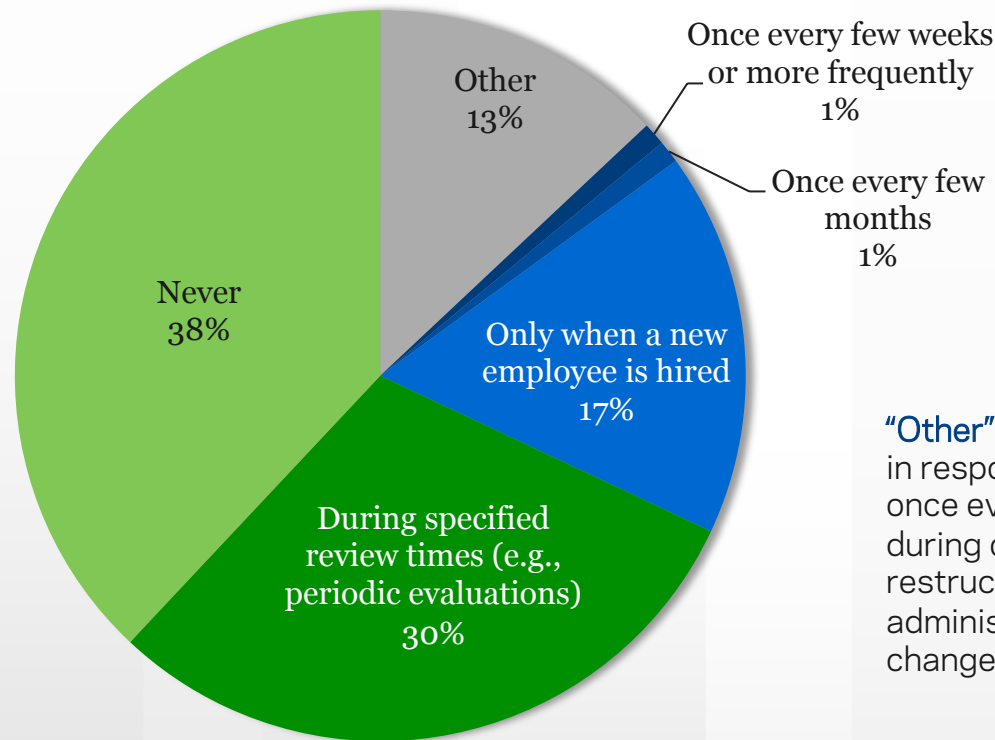
Percentage of all respondents, n=1109

Agency data is rarely up-to-date

In your organization, which best describes how often information on competencies is updated?

38%

of respondents say their agency never updates competencies

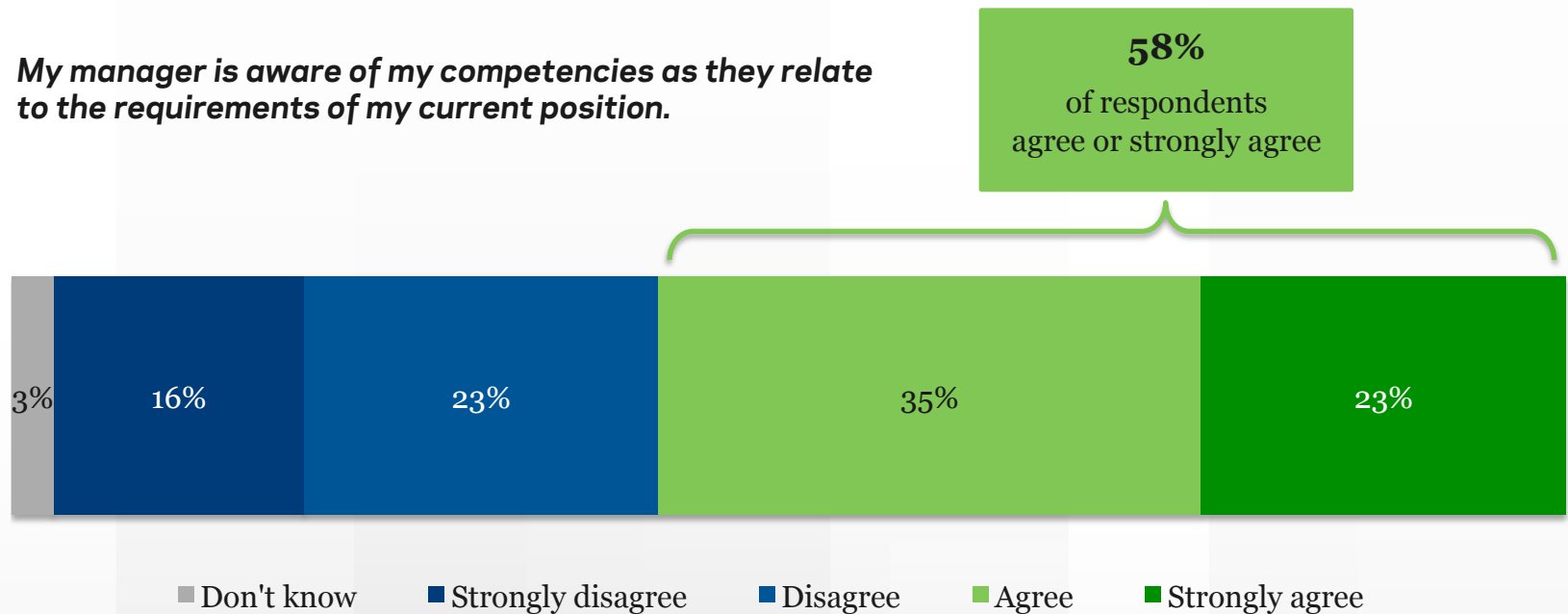


"Other" included write-in responses such as once every few years, during organization restructuring, or after administration changes.

Percentage of all respondents, n=1083

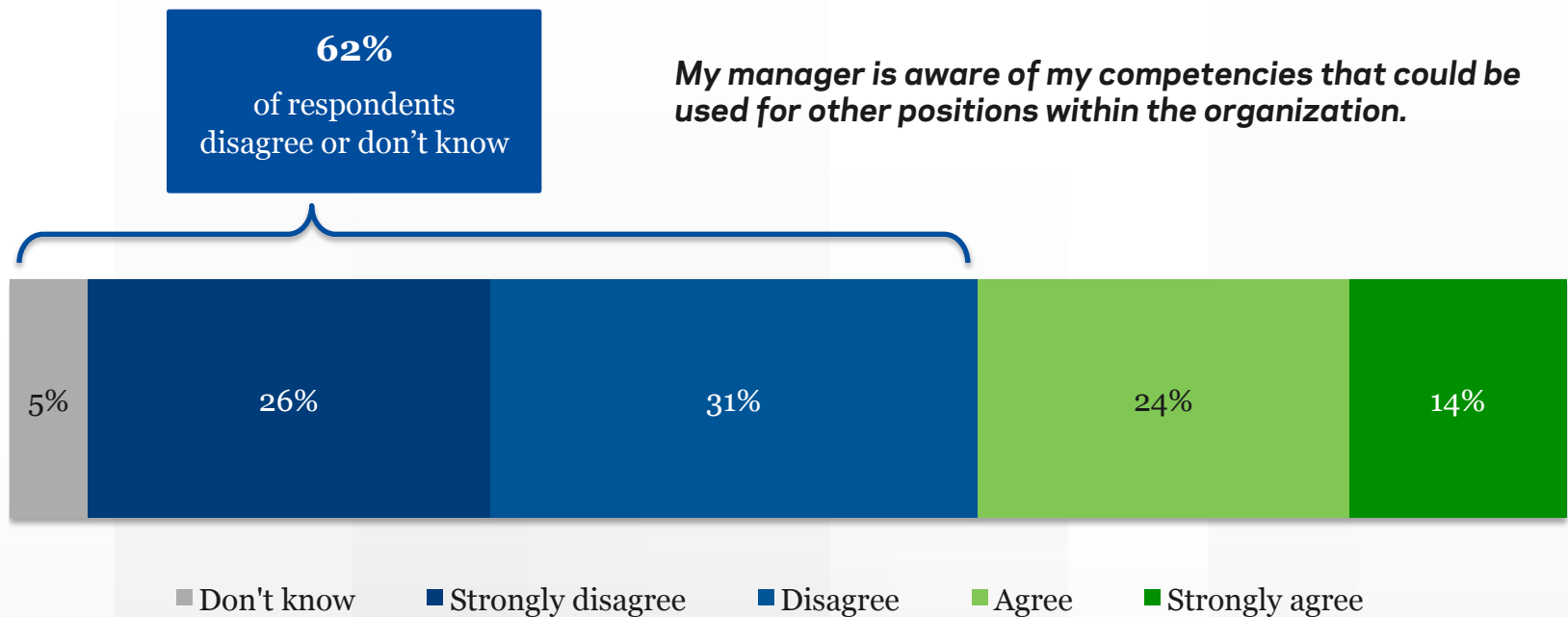
As a result, managers may be aware of employee competencies related to current jobs...

My manager is aware of my competencies as they relate to the requirements of my current position.



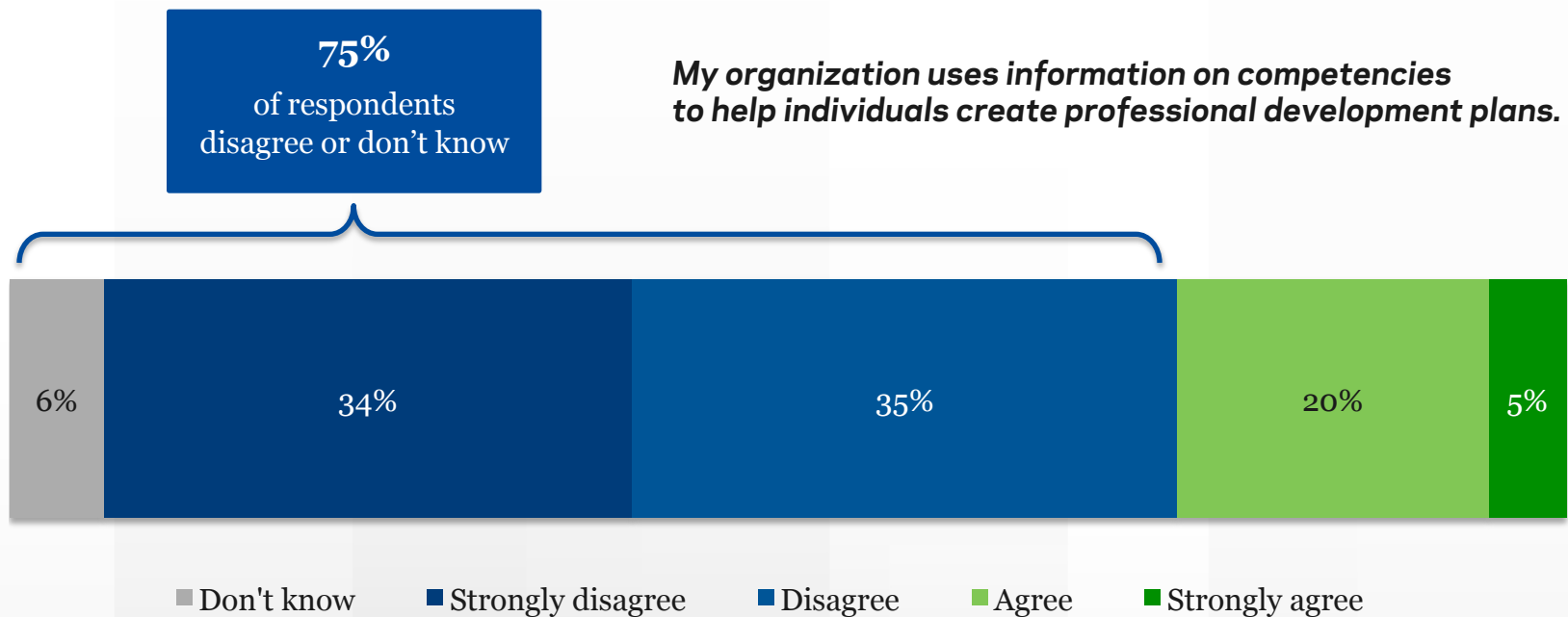
Percentage of all respondents, n=1116

...but are unaware of competencies that could be used elsewhere in the organization



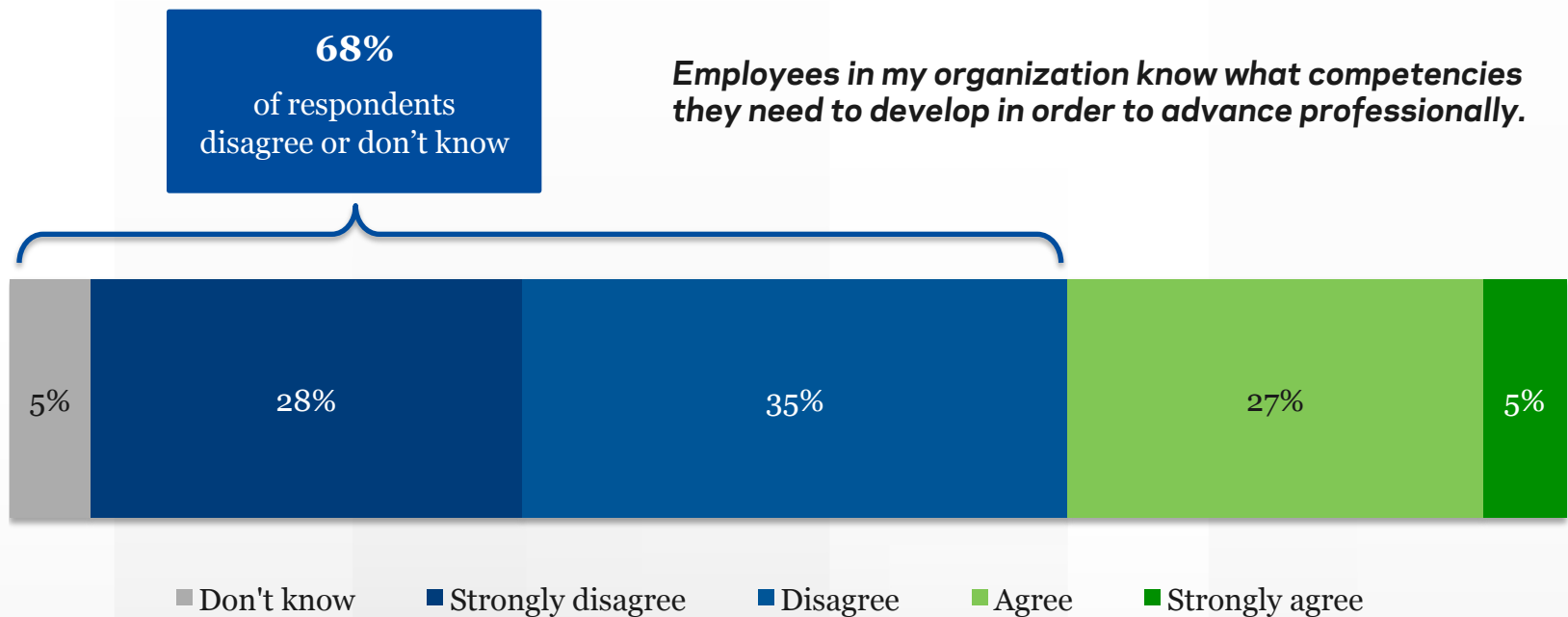
Percentage of all respondents, n=1116

Agencies are not using competencies to help individuals with professional development



Percentage of all respondents, n=1104

Federal employees do not know what competencies to develop in order to advance



Percentage of all respondents, n=1105

One survey respondent told us...

“

My agency does not track individual competencies, skills, or abilities. Supervisors and managers are too busy to really worry about individual employee development. Resourcing is confined to whoever is in the job; individual skills are not heavily weighted in decisions for promotion, hiring, and assignments. ”

iii.

Empowering Decision Making

There is an opportunity for agencies to more fully utilize competencies

For which of the following activities does your organization utilize competencies?

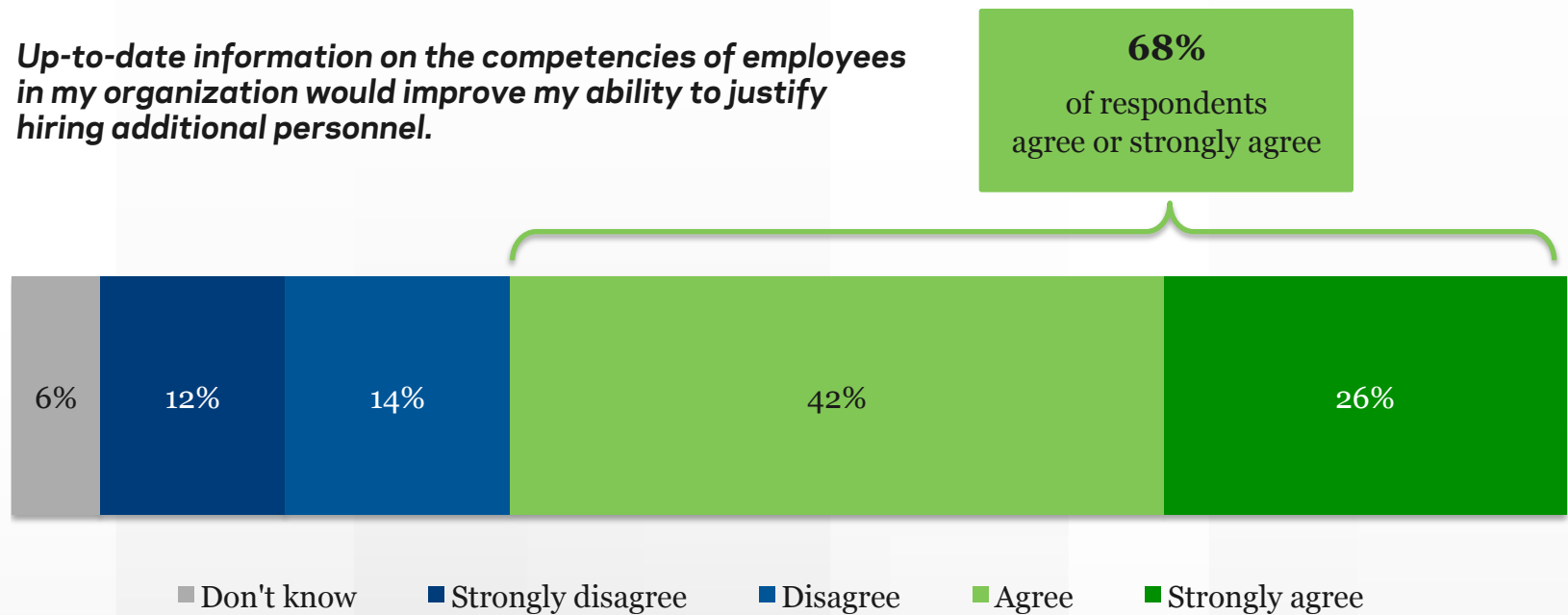
Despite being the three most commonly selected answers, **one-third or fewer** of respondents indicate that their agency employs competencies for determining training needs, performance management, or determining hiring needs.



Percentage of managers, n=503; respondents could select more than one answer

Up-to-date information on competencies could help managers justify hiring decisions

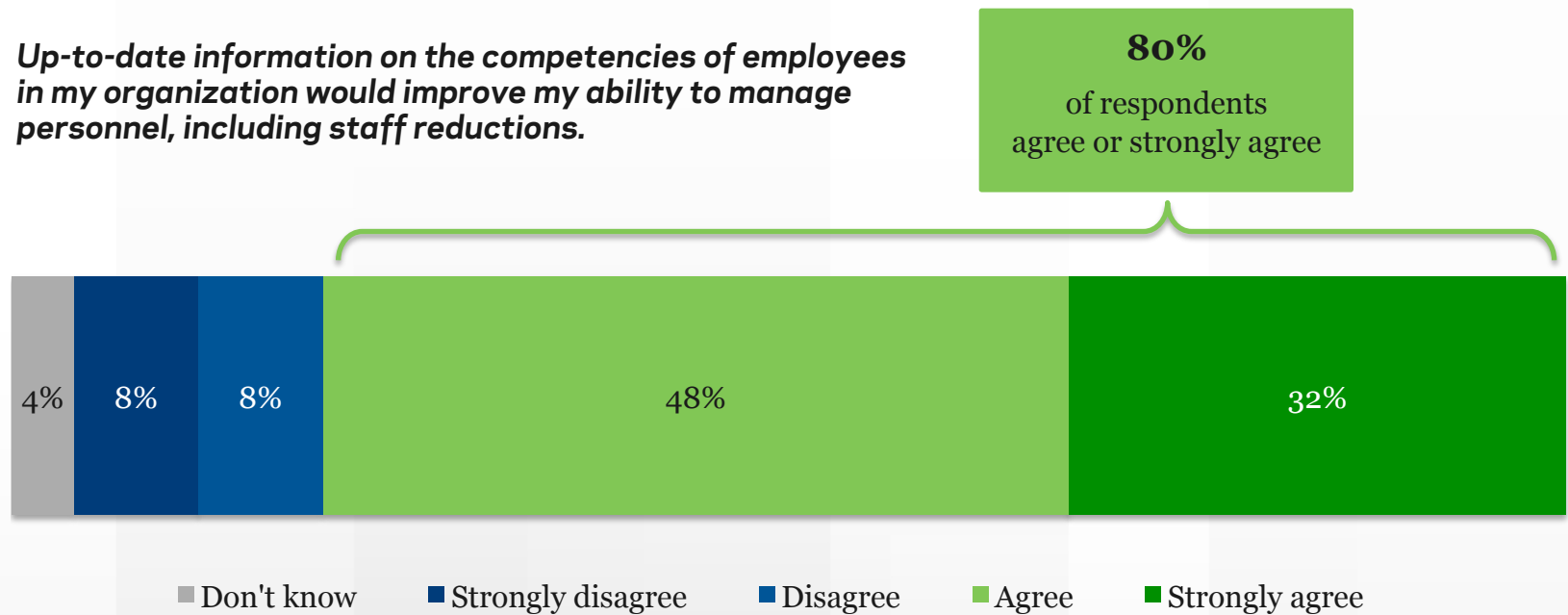
Up-to-date information on the competencies of employees in my organization would improve my ability to justify hiring additional personnel.



Percentage of managers, n=421

Up-to-date information on competencies could help managers handle staff changes

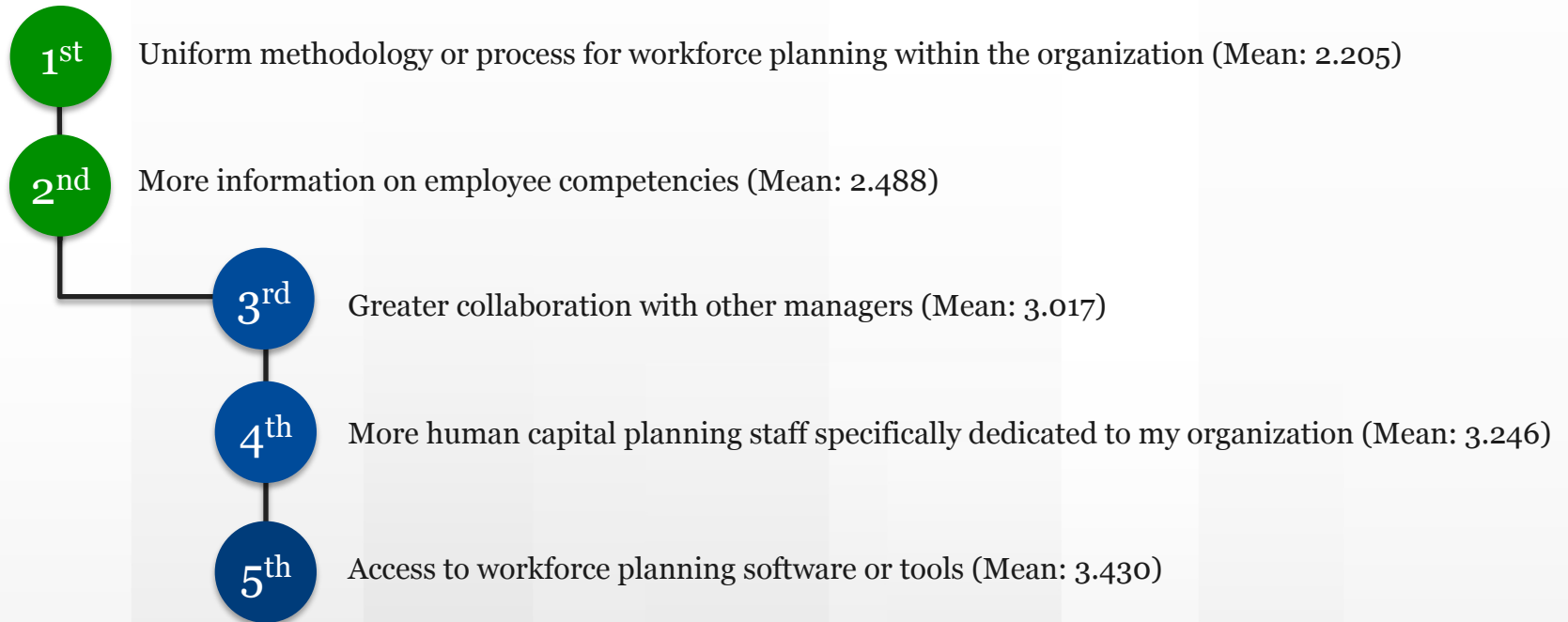
Up-to-date information on the competencies of employees in my organization would improve my ability to manage personnel, including staff reductions.



Percentage of managers, n=430

Uniform process and more data on competencies would most improve workforce planning

What would help managers at your organization the most when conducting workforce planning?



Ranked by mean; respondents are managers, n=448

Out of 465 federal managers...

90%

of respondents say **uniform methodology or process** would help managers in their agency conduct workforce planning, with **36%** of managers selecting it as the most helpful choice.

90%

of respondents also say **more information on employee competencies** would help managers in their agency conduct workforce planning, with **25%** of managers selecting it as the most helpful choice.

Percentage of managers, n=465

One survey respondent told us...

“ More training on evaluating employee competencies and measuring them is needed in order to improve performance management and the ability to strategically plan for the future. ”

4

Final Considerations

When considering how to improve workforce planning...

Align individual development with organizational needs and resourcing strategies

Better information on competencies at an individual level can improve workforce planning for managers, but also help employees guide their own professional growth. As the federal government looks to fill skill gaps and become more competitive with private sector jobs, individual development should factor into each agency's long-term human capital strategy.

Improve the accuracy of data to enable better decision making

Information on employee competencies that is up-to-date and thorough can help managers determine the capabilities of their workforce and make short- and long-term human capital decisions supported by data. Better data can help managers be more confident, but it can also empower individuals to determine their own strengths and areas for improvement.

Consider technological or process improvements to streamline data collection and analytics

The burden on managers or human resources staff can be minimized by automating the collection and regular updating of information on all employees. For instance, employees can use electronic tools to input information that managers can then review and utilize to create customized individual development plans or macro-level organizational workforce decisions. Technologies can also allow agencies to conduct workforce analytics with greater ease at any time, freeing agencies from reliance on periodic employee surveys that provide only a snapshot of current capabilities.

Underwritten by

monster[®]
Government Solutions

About Monster Government Solutions

Monster Government Solutions is the premier provider of complete workforce solutions for government and education. Monster Government Solutions pioneered online hiring in the U.S. Federal community 15 years ago and has continued developing innovative products and professional services across federal, state, and local governments and educational institutions. Monster Government Solutions helps customers plan carefully to ensure that they achieve their mission and drive measurable results. Innovative products and professional services help agencies plan their workforce, recruit among diverse audiences, build communities of talent, and help pinpoint the right hires.

About GBC

Contact

Zoe Grotophorst
Manager
Research & Strategic Insights
Government Business Council

Tel. 202.266.7335
zgrotophorst@govexec.com

govexec.com/GBC
[@GovBizCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/GovBizCouncil)

Our Mission

Government Business Council (GBC), the research arm of Government Executive Media Group, is dedicated to advancing the business of government through analysis and insight. GBC partners with industry to share best practices with top government decision-makers, understanding the deep value inherent in industry's experience engaging and supporting federal agencies.