

**Government  
Business  
Council**

# Getting to 'Ready'

A Survey on Trends and Challenges in Government Technology Adoption Initiatives

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Underwritten by

**Booz | Allen | Hamilton<sup>®</sup>**

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# Overview

## Purpose

The government has a poor track record in acquiring, developing, and managing technology initiatives. Too often, IT projects run over budget, fall behind schedule, or fail to deliver the intended results. Additionally, as the speed of technology developments accelerates, agencies face increasing pressure to more quickly develop, deliver, and integrate technologies into mission-critical operational environments.

To better understand the challenges agencies face when trying to evaluate technology maturity, assess risks, and successfully implement new tools and systems, Government Business Council (GBC) conducted an in-depth research study of federal and defense employees.

## Methodology

In October and November of 2019, GBC issued a survey on technological readiness in federal and defense organizations. 450 employees responded, representing over 34 federal agencies. 54% of respondents hold positions at the GS/GM-13 level or above (including Senior Executive Service) and over one-third are directly involved in their organization's technology adoption efforts.

For more information on respondents, please see the Respondent Profile.

# Executive Summary

## **Responsibility for technology adoption initiatives is unclear**

Despite widespread recognition that -- when executed properly -- technology can be a great catalyst for transformation and help agencies more effectively fulfill their missions, it is often unclear who within an agency is responsible for ensuring alignment between mission needs and IT goals. When asked if their organization has a designated individual who steers technology implementation to align with strategic business needs, 63% of respondents were either unsure or indicated that their organization has no such person. Similarly, 50% say their organization performs below expectations when it comes to clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and accountability for those involved in technology adoption initiatives.

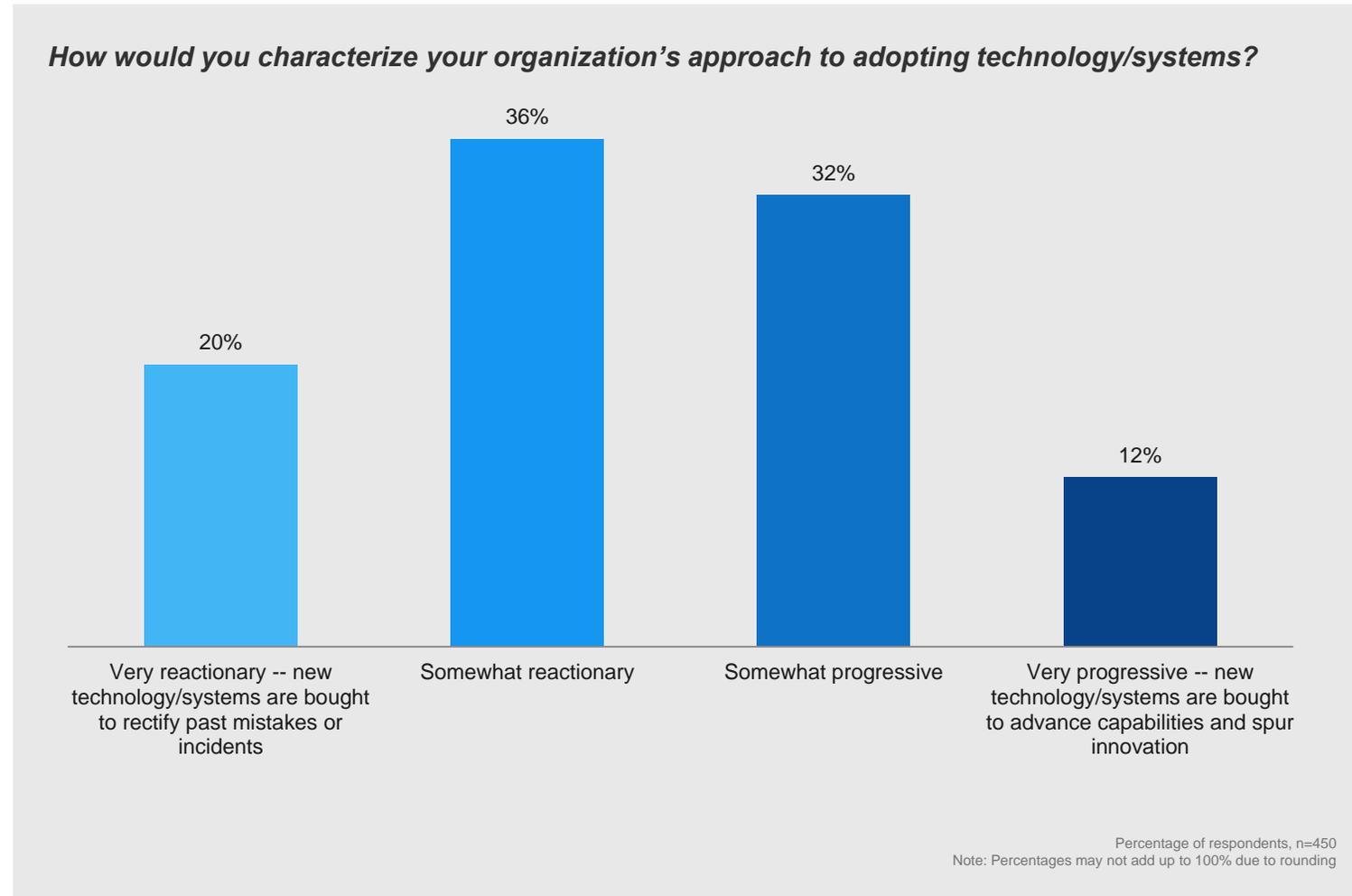
## **Organizations are struggling to tailor new technology to mission-specific environments**

When it comes to successfully implementing new technologies, more important than the technology itself is often the strategy guiding its development and the amount of attention paid to end-users throughout the process. GBC's survey results indicate that organizations are not adequately incorporating mission expertise into the design and implementation of new technology, with only 21% of respondents reporting that their organization involves operation leads and program owners in the technology adoption process.

## **Government technology adoption efforts continue to take more time and produce less value than expected**

Just over a third of respondents say their organizations derives consistent value from their technology adoption efforts, and over 75% say their organizations' technology initiatives either take more time than expected, or are never completed at all. GBC's research points to several factors that may be causing agencies to underperform, including insufficient resources, the inability of organizations' overall IT ecosystems to adopt and leverage new technologies, and organizations' tendency to take a reactionary approach to implementing new technology.

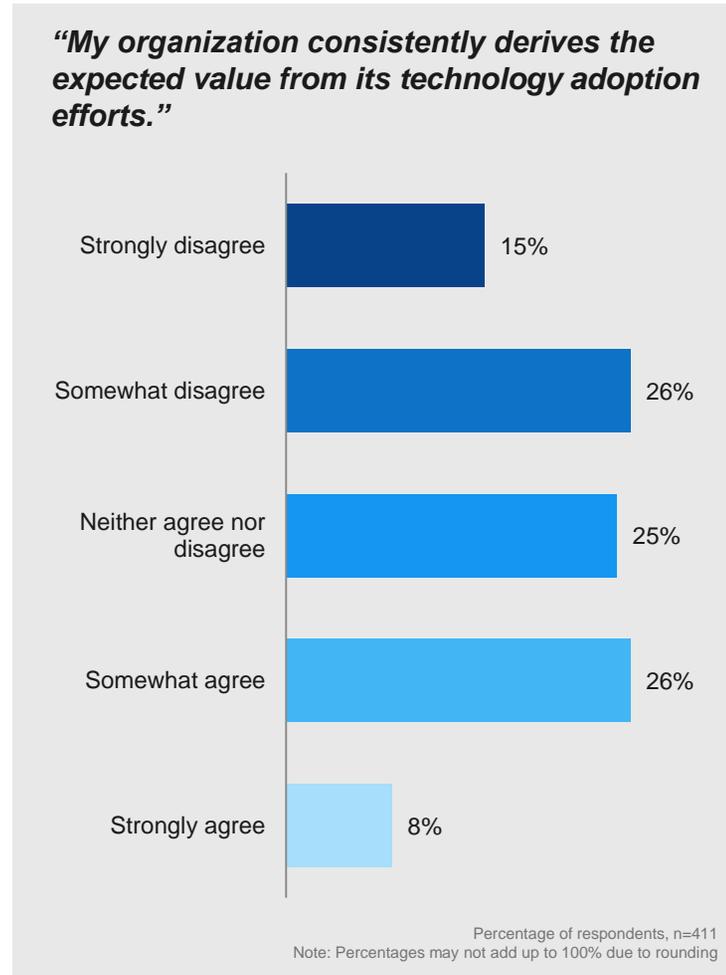
**A majority of respondents feel their organization has a reactionary approach to technology adoption**



## Just 12%

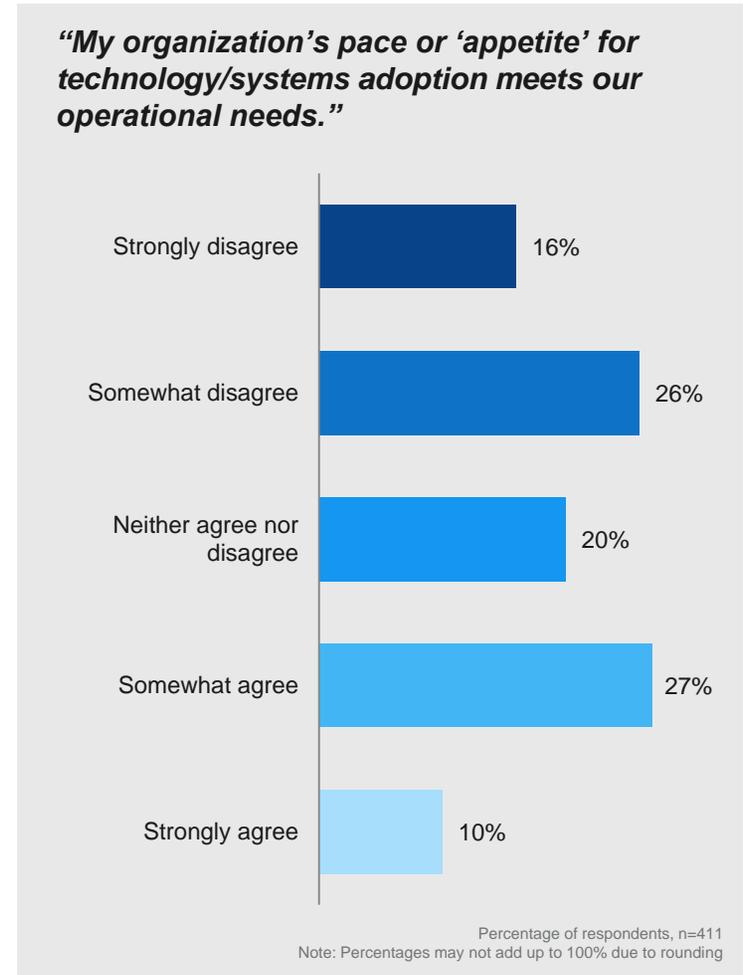
believe that their organizations are very actively using the insertion of technology as a means of advancing their capacity and spurring innovation.

**Respondents indicate that technology adoption efforts neither keep pace with their operational needs nor deliver their expected value**



**Just 8%**

strongly agree that their organization consistently derives the anticipated value from their technology adoption efforts.



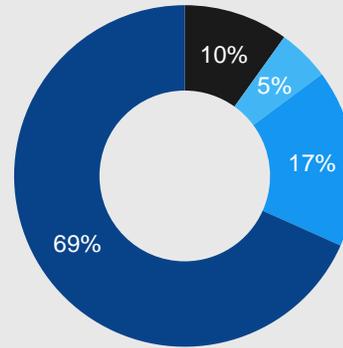
**42%**

of respondents say that their organization is failing to keep pace with their operational needs.

**More than two-thirds of respondents say technology adoption initiatives take longer than expected**

*Please complete the following statement: "Within my organization, technology adoption initiatives take \_\_\_\_\_."*

- We rarely or never complete technology adoption initiatives
- Less time than expected
- The expected amount of time
- More time than expected

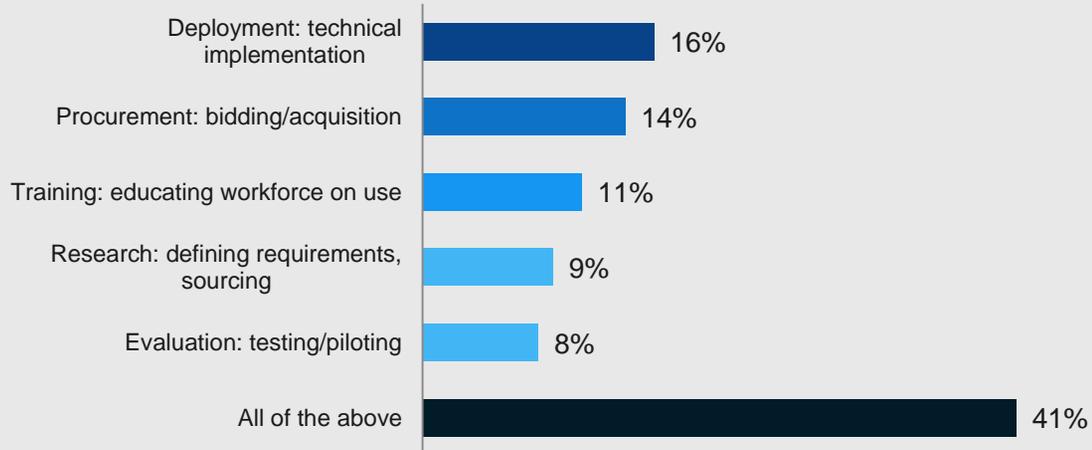


Percentage of respondents, n=388  
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**69%**

of respondents say their organization's technology adoption initiatives take more time than expected.

*To the best of your knowledge, which phase in the technology/systems adoption lifecycle creates the greatest challenge for your organization?*

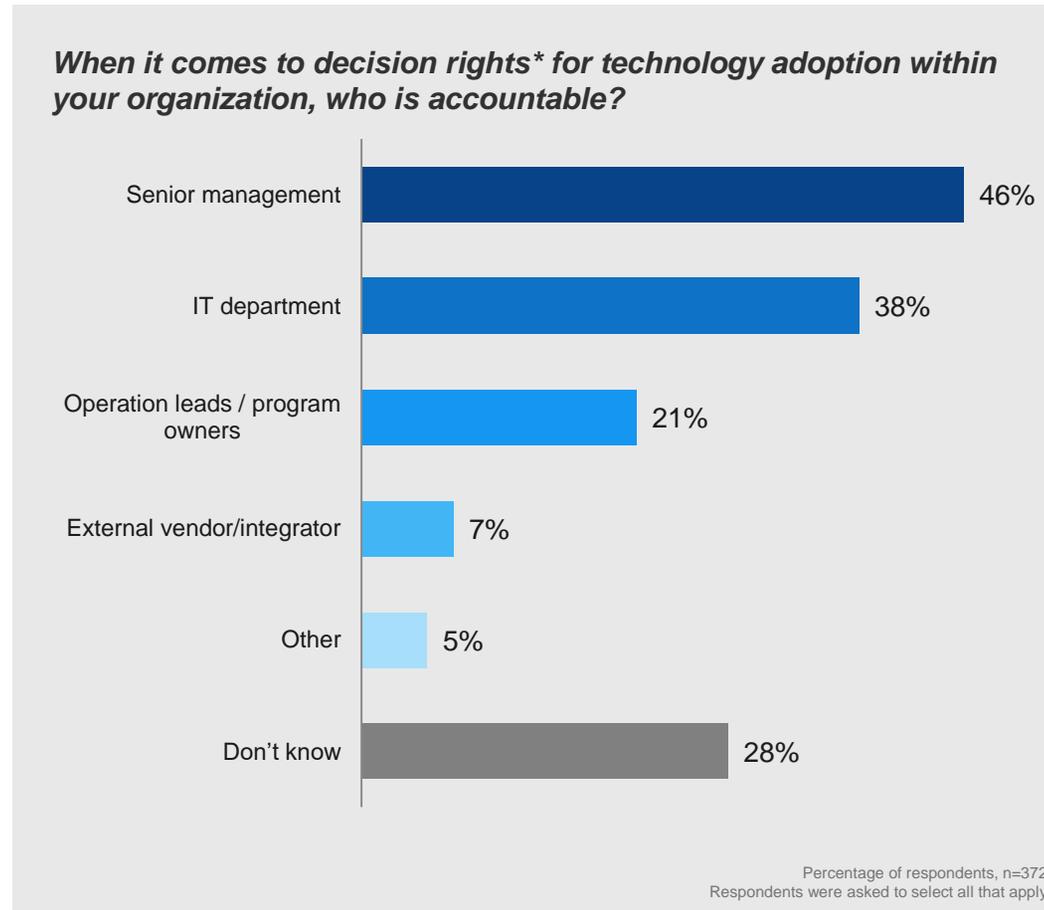


Percentage of respondents, n=385  
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**41%**

say that their organization encounters obstacles at each phase in the technology/systems adoption lifecycle.

Nearly a third of respondents are unclear on who is responsible for technology adoption within their organization



“The decision-makers are so far removed from the operations that they have no clue what’s actually needed, how it’s working/implemented, the impact on the workforce and customers, etc. They just rush, rush, rush to check the box, and move on before the failures become apparent. As long as they have a new buzzword, they are good to go.”

– Survey respondent

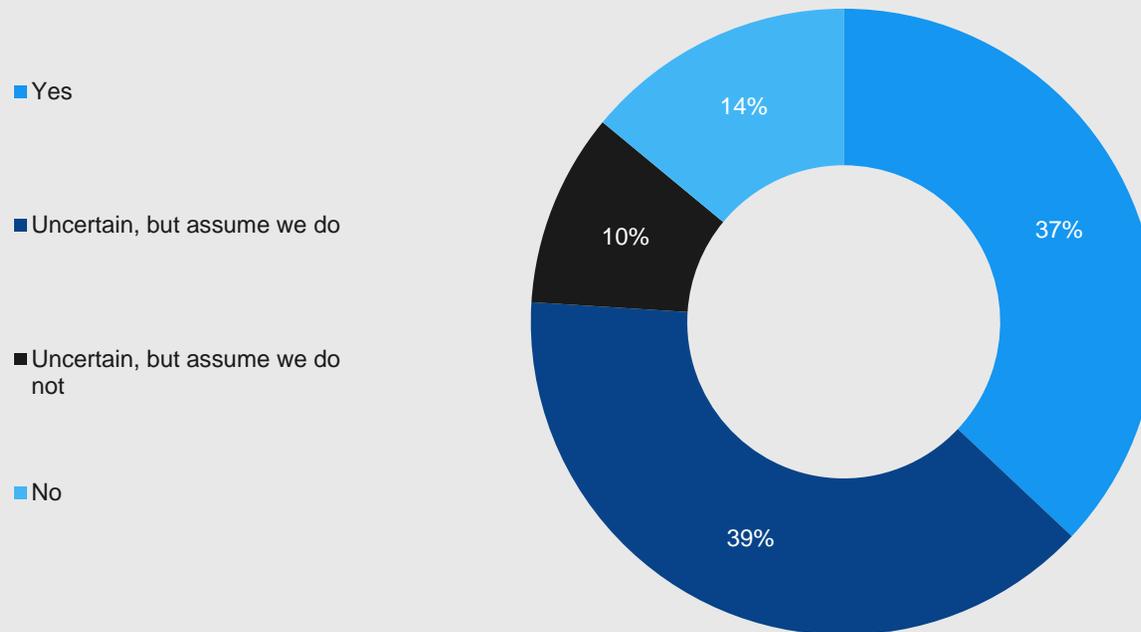
46%

say that senior management is accountable for decisions made regarding technology adoption. Of those respondents who selected ‘other,’ the most common response was that no one is accountable.

*\*Decision rights are defined as those with a defined role as either a decider or as a formal or informal influencer in technology adoption processes.*

**Fewer than half of respondents are confident that their organization has a designated individual responsible for aligning strategic business needs with technology implementation**

*Does your organization have a designated individual who steers technology/systems implementation to align with strategic business needs?*



Percentage of respondents, n=370  
Respondents were asked to select all that apply

**63%**

of respondents either do not know if there is a designated individual responsible for ensuring that technology implementation aligns with strategic business needs or say there is no such individual.

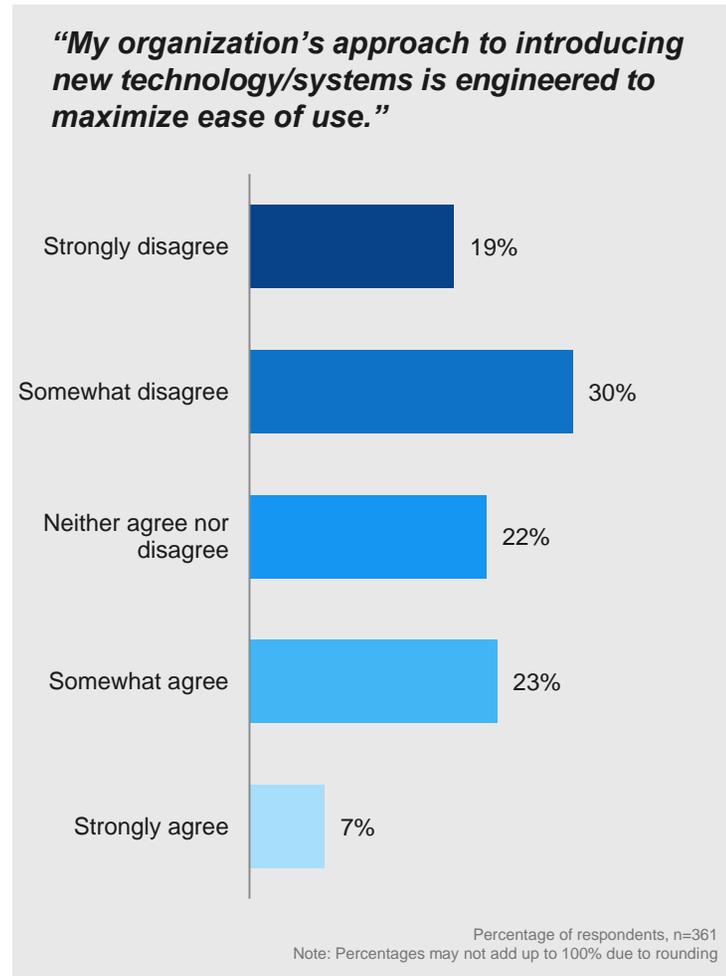
***Did you know?***

Over the last three decades, several laws have been put into place to help federal agencies better manage the billions of dollars they spend each year on IT. Most recently, in response to congressional leaders' growing concern over largescale government IT failures, they passed the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) in an effort to address what they described as "a lack of disciplined and effective management, such as project planning, requirements definition, and program oversight and governance."<sup>1</sup>

FITARA's most significant impact has been to empower federal Chief Information Officer (CIO); CIOs now have much more clearly outlined responsibilities and authority, and with it, a stronger mandate to govern all IT processes.

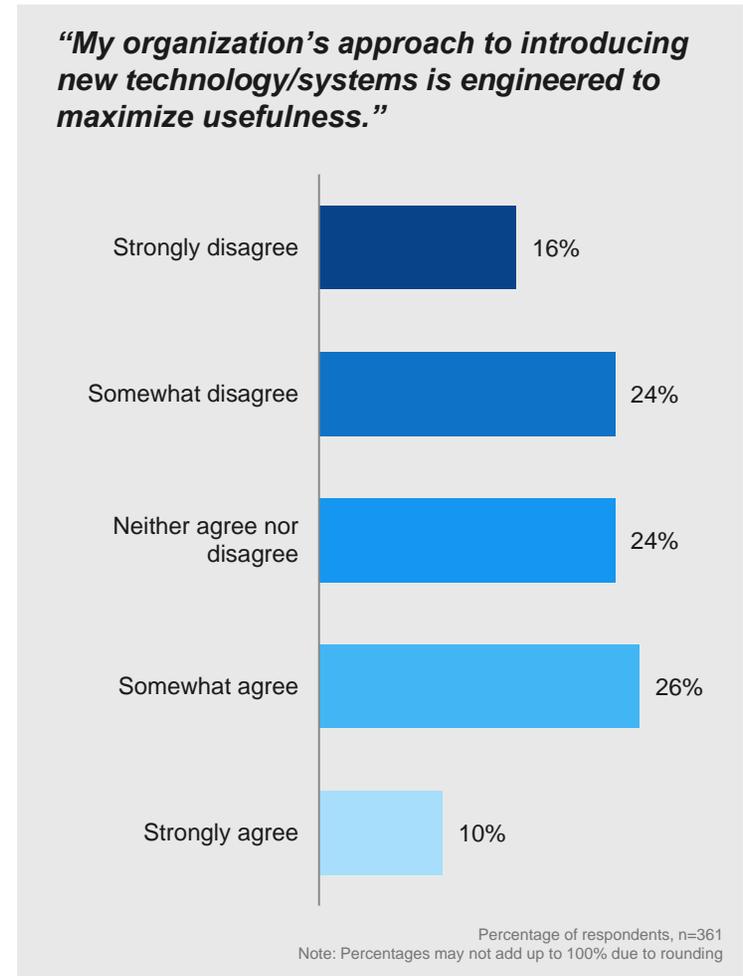
1. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R44843.pdf>

A concerning number of respondents say new systems are not introduced in a way that prioritizes utility or ease of use



**Only 31%**

of respondents believe that their organization prioritizes ease of use when introducing new technology.

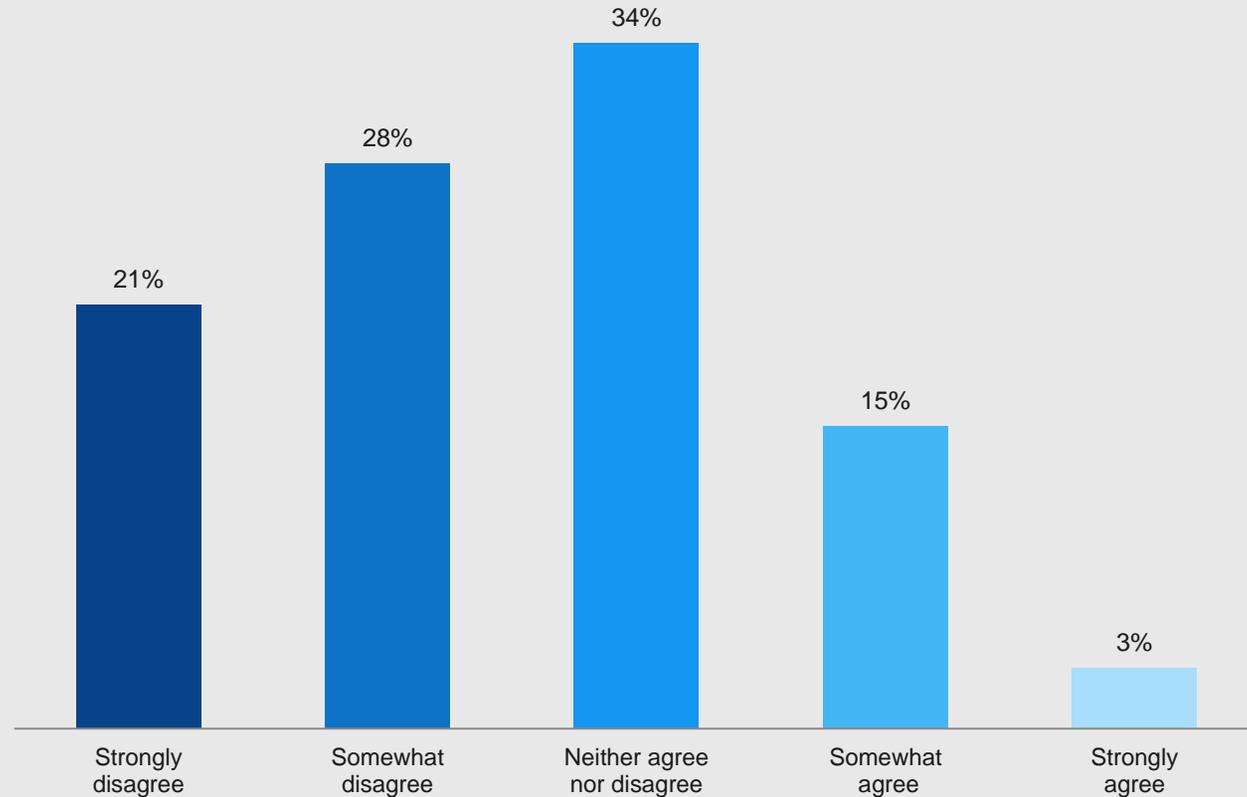


**36%**

say their organization prioritizes usefulness when introducing new technology.

Organizations generally lack sufficient resources to catalyze technology adoption efforts

*“The resources available for technology adoption (the process of implementing technology, versus the purchasing of the technology itself) efforts within my organization are sufficient.”*



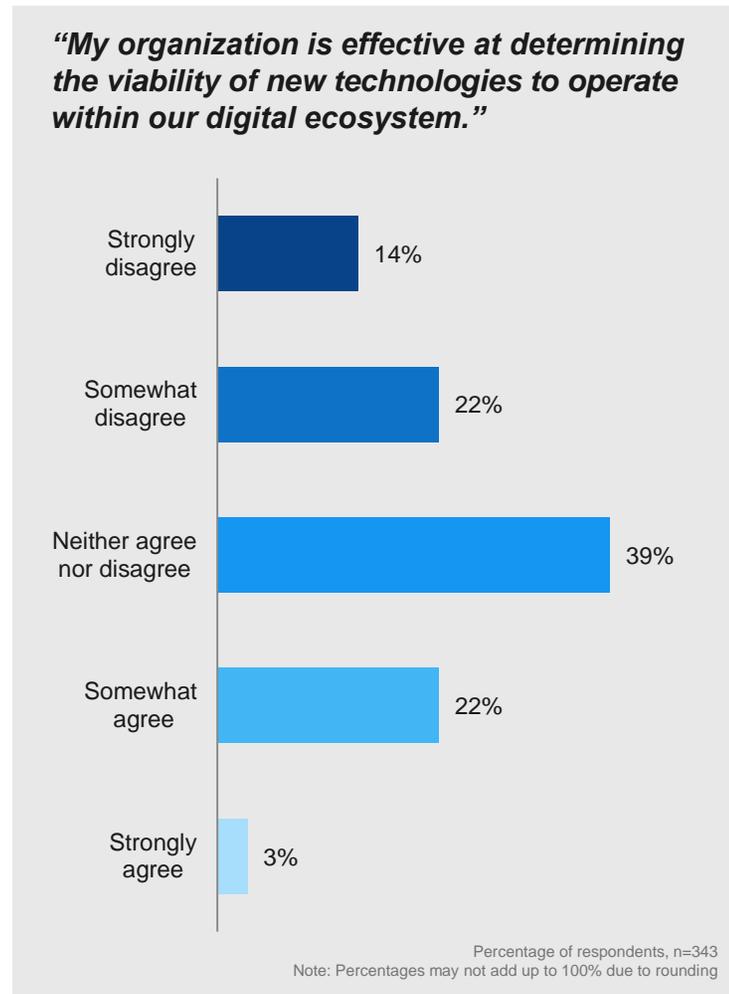
Percentage of respondents, n=343  
 Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

“

My agency’s help desk system is broken. Tickets sit in the queue for months at a time and are then ‘resolved’ without any actions taken. **Problems are not fixed, but instead are blown off for the workforce to overcome.** It’s likely **a lack of funding** to support the programs, but nothing is said or done to address the real problems for the field.”

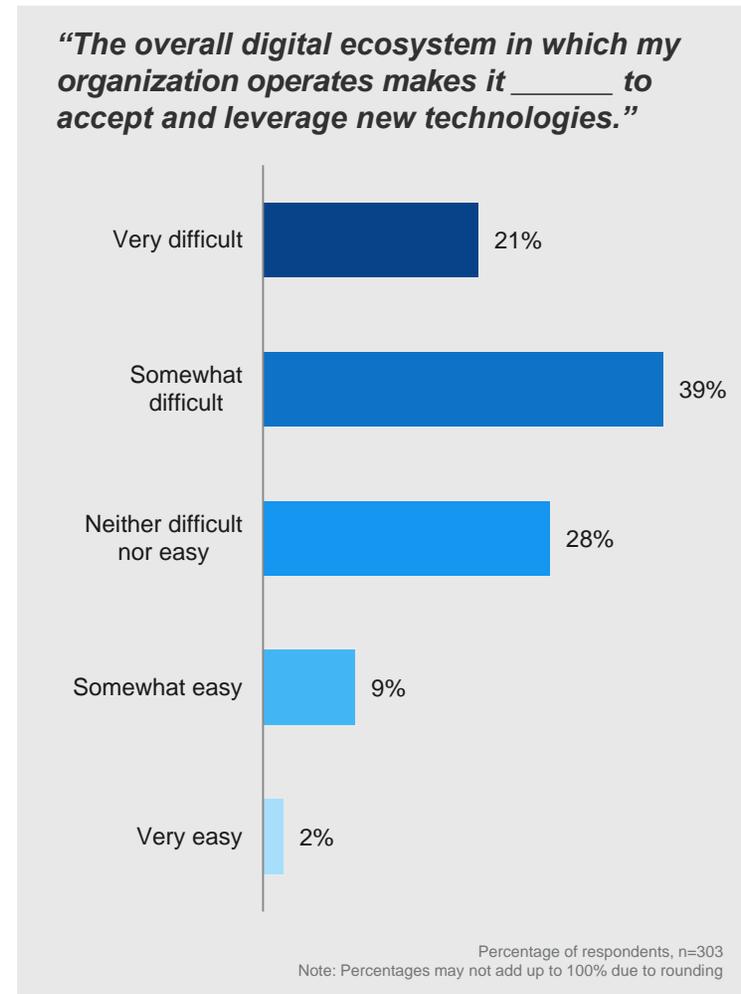
-- Survey respondent

**A majority say their digital ecosystem creates significant barriers to introducing new technologies**



**Just 1 in 4**

agree that their organization effectively determines the viability of new technologies to operate within its digital ecosystem.

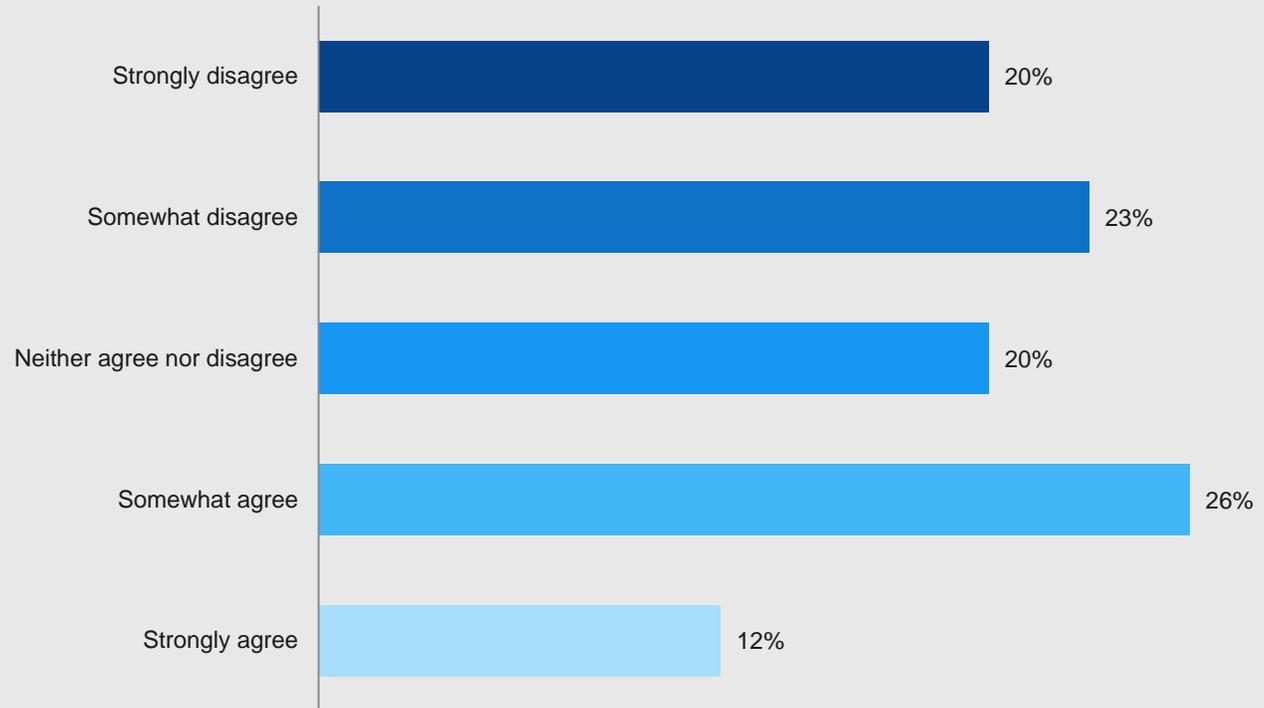


**Only 11%**

of respondents believe their organization’s systems are designed in a manner that enables the implementation of new technologies.

Fewer than half of respondents believe their organization employs outcome-measuring metrics

*“My organization has metrics in place that measure whether the outcomes of technology adoption initiatives meet their intended goals.”*



Percentage of respondents, n=277  
 Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

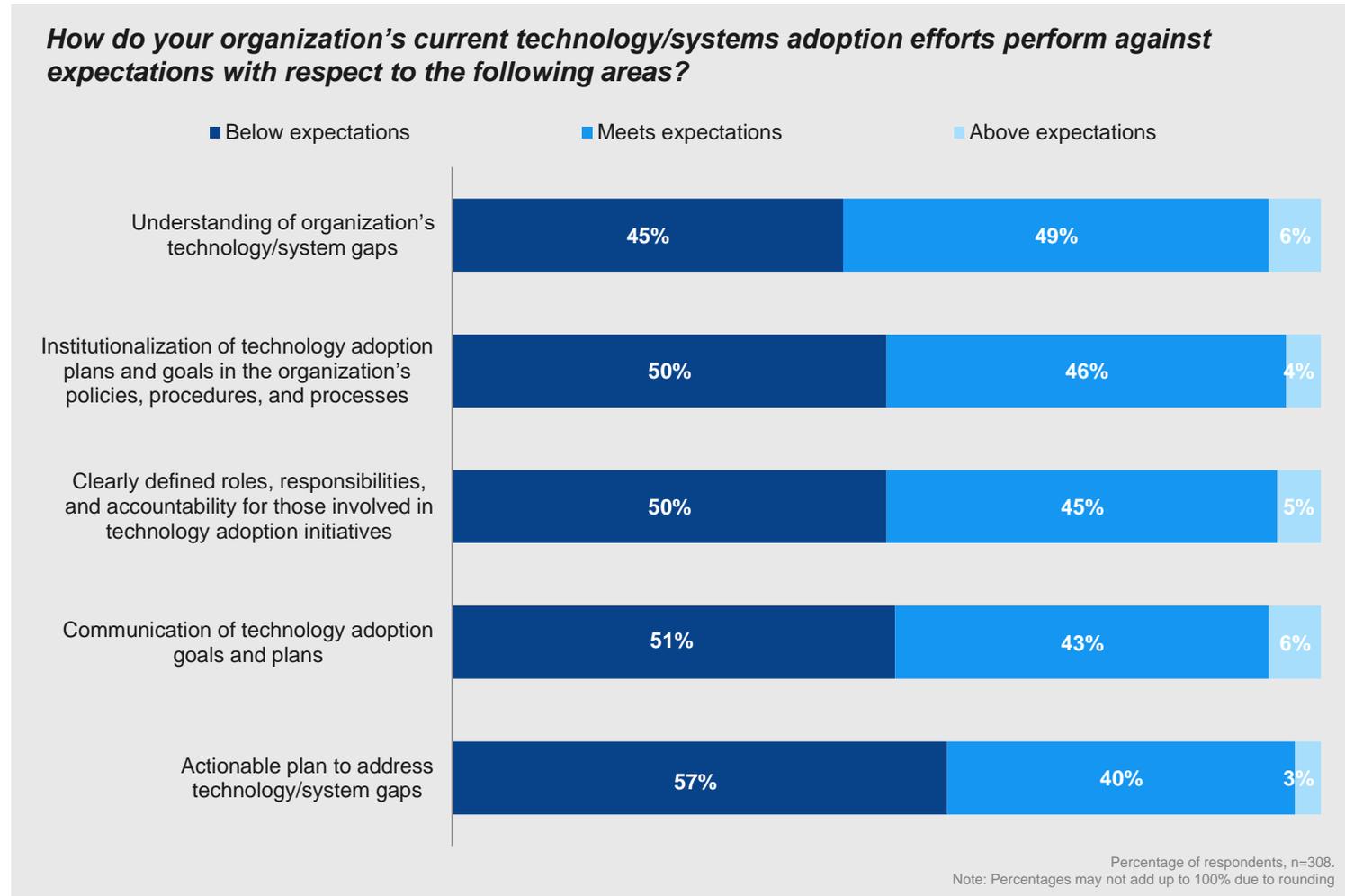
To successfully implement reforms and improve their operations and results, agencies will need to robustly manage their performance. This involves not only measuring progress toward goals, but also using that information to identify and correct problems, improve program implementation, and make other important management and resource allocation decisions.

**Did you know?**

In 2015, the GAO found that the Department of Defense took, on average, over five years and spent \$452 million to establish baselines for lifecycle cost, scheduling, and performance targets for individual IT programs.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668718.pdf>

Nearly half of those surveyed say their organization’s adoption efforts fall below expectations across a range of metrics



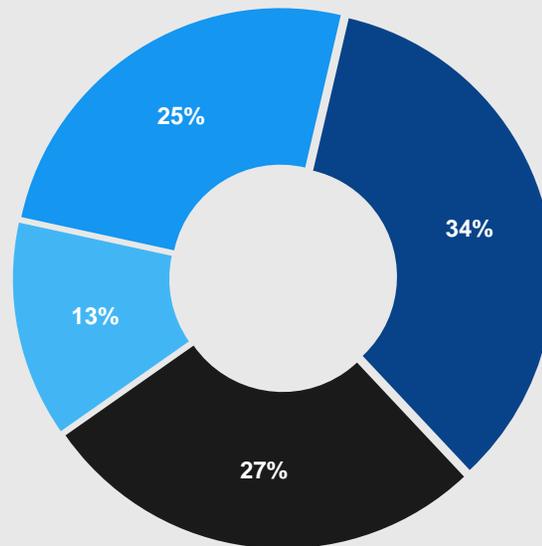
“

We are great at communicating and understanding the technology gaps. Unfortunately, we spend so much time revamping our multiple-layered governance structure that we have no time to articulate it to our operations teams, who, in the end, know our pain points better than leadership. **Great plans, not meeting the need, not in real time.**

-- Survey respondent

A plurality of respondents feel their organization's involvement with stakeholders is sub-par

*When it comes to technology adoption initiatives, which of the following statements best describes your organization's involvement with stakeholders?*



- Engagement of stakeholders is proactive, continuous, and/or comprehensive in outreach
- Engagement of stakeholders is formalized, periodic, and/or selective in outreach
- Engagement of stakeholders is ill-defined, sporadic, and/or narrow in outreach
- Don't know

Percentage of respondents, n=302

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

34%

say their organization's engagement with stakeholders is underdeveloped and ineffective.

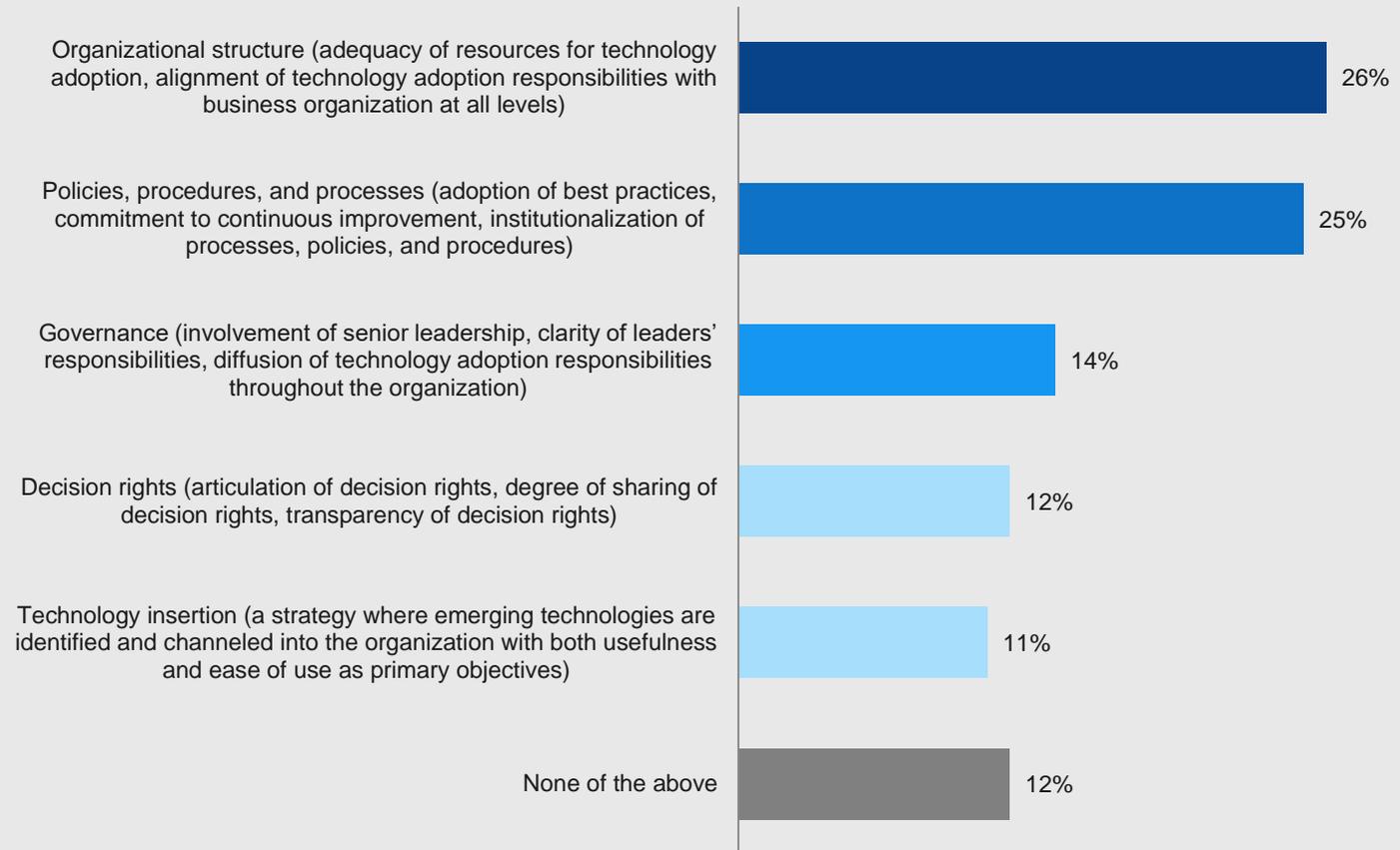
“

In my organization, **they never ask** the employees about ideas they might have, or get feedback in which way technology can be utilized successfully. **Top to bottom should have a say, and not just upper level management.**

- Survey respondent

**Ineffective organizational structures and flawed procedures are seen as top roadblocks to technology adoption**

*In your opinion, which is the greatest impediment to your organization’s technology adoption efforts?*



Percentage of respondents, n=300  
 Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding



It’s the same everywhere. Everyone likes the ideas and the widgets, **but nobody wants to change their standard operating procedure.** Change requires **leadership.**

-- Survey respondent

# Final Considerations

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**When considering how to improve technology adoption initiatives, government leaders should...**

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## **Embed technology adoption goals and plans into organizational policies, processes, and procedures**

One-quarter of respondents identify their organization's policies, procedures, and processes as the biggest impediment to their technology adoption efforts. Even more concerning, 50% of respondents say their organization has not adequately institutionalized technology adoption plans and goals into its procedures. Agencies can drive better outcomes by establishing clear objectives and better defining the role of technology adoption efforts for the organization.

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## **Involve the end-user**

Many IT failures stem from overlooking the end-user. GBC's survey results support that premise, with just over one-third of respondents saying their organization's approach to introducing new technologies is engineered to maximize ease of use and usefulness. Successful technology adoption requires that organizations tailor tools to the operational environments and missions of their end-users. The best way to do this is by engaging them at each stage of the technology adoption lifecycle.

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## **Develop metrics that effectively measure the progress of technology adoption efforts**

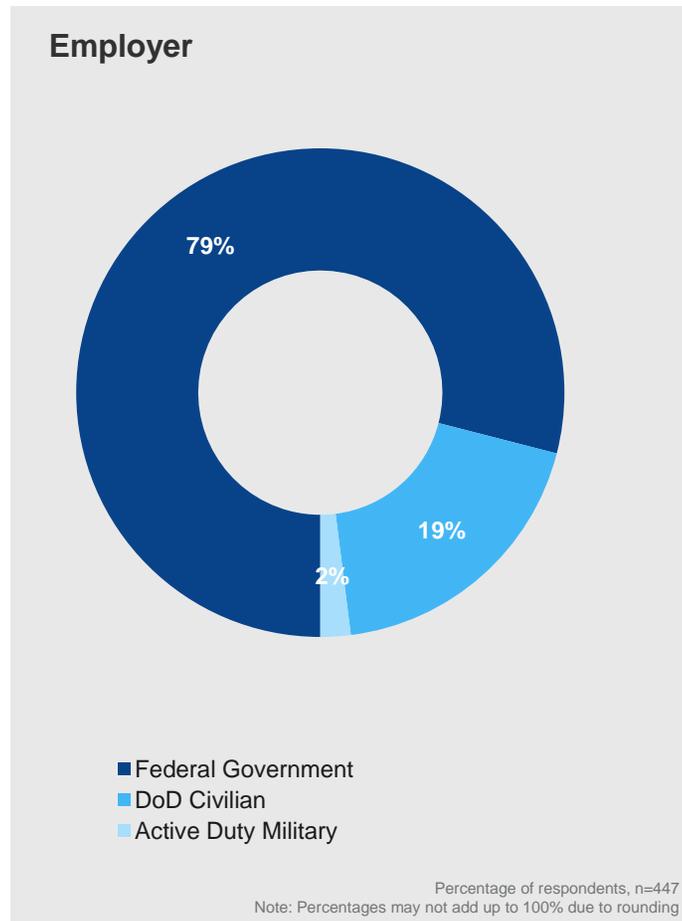
A common contributor to underperforming technology adoption initiatives is the failure to implement metrics that adequately capture both the performance of IT assets and their contribution to organizational performance. GBC found that just 38% of respondents believe their organization leverages metrics to determine whether the outcomes of technology adoption initiatives are meeting their intended goals. Beyond increasing transparency of operations, tracking progress, and providing more insight into places for improvement, metrics help leaders more effectively communicate the value of technology adoption efforts and encourage end-users to 'buy in.'

## **Insights from Booz Allen Hamilton**

Defense and federal agencies across government are implementing advanced analytic and digital technologies to help improve mission performance. Oftentimes, these innovative technologies underpin a set of broader digital transformation goals for these organizations. However, maximizing the potential of any new technology and achieving transformational goals does not simply happen when a new technology is inserted. To get the most value out of investments in technology, organizations must start early to deliberately and continuously manage how they integrate new digital capabilities into their operating environment. Facilitating the type of technology adoption that drives transformation is the realm of the adoption architect.

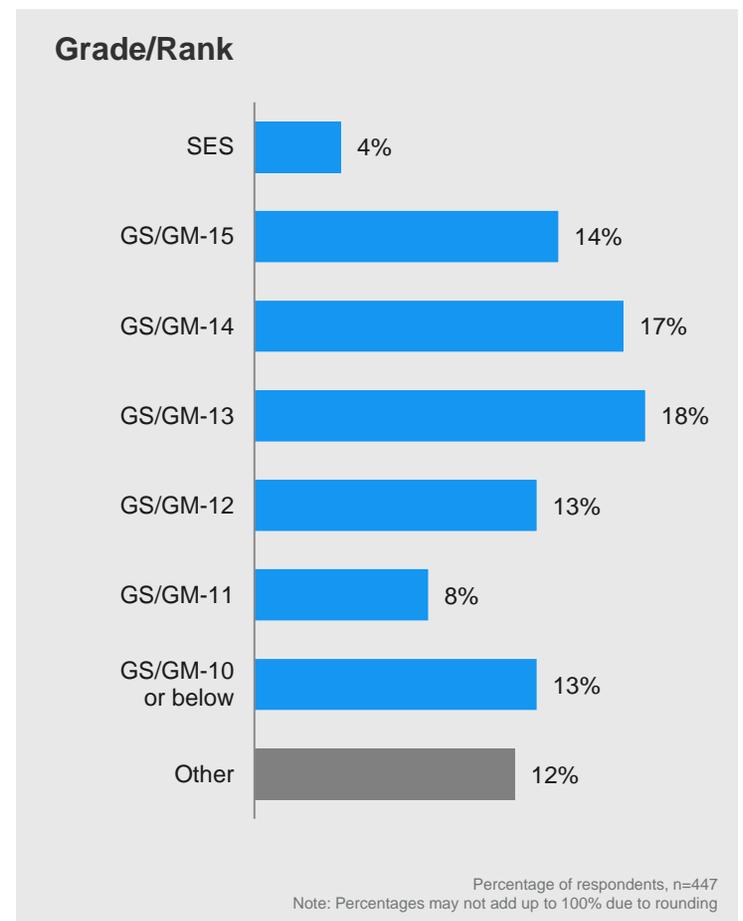
# Respondent Profile

A majority of respondents are senior decision-makers in the federal government



**1 in 5**

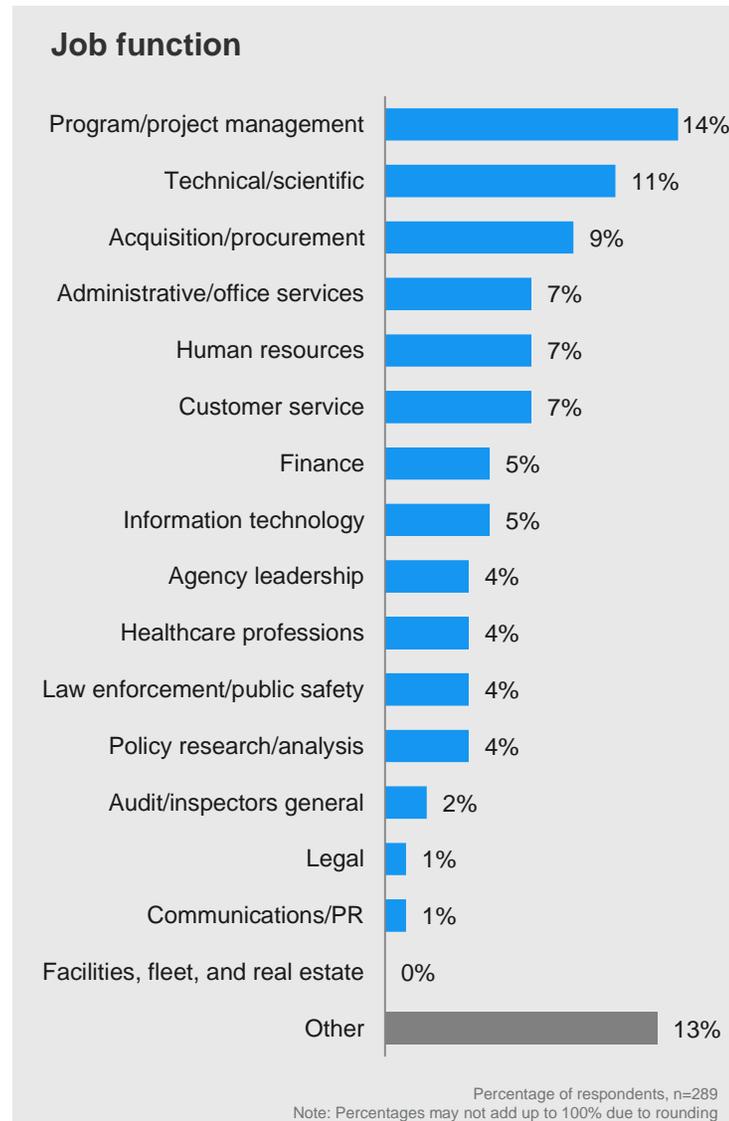
respondents are civilians working in the Department of Defense or registered as Active Duty Military.



**54%**

of respondents identify as GS-13 or above, including members of the Senior Executive Service, General/Admiralty, and Major/Commander.

**Most widely represented are program managers, technical specialists, and acquisition professionals**



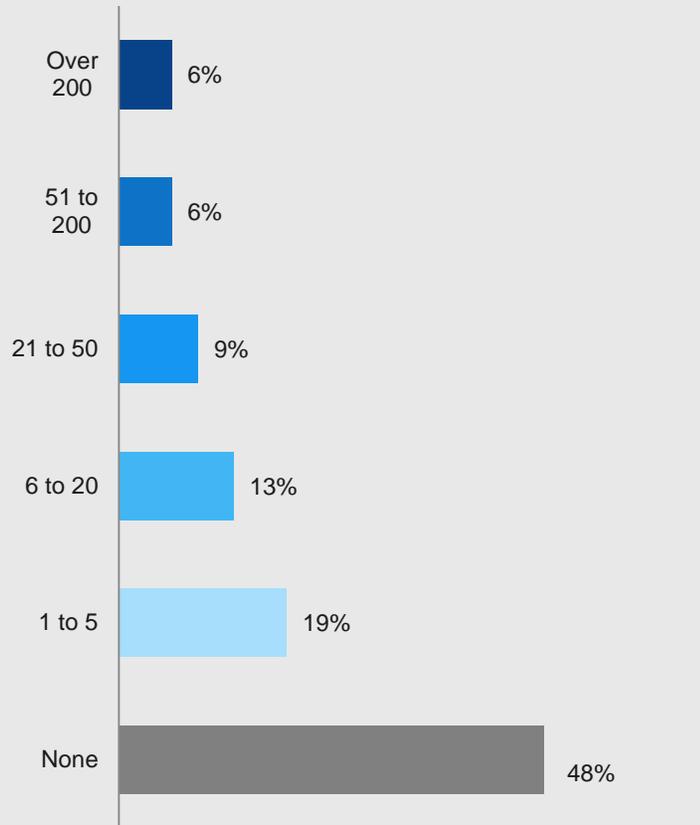
Respondents were asked to choose which single response best describes their primary job function.



Departments and agencies are listed in order of frequency.

A majority of respondents oversee direct reports

*How many people do you oversee in total, either directly or through your direct reports?*

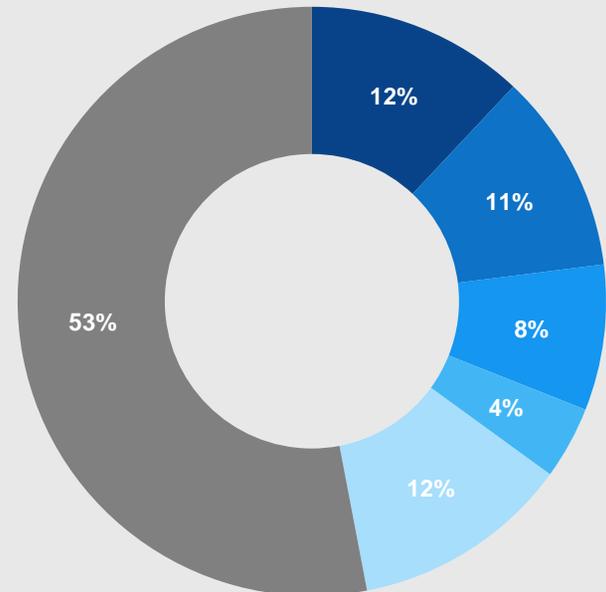


Percentage of respondents, n=302  
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

12%

of respondents oversee at least 50 people.

*Which of the following best describes your role in your organization's efforts to adopt new technology/systems?*



- General leadership
- Technical
- Managerial
- Policy
- Other
- Not involved

Percentage of respondents, n=450  
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

1 in 3

respondents are directly involved in their organization's technology adoption efforts.

# About

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As Government Executive Media Group's research division, Government Business Council (GBC) is dedicated to advancing the business of government through analysis, insight, and analytical independence. An extension of *Government Executive's* 50 years of exemplary editorial standards and commitment to the highest ethical values, GBC studies influential decision makers from across government to produce intelligence-based research and analysis.

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