Enterprise Horizons, 2025

Technology Leaders' Priorities:
Achieving Digital Agility

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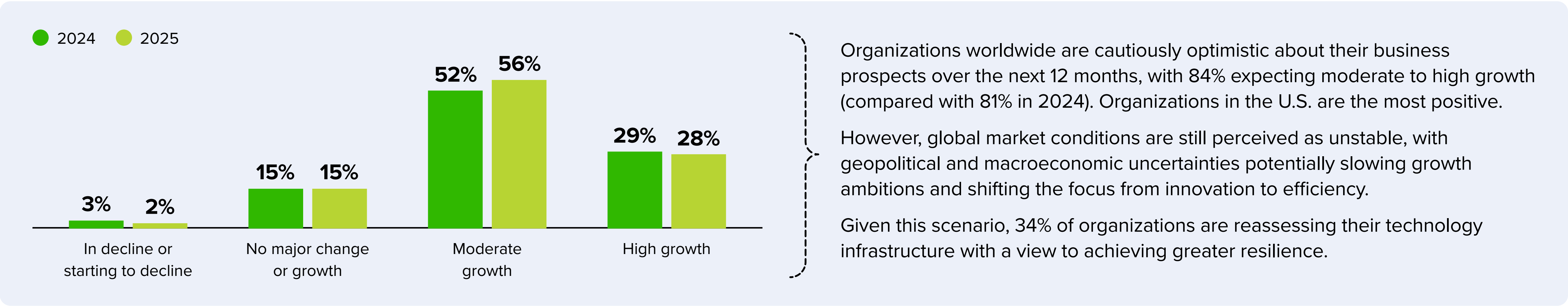
Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This InfoBrief analyzes technology leaders' challenges — including the macroeconomic scenario, business priorities, AI and networking investments, digital skills gaps, enterprise sustainability, and the evolving role of technology leadership — in building a resilient and competitive organization.

This analysis is based on the latest results of IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2025*.

- **Navigating uncertainty:** Moderate to high growth expectations are being tempered by geopolitical risks and economic instability. As a result, organizations are reassessing tech investment priorities.

- **Toward the "adaptive" organization:** Top business priorities driving technology investment are linked to efficiency (becoming agile and automated), security, and customer experience (driving customer retention and revenue growth).

- **AI maturing:** Some companies are pulling ahead but still have far to go. Expectations are high — too high in some cases — but organizations are concerned over ethics/governance and employee resistance, and their networks are becoming AI bottlenecks.

- **Networking falling behind and in need of urgent attention:** Half of companies' networks are not ready for the future, and a lack of network resilience is causing direct financial harm. Companies have placed networks at the top of their investment priorities, as they are limiting major initiatives such as AI and sustainability. But enterprises lack the skills to do the transformation work and are turning to external partners.

- **Sustainability rising up the agenda:** Sustainability features in virtually all partner decisions and delivers real business benefits. Again, however, companies' networks have fallen behind and are in urgent need of investment to help improve sustainability.

- **Partner support to bridge the skills gap:** Digital skills shortages in key technology areas, such as cybersecurity and networking, are driving organizations to increase external support partners, such as managed services providers, to bridge skills gaps. Internal upskilling and reskilling programs for the current workforce emphasize culture and collaboration.

- **AI elevating technology leaders to the board:** Business priorities are driving technology leaders to seek new efficiencies and manage digital risk. Nevertheless, the pace of AI innovation is expected to make them fully digital business leaders in the next two years, directly contributing to the creation of new digital streams. It is an exciting time to be a technology leader.

# Business Growth Expectations Tempered by an Uncertain Market Environment

Q: Which of the following best describes the outlook of your overall business for the next 12 months?

● 2024   ● 2025

	In decline or starting to decline	No major change or growth	Moderate growth	High growth
2024	3%	15%	52%	29%
2025	2%	15%	56%	28%

Organizations worldwide are cautiously optimistic about their business prospects over the next 12 months, with 84% expecting moderate to high growth (compared with 81% in 2024). Organizations in the U.S. are the most positive.

However, global market conditions are still perceived as unstable, with geopolitical and macroeconomic uncertainties potentially slowing growth ambitions and shifting the focus from innovation to efficiency.

Given this scenario, 34% of organizations are reassessing their technology infrastructure with a view to achieving greater resilience.

Top 3 Risk Factors or Inhibitors to Growth Ambitions Over the Next 12 Months

35%
Inflation
⬆ **2024: 34%**
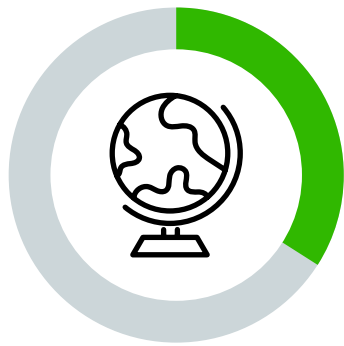
34%
Geopolitical turmoil
(affecting either us or our technology providers)
⬇ **2024: 38%**
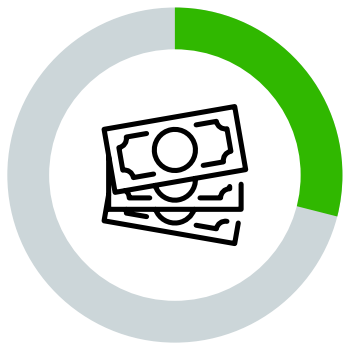
29%
Economic uncertainty
⬇ **2024: 32%**

Q: How will companies deliver growth over the next 12 months?

43%
Cost containment and efficiencies

38%
New services and products

33%
Increased innovation

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Source: IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2025*, January 2025 (N = 650); IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2024*, March 2024 (N = 650)

4

The Adaptive Organization in 2025: Becoming Efficient, Secure, and Competitive

43% of organizations plan to deliver growth internationally in the next 12 months thanks to cost containment and efficiencies.

Top 3 Business Priorities Driving Technology Investments
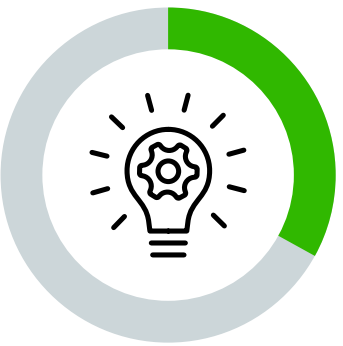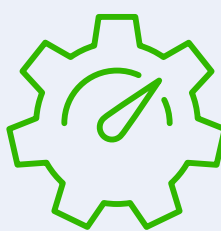
Efficiency: 37%
Reducing cost and wastage, streamlining operations, and reducing time to market
2024: 32%

Cybersecurity: 32%
Detection and resilience
2024: 35%

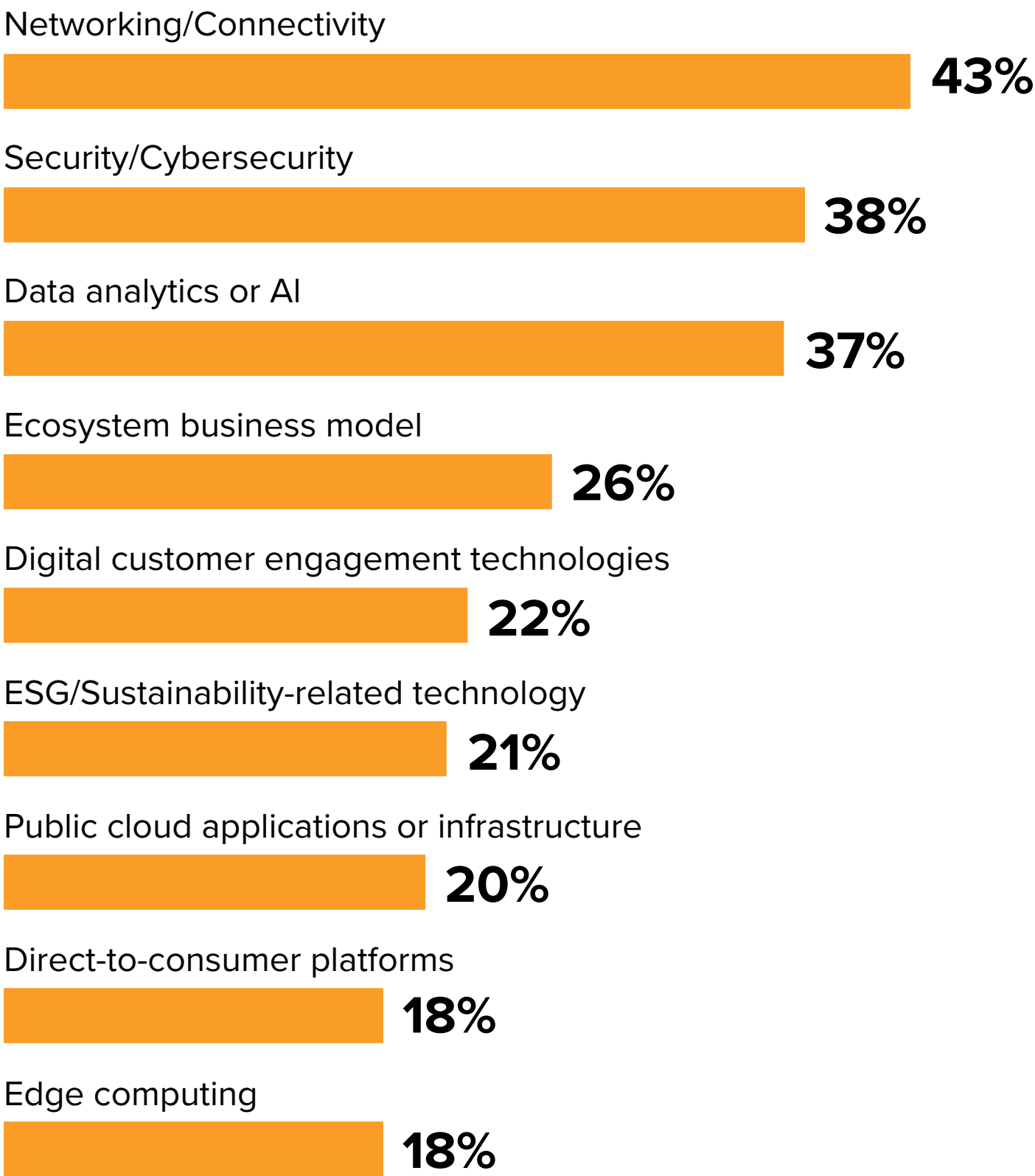**Customer experience: 31%**
Frictionless digital experience
2024: 30%

Building the Adaptive Organization

- Becoming **lean, agile, and automated in search of new efficiencies** and enhanced competitiveness is the top priority for organizations around the globe in 2025.

- An uncertain geopolitical scenario is **driving technology investments in cybersecurity** — Networking investments are prioritized for resilience and scalability.

- Investments in **digital customer experience** are considered key to driving customer retention and revenue growth.

- **Innovation** is a relevant business priority, especially for European organizations, but it was no longer centerstage in 2024. Continuous instability is pushing companies to prioritize clear and short-term ROI over pure innovation.

- **Developing new products and services is a key driver of growth**, as is implementing digital business models, such as ecosystem and direct-to-consumer platforms.

- **AI initiatives** are being implemented to meet business priorities from increased operational efficiency to revenue growth.

Q: Which of the following technologies will your organization prioritize in terms of effort and/or financial investment over the next 12 months?

Technology	%
Networking/Connectivity	43%
Security/Cybersecurity	38%
Data analytics or AI	37%
Ecosystem business model	26%
Digital customer engagement technologies	22%
ESG/Sustainability-related technology	21%
Public cloud applications or infrastructure	20%
Direct-to-consumer platforms	18%
Edge computing	18%

Source: IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2025*, January 2025 (N = 650); IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2024*, March 2024 (N = 650)
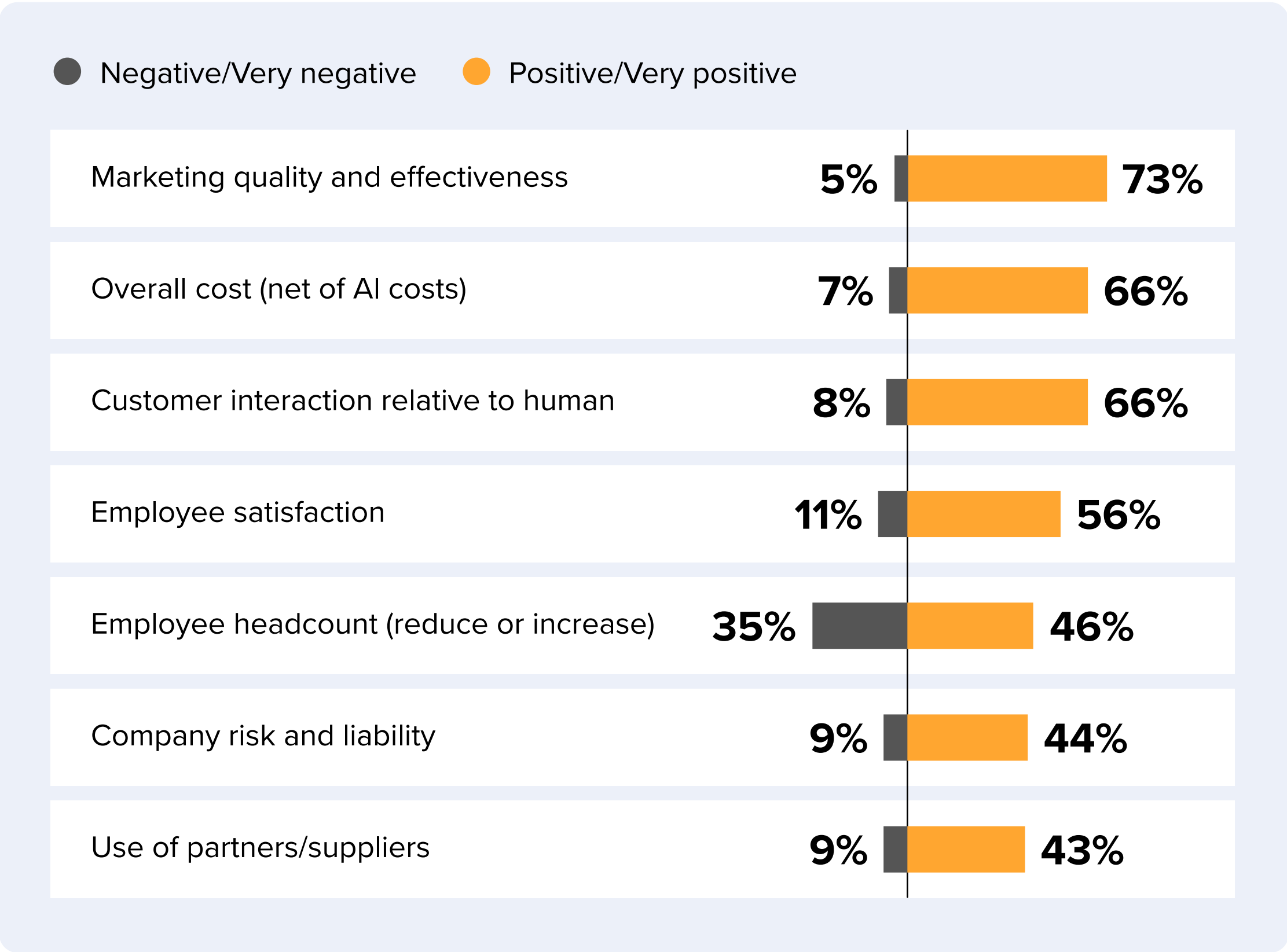
AI Realizing Its Potential and Positively Impacting Business

AI is maturing but has a long way to go. Around a quarter of companies are moving ahead fast, using it extensively and reporting good or exceptional outcomes. But most companies are a little further behind and are achieving satisfactory rather than exceptional outcomes.
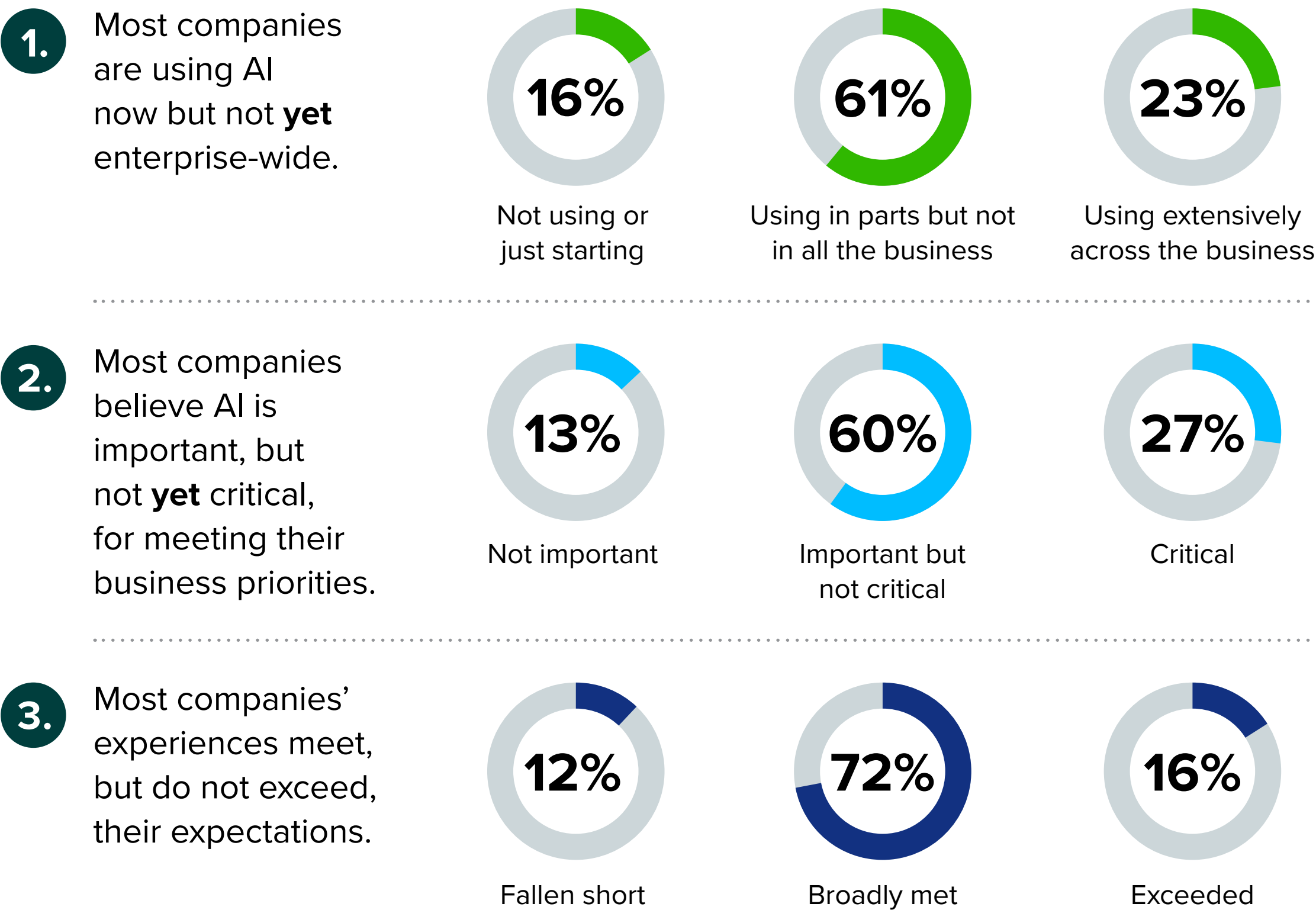
Companies agree that AI will positively impact business, particularly customer-facing activities, but one-third expect their workforces to shrink as a direct result. Among European and APAC organizations, that proportion rises to well over 40%.

1. Most companies are using AI now but not **yet** enterprise-wide.

16%
Not using or just starting

61%
Using in parts but not in all the business

23%
Using extensively across the business

2. Most companies believe AI is important, but not **yet** critical, for meeting their business priorities.

13%
Not important

60%
Important but not critical

27%
Critical

3. Most companies' experiences meet, but do not exceed, their expectations.

12%
Fallen short

72%
Broadly met

16%
Exceeded

● Negative/Very negative ● Positive/Very positive

	Negative	Positive
Marketing quality and effectiveness	5%	73%
Overall cost (net of AI costs)	7%	66%
Customer interaction relative to human	8%	66%
Employee satisfaction	11%	56%
Employee headcount (reduce or increase)	35%	46%
Company risk and liability	9%	44%
Use of partners/suppliers	9%	43%

Organizations Feeling Some AI Growing Pains

Q: Are AI expectations growing faster than you can meet them?

Yes **28%**   No **29%**
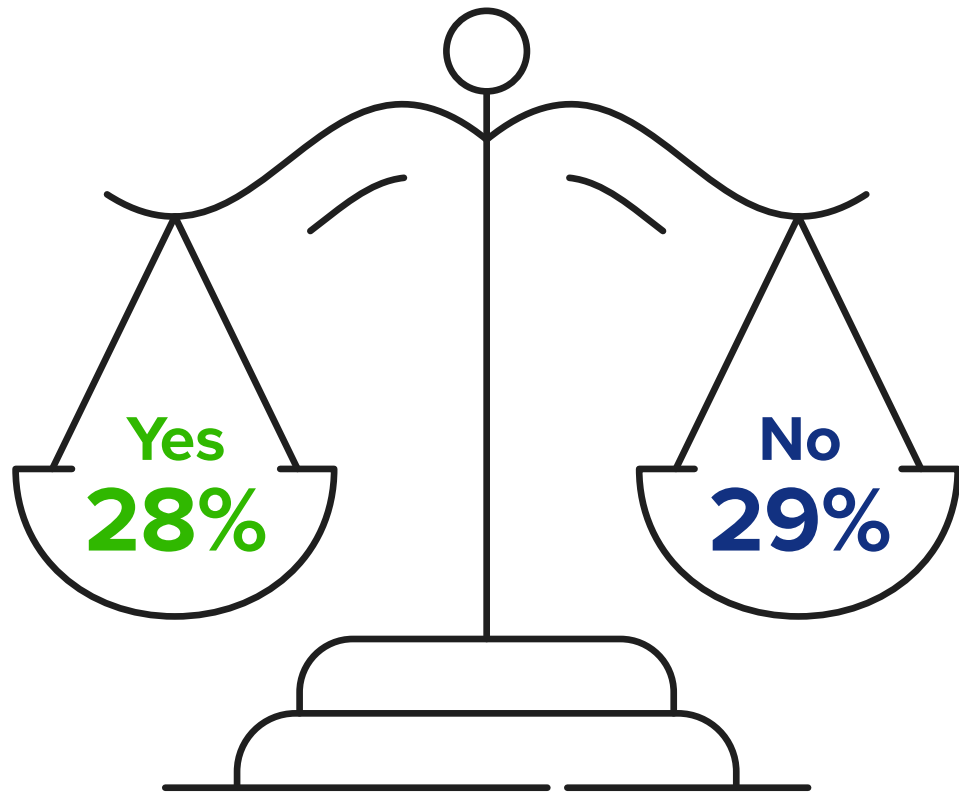
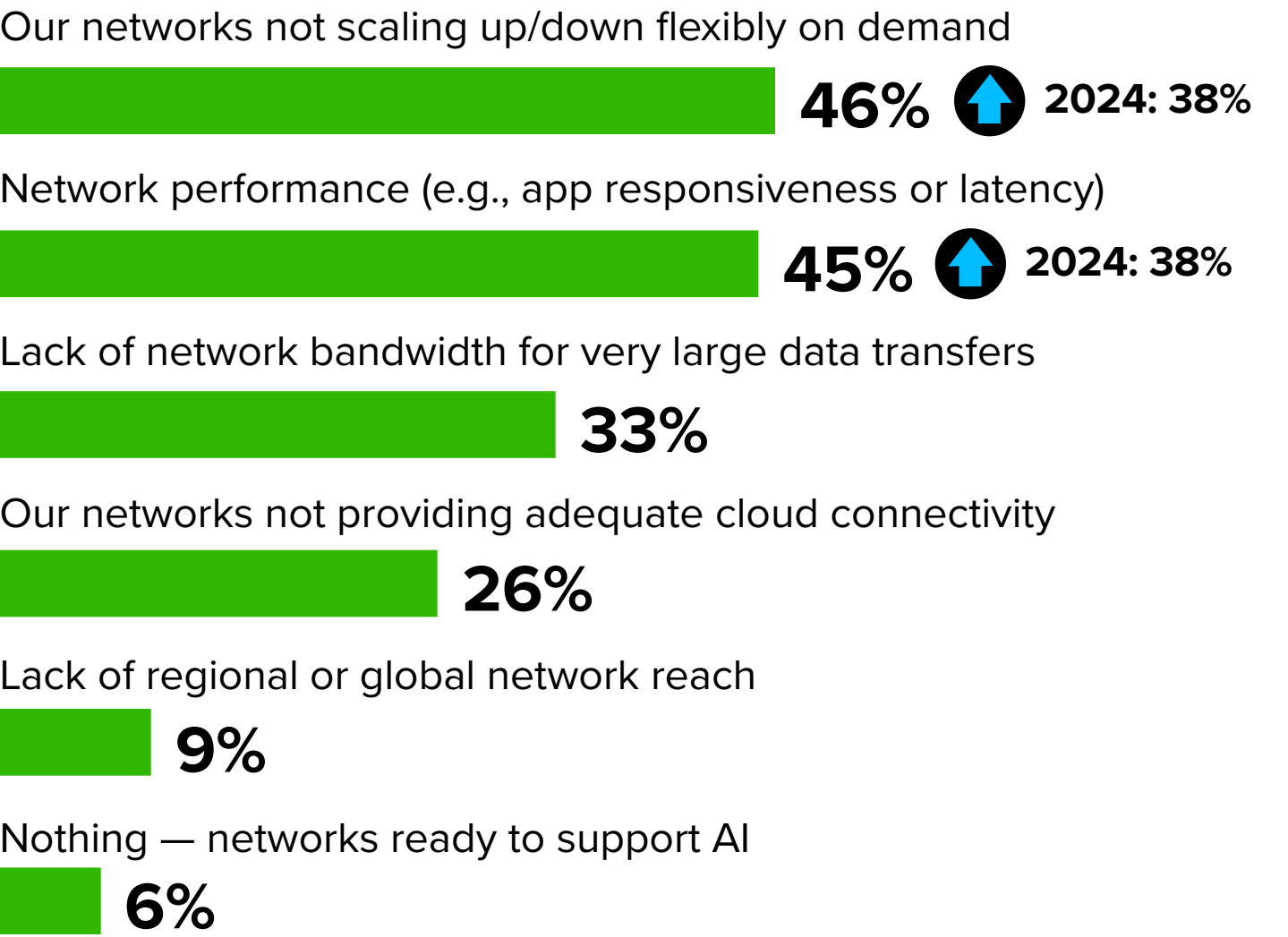- A significant proportion of technology leaders are trying to meet expectations that are growing faster than their ability to meet them, if they can even meet them at all.

- 33% of technology leaders feel that their board has unrealistic expectations of how new technology in general can benefit business performance.

- Just as many companies have unrealistic expectations of what AI can do for them as those with realistic expectations.

- It is time for a reality check on what AI can and cannot do for businesses and on the timescales needed to implement solutions.

AI is being held back by some significant obstacles.

- Ethics and governance are growing concerns that cannot be solved with a quick technology fix.

- Employees are expressing concern over, or resistance to, being superseded.

- Keeping on top of change and having the right capabilities are challenges for both in-house teams and partners.

42%	**35%**	**34%**	**29%**
Concerns over AI ethics or governance	Employee resistance	Keeping up with the pace of change	Partners not having the right AI capabilities

Change compared with Enterprise Horizons, 2024:

2024: 36%	NA	2024: 28%	2024: 29%

Networks are an AI bottleneck.

94% of companies say their networks limit their ability to run large data/AI projects in some aspect.
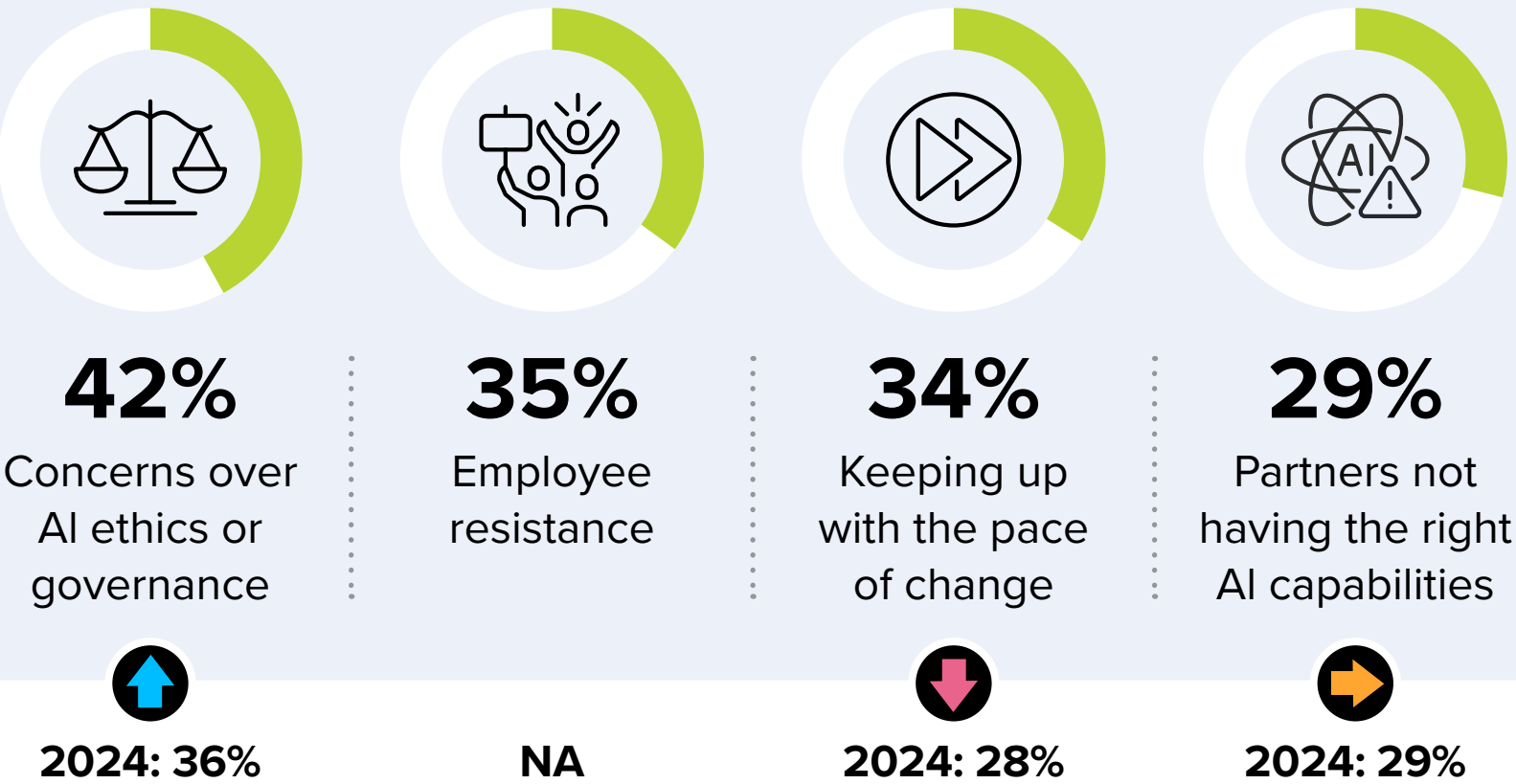
Scalability/flexibility and network performance are the biggest issues and are becoming bigger over time. Companies need new networks able to scale up capacity where and when it is needed to support variable and unpredictable large data workloads.

Q: Which of the following are preventing or limiting your organization's networks/connectivity from supporting large data/AI projects?

Our networks not scaling up/down flexibly on demand
46% ⬆ 2024: 38%

Network performance (e.g., app responsiveness or latency)
45% ⬆ 2024: 38%

Lack of network bandwidth for very large data transfers
33%

Our networks not providing adequate cloud connectivity
26%

Lack of regional or global network reach
9%

Nothing — networks ready to support AI
6%

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Source: IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2025*, January 2025 (N = 650); IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2024*, March 2024 (N = 650)

7

Half of Companies Running Outdated Networks, Creating Serious Resilience Issues with Direct Financial Consequences
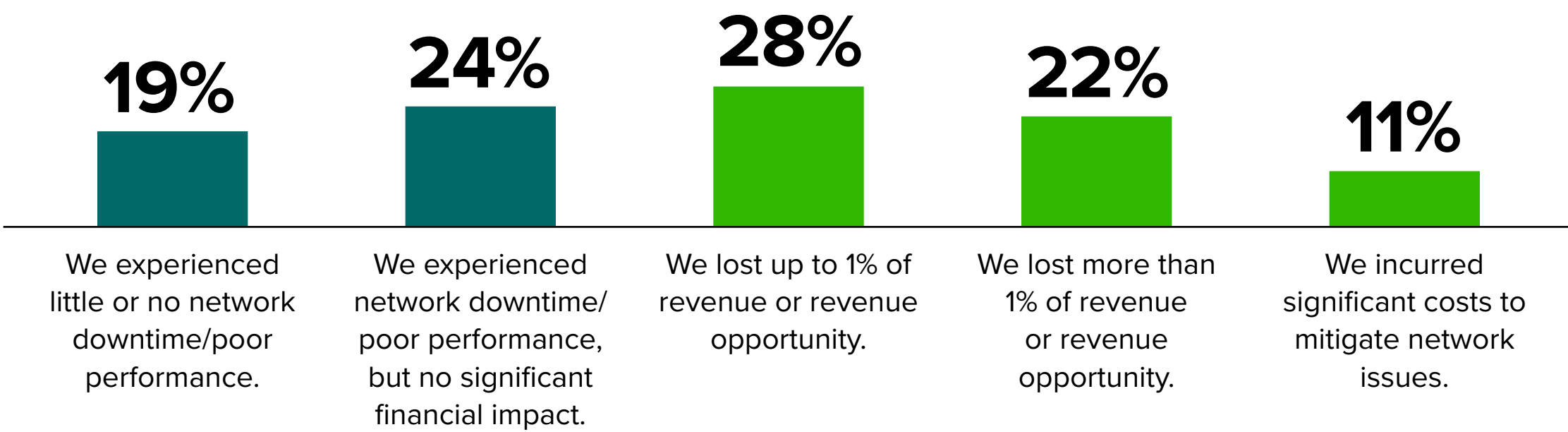
Networks are not ready for the future.

Only one-half of organizations believe their networks are ready to support their new technology initiatives.

Network Readiness

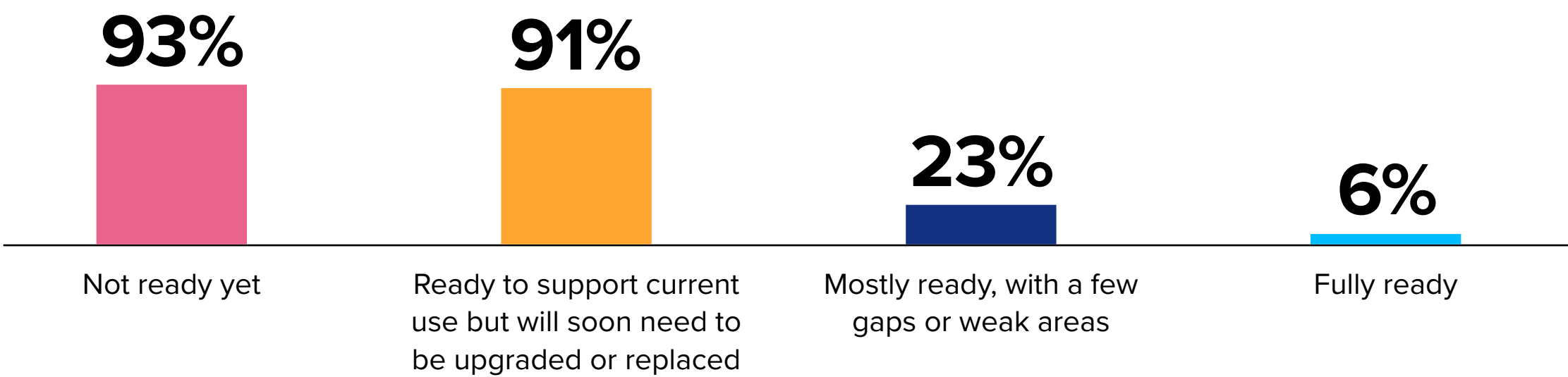|	
Fully ready	**8%**
Mostly ready, with a few gaps or weak areas	**40%**
Ready to support current use but will soon need to be upgraded or replaced	**45%**
Not ready yet	**7%**
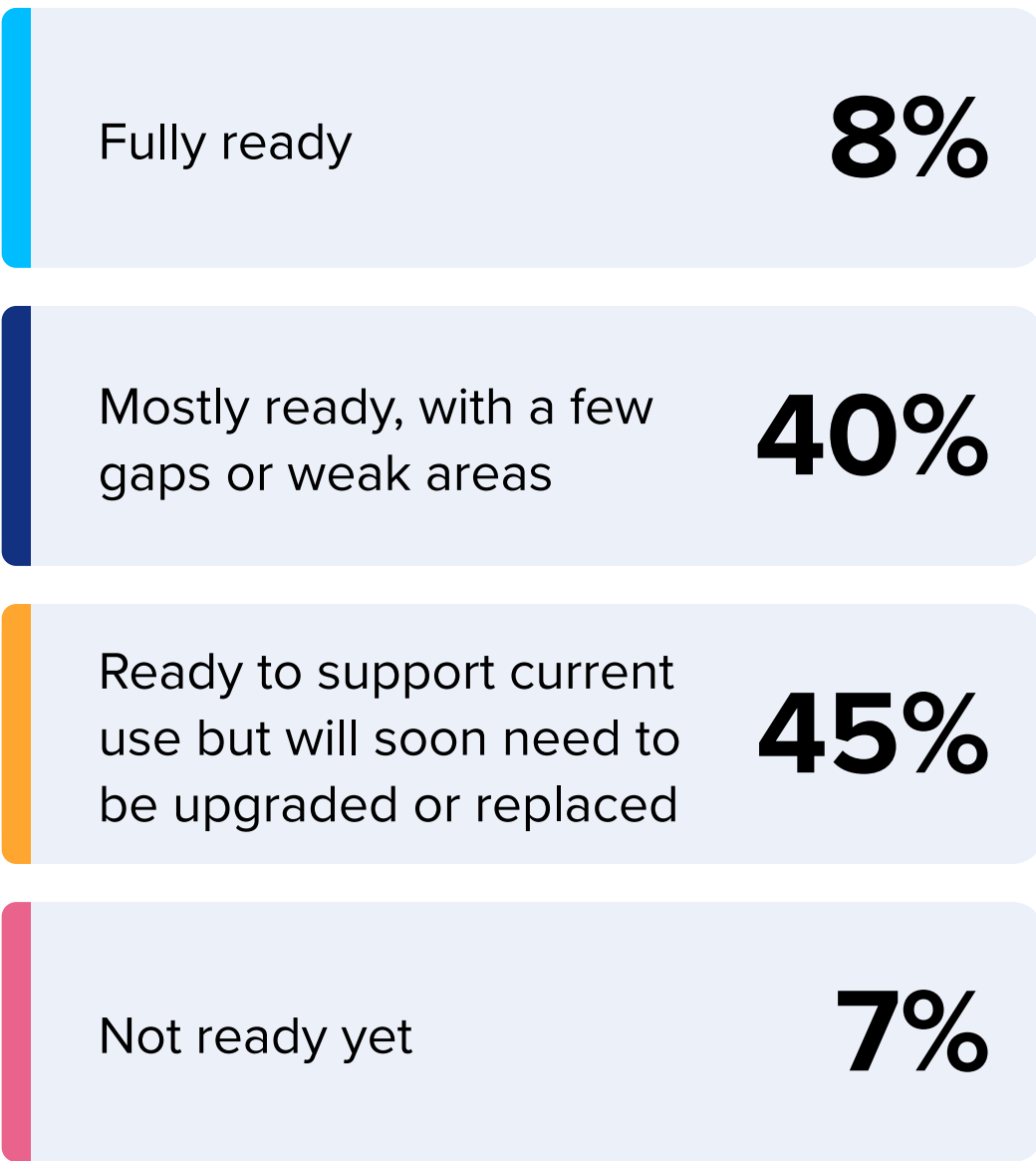
Network problems are common, and they hurt.

Resilience/Reliability is such an issue that over half of companies have experienced financial impacts over the last 12 months from network downtime or poor performance.

| **19%**	**24%**	**28%**	**22%**	**11%**
We experienced little or no network downtime/poor performance.	We experienced network downtime/ poor performance, but no significant financial impact.	We lost up to 1% of revenue or revenue opportunity.	We lost more than 1% of revenue or revenue opportunity.	We incurred significant costs to mitigate network issues.

And running outdated networks hurts the most.

The chart below shows the proportion of companies impacted financially by poor network performance or downtime, based on their network readiness. Nearly all companies with unready networks are affected, making holding back on network investment a false economy.

93%	**91%**	**23%**	**6%**
Not ready yet	Ready to support current use but will soon need to be upgraded or replaced	Mostly ready, with a few gaps or weak areas	Fully ready

Sourcing global networks creates further issues.

Only 3% of companies sourcing networks in North America from outside the region have significant problems, but that rises to 28% for LatAm, 32% for the Middle East, and 48% for Africa.
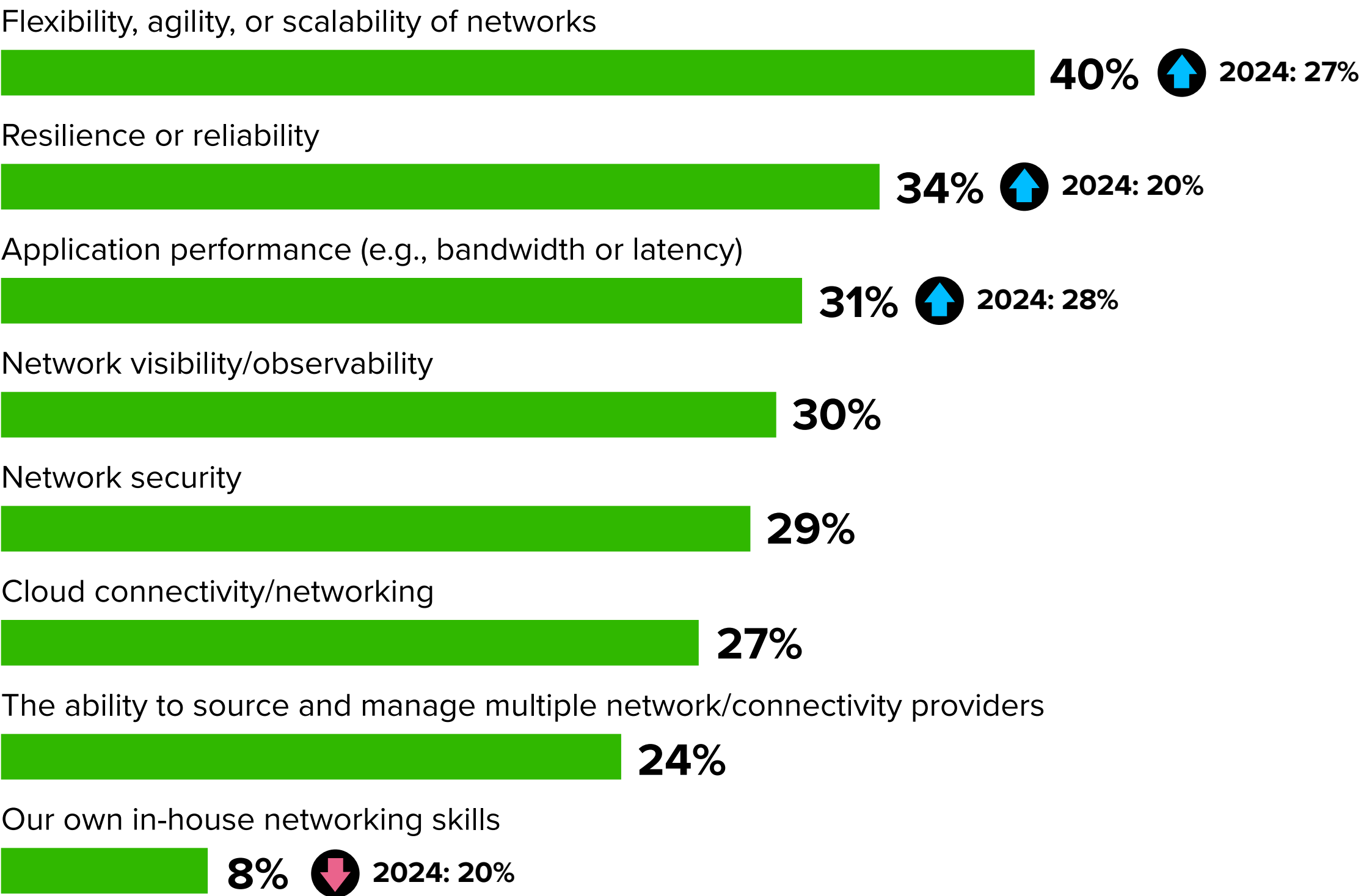
The top issues when buying networks in other regions are:

	Outages/ Reliability	**40%**
	Finding the right provider	**37%**
	Price/Cost	**37%**
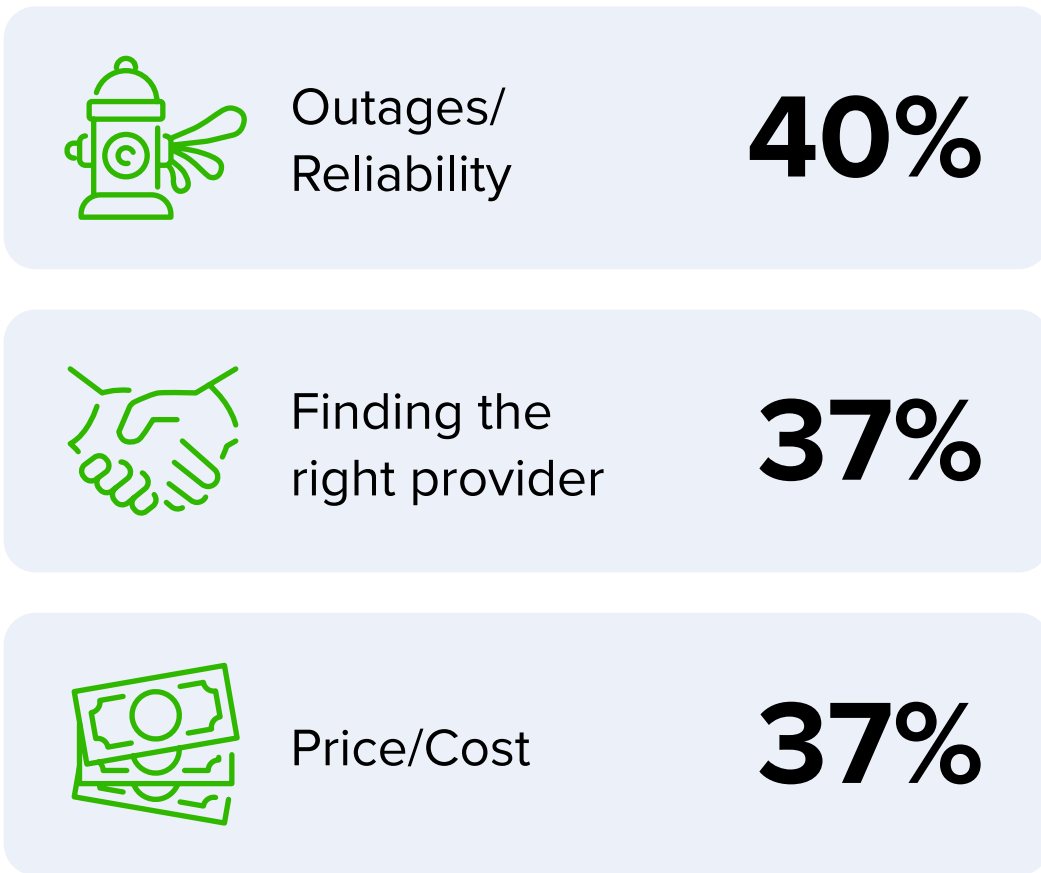
Urgent Fundamental Network Improvements Increasingly Being Delivered by Partners

Companies know what needs fixing.

Aspects of networking that urgently need improvement — flexibility, resilience, and performance — are all critical elements of a future-ready network. Yet, unlike other areas, these issues are becoming more, not less, pressing.

Flexibility, agility, or scalability of networks
40% ⬆ **2024: 27%**

Resilience or reliability
34% ⬆ **2024: 20%**

Application performance (e.g., bandwidth or latency)
31% ⬆ **2024: 28%**

Network visibility/observability
30%

Network security
29%

Cloud connectivity/networking
27%

The ability to source and manage multiple network/connectivity providers
24%

Our own in-house networking skills
8% ⬇ **2024: 20%**

And they are looking to external partners to help.

Networking is the number 2 area after cybersecurity in which companies are struggling to find or retain skills. (See the next page on skills gaps.)

Yet they are not prioritizing upgrading their in-house networking skills. As the chart on the left shows, only 8% are doing this with urgency.
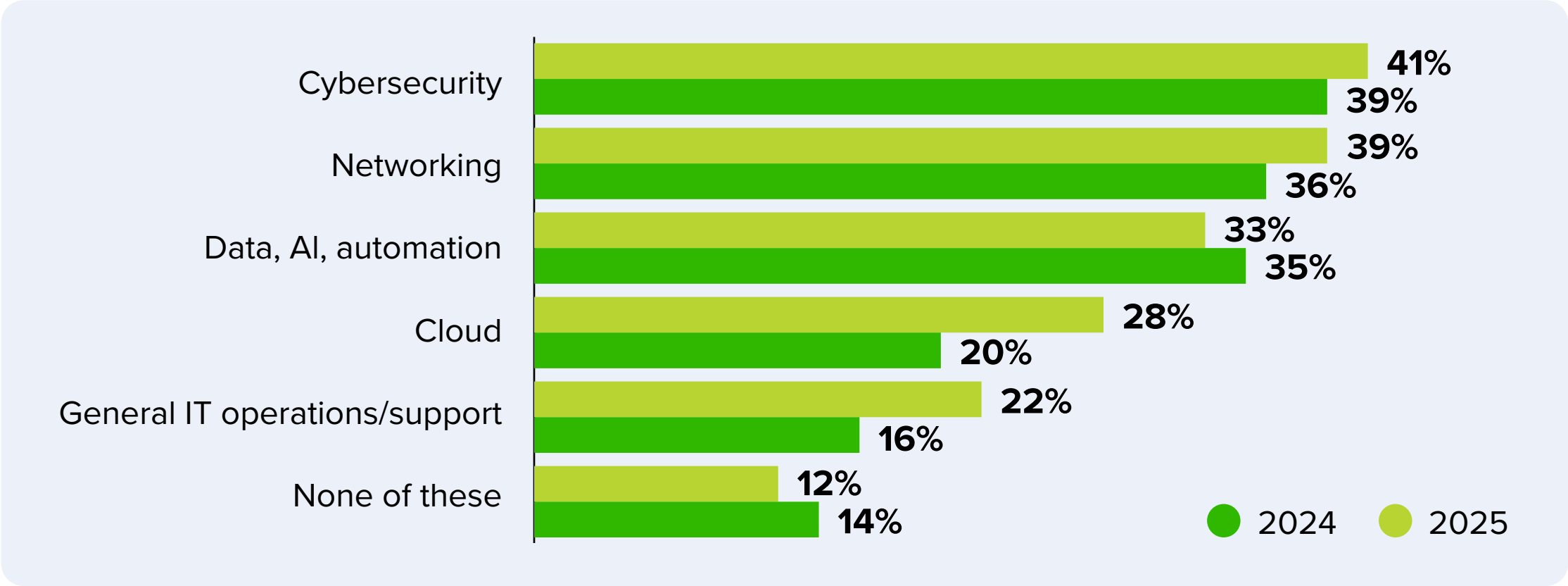
Instead, they are looking externally: Networking is the top area in which companies are looking to increase their use of partners, such as managed services providers, to bridge skills gaps. (See the next page.)
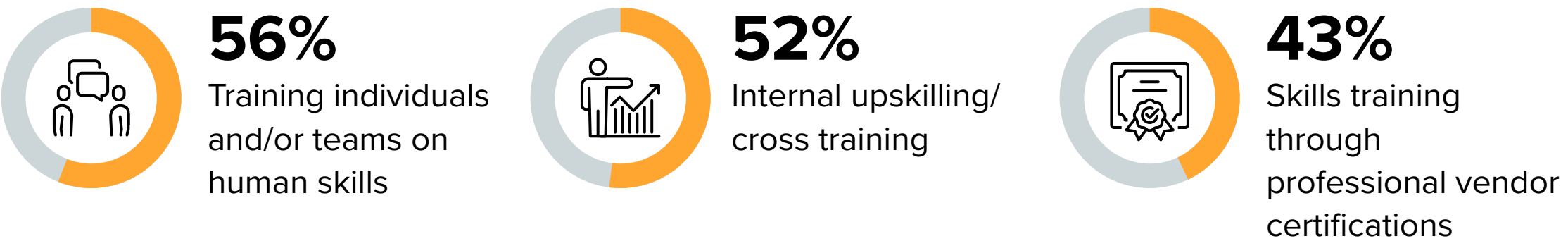
The net result of these trends is that networking is moving from an in-house activity to a managed service delivered by a trusted partner.

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Source: IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2025*, January 2025 (N = 650); IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2024*, March 2024 (N = 650)
9

A Dual Approach to Bridging the Technology Skills Gaps: Internal Reskilling Programs and External Support from Partners

Q: In which areas does your organization struggle to find or retain skills?

	2024	2025
Cybersecurity	39%	41%
Networking	36%	39%
Data, AI, automation	35%	33%
Cloud	20%	28%
General IT operations/support	16%	22%
None of these	14%	12%

● 2024 ● 2025

Technology investments are continuing at a rapid pace, with 42% of organizations finding it moderately to extremely difficult to find and retain talent for technology-related roles.

Filling skills gaps from cybersecurity and networking to data and AI is the most challenging of the top technology priorities in which organizations are investing.

Bridging digital skills gaps is critical to building organizational resilience, which involves enabling agile adaptation, maintaining productivity during disruptions, and facilitating the rapid adoption of new technologies. Organizations are taking the dual approach of using internal programs and external partners.

Q: Which of the following measures is your organization taking to address talent shortages and skills gaps? [Top 3]

56% Training individuals and/or teams on human skills

52% Internal upskilling/ cross training

43% Skills training through professional vendor certifications

Rapid technological advances, including in AI, are forcing organizations to establish structured training options for employees. Organizations are focusing on internal upskilling and reskilling programs for the current workforce, emphasizing culture and collaboration on one side and providing technical training through partner certifications on the other.

Q: In which areas do you expect to increase your organization's use of external partners, such as vendors or managed service providers, to help bridge skills gaps? [Top 3]

45% Networking

37% Cybersecurity
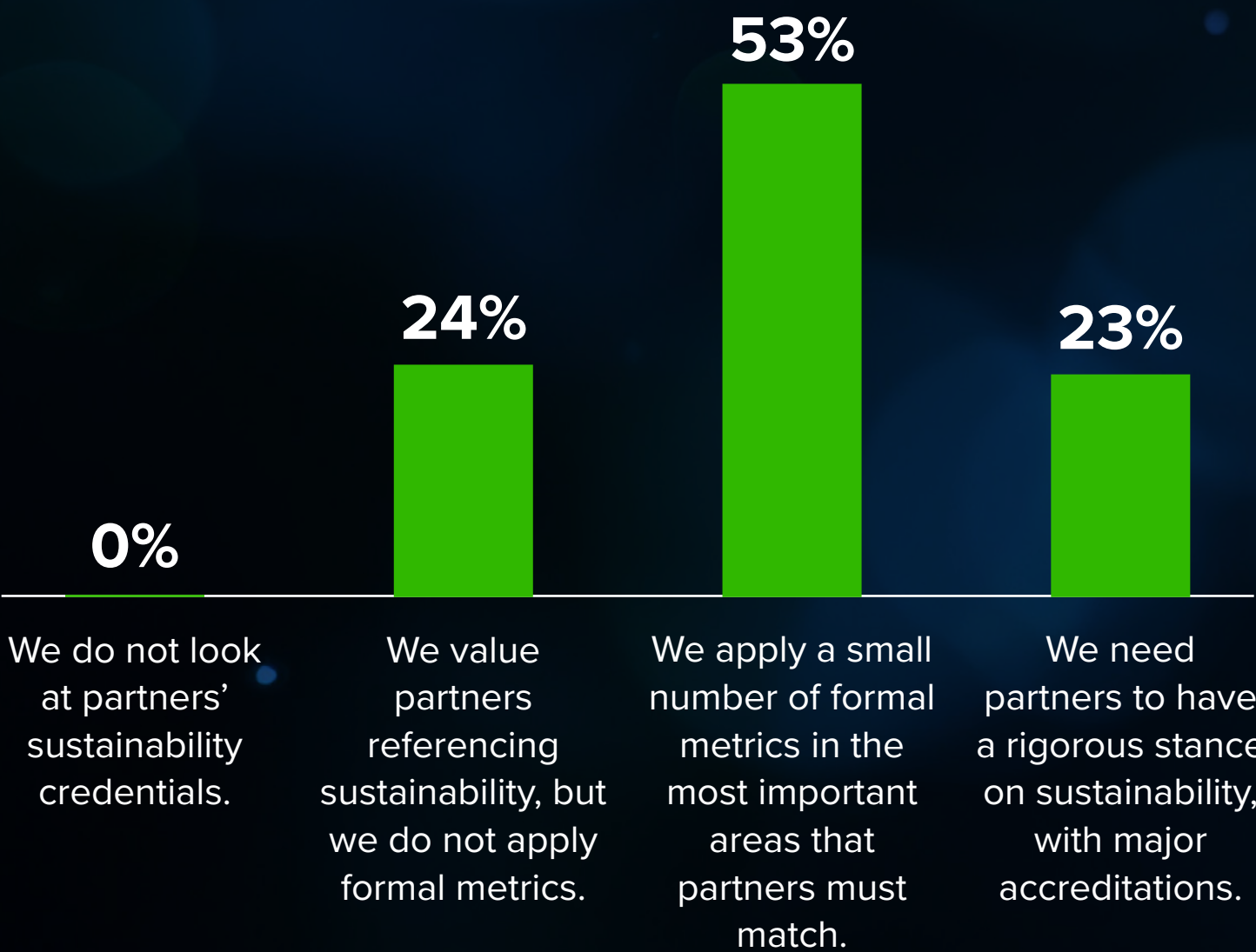
25% General IT/ Operations support

Technology partners also play a critical role in filling these skills gaps in technical areas, from network management to cybersecurity services. Support for IT operations is also critical, as it allows organizations to focus on hiring or internally training critical data and AI skills.

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Source: IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2025,* January 2025 (N = 650); IDC's *Technology Leaders Survey, 2024,* March 2024 (N = 650)

10

Sustainability Non-Negotiable for Staying Competitive, But Networks/Connectivity in Need of Urgent Improvement

Sustainability cannot be ignored.

100% of organizations consider sustainability credentials to some degree when choosing a technology partner. Increasing regulation and complexity of reporting are pushing companies toward partners with robust ESG strategies.

0%
We do not look at partners' sustainability credentials.

24%
We value partners referencing sustainability, but we do not apply formal metrics.

53%
We apply a small number of formal metrics in the most important areas that partners must match.

23%
We need partners to have a rigorous stance on sustainability, with major accreditations.

Enhancing sustainability improves the business.

Three areas stand to benefit the most as a company improves its sustainability metrics:

Competitive advantage and differentiation
Consumers continue to value sustainable products and services, favoring companies that can offer them (45%).
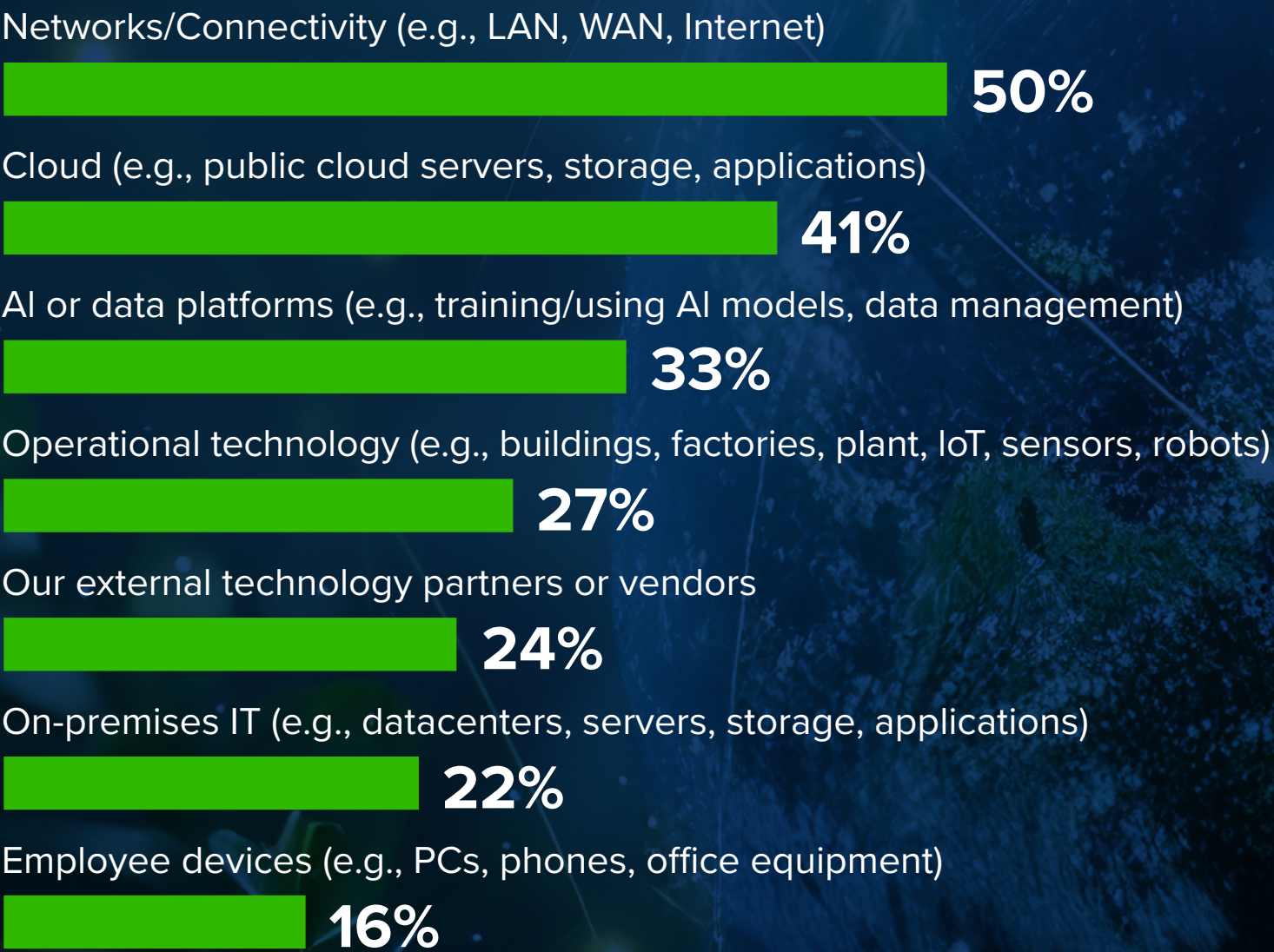
Customer satisfaction
For the same reason, sustainability increases customer satisfaction and loyalty (43%).

Operational efficiency or cost reduction
Sustainable companies typically use energy more efficiently (regardless of source), produce less waste, and even enjoy higher staff productivity and lower attrition (43%).

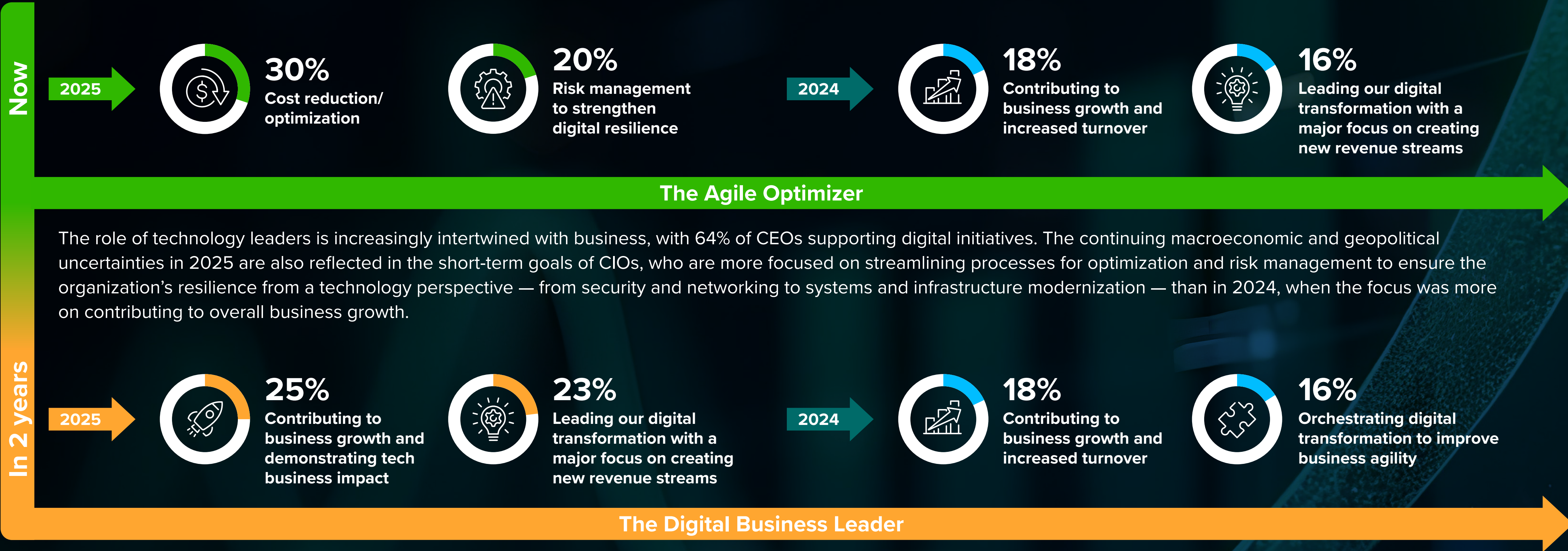## Outdated networks are holding back sustainability.

Again, respondents single out networks as needing urgent upgrades. One-half of the survey participants believe networks need the most attention and investment to help make their IT more sustainable, making networks an even higher priority than heavy energy-consuming technologies like AI/data, cloud, and OT systems.

Investment Priorities in Support of Sustainability

Networks/Connectivity (e.g., LAN, WAN, Internet)
50%

Cloud (e.g., public cloud servers, storage, applications)
41%

AI or data platforms (e.g., training/using AI models, data management)
33%

Operational technology (e.g., buildings, factories, plant, IoT, sensors, robots)
27%

Our external technology partners or vendors
24%

On-premises IT (e.g., datacenters, servers, storage, applications)
22%

Employee devices (e.g., PCs, phones, office equipment)
16%

The Rise of Digital Business Leaders: Moving from Cost Optimization to Business Growth

Q: Which of the following is your technology leaders' current top priority? And what do you expect the top priority to be two years from now? [Top 2]

Now

2025

30% Cost reduction/ optimization

20% Risk management to strengthen digital resilience

2024

18% Contributing to business growth and increased turnover

16% Leading our digital transformation with a major focus on creating new revenue streams

The Agile Optimizer

The role of technology leaders is increasingly intertwined with business, with 64% of CEOs supporting digital initiatives. The continuing macroeconomic and geopolitical uncertainties in 2025 are also reflected in the short-term goals of CIOs, who are more focused on streamlining processes for optimization and risk management to ensure the organization's resilience from a technology perspective — from security and networking to systems and infrastructure modernization — than in 2024, when the focus was more on contributing to overall business growth.

In 2 years

2025

25% Contributing to business growth and demonstrating tech business impact

23% Leading our digital transformation with a major focus on creating new revenue streams

2024

18% Contributing to business growth and increased turnover

16% Orchestrating digital transformation to improve business agility

The Digital Business Leader

Increased adoption of artificial intelligence is driving a trend toward digital business transformation that has been building for several years. All technology leaders agree that, in the coming years, their role will become increasingly important in measuring the ROI of digital technology investments and driving transformation with other business functions; 42% of initiatives are jointly managed by business and IT. This will lead to new revenue streams.

# AI: Exciting Times and New Responsibilities for Technology Leaders

The expanding adoption of AI is transforming the roles of technology leaders. This shift includes a reported increase in their personal profiles at the board level, alongside greater confidence and involvement in driving organizational efficiency and growth and contributing to business strategy.

Tech leaders see their roles expanding thanks to AI rather than new roles being added to the C-suite.

Q: Has your organization established or hired a chief AI officer (CAIO) in the last year?

87% No
12% Yes
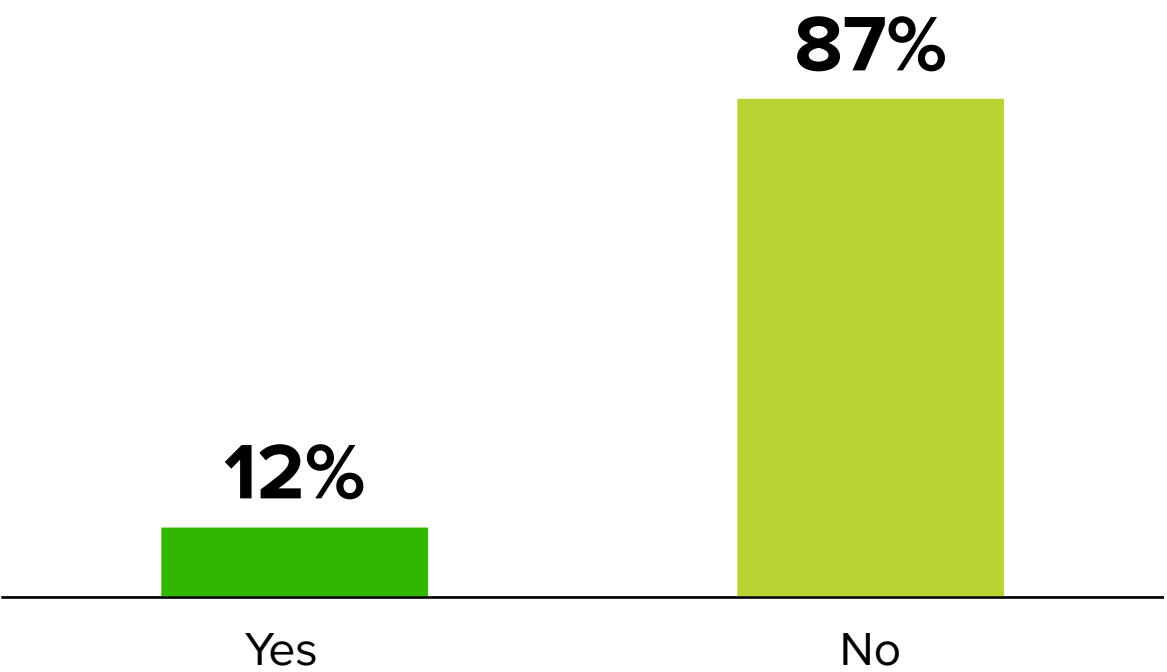
Only a minority of organizations around the globe have established a dedicated role to oversee AI initiatives.

With different stages of AI adoption, companies are currently distributing AI responsibilities among existing technology leaders or establishing AI steering committees.
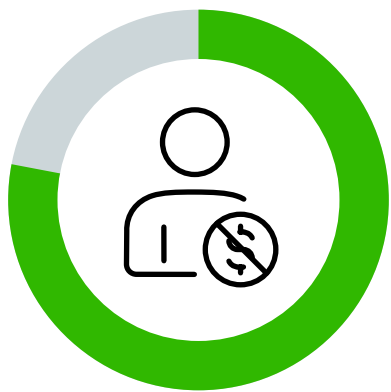
78% of technology leaders **have not been offered** a pay increase as a direct result of their expanded role due to AI.

52% of technology leaders **feel they should have been offered a pay increase** as a direct result of this expanded role.

With expanded AI responsibilities and growing board attention, technology leaders are poised to step up as digital business leaders, enabling growth and innovation.

AI as a Game Changer

Technology leaders agree or strongly agree:

79%
The focus on AI has raised my personal profile at the board level, which is positive.

76%
I am confident that my team and I can support growth and efficiency gains through our technology strategy.

71%
The pace of current technology innovation makes this the most exciting time to be a technology leader.

Recommendations for Enterprises: How to Build an Adaptive, Sustainable, and Secure Organization

A practical guide for technology leaders to take on expanded AI and business responsibilities:

Assess digital ROI. Clearly define the business outcomes you want to achieve with AI and related technology initiatives and prioritize projects that deliver the greatest value. Connect your initiatives with measurable business KPIs.

Focus on change management. AI adoption can require significant changes to business processes and workflows. Coordinate with other C-suite leaders for change management strategies to ensure employees are prepared for and supportive of AI initiatives. Address concerns about job displacement and provide training and upskilling opportunities.

Partner strategically. Define clear partnership goals, whether accessing expertise, managing digital risk, or accelerating implementation. Prioritize those able to support your cybersecurity and networking needs.

Invest to remove network bottlenecks. Networking and connectivity have fallen behind other technology areas and are now putting the brakes on AI projects, holding back sustainability improvements and causing financial damage through inadequate resilience. Assess where your networks are underperforming and, more importantly, how to change them to support the coming wave of technological and business disruptions.

Use sustainability to your competitive advantage. Improving your sustainability measures will directly benefit the business in terms of competitive advantage, customer satisfaction, and efficiency/cost reduction, yet only one-quarter of organizations look for rigorous sustainability credentials in their partners. Accelerate your sustainability initiatives internally and across your supply chain to realize those business benefits.

About the Analysts

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James Eibisch manages IDC's European Enterprise Communications Services research program. In this role, he helps service providers understand the changing nature of the enterprise networking market in Europe, customers' needs, and the competitive landscape. The program covers fixed enterprise WAN services including SD-WAN, NaaS, cloud connectivity, and managed network services.

Martina Longo is a research manager in the IDC EMEA Digital Business and AI Transformation Strategies research group. In her role, Martina advises ICT players on how organizations can create business value using digital technologies. Martina also leads IDC EMEA Digital Native Business research, focused on enterprises born in the modern technological world — a mix of start-ups, scale-ups, and more mature digital natives. In addition, Martina collaborates on EMEA C-Suite Tech Agenda research, analyzing technology investments and buyer preferences across C-suites and how C-suite leaders are evolving to align with key market trends and technology innovations.

More about James Eibisch

More about Martina Longo

Message from the Sponsor

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faster to the future

Global economic and political dynamics continue to create significant uncertainty for businesses worldwide, raising the alarm for technology leaders to implement flexible and adaptable measures to uphold organizational resilience.

While global market conditions are still perceived as unstable, most businesses are optimistic about growth in the next year.

At the heart of this optimism lies AI, which has emerged as a key driver of cost efficiencies and productivity gains. While AI offers significant benefits, it also places immense pressure on business networks.

This has led technology leaders to reassess their IT infrastructure as well as ensure that the right ethical frameworks, technology skills, and external partnerships are in place to harness AI's full potential.

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Ben Elms
CEO of Expereo

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