



# The State of Data Culture Maturity: Research Report

Insights into data culture maturity to drive business results and success



## INTRODUCTION

# Executive Summary

Alation's Data Culture Maturity Model articulates the importance of developing a data culture to drive business success and the four key pillars that organizations must develop to mature their data culture: data leadership, data search & discovery, data literacy, and data governance. The following report dives deeper, analyzing responses from 292 global data leaders to learn where data culture maturity stands today—and where it's going.

Data in this report comes from an online survey conducted from September 13, 2023, to September 27, 2023. The survey generated 292 responses from a range of data professionals across North America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America.

Due to rounding, not all percentage totals in this report equal 100%.

## Key Learnings



**Search is a critical foundation**



**Data governance is still the exception rather than the norm**



**Data leadership drives revenue returns**



**Organizations are focused on using data to drive business value**

# Key Learnings



## Search is a critical foundation

Over half of respondents (63%) report limited usage of search & discovery tools, with the top challenges being a lack of metadata, data silos, and localized knowledge. Just 18% feel confident in discovered data. Those lacking confidence (56%) note no improvement in search & discovery in the past year. Yet those with search in all or most departments are nearly 3x more likely to say they are very confident in the data they can find and have strong data leadership and enterprise-wide data and analytics (D&A) goals.



## Data leadership drives revenue returns

Strong data leadership correlates with competitiveness and strategic alignment. However, less than one-third of respondents express a high level of confidence in their leadership's recognition of the correlation between investing in D&A and maintaining a competitive edge. What's more, strong data leaders drive enterprise-level D&A strategies more effectively than their weak or moderate counterparts. Strong data leadership prevails in APAC (43%), while lagging in EMEA (15%) and North America (27%).



## Data governance is still the exception rather than the norm

Only 1 in 4 organizations (26%) reported a widespread data governance program. The importance of addressing this gap is reflected by almost 70% of organizations committing to strengthen their data governance program in the next year.



## Organizations are focused on using data to drive business value

Respondents prioritize business value creation, data governance, and compliance in D&A strategy. However, the surveyed organizations face challenges like metadata deficiency (69%), knowledge centralization (64%), data silos/duplication (64%), and insufficient user skills/training (51%), hindering effective D&A initiatives.

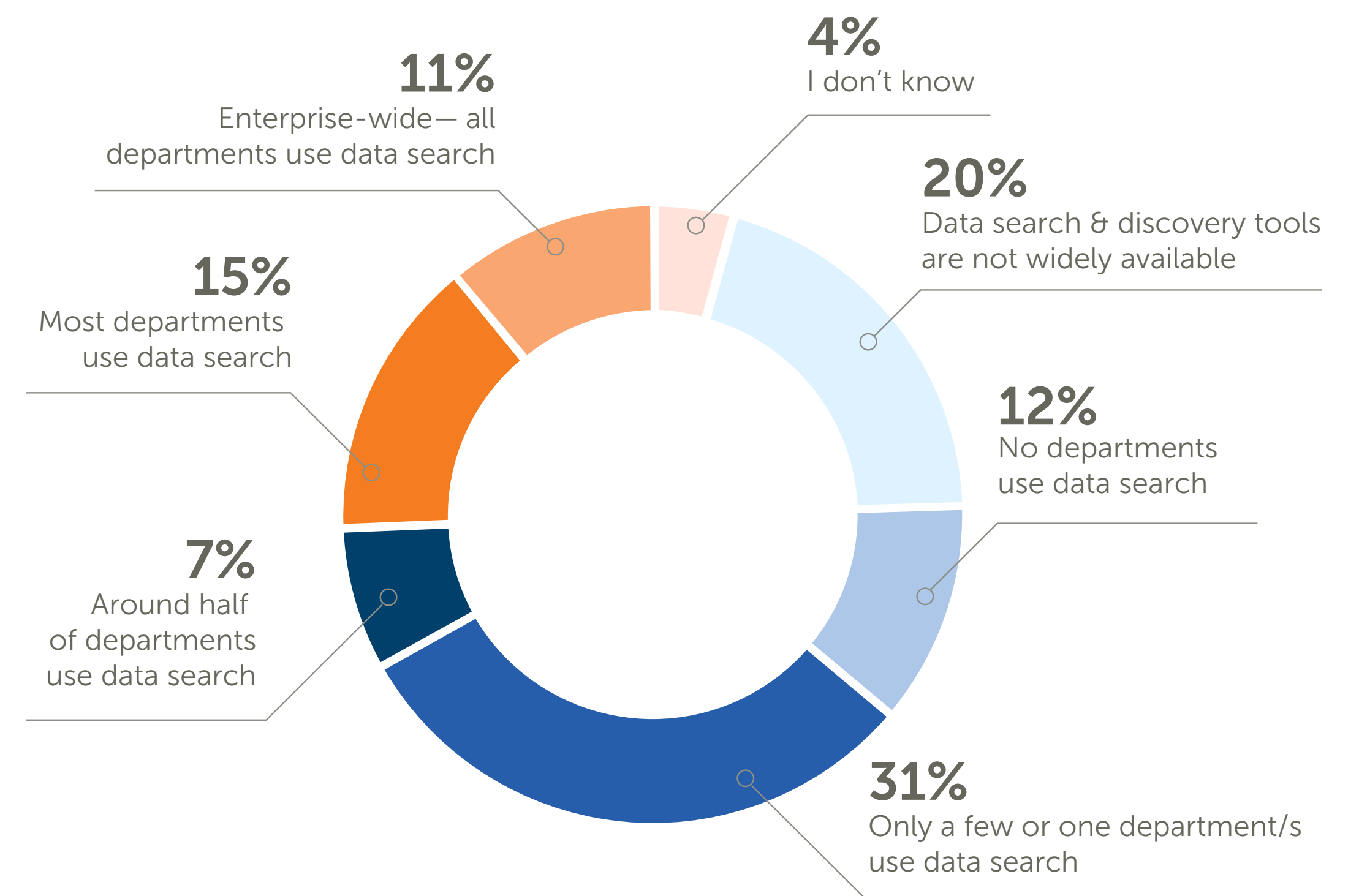
# How widely have organizations adopted data search & discovery tools?

More than 1 in 5 respond that data search & discovery tools are not widely available at their organization.

Organizations with strong data search & discovery tools are more likely to quickly and efficiently retrieve relevant information, which in turn leads to better decision-making.

We asked individuals to describe their adoption of data search & discovery tools. More than half (63%) of respondents combined say that no departments use data search (12%), only a few or one department/s use data search (31%), or that data search & discovery tools are not widely available (20%). As a result, 18% say they are not confident in the data they can discover, 64% are only somewhat confident in the data they can discover, and 18% are confident in the data they can discover.

## How widely has your company adopted data search & discovery<sup>1</sup> tools?



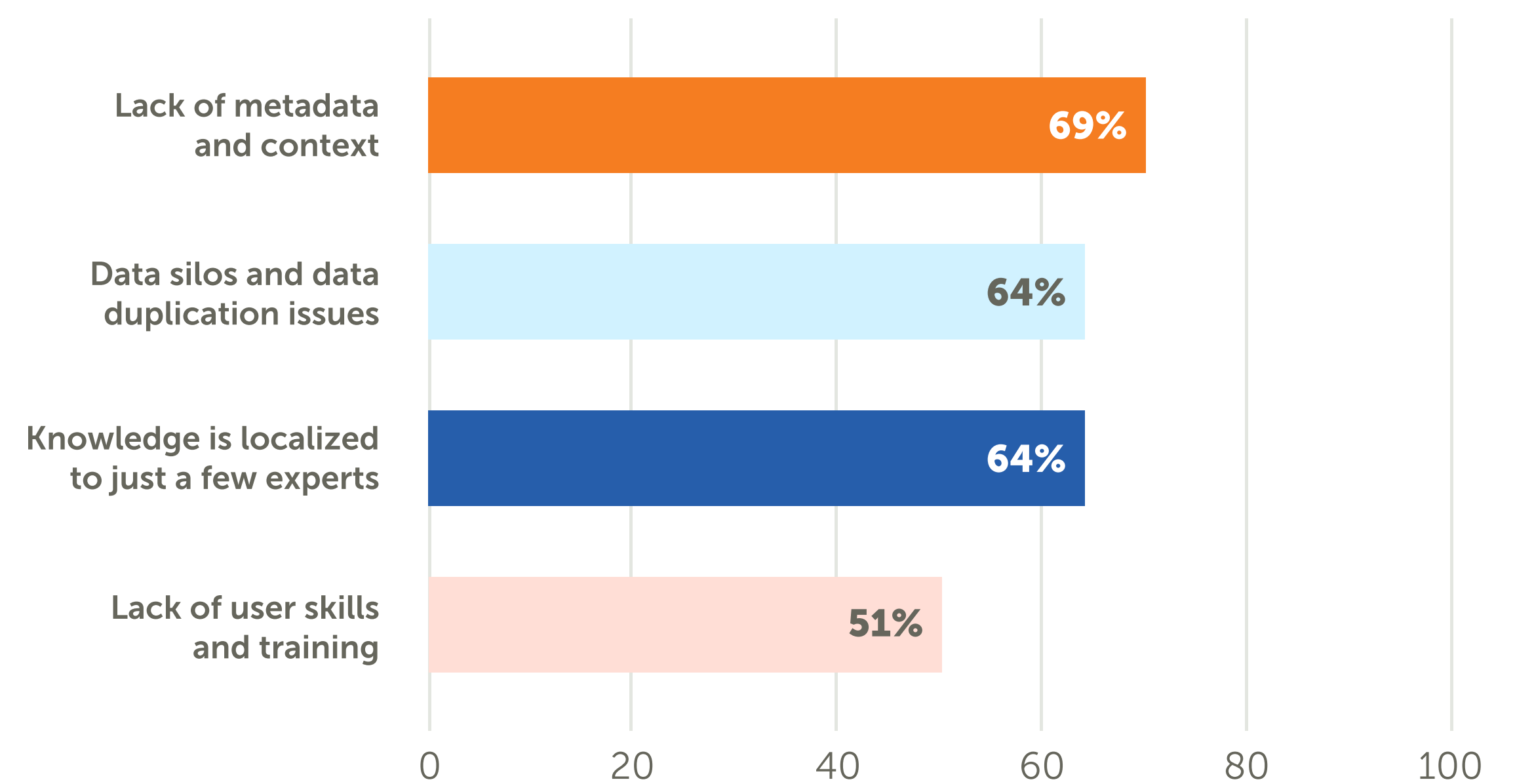
1. Data search & discovery is defined as the ability to quickly and easily find the right data for a specific purpose.

# How widely have organizations adopted data search & discovery tools?

Why do people not trust the data they find? The top challenges for data search & discovery were lack of metadata and context (69%), followed by data silos and duplication issues (64%), and knowledge localized in just a few experts (64%). 62% share their organization has improved its data search & discovery capabilities in the past year, and even more (70%) cite there are plans to improve it in the future year.

One-third of respondents (33%) say their organizations have not improved their search & discovery capabilities in the past year. Of those surveyed who say they are “not at all confident” they can trust the data they can find, a much larger percentage (56%) say their organizations have not improved data search & discovery in the past year. Therefore, under-investment in improving search & discovery is positively correlated with a lack of confidence and trust in data.

## Survey respondents cite the following challenges with their D&A initiatives



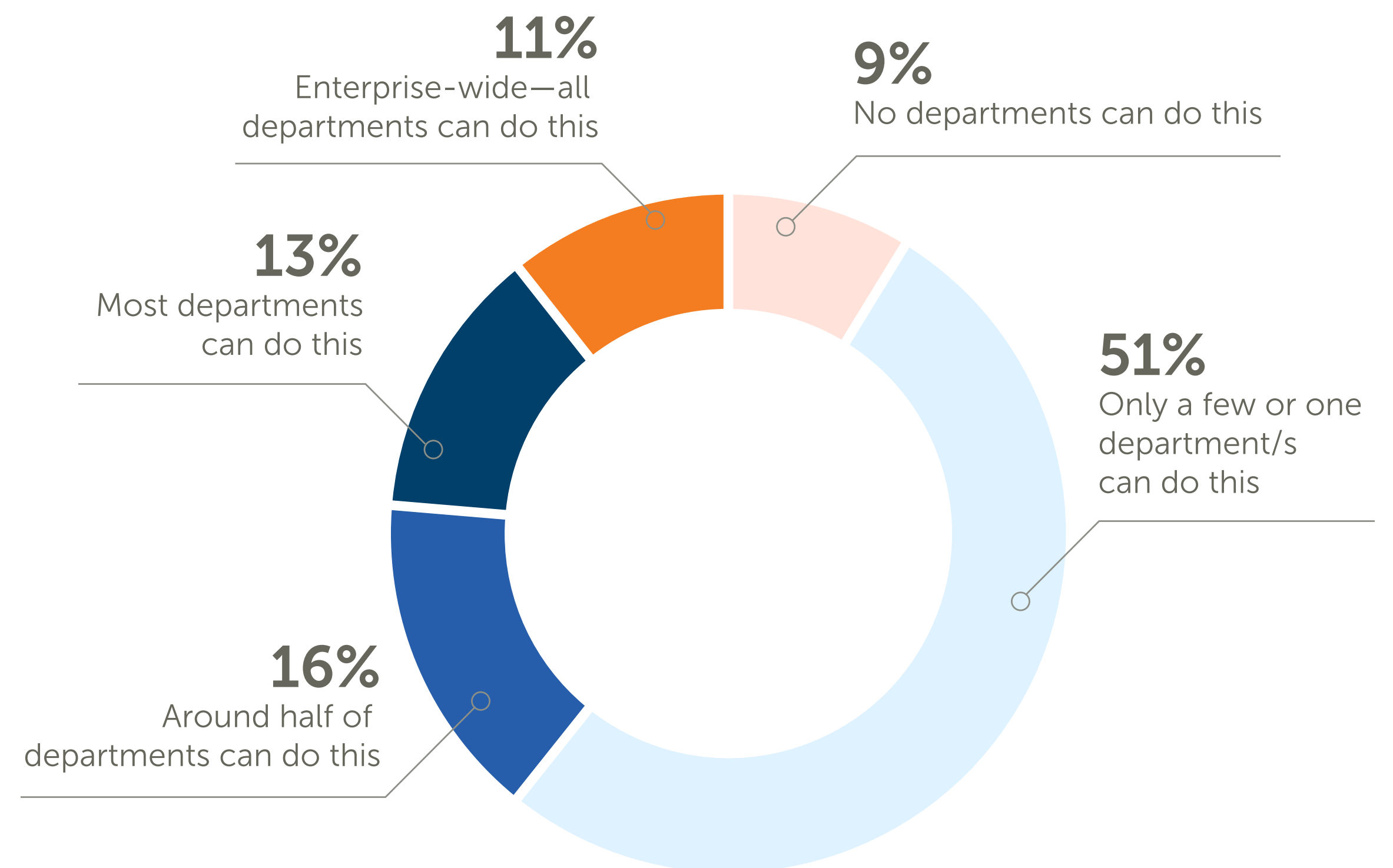
# How widely have organizations adopted data literacy?

More than half of respondents (51%) say that only one or a few departments have adopted data literacy.

We asked individuals to describe their organization's adoption of data literacy, defined as the ability to draw valid conclusions from data, including understanding the limits of interpretation and awareness of common biases. Fewer than a quarter of respondents (24%) have adopted data literacy in most departments or enterprise-wide.

And small wonder: most respondents (61%) report that data literacy training is not offered or do not know if it's offered. When asked about the top challenges to data literacy, people point to constraints on time, budget, and resources as the top challenge (21%), followed closely by lack of understanding, with 20% saying that "Most people don't fully understand the concept of data literacy or its importance."

## How widely has your company adopted data literacy<sup>2</sup>?



2. Data literacy is defined as the ability to draw valid conclusions from data, including understanding the limits of interpretation and awareness of common biases.

# How widely have organizations adopted data literacy?

The lack of understanding data literacy impacts plans for future development. Just 9% of those surveyed say their organizations have plans to improve in the coming year.

Data literacy was most prevalent in APAC, where one-third of respondents (33%) say that it is adopted enterprise-wide, compared with fewer than 10% of respondents in the other regions reporting the same level of adoption. Nearly one-third of respondents in APAC (32%) and EMEA (27%) say their organizations offer data literacy training. That's more than double the rate of North America (14%) respondents who say the same.

In a similar vein, lack of confidence and trust in data is highly correlated with low levels of data literacy; 87% of respondents who say they are "not at all confident" in the data they can find report that their organization's adoption of data literacy is restricted to none or just a few departments.

Organizations with strong data literacy enjoy enhanced collaboration and are more likely to make data-driven decisions. There is a particularly strong correlation between data leadership and literacy, suggesting that literacy programs require strong leadership support:

**61%**

of organizations reporting strong data leadership adopt data literacy in most departments or enterprise-wide

**15%**

of organizations reporting moderate, weak, or unknown data leadership adopt data literacy in most departments or enterprise-wide

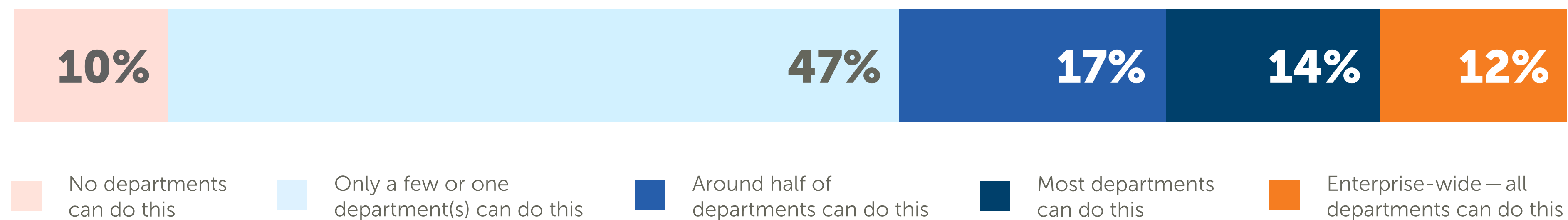
# How widely have organizations adopted data governance?

More than half of respondents say that none or only one or a few departments have adopted data governance.

In the survey, we defined data governance as how data assets are managed to ensure trustworthiness and accountability, including compliance with policies and regulations. Nearly half (47%) of respondents have adopted data governance in only one or a few departments, while nearly 10% don't have any data governance adoption at all.

As was the case with data literacy, APAC organizations outpace the other regions for this pillar, with 22% saying they've adopted data governance enterprise-wide. By contrast, only the North America region has enterprise-wide data governance adoption in more than 10% of organizations.

## How widely has your company adopted data governance<sup>3</sup>?



3. Data governance describes how data assets are managed to ensure trustworthiness and accountability, including compliance with policies and regulations.

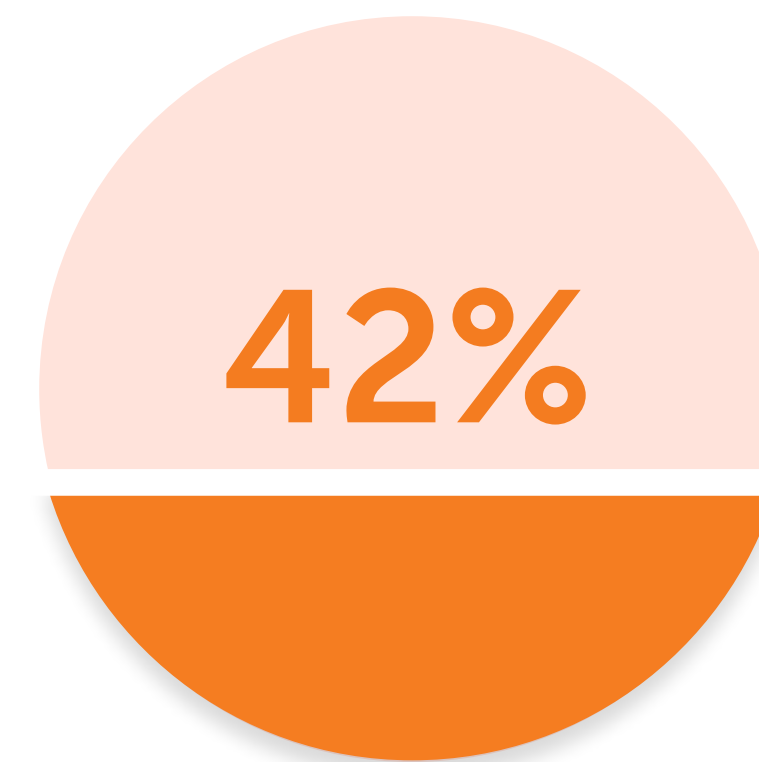


## How widely have organizations adopted data governance?

Organizations with strong data governance are more likely to trust their data. 42% of the respondents with enterprise-wide adoption of data governance are very confident that they can trust the data they discover, while only 10% of those with no adoption, or adoption only within a single or a few departments, can trust the data they discover.

Most respondents (70%) share that their organizations are focused on improving governance in the coming year. Furthermore, more than half of respondents (56%) describe the direction of their data governance strategy as “offensive” (enabling data usage to support business growth) rather than “defensive” (protecting the business from risk and preventing regulatory infringements).

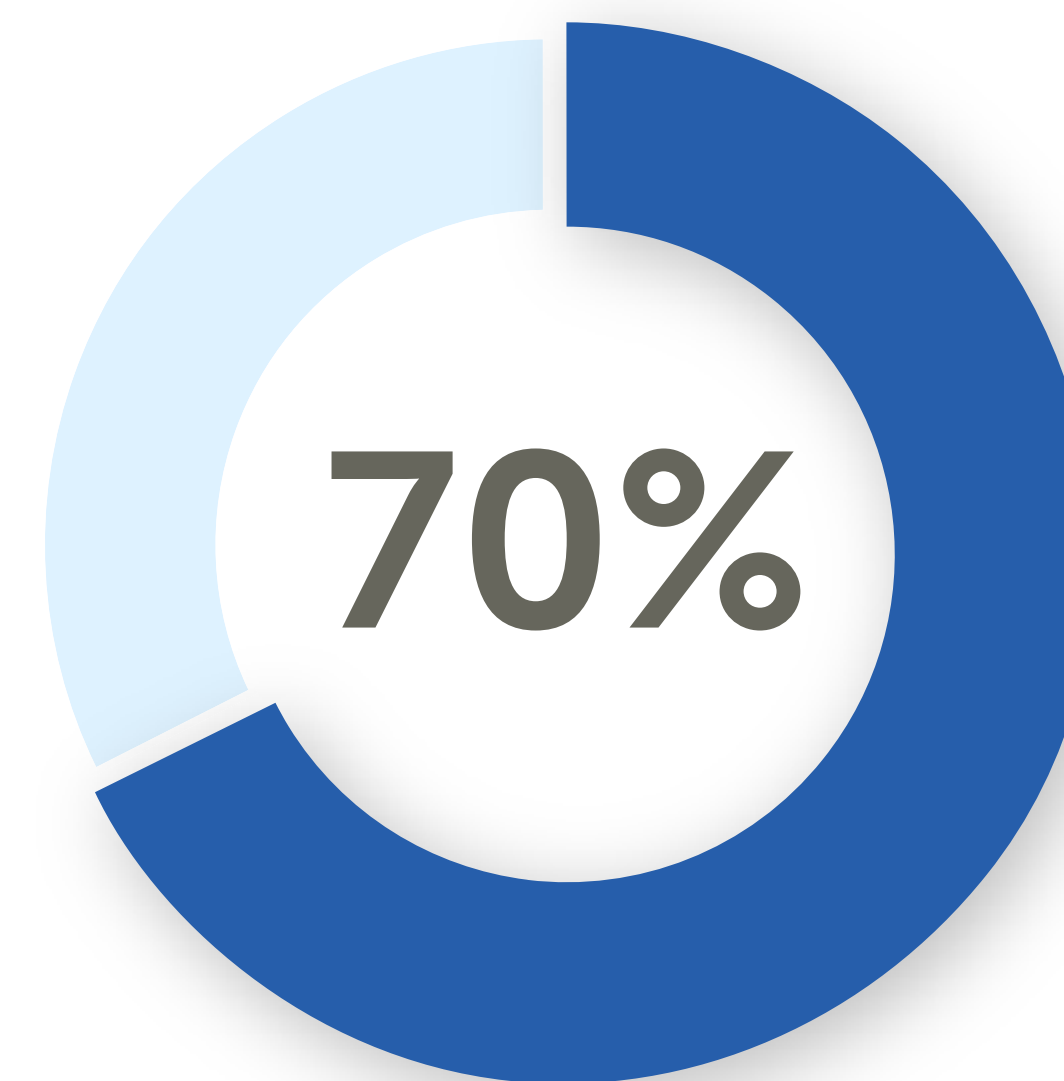
### How confident are you that you can trust the data you can discover?



Respondents reporting enterprise-wide adoption of data governance



Respondents reporting no data governance adoption or adoption in one/a few departments



share that their organizations are focused on improving governance in the coming year

## DATA LEADERSHIP

# How strong is data leadership at organizations?

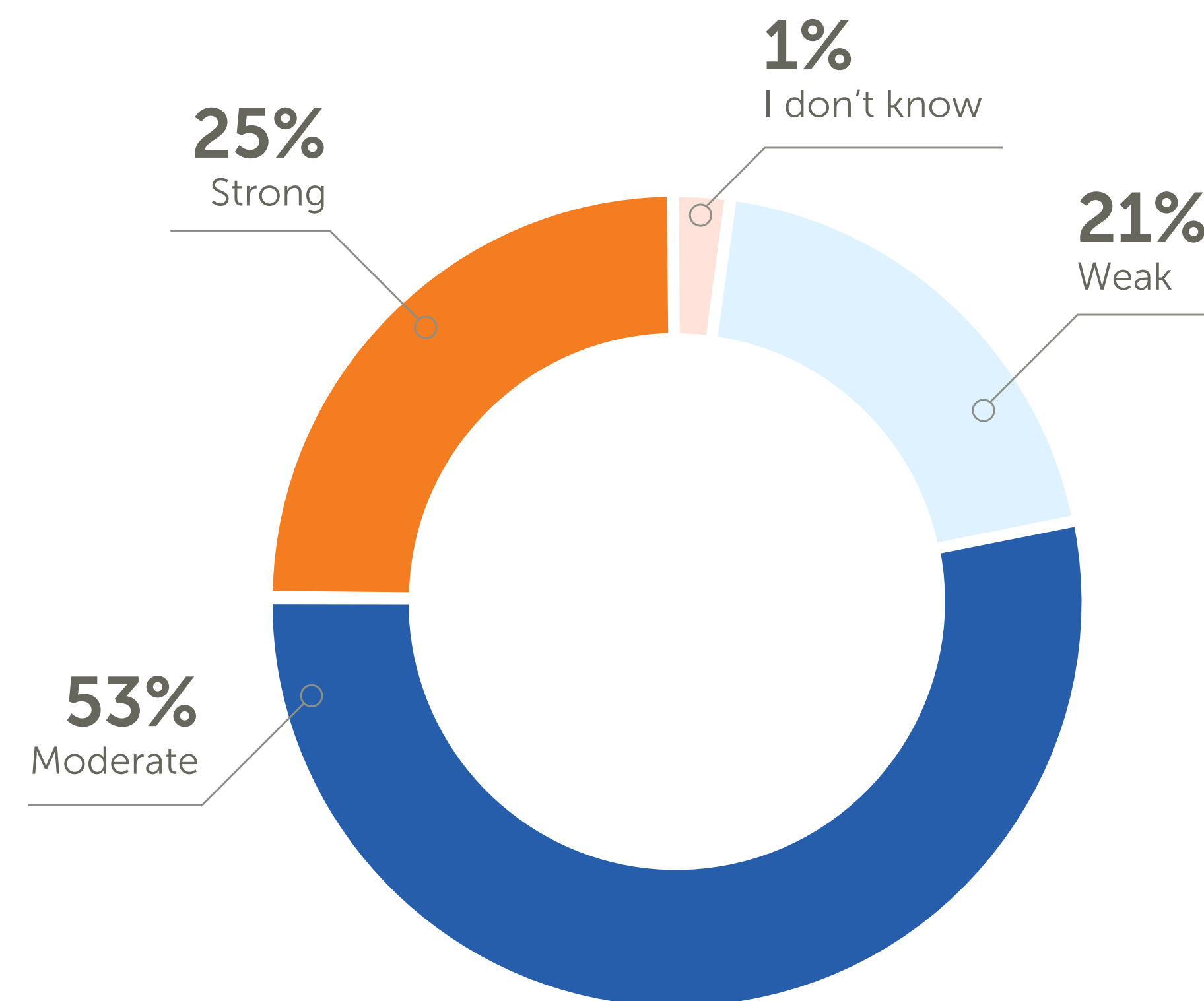
**1 in 4 respondents describe their data leadership as “strong.”**

We asked people to describe the data leadership at their organizations. A strong leadership includes a culture of data-driven decision-making, robust data governance, modern data infrastructure, skilled data professionals, and a focus on data-driven innovation.

More than half respond that their leadership is “moderate” (53%), while a quarter say that their leadership is “strong” (25%), with about 1 in 5 calling it “weak” (21%).

Data leadership is strongest among respondents from APAC (42%) and Latin America (40%), and weakest among respondents from EMEA (15%) and North America (22%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, of the three largest industry sectors represented in the survey, the technology sector had a higher percentage of strong leadership (33%) than finance (23%) and health sciences (22%).

## Which choice best describes data leadership at your organization<sup>4</sup>?

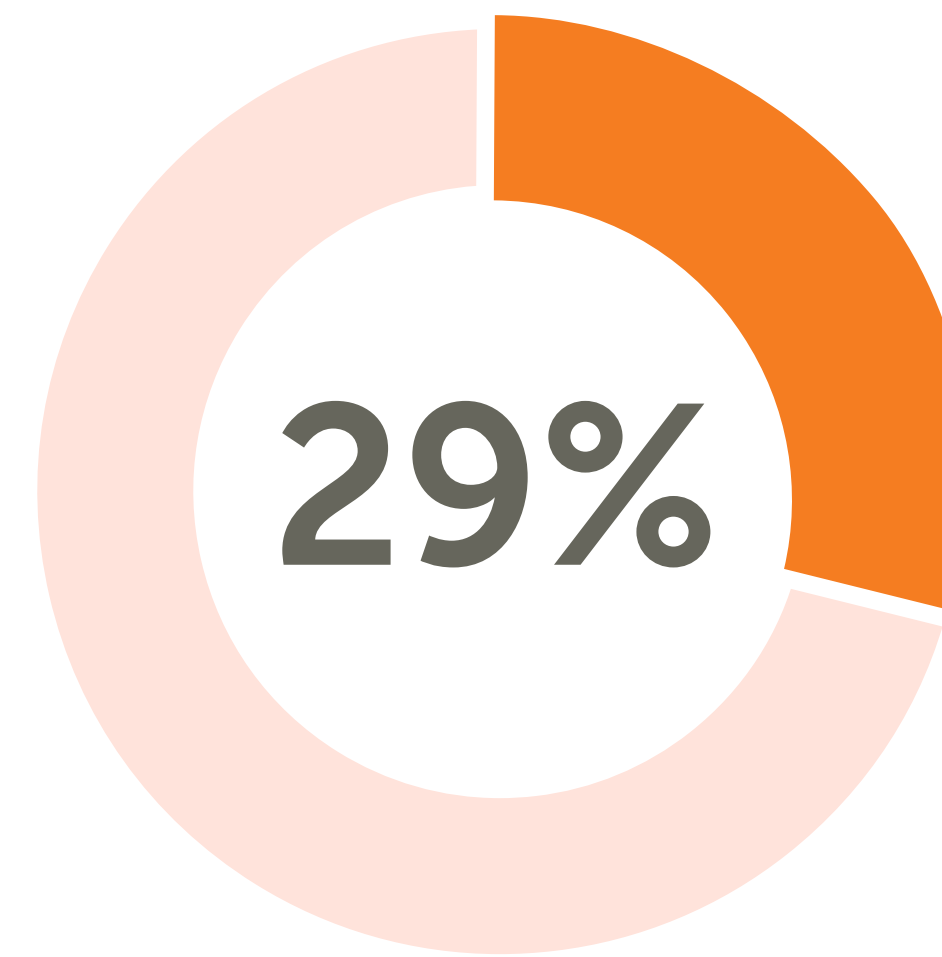


4. Data leadership is defined as an understanding of the value of data by leaders who set the D&A strategy at the organization. With that understanding of data built into their organizational fabric and infused into operations, firms with strong data leadership are more competitive, compliant, and innovative.

## How confident are people that their leadership sees a link between investing in data & analytics and staying ahead of the competition?

Less than one-third of respondents (29%) are very confident that their leadership sees a link between investing in data & analytics and staying ahead of the competition.

We asked individuals to describe how confident they are that their leadership sees a link between investing in data & analytics and staying ahead of the competition. While nearly half (45%) are somewhat confident, more than a quarter (26%) are not confident at all.



are very confident that their leadership sees a link between investing in data & analytics and staying ahead of the competition

How confident are you that your company leadership sees a link between investing in data & analytics and staying ahead of your competition?



- Not confident at all
- Somewhat confident
- Very confident

# How confident are people that their leadership sees a link between investing in data & analytics and staying ahead of the competition?

If you're at an organization that doesn't recognize that link, chances are that your data culture pillars suffer:

- 46% of "very confident" respondents report strong data leadership, whereas just 4% of "not confident at all" respondents report strong data leadership.
- 18% of "very confident" respondents report enterprise-wide adoption of data search & discovery tools, whereas just 3% of "not confident at all" respondents report enterprise-wide adoption of data search & discovery tools.
- 20% of "very confident" respondents report enterprise-wide adoption of data literacy, whereas zero "not confident at all" respondents report enterprise-wide adoption of data literacy.
- 20% of "very confident" respondents also report enterprise-wide adoption of data governance, whereas 5% of "not confident at all" respondents report enterprise-wide adoption of data governance.

In addition, 1 in 3 (33%) "very confident" respondents are also "very confident" that they can trust the data they discover, while a mere 2% of "not confident at all" respondents report that level of confidence that they can trust the data they discover.

Those who are "very confident" that leadership sees a link between D&A investment & staying ahead of competition are more likely to report wider data culture maturity

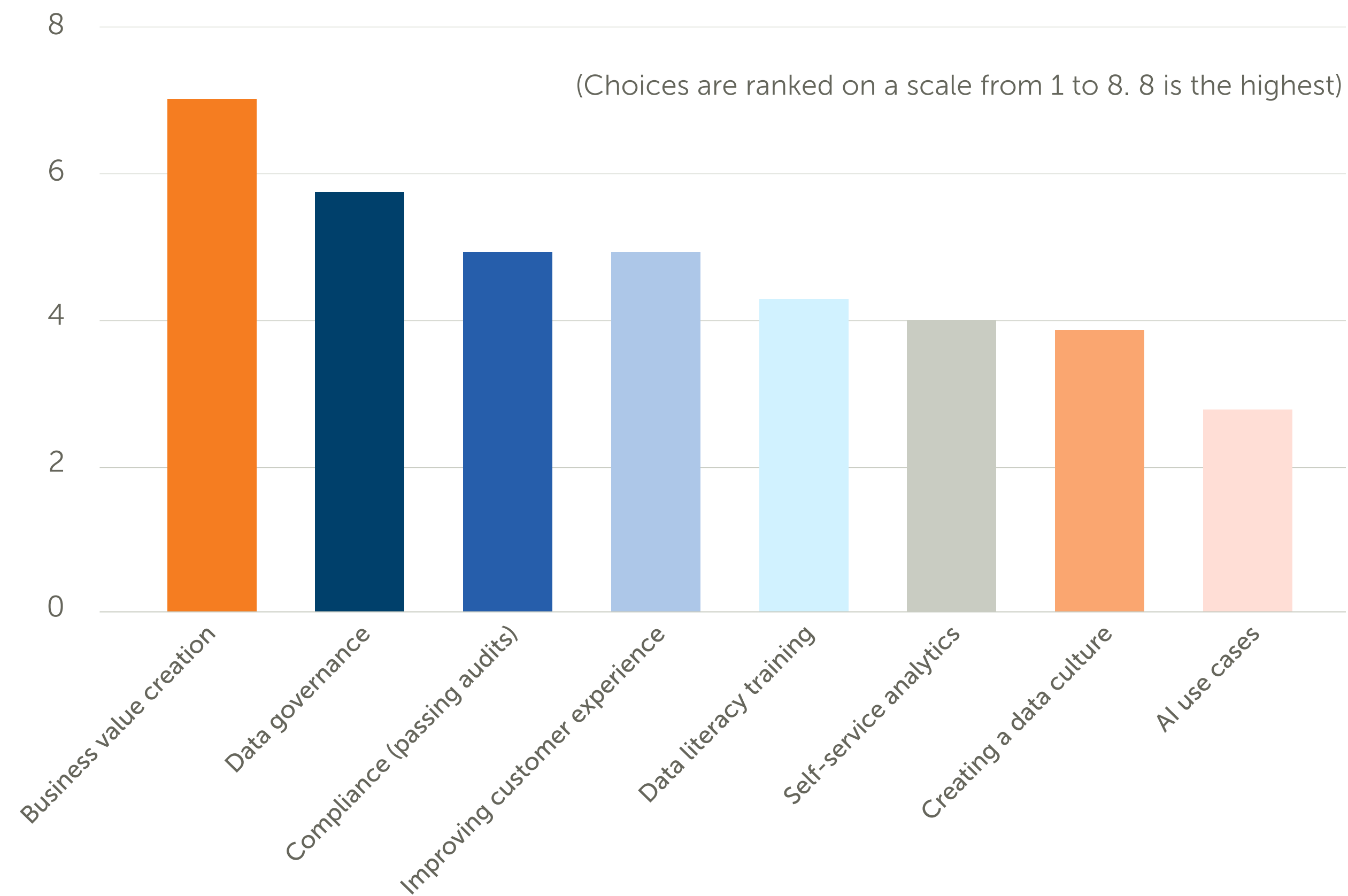
	Very confident	Not confident at all
Have strong data leadership	46% ▲ (42%)	4%
Have enterprise-wide adoption of data search & discovery tools	18% ▲ (15%)	3%
Have enterprise-wide adoption of data literacy	20% ▲ (20%)	0%
Have enterprise-wide adoption of data governance	20% ▲ (15%)	5%
Have strong confidence that they can trust the data they discover	33% ▲ (31%)	2%

# What are the top priorities for organizations' data & analytics strategy?

“Business value creation” ranked highest, while “creating a data culture” ranked second-lowest.

We asked respondents to rank their priorities for their data & analytics strategy. The three highest results are business value creation, data governance, and compliance (passing audits), whereas the three lowest are self-service analytics, creating a data culture, and AI use cases.

## What are the top goals for your D&A strategy?



# What is holding organizations back from achieving D&A goals?

Our previous [State of Data Culture Report](#), released in 2022, surfaced two important conclusions:

- Having a strong data culture is linked to achieving revenue goals.
- Organizations in the “top tier”—adopting data culture pillars of data search & discovery, data literacy, and data governance in most or all departments—were most likely to have exceeded their 12-month revenue goals.

Considering that “creating a data culture” was ranked low in this survey, it’s clear that most respondents are not aware of the link between driving business value and a data culture today.

Survey respondents cite the following challenges with their D&A initiatives

69%

Lack of metadata and context

64%

Knowledge is localized to just a few experts

64%

Data silos and data duplication issues

51%

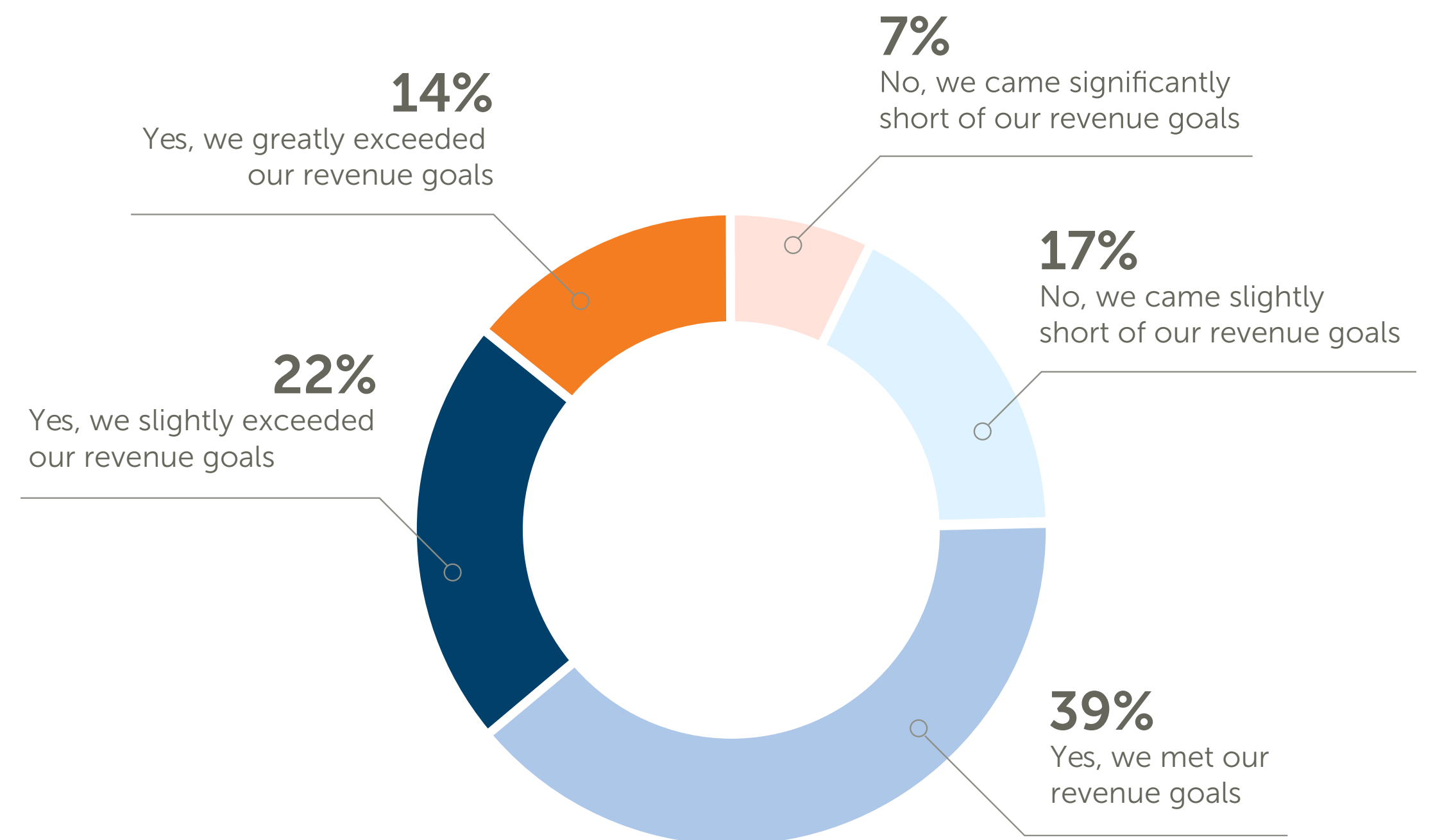
Lack of user skills and training

# What do organizations that exceed their revenue goals have in common?

We asked respondents if their company hit its revenue goals in the past year. About three-quarters (75%) say they met or exceeded their revenue goals.

Interestingly, the majority of respondents with strong data leadership (89%) say their organizations met or exceeded revenue goals in the past year.

## Over the past 12 months, did your company hit its revenue goals?



# What do organizations that exceed their revenue goals have in common?

Respondents with strong data leadership or enterprise-wide data governance were more likely to hail from organizations that met or exceeded goals. Those who met or exceeded their revenue goals are more than twice as likely to describe their data leadership as strong as those who did not meet their revenue goals (29% vs. 13%).

		Data Leadership is "Strong"	Data Search & Discovery is "Strong"	Data Literacy is "Strong"	Data Governance is "Strong"
Company Performance	Met or exceeded revenue goals	29%	28%	26%	29%
	Did not meet revenue goals	13% ▼ (16%)	21% ▼ (7%)	17% ▼ (9%)	23% ▼ (6%)

"Strong" data search & discovery, data literacy, and data governance is defined as adopted in most departments or enterprise-wide.

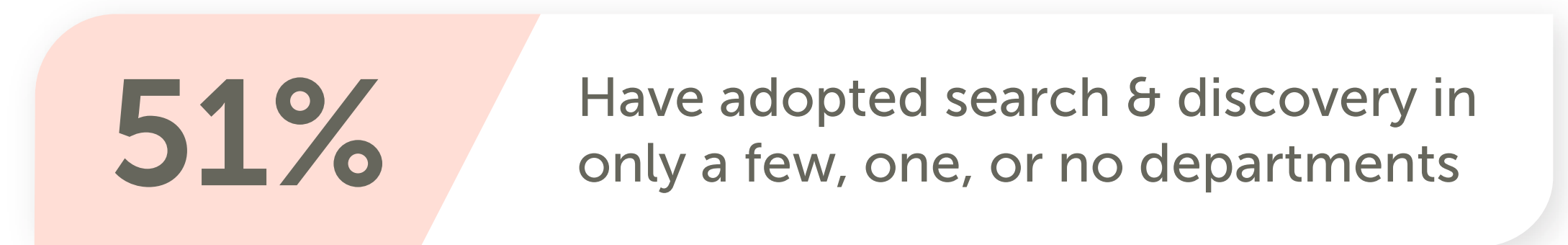
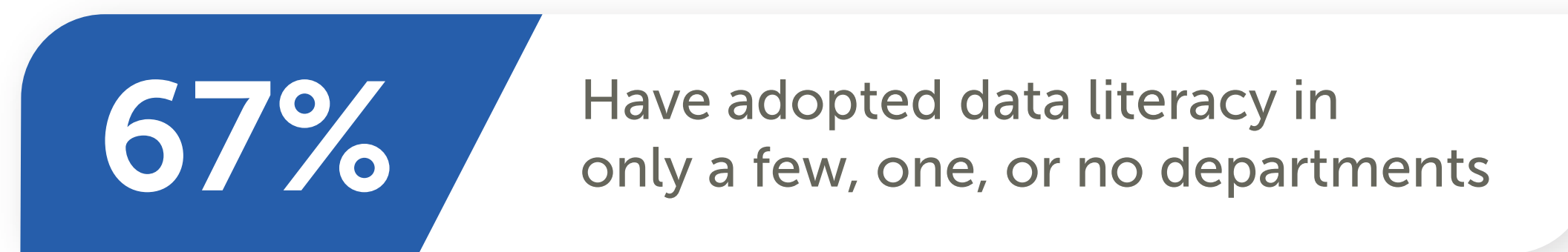
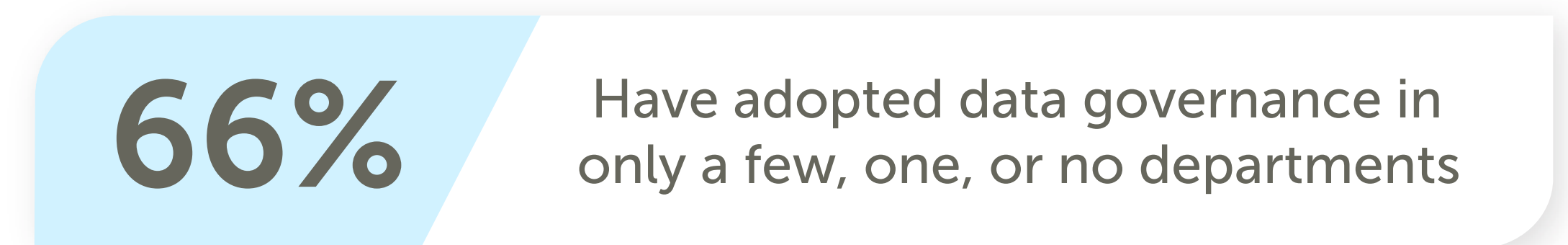
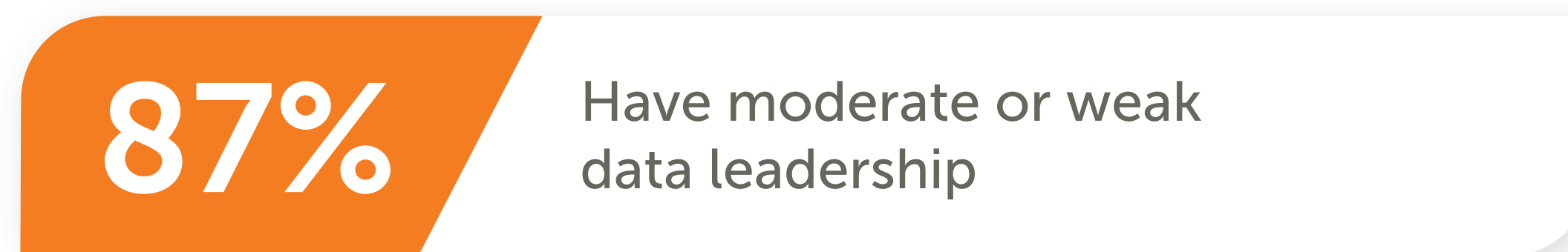


## What do organizations that exceed their revenue goals have in common?

Which industries ranked as top performers? When comparing those who met or exceeded revenue goals to those who failed to meet goals, one stood out. Whereas just 2% of respondents who failed to meet goals sat in health sciences, 9% of health sciences respondents met or exceeded those goals.

In summary, respondents from organizations that met or exceeded revenue goals are more likely to also report strong data leadership and data governance. We saw an inverse relationship here, as well, with those who fell short more likely to describe weak data capabilities.

## What do those organizations who fell short of their revenue goals have in common?



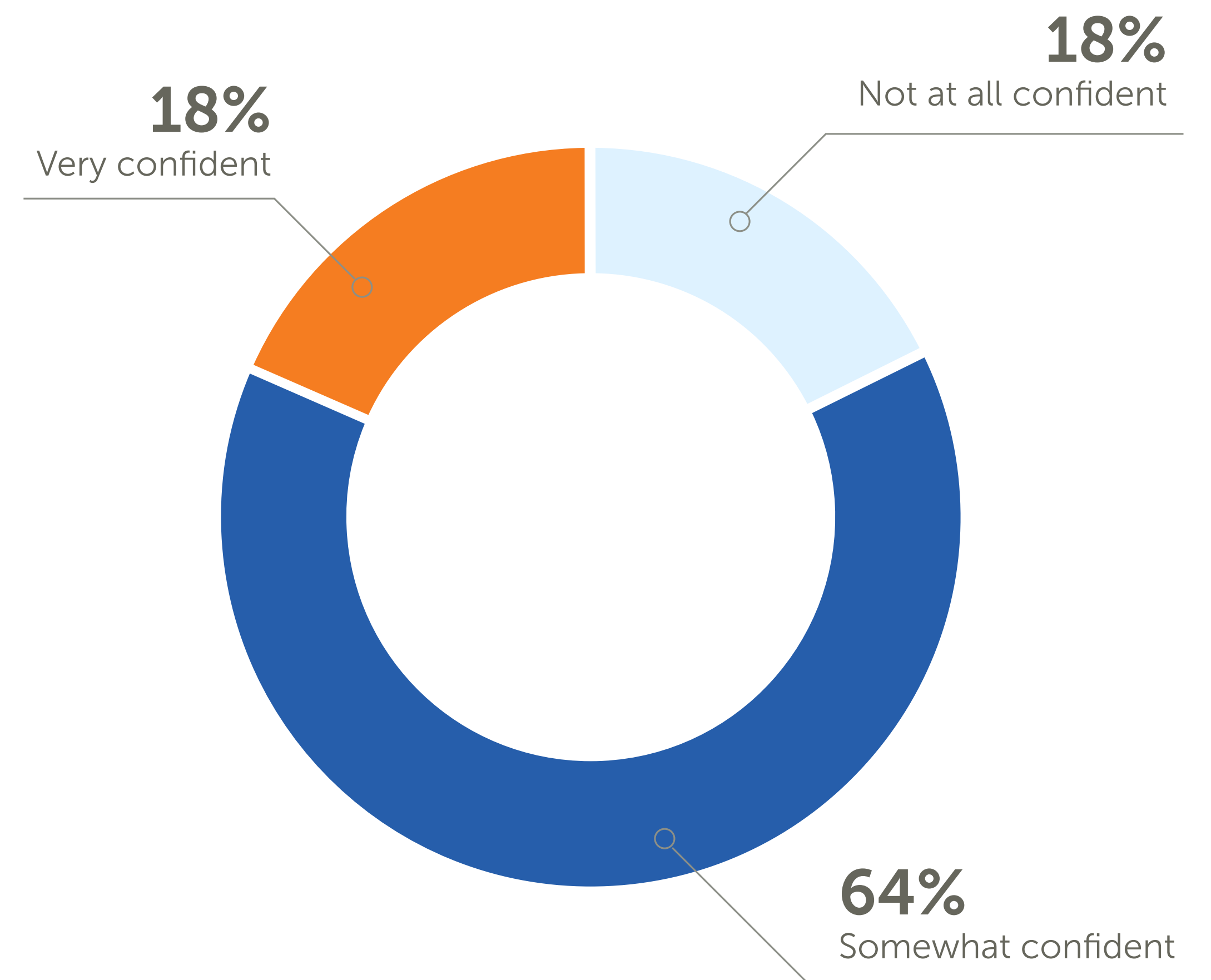
## How confident are organizations in trusting the data they can discover?

Fewer than 1 in 5 are very confident, while nearly 1 in 5 are not at all confident.

We asked individuals to describe how confident they are in the data they can discover. While nearly two-thirds of respondents are somewhat confident, the remainder are split between very confident (18%) and not at all confident (18%).

You can't leverage data as an asset if you can't find it. The research indicates that the ability to discover trusted data is highly correlated with higher rates of data literacy and demands a strong governance framework to ensure quality and leadership to drive change.

### How confident are you that you can trust the data you can discover?



## How confident are organizations in trusting the data they can discover?

Organizations achieving enterprise-wide adoption of this one key pillar (data search & discovery) show better results across all data culture maturity pillars overall. Respondents reporting that all or most departments in their organization have adopted data search & discovery are nearly 3x more likely to say they are very confident in the data they can find and have strong data leadership and enterprise-wide D&A goals.

The ability to find trusted data and understand it is closely tied to the ability to analyze data and draw valid conclusions from it (data literacy). Organizations that enable people to trust data and feel confident in its use have the highest rates for data governance and leadership, as well—and are more likely to achieve revenue goals.

Most striking is the correlation between widely adopted data search & discovery and data literacy:

- Of those reporting data search & discovery adoption in most or all departments, two-thirds (67%) also report data literacy adoption in at least half of departments.
- By contrast, of those reporting data search & discovery adoption in either a few or no departments—or reporting that data search & discovery tools are not widely available—three-quarters (74%) also report data literacy adoption in only a few or no departments.

# Conclusion

This research report sheds light on the pivotal role of data culture in business success today. Our survey analysis highlights one key truth: data culture is not merely a buzzword but a fundamental necessity for organizations aiming to thrive in the digital age. The findings demonstrate that those who embrace a data culture are best equipped to extract maximum business value from the vast sea of available data.

One standout trend is the heightened focus on data governance within modern organizations. With data becoming an increasingly valuable asset, businesses are investing in establishing comprehensive frameworks to ensure data integrity, privacy, and compliance — not just to pass audits, but to drive value. This focus on governance reflects a maturing understanding of the responsibility that comes with leveraging data for strategic decision-making.

Furthermore, our study underscores the importance of data search & discovery, data literacy, and data leadership to support a thriving data culture. Organizations that invest in empowering their employees with the ability to efficiently search and access relevant data, foster data literacy among their workforce, and cultivate strong data leadership at all levels of the organization are better positioned to harness the full potential of their data assets.

As businesses continue to navigate a data-driven landscape, it is imperative for leaders to recognize that building a strong data culture is not an option but a strategic imperative. Those who successfully nurture a data-centric mindset within their organizations will not only drive innovation and agility but also gain a competitive edge in the market. In essence, the findings of this research report serve as a clarion call for businesses to prioritize the cultivation of a robust data culture, ensuring their relevance and resilience in an increasingly data-centric world.

## Want to learn more?

Read our latest whitepaper: [\*Data Culture Maturity Model: The Path to Data Excellence\*](#).

Get started today at [alation.com](https://alation.com).