



BRIDGES

**20-Year Results From Surveying
Strategy Implementation**



INTRODUCTION



Every year leaders invest the time, energy and money to implement strategy but to varying degrees of success.

For the last **20 years**, Bridges has been researching strategy implementation. When we first started the company in **2000**, we struggled to find data in our field. This was the catalyst initiating our first survey that produced the astonishing result that **90%** of implementations were failing.

When we published the results in **2004**, social media was just starting, but the high failure rate still went viral. Like the Olympics, our researcher rolls around every four years. Today, for our 5th survey, we are able to reach more survey participants faster and easier than ever before.

Bridges was one of the first consultancies to report the high failure rate for strategy implementation. It is also among the few in the world to consistently track strategy implementation performance over **20 years**. For the first time, we are able to leverage this report to focus on **20 years of trends in strategy implementation** as well as reporting 2020 results. It's Bridges' mantra to "support leaders to succeed in implementing their strategy." Our 20 years of research reveals interesting trends toward accomplishing that.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the research and to Professor Michael Netzley and Dr Gaia Grant for their guidance. We hope the results will assist you to implement more successfully during these challenging times.

Robin Speculand

Please note that the majority of respondents answered before the global pandemic, which of course has shifted the strategic landscape. The crisis has placed even greater importance on implementing new strategies correctly the first time.

20 Years of Research



20 Years Consistent Findings in Strategy Implementation

- Leaders habitually underestimate the implementation challenges
- Vision, mission and values is always in the top three organizational transformations
- Employees struggle to understand the right actions to implement strategy
- Leaders don't review their strategy implementation frequently enough
- Poor communication, lack of different actions being taken and lack of leadership consistently rank as the key reasons implementation fails
- People are being recognized for their efforts
- Leaders have the skills and knowledge to implement strategy successfully but not the discipline to do it
- Only one in five leaders reviews the implementation at least once a month

2020 Changes from Previous Surveys

- More companies succeeded than failed for the first time – 52%
- Implementation strategy improved by +15%
- Implementation is perceived as marginally more important than strategy for the first time
- Confidence in an organization's performance to implement strategy is dropping despite improving performance. This could be due to the pandemic.
- For the first time, culture is the lowest-ranked reason why implementation fails
- "Digitalization Transformation" is a newly added strategic transformation

Key Takeaway from Each Four-Year Survey



(Editor's note: We had to use the words "change management" as leaders were not familiar with the word "implementation.")

EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS



It's good news. Leaders are consistently improving their ability to implement strategy. For the first time **over 20 years**, more companies have succeeded than failed, with **52%** of respondents implementing their strategy successfully.

We have consistently seen a reduction in failure rates from **90%** in **2004** to **67%** in **2016** and now **48% in 2020**. When the pass mark is achieving two-thirds of the strategic objectives, then **85%** of implementations are failing, as some researchers report.

Our **20 years of research** reveals leaders consistently underestimate what it will take to successfully implement strategy. They continue to repeat past mistakes such as not communicating consistently through the whole implementation journey and that organizations lack the discipline that it takes to achieve success.

In **2020 results**, from comments received, the single greatest challenge leaders are facing as they implement strategy is **“managing teams and talent.”** This issue has increased in importance probably because many organizations are adopting agile, which requires cross functional teams and new skills.

Also in 2020 results, it is encouraging that **two-thirds** of respondents feel they *do* receive immediate recognition from their boss for their implementation efforts. Why is this true? Implementation is about taking the right action. It's critical to reinforce right actions by encouraging employees to do them. It is also encouraging that almost **two-thirds** of respondents believe they possess the right implementation skills and knowledge, which could be a key contributor to the improved implementations reported.



EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS – Warning Messages from 2020 Results



There are significant opportunities for improvement based on certain disquieting results.

Approximately **one out of two** strategy implementations are still failing. This is a poor ROI for the time, effort and revenue invested.

Only one out of five leaders is reviewing the implementation at least once a month. This is deeply concerning as when leaders stop focusing on implementation, so do their employees. Almost a **quarter** of the organizations are still only reviewing their strategy implementations once a year!

For 20 years, in every wave of research, both **“poor communication and lack of leadership”** have been among the top three reasons why implementation fails. This reinforces that leaders know why implementation fails but have not yet instilled the discipline to do what they need to do through the whole journey.



Only **7%** of respondents believe their organization is excellent in its ability to implement strategy. This can translate into a market differentiator for leaders who can achieve excellence in implementation.



Based on this year's survey, it is concerning that only **28%** of the organizations have an effective measurement system in place for tracking strategy implementation. That is a decline from 2016. Without the right measures in place, leaders do not know whether they're on the right track and what, if any, corrective action needs to be taken.



EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS – Leadership Opportunities from 2020 Results



- Keep instilling the **discipline** to follow through and stay engaged through the whole implementation journey.
- Create structured bi-weekly implementation **reviews** across departments and quarterly **reviews** across the whole organization.
- Nurture the **communications** throughout the implementation journey.
- Ensure that every strategic objective has at least one **measure** that is driving the right actions, with people being held accountable. **“Change the strategy, change the measures”** is a Bridges idiom that has never been truer or more important than now.

We have intentionally kept the leadership opportunities to a small number as a best practice. In implementation, less is more.

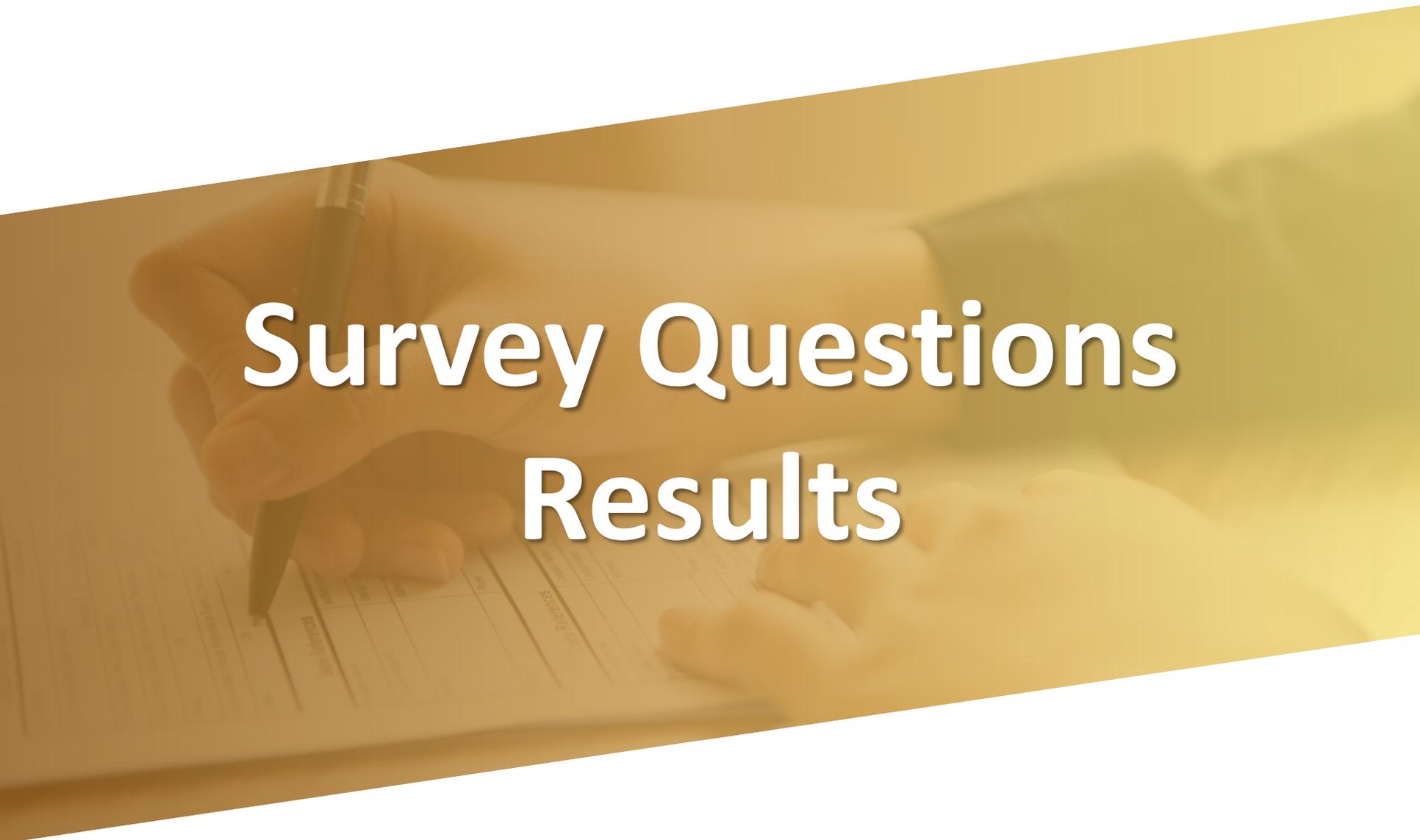
Leadership opportunities are summarized in FOUR words:

✓ **Discipline**

✓ **Reviews**

✓ **Communications**

✓ **Measures**

A background image showing a hand holding a pen over a survey form. The form has various fields and checkboxes, though the text is blurred. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange-to-yellow gradient.

Survey Questions Results

20-Year Results of Q1: What type of strategy are you currently undertaking or conducted within last three years?

2004

- Vision, Mission and Values
- ISO
- Customer Service

2008

- Vision, Mission and Values
- Expanding into New Markets, e.g. China
- Rolling out New Corporate Strategy

2012

- Development of New Strategy
- Vision, Mission and Values
- Balance Scorecard

2016

- Vision, Mission and Values
- New Corporate Strategy
- Expanding into New Markets

20-Year Trends

Vision, Mission and Values is the only organizational transformation to consistently be ranked in the top three of transformations in every survey.

In 2016, if digital mindset and big data were combined, they would have been in second place.

2020 Q1: What type of strategy are you currently undertaking or conducted within last three years?

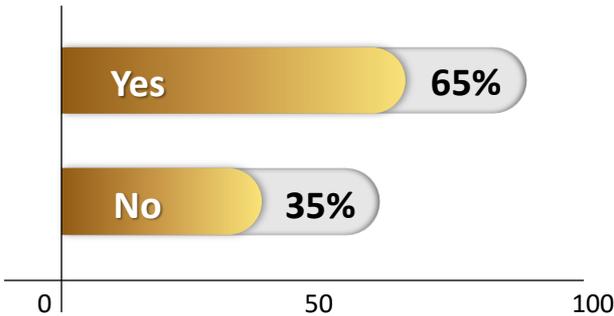


2020 Results - Vision, Mission and Values is the leading strategy transformation

It should be noted that “Digitalization” involves many different initiatives. If they were combined on the survey, then it would be the leading strategy transformation.

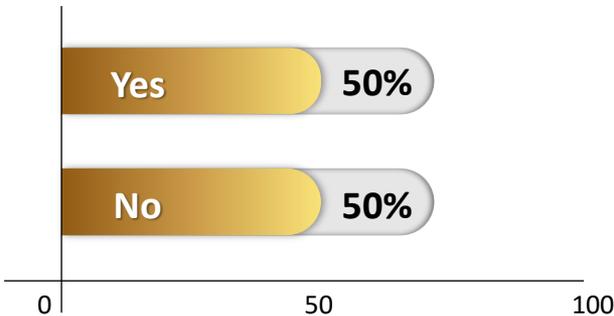


Q2: Do you believe your organization is good at crafting strategy?



20-Year Trend

These two questions have been answered with remarkable consistency. Two-thirds of respondents believe their organization is good at crafting strategy and 50% believe they are good at implementation. This begs the question “Why are so many implementations failing?” From our experience, leaders know what they need to do differently but somewhere between thought and action, their good intentions get lost. They don't have the discipline to follow through.

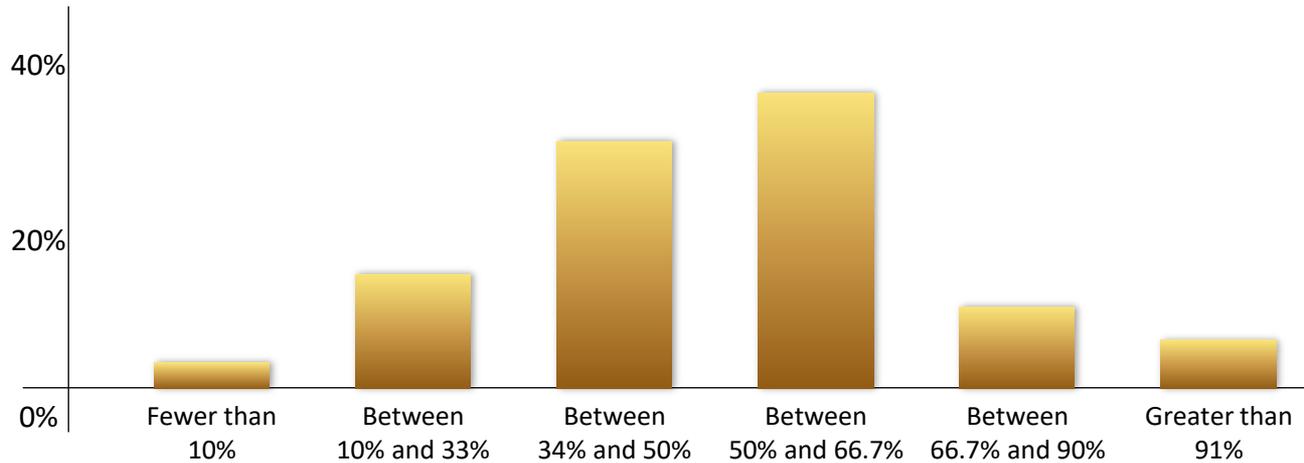


2020 Results:

Two-thirds of leaders believe their organization is good at crafting strategy and around half believe their organization is good at implementing strategy.

Q3: Do you believe your organization is good at implementing strategy?

Q4: What percentage of strategy implementations are successful in your organization?



48%

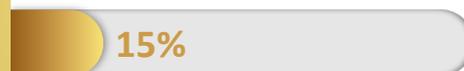
Failing

It is concerning that 48% of organizations are failing. If we raise the pass mark to achieve at least 67% of the intended strategic objectives, the failure rate would be dramatically higher – 85%.

2020 Results: It's good news



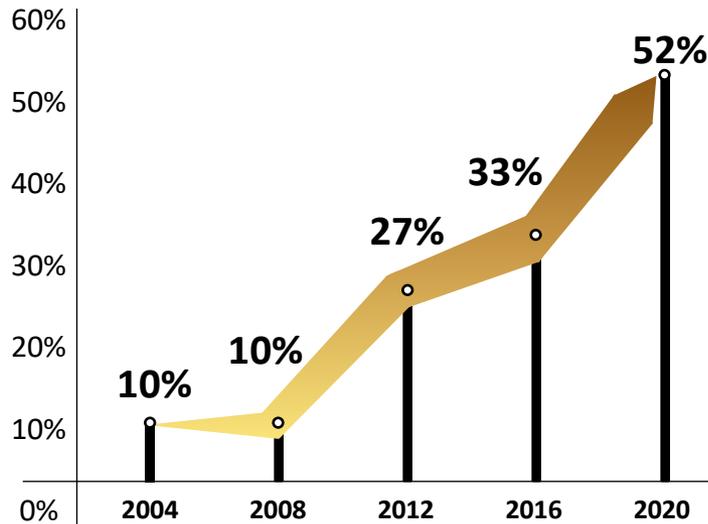
of implementations are succeeding in achieving 50% of their strategic objectives. (2016 was 33%)



of organizations are now achieving over two-thirds of their intended objectives (2016 was 10%)

Q4: What percentage of strategy implementations are successful in your organization?

(Achieve at least 50% of the intended strategic objectives?)



2020 Results: – It's good news

It's both encouraging and inspiring to see the most dramatic improvement in success in all the years, +19%.

A possible reason for this is that implementation has become its own recognized domain; it is no longer under the shadow of strategy. This has resulted in increased focus, tools and frameworks.

Still, 48% of implementations are failing, which means we need to continue to strive for greater improvement.

Editor's Note:

This is a key question in our surveys every four years. Responses to it garnered the most interest and became the most shared result on social media.

Q5: What is the single greatest challenge your organization faces in implementing its strategy?

(Answers not prioritized)

- Funding and financial balance
- Macro-economic and pandemic impact
- Resources and capabilities
- Keeping track of projects and communicating their progress
- Resistance to change
- Alignment on the strategic direction
- Managing change
- Team and talent issues
- Leadership teams don't create and execute on strategy plan.
- Stepping back from the tactical day-to-day pressures to review against the longer-term plan.

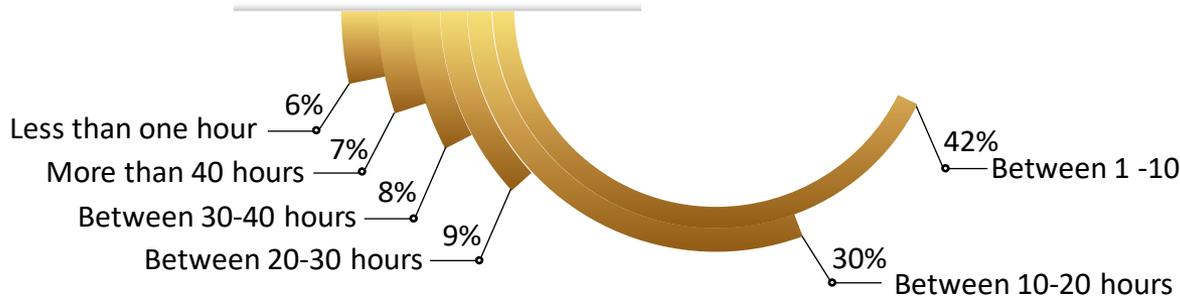
20-Year Trend

The verbatim comments are consistent over all the research. In the past, though, teams and talent issues have not been as prevalent as in this year.

2020 Results:

This year's greatest challenge is dealing with the team members' mindset, commitment and skill level.

Q6: How much time do leaders in your organization spend discussing strategy each month, as compared to operations and day-to-day challenges?



20-Year Trend

Leaders do not pay enough attention to reviewing their strategy implementation. They are typically heavily involved in discussing strategy but, as the results show, they are less involved in discussing the implementation. If they don't know what's going on, they can't take corrective action and encourage the right actions.

To review implementation consistently, discipline needs to be instilled with the right structure.

2020 Results:

It is deeply concerning that when discussing their organization's strategy:

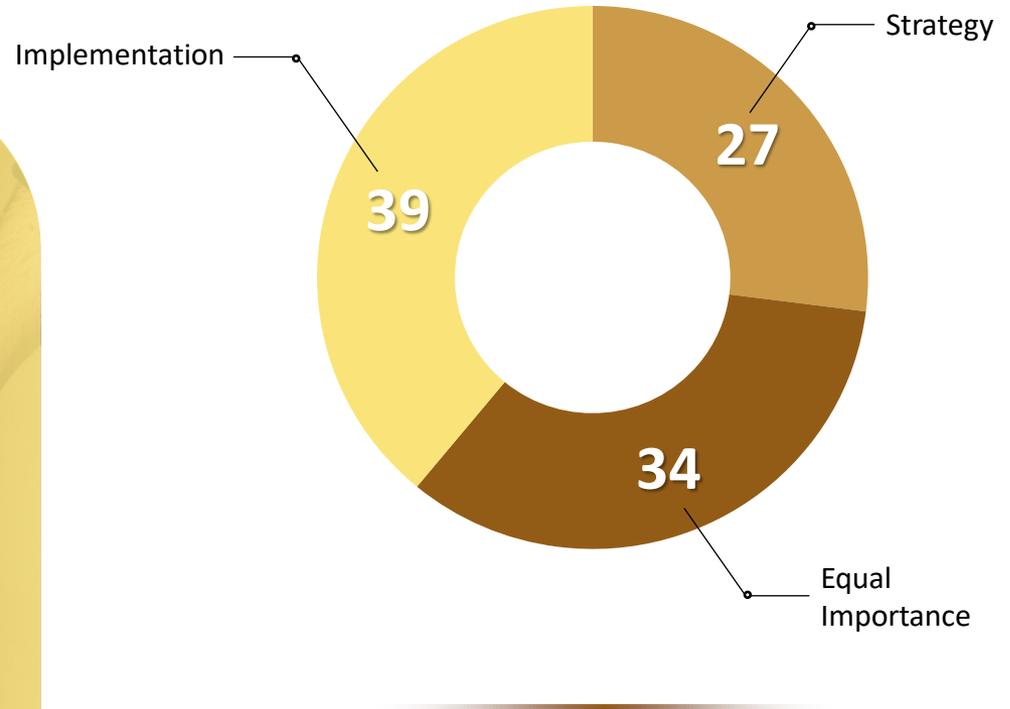
- 48% of leaders spend less than one day a month
- 80% of leaders spend less than 20 hours a month

- ✓ 2016 - 49% spend less than one day a month
- ✓ 2012 - 70% spend less than one day a month
- ✓ 2008 and 2004 - Question not asked

Q7: Which is honestly perceived as more important in your organization?

20-Year Trend

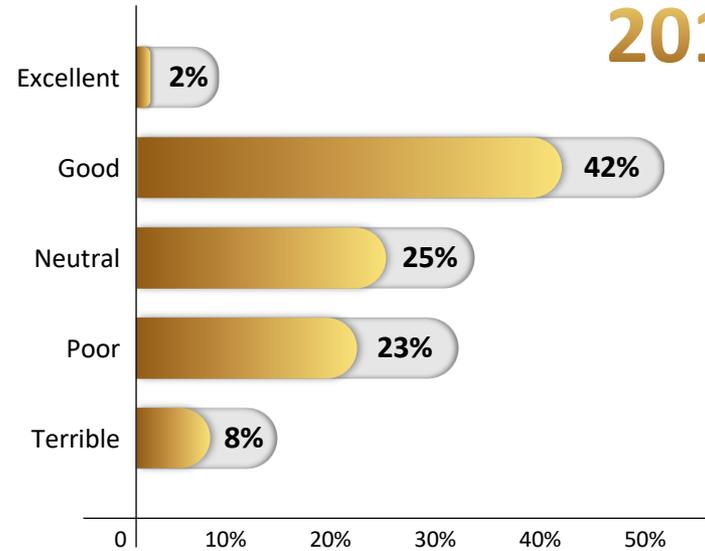
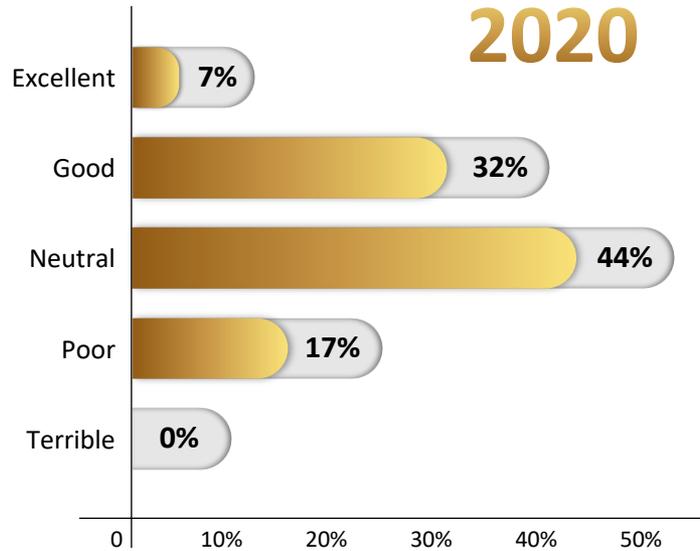
2016 was a breakthrough result in that “equal importance” was higher for the first time than “strategy” and “implementation.” The concern is that all three continue to be on relatively equal terms. This is because a good strategy means it can also be implemented well. Leaders need to see both as equally important.



2020 Results:

For the first time, implementation is now viewed as more important than crafting strategy.

Q8: How do you rate your organization's performance in implementing strategy?



This question was not asked in previous research.



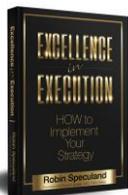
Results

2020 Results:

With only 7% of respondents saying their organization is excellent in implementation and 61% being neutral or poor, there is an opportunity to differentiate your company by becoming **excellent in execution**.

Editors Note:

We recommend a good book with that title!



20-Year Trend

It is alarming to see implementation performance dropping 10 percentage points. In 2016, "good" was rated the highest; in 2020, "neutral" was highest.

Q9: Leaders in our organization have the skills and knowledge to implement strategy successfully.



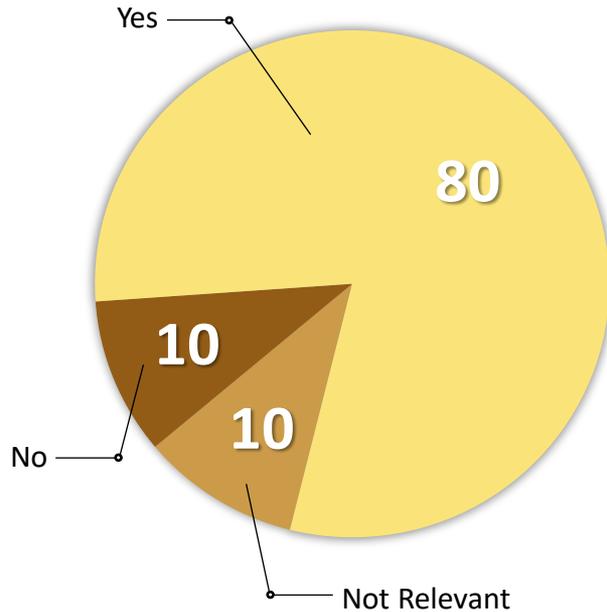
2020 Results:

Almost two-thirds of respondents believe they have the right skills and knowledge.

20-Year Trend

Approximately twice as many respondents agree to this question in every survey it was asked. This suggests that poor performance in implementation could be mostly because of attitude and lack of discipline for leaders to follow though.

Q10: Does your immediate boss recognize you for your implementation efforts?



2020 Results:

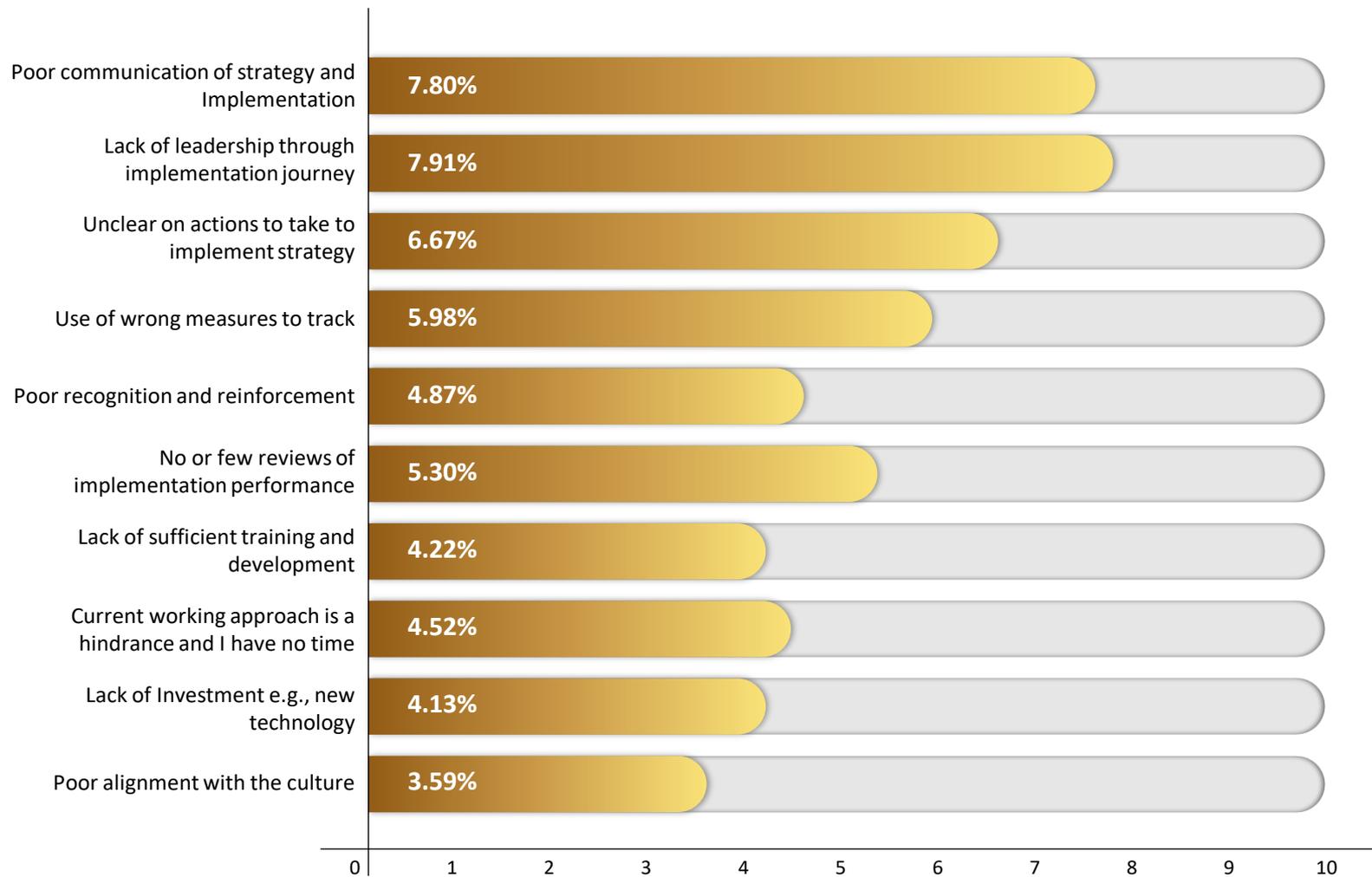
Four out of five respondents feel they received recognition from their immediate boss for their implementation.

20-Year Trend

Individual's needs to feel appreciated when taking new actions to implement the strategy. There is a 10% drop in the number from 2016, when we first asked this question.

It's encouraging that people are being recognized for their efforts. Implementing strategy involves taking new actions for which employees need to be recognized for their efforts to sustain the implementation.

20-Year Results of Q11: Please rank the reasons you think implementation fails, with number one being the top reason.



20-Year Results of Q11: Please rank the reasons you think implementation fails, with number one being the top reason.

2004

- Gaining support and action
- Communicating the change
- Overcoming resistance from staff

2008

- Ensuring staff members take different actions
- Communicating the change
- Gaining support among the people in the organization

2012

- Ensuring staff members take different actions
- Aligning implementation to the organization's culture
- Getting people support

2016

- Poor communication
- Lack of leadership
- Using the wrong measures

2020

- Lack of leadership through the implementation journey
- Poor communication
- Unclear on what to do to implement the strategy.

20-Year Trend

It is captivating to step back over 20 years and see that poor communication, lack of different actions being taken and lack of leadership consistently rank as the key reasons implementation fails. If leaders know why implementation fails, then why is it still failing? It is because it's one thing knowing what to do. It's quite another having the discipline to see it through the 18 to 24 months most implementations take.

Q11: Please rank the reasons you think implementation fails, with number one being the top reason.

2020 Results:

Why implementation fails

- Lack of leadership through the implementation journey
- Poor communication
- Unclear on what to do to implement the strategy

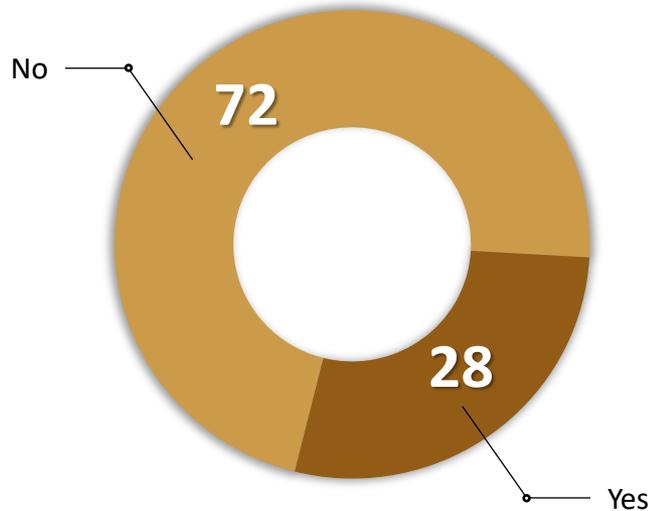
Reasons:

- Poor communication of strategy and implementation
- Lack of leadership through implementation journey
- Unclear on actions to take to implement strategy
- Use of wrong measures to track
- Poor recognition and reinforcement
- Current working approach is a hindrance, having no time
- Lack of sufficient training and development
- Lack of investment e.g., new technology
- Poor alignment with the culture

Q9 responses indicated that leaders do have the needed implementation skills. Therefore, they have to ask themselves why they don't follow through and also why employees perceive they don't provide support throughout the implementation journey.

Culture has previously been among the top three. Interestingly, it is the lowest ranked in 2020.

Q12: Do you have an effective measurement system in place for tracking the strategy implementation?



20-Year Trend

The “Yes” response is almost half of what it was four years ago when we first added this question. This suggests organizations are finding it harder to track implementation. With organizations adopting digitalization, it’s possible tracking is becoming harder because of multiple components involved in the transformation.

2020 Results:

This is the most alarming result in this year’s survey - only 28% of respondents say they have an effective measurement system. It’s alarming because we know that *what gets measured gets done*. Therefore, without the right measurement system, implementation becomes even tougher to track and show successful outcomes.

Q13: How often does the leadership review the strategy implementation for the whole organization?

2016



2020



Agree

2020 Results:

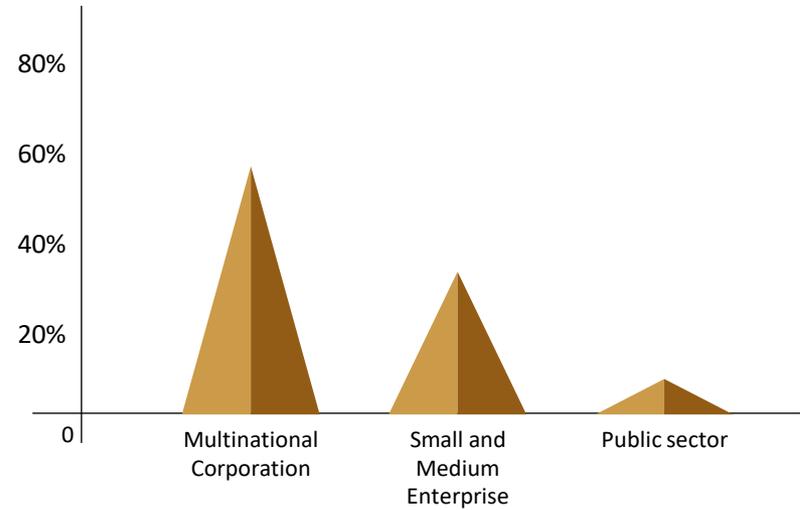
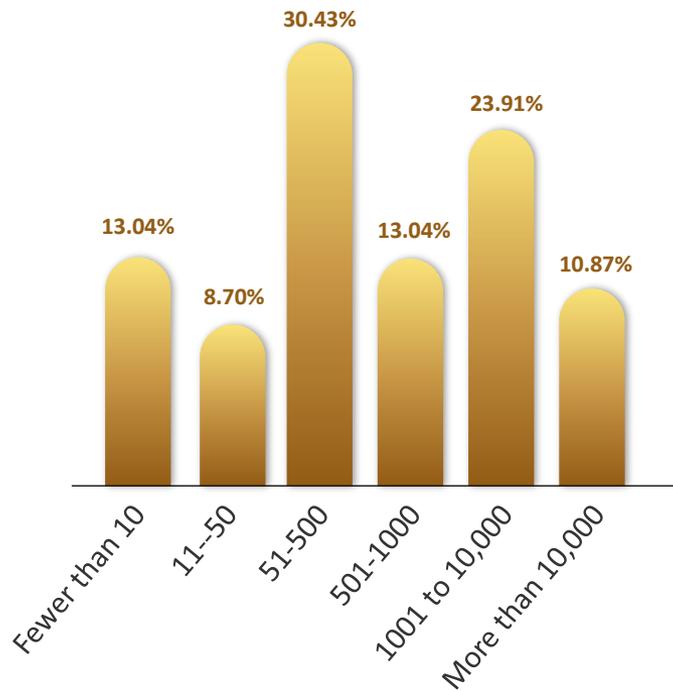
Only 46% of respondents said that their leaders are reviewing the implementation on a regular monthly or quarterly basis. Almost a quarter are reviewing the strategy implementation once a year and 9% never!

20-Year Trend

This was a new question in 2016 when one in five organizations reviewed their implementation monthly. This year also shows about one in five reviewing it monthly.

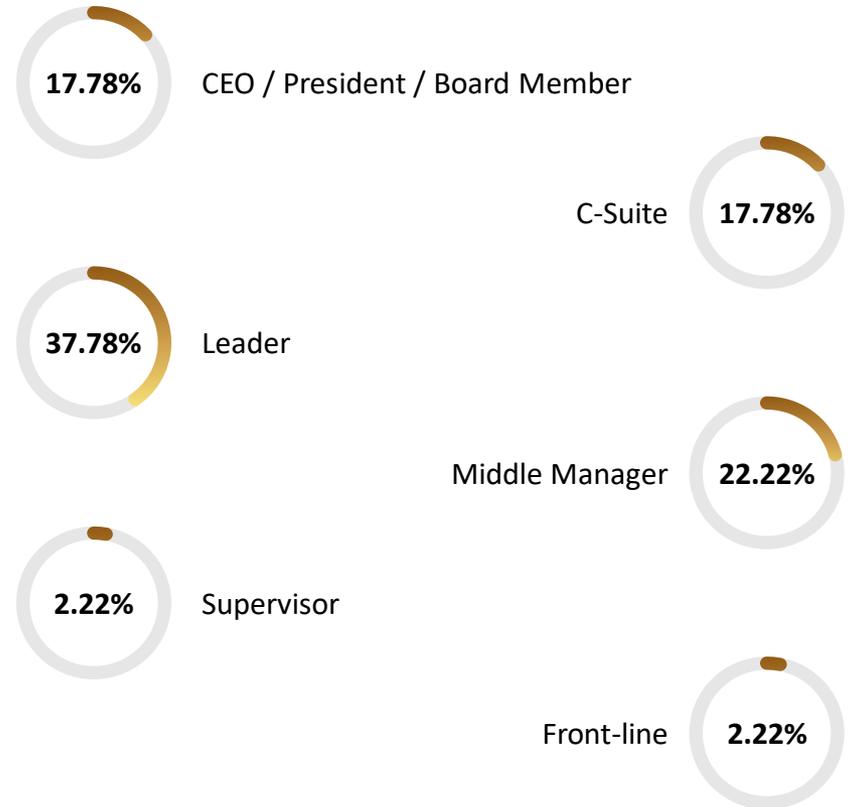
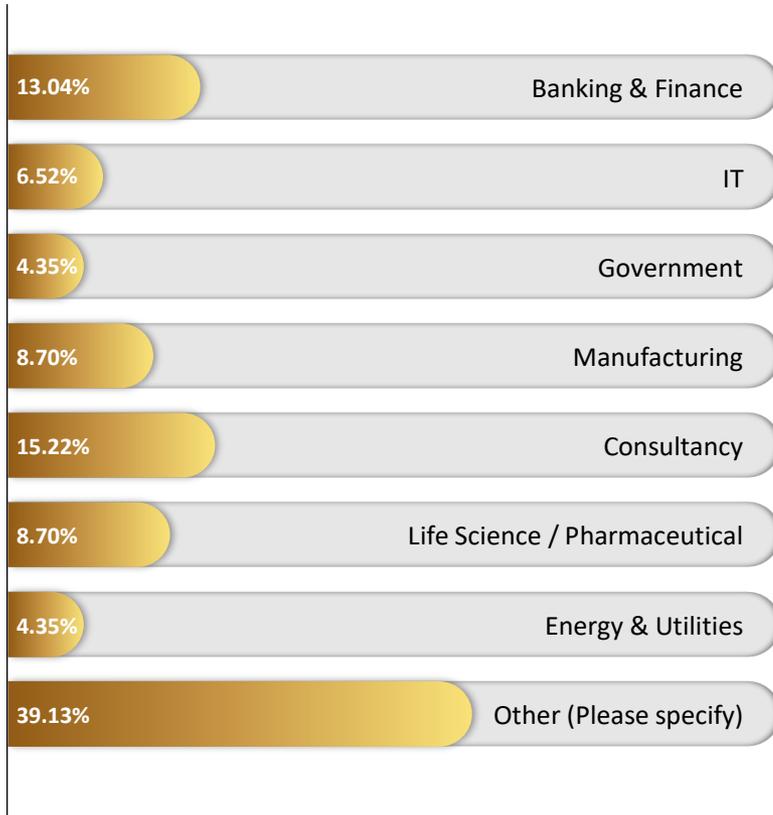
This is a key area for concern. Regular and consistent reviews are a critical success factor for implementation.

Q14: How many people are in your organization?



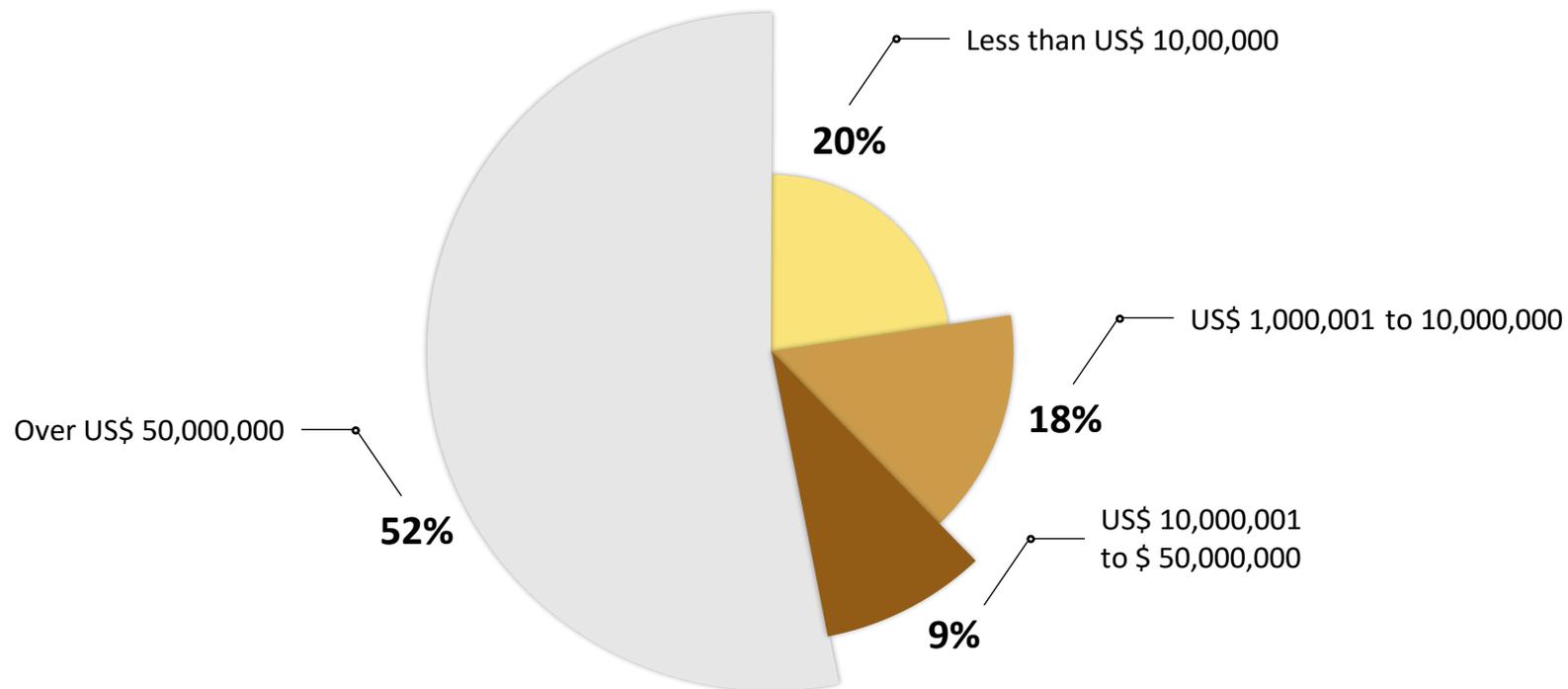
Q15: What category best describes your organization?

Q16: Which industry sector best describes your organization?



Q17: How would you describe your position in the organization?

Q18: What is the annual revenue of your organization?



- Less than US\$ 10,00,000
- US\$ 1,00,00,001 to 50,000,000
- US\$ 10,00,001 to 10,000,000
- Over US\$ 50,000,000

Social Media Messages for You to Share



- It's good news that 52% of organization implementations are successfully implementing strategy. The first time more are succeeding than failing. - [Bridges 2020 strategy implementation survey](#)
- Only **5%** of organizations are achieving at least **90%** of their strategic objectives, an exclusive club - [Bridges 2020 strategy implementation survey](#)
- It's both encouraging and inspiring in [Bridges 2020 strategy implementation survey](#) to see the most dramatic improvement over the years by **19%**. Today, **52%** of organization are succeeding in strategy implementation.
- In **Bridges** latest [strategy implementation survey](#), only **7%** of respondents believe their organization is excellent in its ability to implement strategy.
- Confidence in an organization's performance to implement strategy is dropping - [Bridges 2020 strategy implementation survey](#)
- In **Bridges** latest [strategy implementation survey](#), only one in five leaders is reviewing the implementation at least once a month.
- In **Bridges** latest [strategy implementation survey](#), almost a quarter of the organizations are only reviewing the strategy implementation once a year.
- For **20** years of **Bridges strategy implementation surveys**, both "poor communication and lack of leadership" have been among the top three reasons implementation fails.
- Lack of leadership through the implementation journey is the number one reason why implementation fails. - [Bridges 2020 strategy implementation survey](#)
- Comments in **Bridges** latest [strategy implementation survey](#) identify the biggest strategy implementation hurdle facing organizations today is "**Managing teams and talent.**"



Who We Are

[Bridges Business Consultancy Int](#) is a strategy and digital implementation specialist. We work with organizations around the world to support their implementation by providing the knowledge, structure and tools that are often missing.

Since **2000**, we have continually researched strategy implementation to identify happenings and trends in the field. In **2015**, Bridges became more conscious of organizations adopting digitalization and pivoted to support leaders in this area.

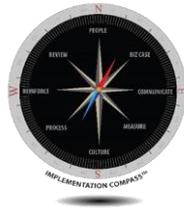
We now partner with our clients to transfer our IP into client organizations, so they become self-sufficient. This is because implementation cannot be outsourced; all employees need to participate. We support leaders to develop the right skills, knowledge and attitude for their people to successfully implement strategy.

Over the years, Bridges has pioneered many different resources. The [Implementation Hub](#) portal is packed with **600+** resources. The [Implementation Compass](#)[™] is our proprietary framework for guiding the implementation of a strategy. Our [Readiness2Implement](#) is an assessment to identify an organization's implementation capabilities. Our [IMPACT](#) toolkit is for implementing actions in **90 days**.

Strategy implementation is not rocket science—it is common sense. Just because it is common sense, however, does not mean it is common practice. We are here to share best practices and, at heart, are a team of people who truly believe in—and passionately focus on—strategy implementation.



Bridges Key Implementation Tools



[Framework](#) to guide an organization through his implementation journey



[Framework](#) to guide an organization through adopting digitalization



[Assessing an organization's](#) ability to implement



[Online course and certification](#) to become a Strategy Implementation Professional



5 implementation books for only \$50
[Special offer](#) celebrating Bridges 20th Anniversary



How DBS became the [World's Best Bank](#), Q4 2020