



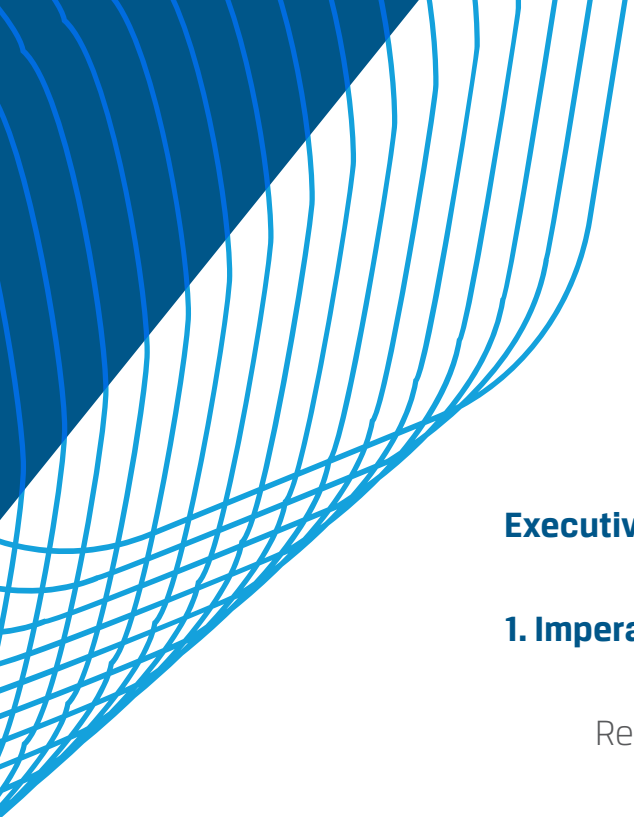
2018

Federal Digital Trends

Landing the Next Moonshot



Contents



Executive Summary	1
1. Imperative 1: Culture	2
Recommended path forward	9
2. Imperative 2: Experience	10
Recommended path forward	19
3. Imperative 3: Approach	20
Recommended path forward	27
Conclusion	28

Executive Summary

Trust in government today **is lower** than it was during Vietnam, Watergate, the stagflation of the 1970s, and the global financial crisis. Some senior government leaders believe that we need a breakthrough to restore that trust. A grand budget agreement. A New Deal for the 21st century. A research leap. A mission to Mars. But what if that isn't what Americans really want—or need—right now?

In reality, citizens need reliable and efficient government services that get the little things right again and again. This is how digital transformation begins: by creating an environment in which these great moments become reliable and commonplace, not aspirational.

You may not know it, but we are in the midst of another moonshot moment—the potential for government transformation is high, the technology is ready, the talent is eager, and all that's left is to seize the opportunity that awaits. To see real progress, though, government agencies must go beyond heavy investments in IT, balancing technology, human-centered design, change management, stakeholder engagement, and deep analytics to understand the needs of citizens and achieve results.

To get a better sense of how agencies are responding to this tall order, we surveyed 500 federal employees about the role of digital transformation in their organizations. Our findings suggest three imperatives for the federal government and its agencies to get the little things right—and seize our next moonshot moment.

- 1** Create a culture of innovation that supports iterative, ongoing progress.
- 2** Prioritize the citizen experience.
- 3** Implement an integrated approach to digital transformation.

1. Create a culture of innovation that supports iterative, ongoing progress

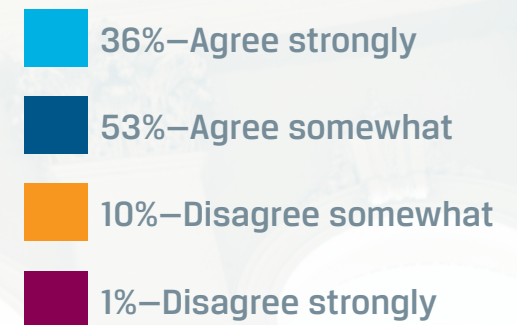
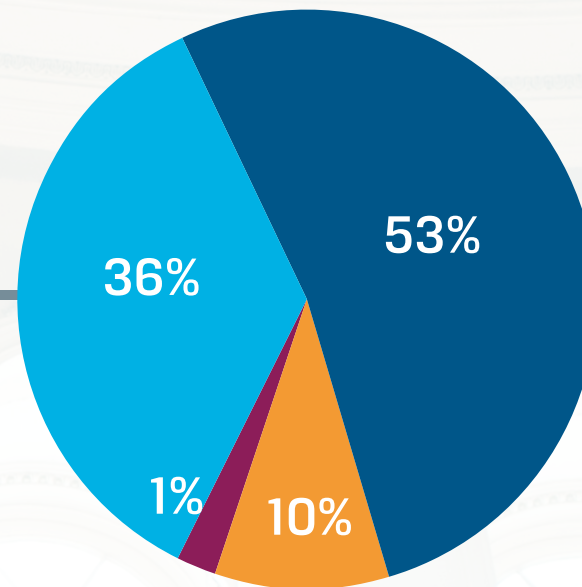
Federal security and privacy requirements are major barriers to trying something new. Cybersecurity incidents are relatively common and threaten to halt progress on technological innovation. Adding to that, the procurement process is in dire need of repair, which forces government employees to turn to unapproved solutions that could cause more harm than good. The government must identify necessary safeguards and eliminate unnecessary barriers to allow employees to apply secure, creative solutions.

**Nearly
90%**
of respondents
said security and
privacy requirements
significantly delay
technological
innovation

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Finding 1.1

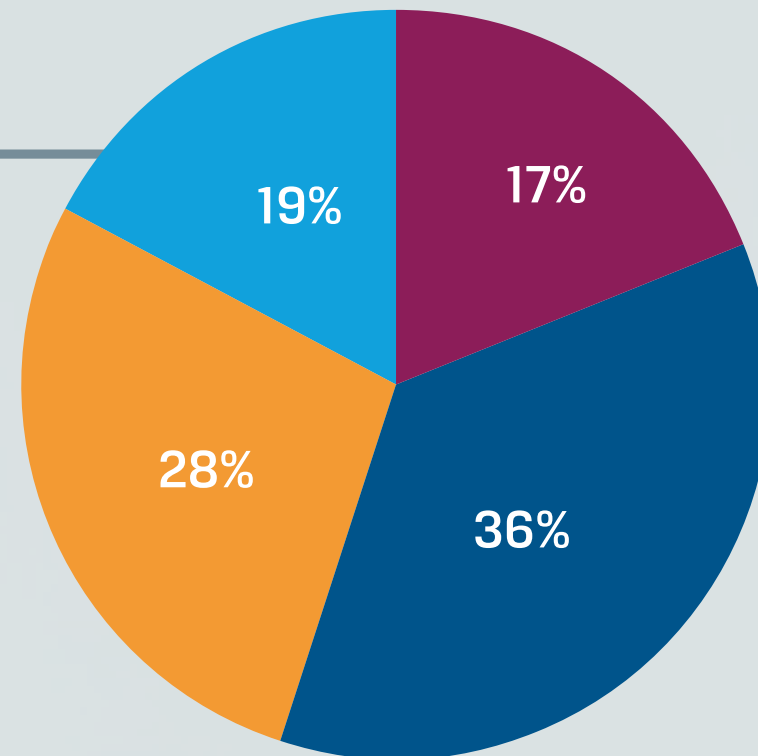
Federal security and privacy requirements significantly delay technological innovation.



**Over half of respondents
said that they had
experienced a
cybersecurity incident
after implementing a
new digital initiative—of
those who experienced
an incident, nearly half
indicated that future
digital innovation was
put on hold**

Finding 1.2

To your knowledge, has your team, division, or agency ever experienced a cybersecurity incident after launching a new digital technology?



19%—Yes, my team or division has

36%—Yes, my agency has but not as part of my team or division

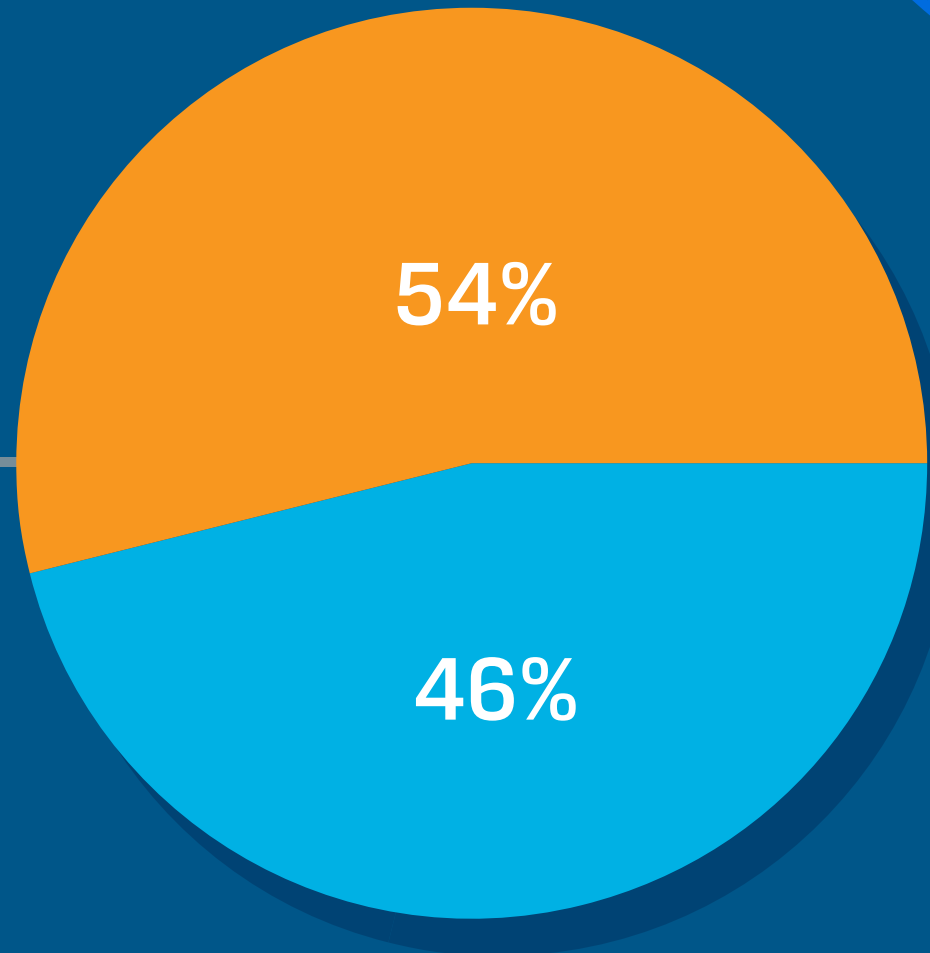
28%—No

17%— I don't know

Did the cybersecurity incident that occurred after launching a new digital technology prevent your team, division, or agency from developing any other technologies?

Finding 1.3

(Asked among those whose team, division, or agency ever experienced a cybersecurity incident after launching a new digital technology)



54%—No

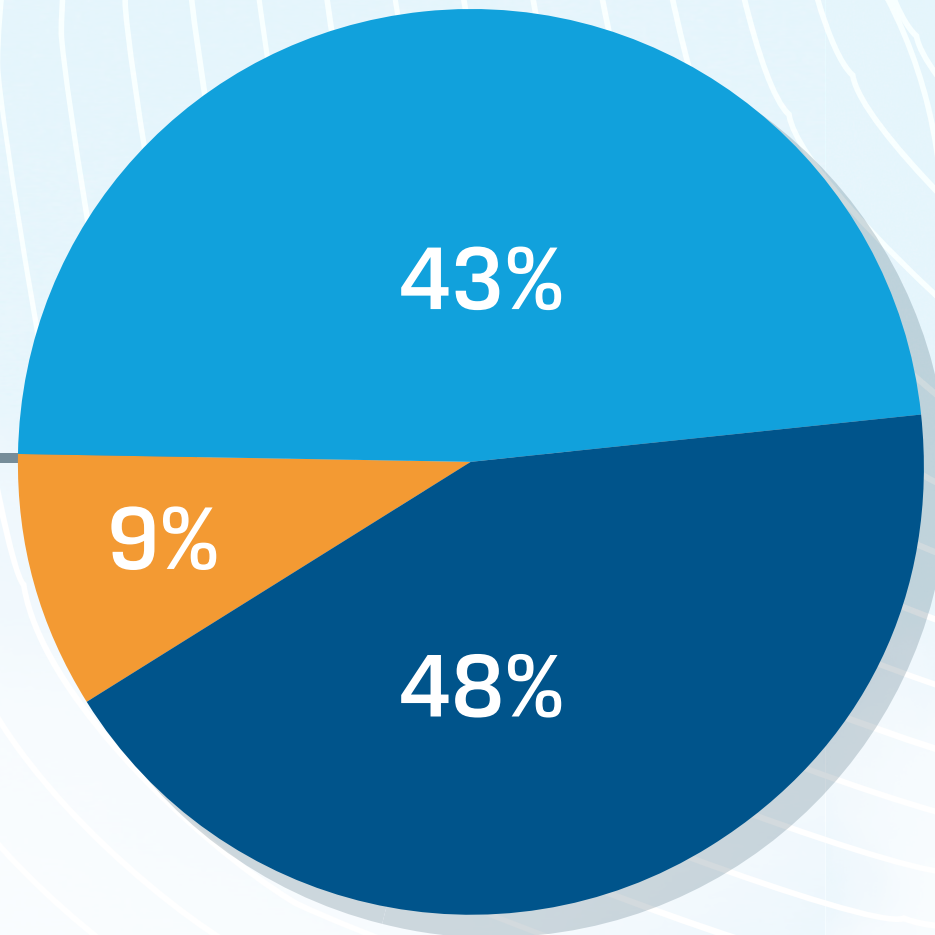
46%—Yes

91%
of respondents
agreed that the
federal IT procurement
process should be
completely overhauled

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Finding 1.4

The federal IT procurement process is in need of a complete overhaul.



43%—Agree strongly

48%—Agree somewhat

9%—Disagree somewhat

0%—Disagree strongly

Over
30%
of respondents
indicated
that there
are benefits
to using
unauthorized
technologies

Which of the following better describes your perspective on federal employees using unauthorized technology tools (for example, devices, software, or other technological services that have not been officially authorized by the IT department)?

Finding 1.5

69%—Harmful, such as by potentially introducing security threats

31%—Helpful, such as by expediting digitization

Recommended path forward

Creating a culture of innovation requires proactive creativity, rewarding and acknowledging staff who bring this perspective to the table. Leaders can **encourage** and **empower** employees to follow through on new ideas and solutions for big organizational challenges as well as their daily tasks.

A common misconception is that innovation only comes in big, splashy packages or that it must incorporate technology. In truth, **innovation can be incremental**, and agency leaders can support innovation firsthand by finding small ways to improve processes, products, and workflows.

In the federal space, applying innovative approaches is often met with risk concerns within a regulated environment. Federal leaders can help mitigate risk by **empowering staff** to address security and privacy concerns through training, heightened awareness, and implementing controls that support privacy protections without stifling creativity. They need to foster work environments that deliver necessary, comprehensive security and privacy controls.

Agency leaders also need to **define innovation** for specific departments and workflows. Leaders should **develop agency- or department-specific principles** that guide staff through privacy and security improvements without sacrificing creativity. Ultimately, leaders should **explore data-backed solutions** that provide a safeguarded outlet for federal staff to advance processes, workflows, and products that help citizens.

2. Prioritize the citizen experience

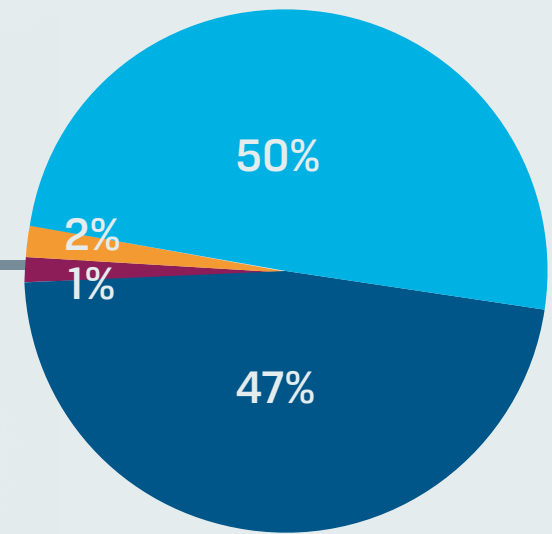
Federal employees overwhelmingly agree that government agencies now have a greater responsibility than ever to provide digital tools and services that will have a positive impact on the lives of citizens. However, when it comes to creating those tools and services, the citizen experience takes a back seat. The majority of respondents believe that the government prioritizes back-end technology over the citizen experience and that issues like user adoption and technology usability are not getting the attention they deserve. What's more, there's no consensus around the barriers to enhancing the citizen experience or how to determine whether an initiative was successful. Overall, the government must stop classifying technology as the end-all-be-all of digital transformation and focus on creating an intuitive, replicable, and efficient citizen experience.

When it comes to the government's role in making the most of digital tools and services, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that now is the time to step up to the plate.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Finding 2.1

Government agencies now have a greater responsibility than ever to provide the digital tools and services that will make a positive difference in citizens' lives.



50%—Agree strongly

2%—Disagree somewhat

47%—Agree somewhat

1%—Disagree strongly

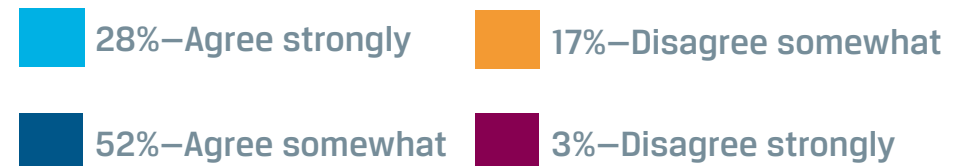
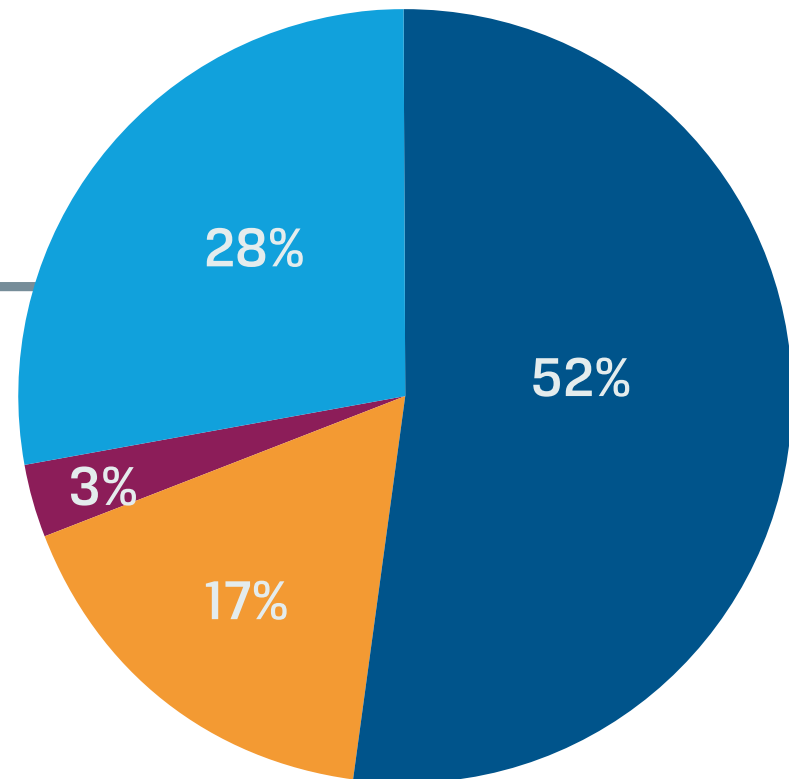


80%
said the government
would prioritize perfecting
technology over the quality of
the citizen experience

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Finding 2.2

When it comes to digital solutions for citizens, my agency would prioritize perfecting the technology over the citizen experience (i.e., the back-end system over the front-end user experience).



Only
13%
of respondents
prioritized having
a digital-first
mindset

Which of the following ideas or practices from the private sector, if any, do federal agencies need to incorporate as part of a digital transformation?

Finding 2.3

54%—Regularly update technologies to stay current

25%—Use technology that has a proven record of success

17%—Focus on user satisfaction

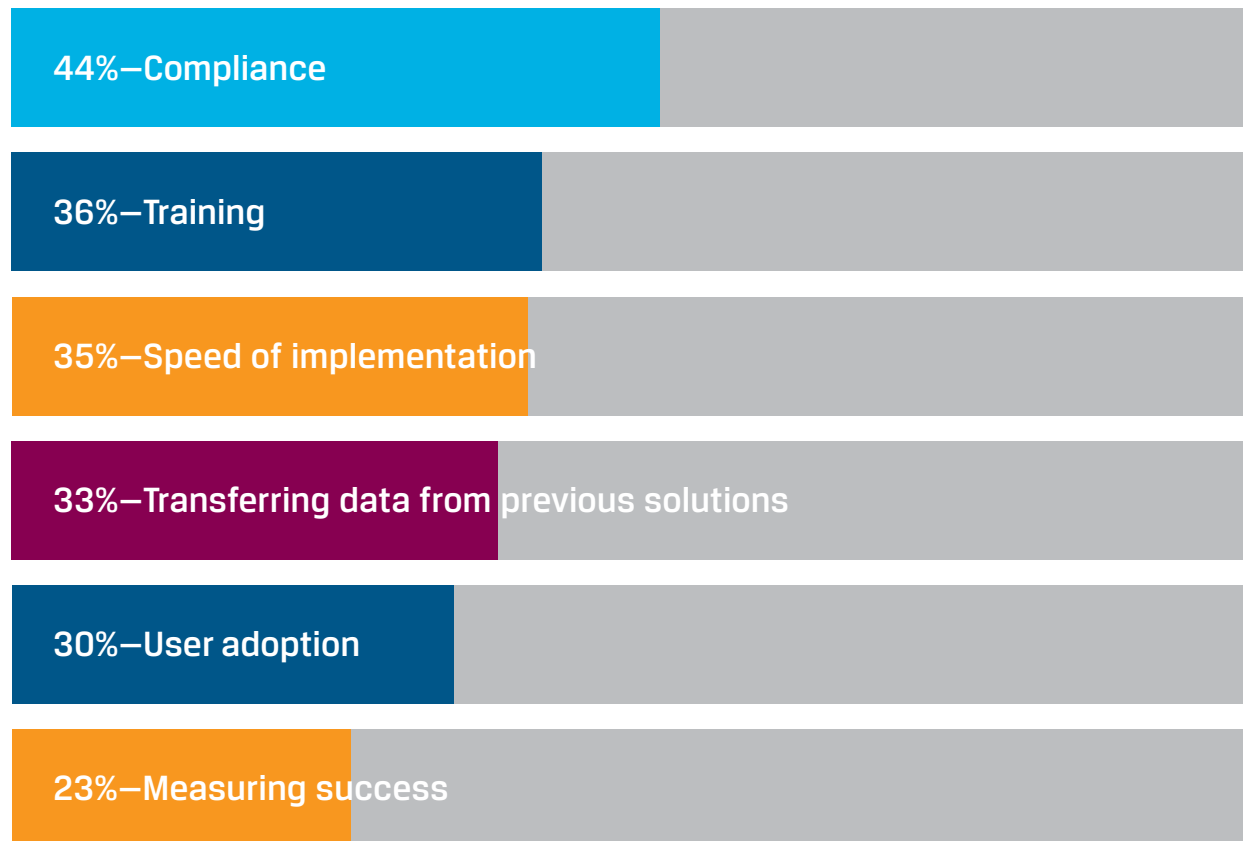
14%—Minimize lengthy-to-build custom tools

13%—Have a digital-first mindset

13%—Use open or adaptable enterprise platforms

Which of the following is the biggest priority for your agency when implementing a new digital technology?

Finding 2.4



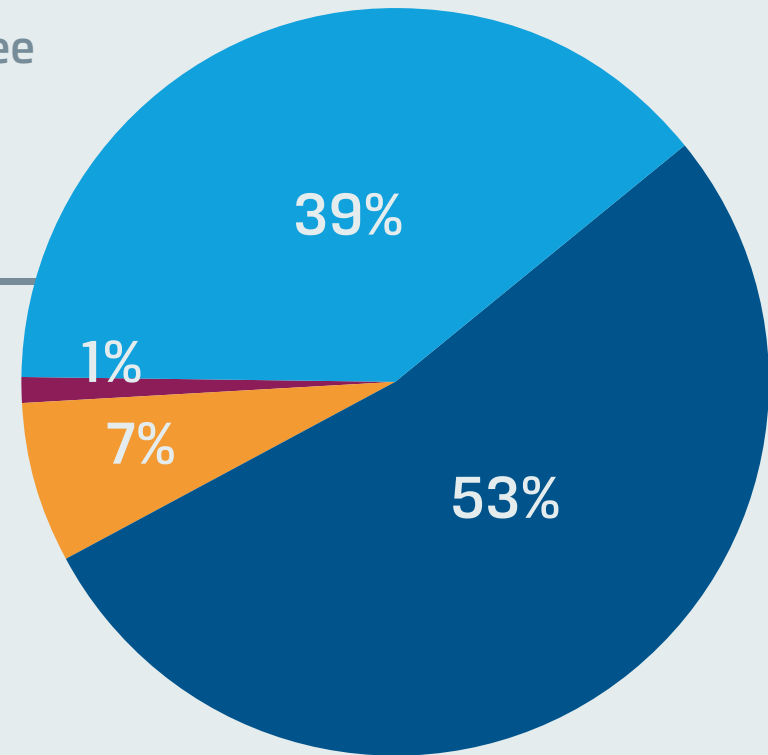
When asked about priorities for digital technology implementation, user adoption ranked second to last—which makes it very difficult for transformation to succeed

Over
90%
of respondents
agreed that
improving
usability of
technology
should be
prioritized over
technology
development

How strongly do you agree
or disagree with the
following statement?

Finding 2.5

My agency needs
to spend more
time on improving
the usability of
technology, as
opposed to the
development of the
technology itself.



39%—Agree strongly

7%—Disagree somewhat

53%—Agree somewhat

1%—Disagree strongly

Which of the following, if any, are the biggest barriers your agency has encountered in its efforts to enhance the citizen experience?

Finding 2.6

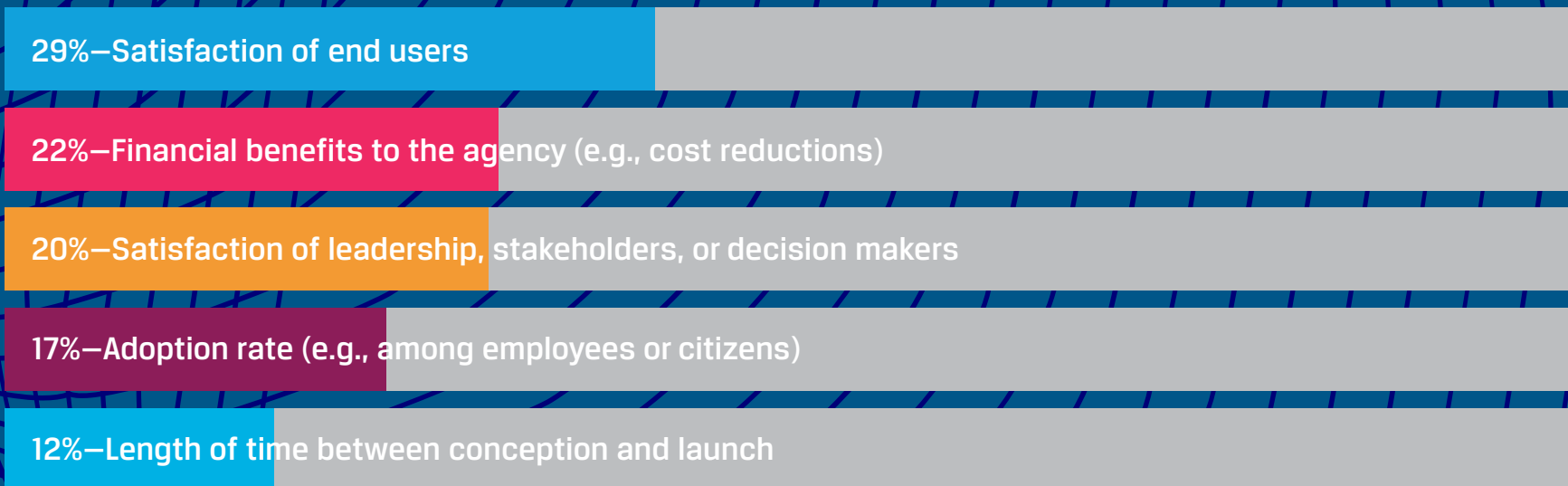


When asked to identify which barriers created the greatest hindrance to the citizen experience, respondents had difficulty reaching a consensus

When asked how
they'd know whether
a new digital
initiative had been
successful, just
29%
of respondents
said End User
Satisfaction

If your agency were to implement a new digital technology, which of the following would it consider the greatest indicator of success?

Finding 2.7



Recommended path forward

Beyond just successfully installing compliant technology, federal leaders must implement user research and feedback loops that are designed to create and improve digital services. Federal leaders can demonstrate tangible value by implementing measurable solutions and **evaluating the metrics** that matter to an agency's mission. Solutions need to collect meaningful data that can inform exactly how an agency modernizes its processes and systems. In practice, leaders need to establish specific key performance measures for each new solution or implementation and **extract the information** that will provide their agency with relevant insights.

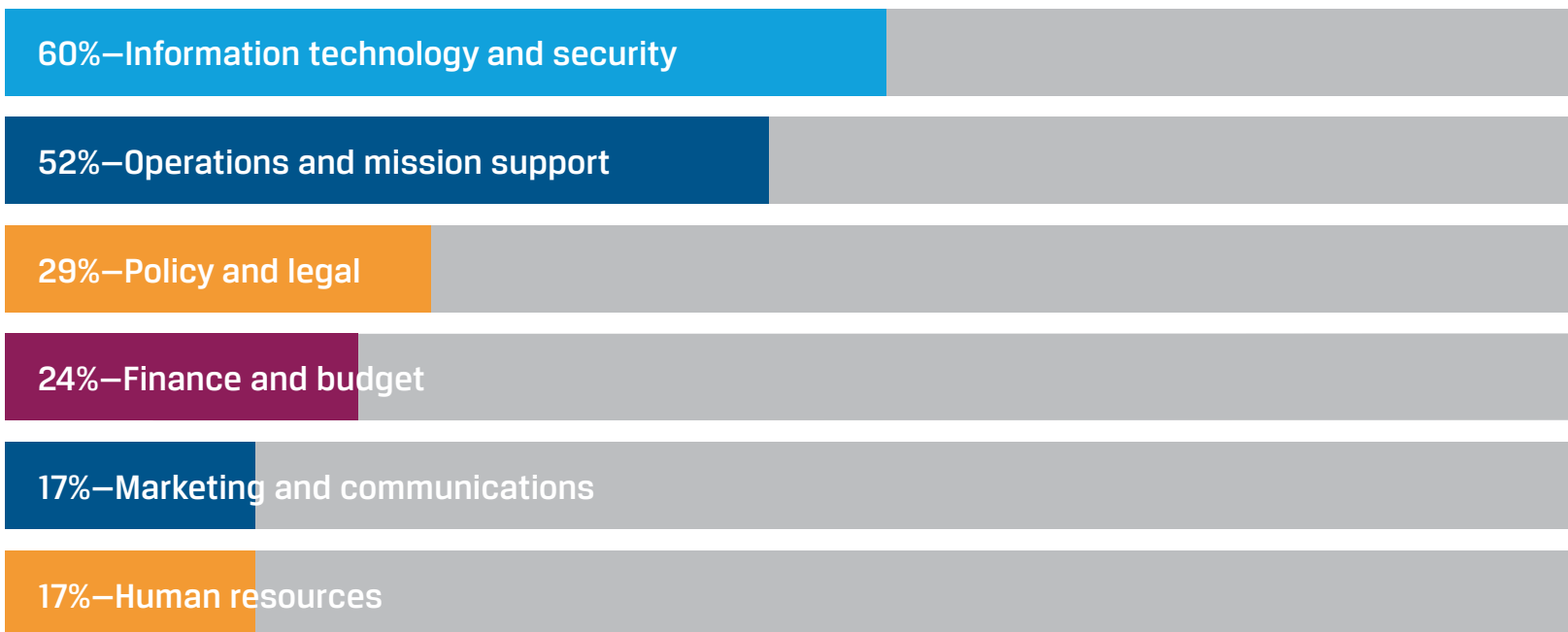
3. Implement an integrated approach to digital transformation

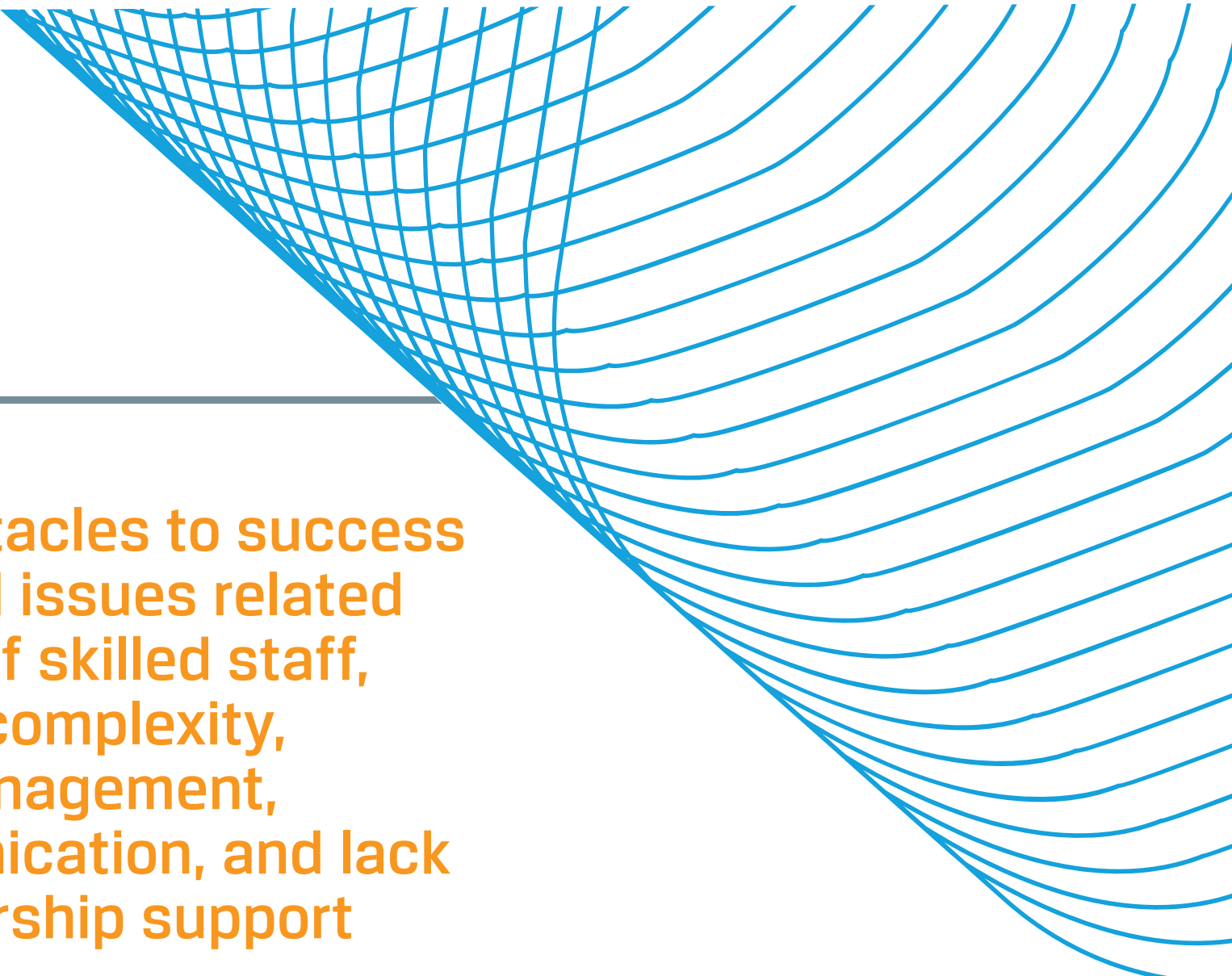
IT and security are cited as the most integral departments for ensuring the success of digital initiatives, with human resources ranked as the least important. For technology to fulfill its purpose in a digital transformation strategy, though, we need to empower employees agency-wide to use, implement, and support it. For instance, many barriers to successful digital adoption can be addressed by having well-rounded talent in the room, which falls squarely on the HR department. In order for the government and its agencies to move the digital transformation needle, they must implement an integrated approach that puts stakeholders across disciplines at the decision table.

Although the HR department plays a key role in finding and hiring the right talent, it was ranked at the bottom of the list for supporting digital initiatives—and IT was ranked at the top

If your agency were implementing a new digital technology that was designed to be used by all employees, which of the following departments would likely provide the most useful input to ensuring its success?

Finding 3.1

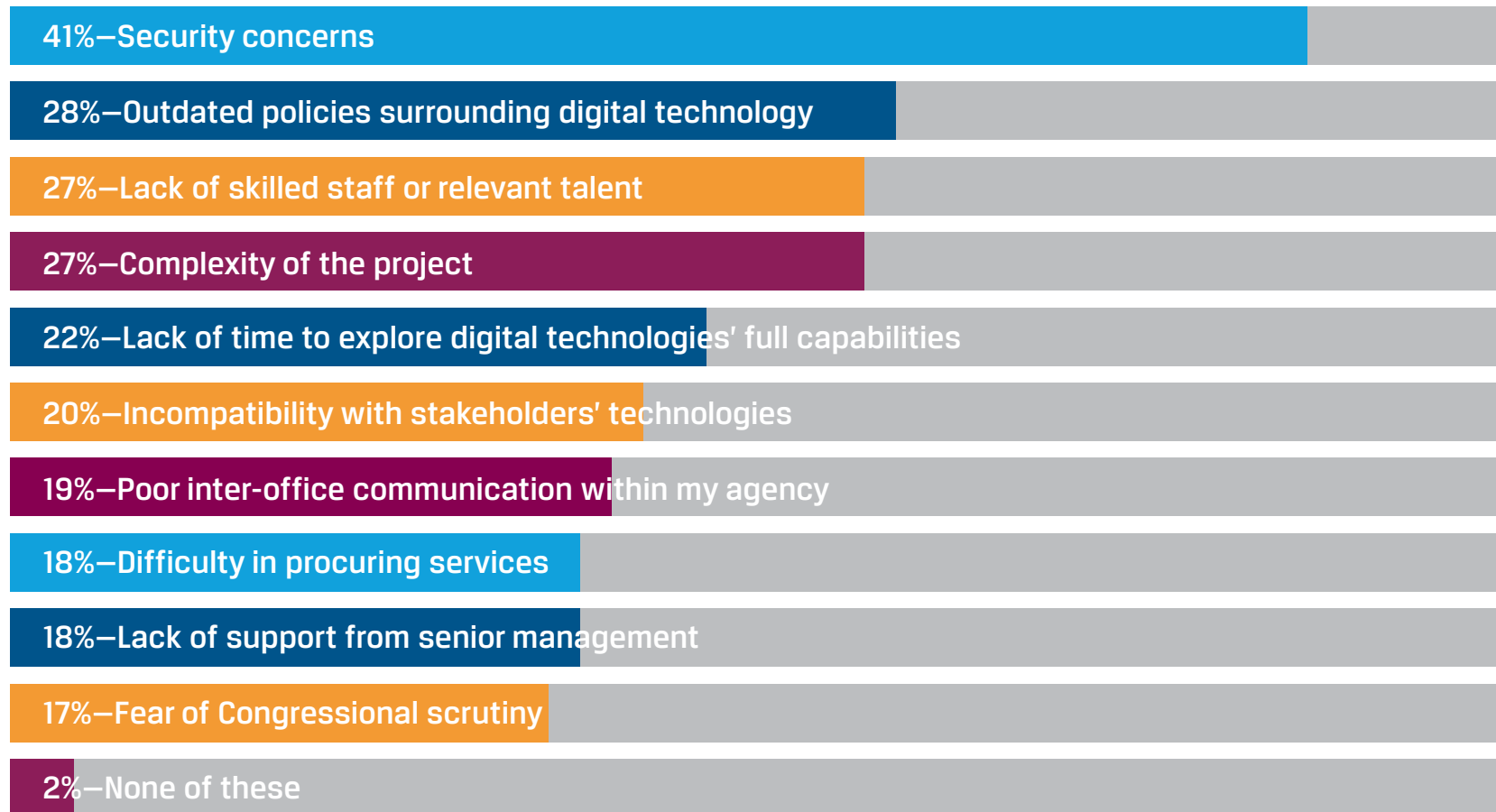


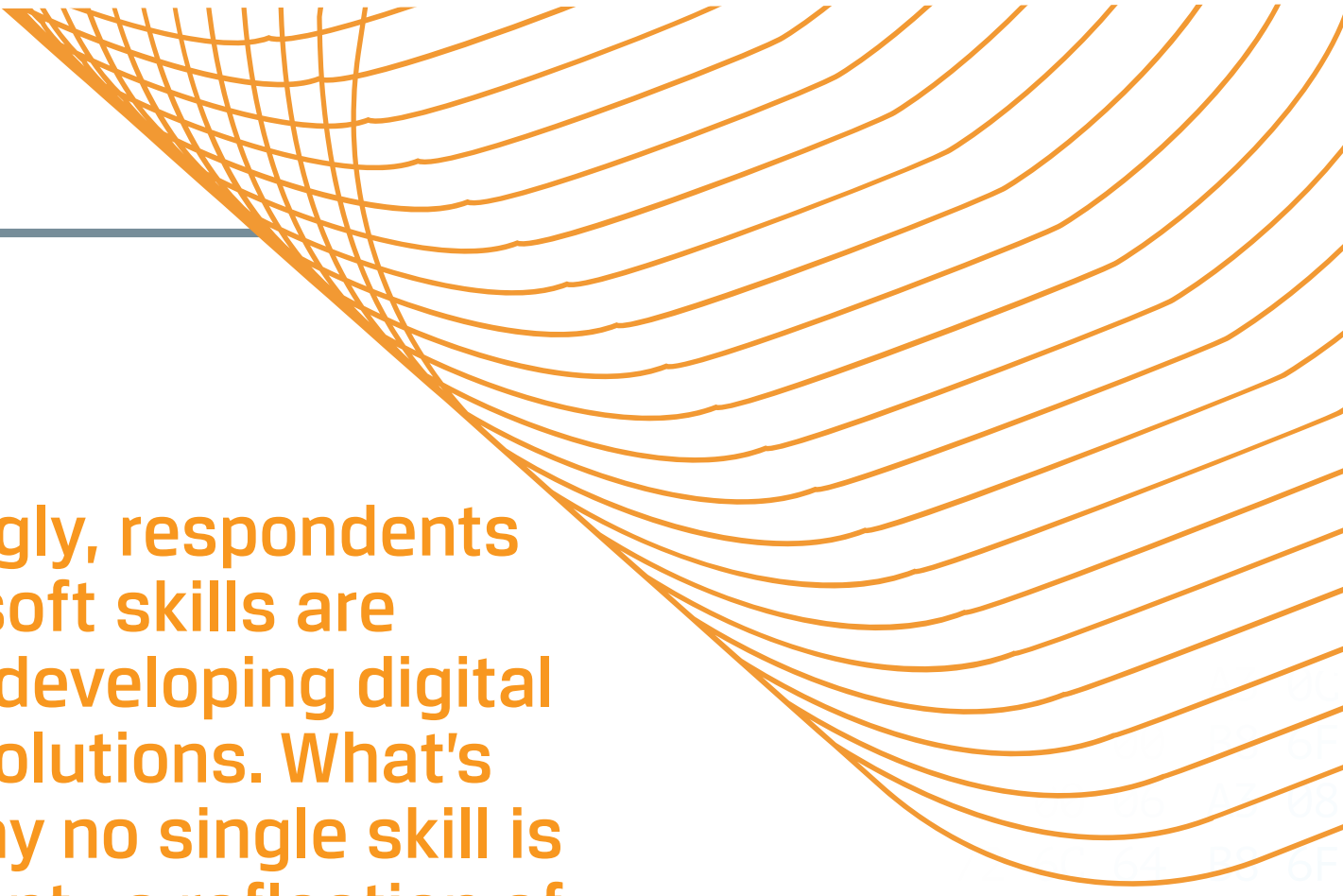


The obstacles to success included issues related to lack of skilled staff, project complexity, time management, communication, and lack of leadership support

If your agency had sufficient funding to deliver its most important service through digital means, which of the following, if any, would be the biggest obstacles to its success?

Finding 3.2



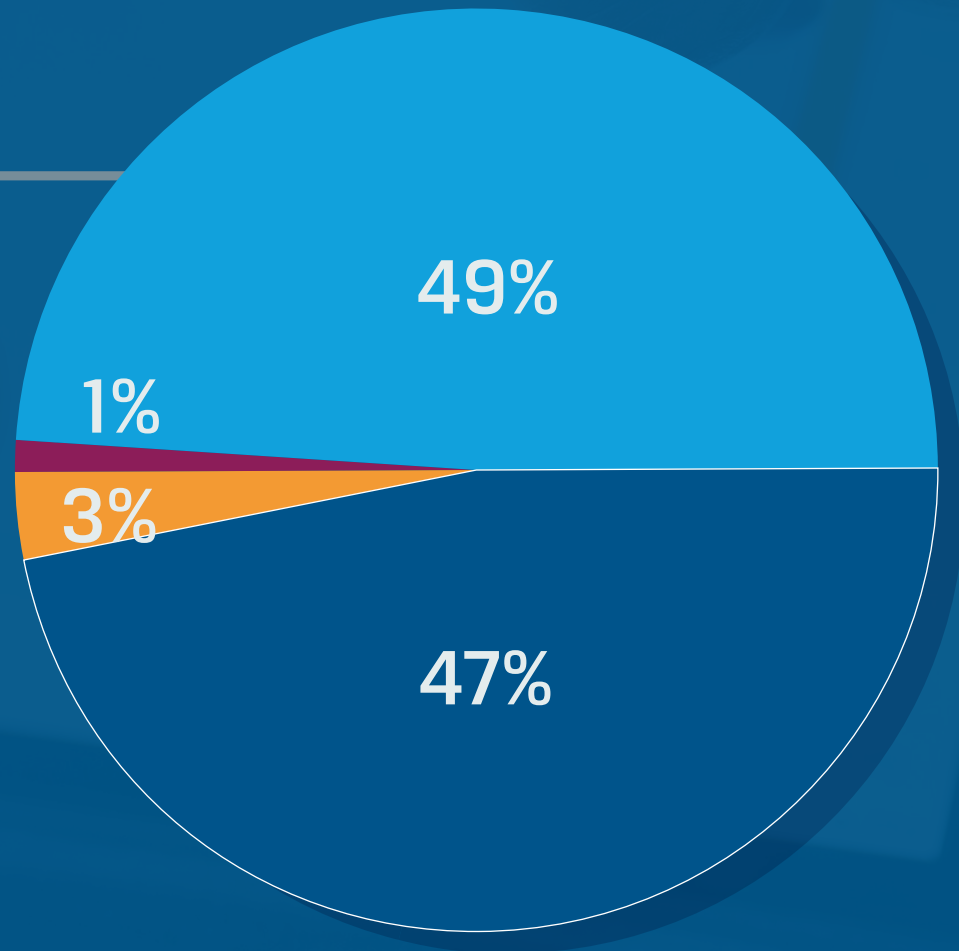
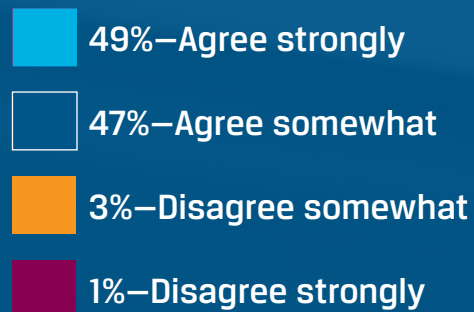


Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed that soft skills are essential for developing digital technology solutions. What's more, they say no single skill is most important—a reflection of the need for well-rounded talent

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Finding 3.3

Soft skills are just as important a qualification for the team developing a digital technology solution as hard skills (i.e., compared to skills such as coding or programming).



Which of the following are the most important "soft skills" for successfully implementing a digital solution at your agency (i.e., attributes that cannot be objectively measured, such as critical thinking, communication, and mission focus)?

Finding 3.4

35%—Ability to learn or adapt quickly

35%—Receptiveness to change or new ideas

32%—Staff collaboration or engagement

30%—Staff adaptability

25%—Technical savviness

23%—Time management skills

19%—Attention to detail

Recommended path forward

To develop an **integrated approach to digital transformation**, agencies should build a multi-disciplinary team that executes technology implementation and prioritizes user adoption. Leaders need to ensure that every department—including common omissions like HR—is represented to better **understand the needs** of the entire organization as it works to **apply digital transformation**. To ensure agency staffs internalize new solutions, leaders must develop trainings that focus on both hard and soft skills.

TOC

Executive
Summary

Imperative 1:
Culture

Imperative 2:
Experience

Imperative 3:
Approach

Conclusion

Conclusion

While digital transformation is an inherently complex process, it provides an unprecedented opportunity for federal agencies to regain public trust and achieve their missions. Never before in history have governments been able to create the type of positive and enduring change that technology makes possible today. For your agency to use this potential, you can start by creating a culture of innovation, prioritizing the citizen experience, and implementing an integrated approach to digital transformation. Focusing on these launch activities will position the federal government to launch its next moonshot: digital transformation that reignites citizen trust and satisfaction in the government.

Methodology and Demographics

The ICF Survey was conducted by Wakefield Research among 500 federal full-time employees, with 250 employees at levels GS-9 through GS-12 and 250 program level directors GS-13 or higher between February 1 and February 15, 2018, using an email invitation and an online survey. For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 4.4 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

All decimals are rounded to the nearest percentage point. This may result in certain numerical totals adding up to slightly more or slightly less than 100%.

Great change starts with great moments. ICF has honed its approach to transformation through a human-centered design approach and decades of mission-focused expertise.



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