



Private
Company Outlook
Digital Investment

April 2026

About the survey

Deloitte Private asked **leaders of 100 private companies** about their investment priorities around digital transformation and AI adoption over the next 12 months.

METHODOLOGY

Deloitte Private's pulse survey, "Private Company Outlook," gauges private company leaders' perspectives on opportunities and risks to business now and in the future. This survey looks specifically at priorities and investment in digital transformation and AI.

The survey of 100 privately held company leaders was conducted online by an independent research company between March 18th and March 24th, 2026. Respondents included C-level executives, board members, and partners/owners of private companies in the US with annual revenues of US\$100 million to US\$1 billion+.

Executive summary

Digital and AI are core near-term priorities and the pace of investment is accelerating.

Revenue growth (71%) and productivity (62%) are the top business priorities among private company executives surveyed, followed by 52% selecting “increasing the use of AI across the organization” as a top three priority – up from 22% at this time last year. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents report they are actively investing in digital transformation (including AI), almost double those investing in projects in limited/pilot form (33%).

Private companies are seeing ROI from AI investments, but there is a maturity gap.

Private companies earning \$500 million or more in annual revenue are actively investing in digital and AI initiatives at a higher rate (83%) than those earning under \$500 million (40%). When measuring ROI, 64% of higher-revenue companies surveyed report moderate or significant ROI from AI investments, compared with 11% for those with lower revenue.

Funding for digital investments is coming from private companies' existing financial resources.

Among private company leaders surveyed, 50% say that internal budget reprioritization will be the primary source of funding for these initiatives over the next 12 months, followed by existing operating capital (43%).

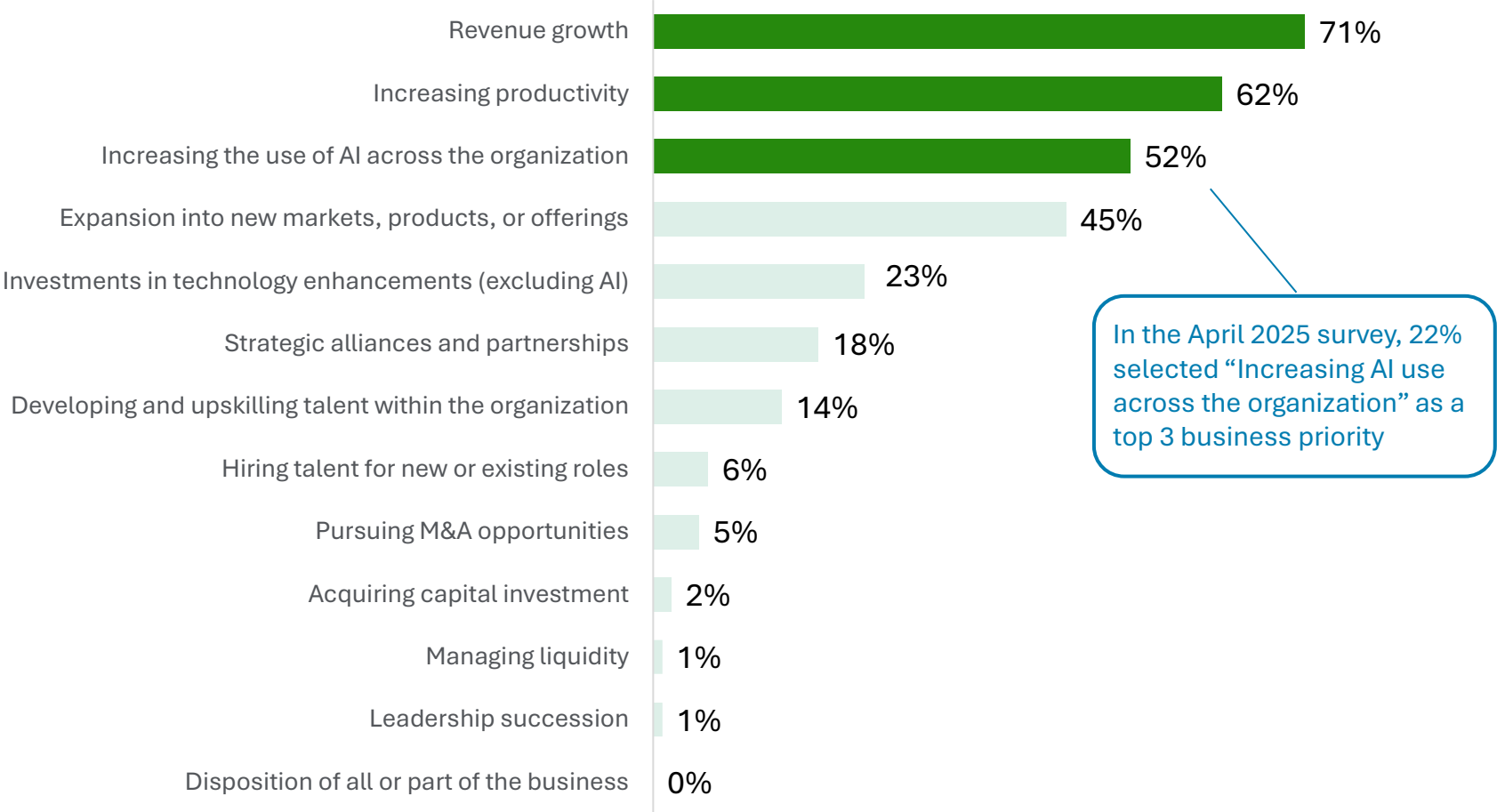
Private company boards are proactive around investments and compliance, but less so on technology risk and execution.

Executives surveyed said their organizations boards are proactive around technology investment (70%), cybersecurity oversight (67%) and data governance, privacy and regulatory compliance (64%). Fewer said their boards are proactive about the ethical use of technology (25%) or engaged in oversight of leadership capability to execute AI/digital transformation (22%).

Revenue growth and productivity lead the list of near-term business priorities among private company executives surveyed, with over half (52%) indicating AI adoption is a top-tier strategic focus for their organization, up from 22% at this time last year.

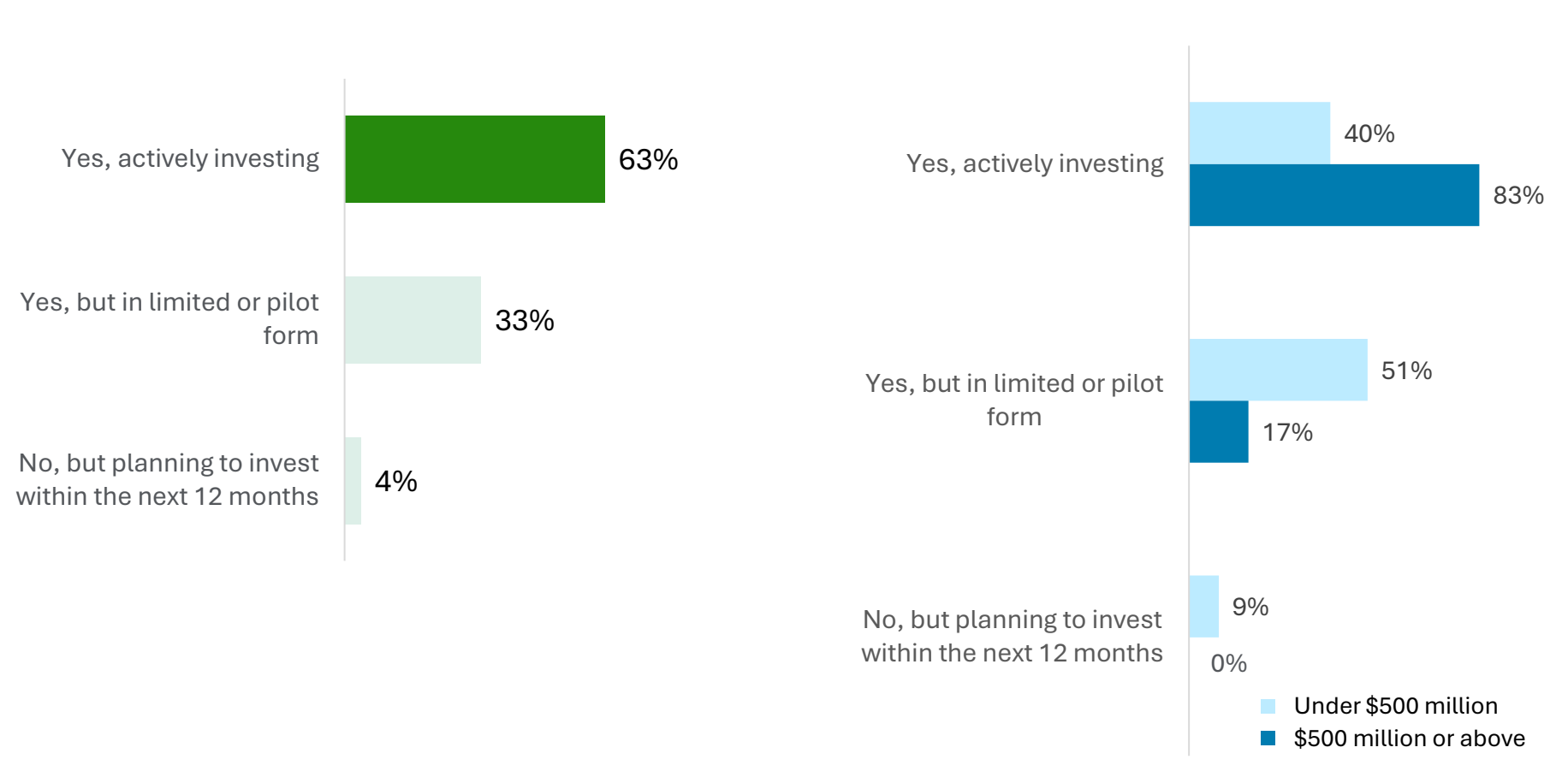
What are the main priorities for your business over the next 12 months?

Select top 3.



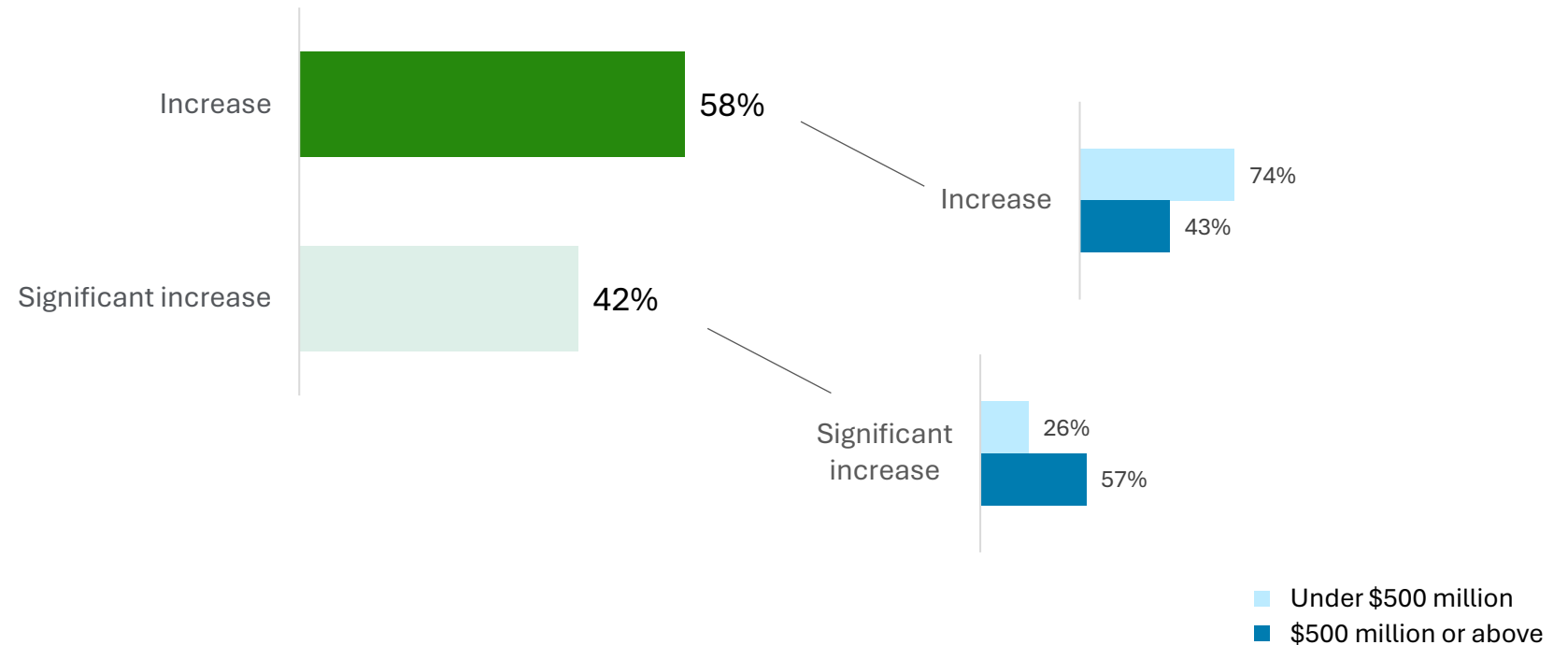
Private companies with higher annual revenue are predominantly active in digital transformation initiatives, while companies with annual revenue under \$500 million are still progressing through pilot stages, according to surveyed executives.

Is your organization currently investing in digital transformation initiatives (including AI)?



While all private company executives surveyed say their organizations plan to increase investments in digital transformation in the next 12 months, higher-revenue organizations are planning a more significant increase.

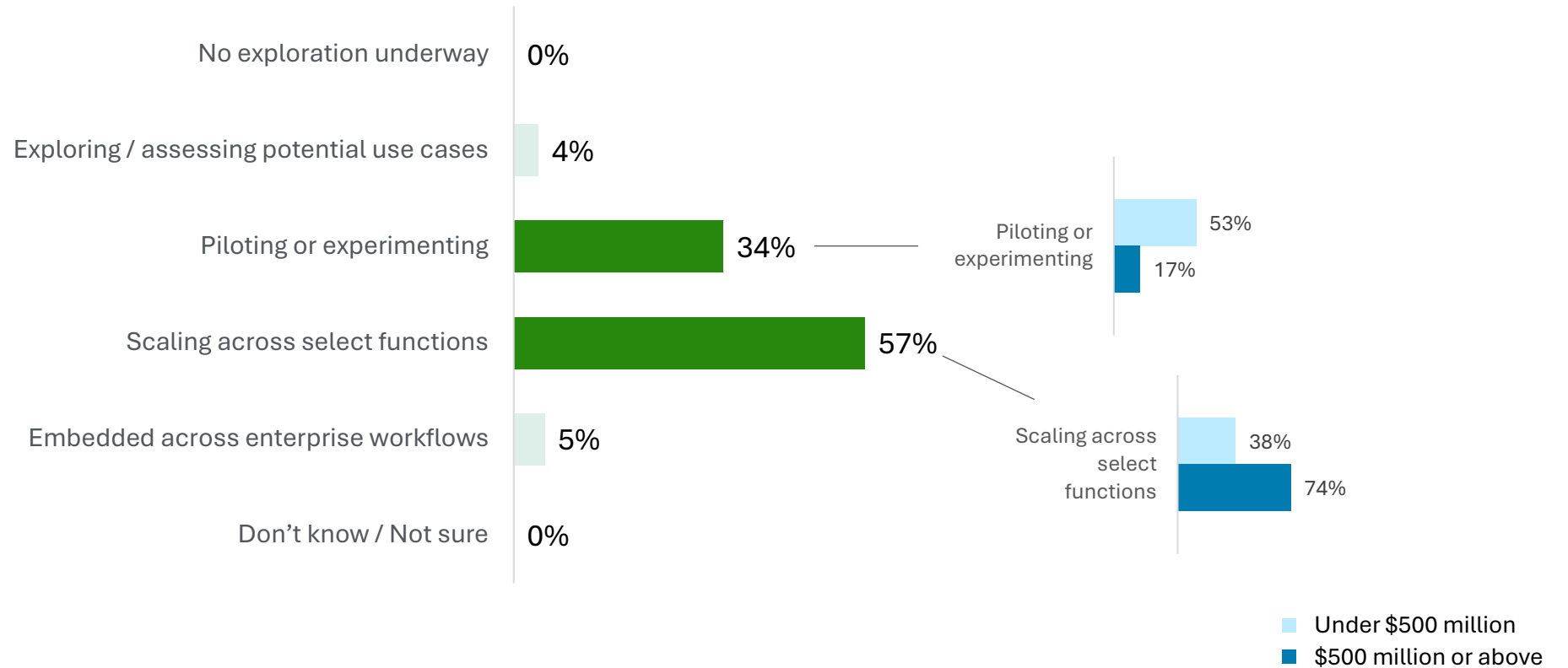
Is your organization planning to increase or decrease investments in digital transformation initiatives (including any investments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools or technologies) over the next 12 months?



Private company executives surveyed report their organizations are transitioning from pilot to scaled AI deployment, with higher-revenue organizations significantly further along.

Which best describes your organization's current stage of AI adoption?

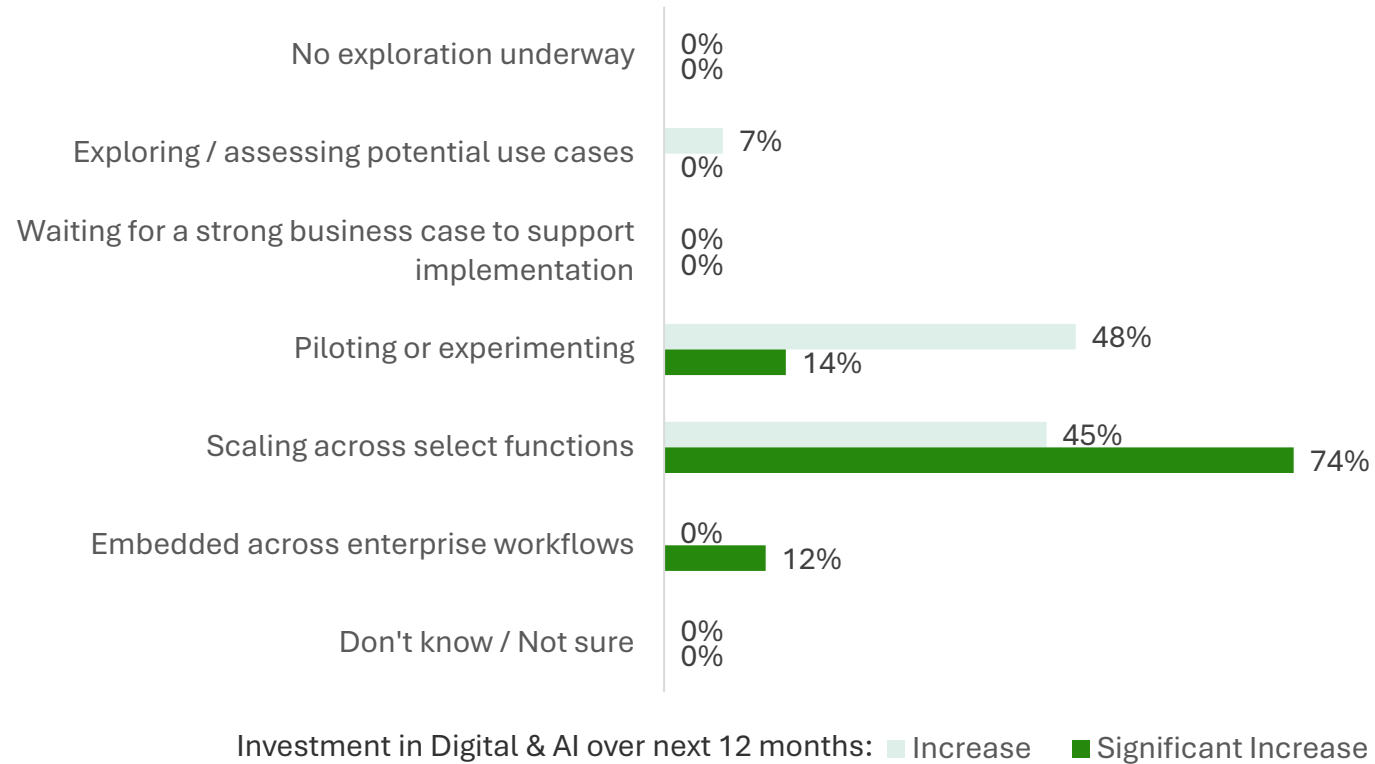
Select one.



Private companies scaling and embedding AI are more likely to significantly increase digital and AI investment in the next 12 months, while those in pilot stages are taking a more moderate approach, according to respondents.

Which best describes your organization's current stage of AI adoption?

Select one.



Digital and AI investments are primarily concentrated in data & analytics, IT, customer experience, and marketing and sales, according to the survey.

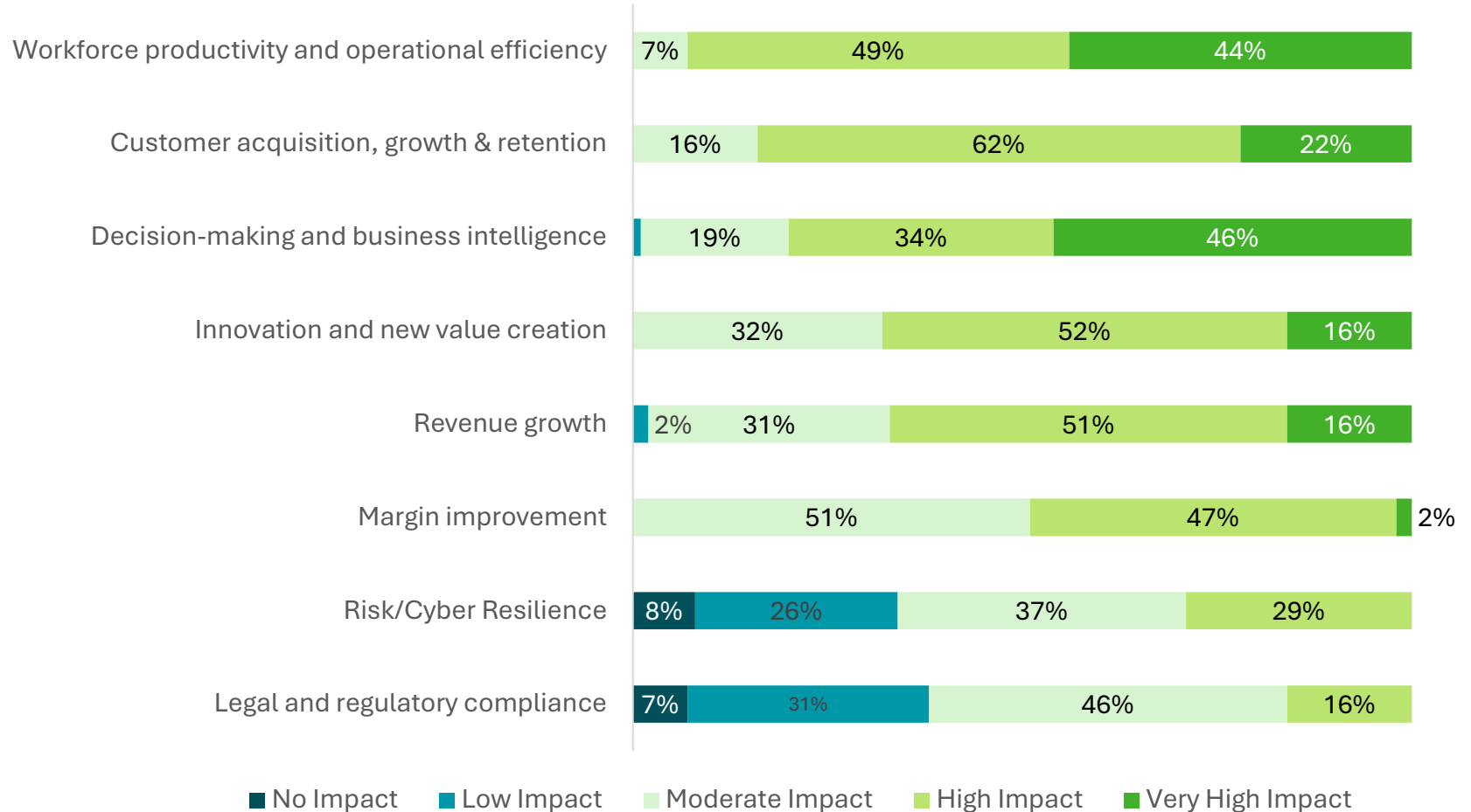
Which functions or business areas are being prioritized in your organization's digital transformation and AI implementation efforts?

Select all that apply.



In the survey, 93% of private company executives anticipate their organization’s digital investments will have a high/very high impact on workforce productivity and operational efficiency but have comparatively lower expectations around risk and compliance.

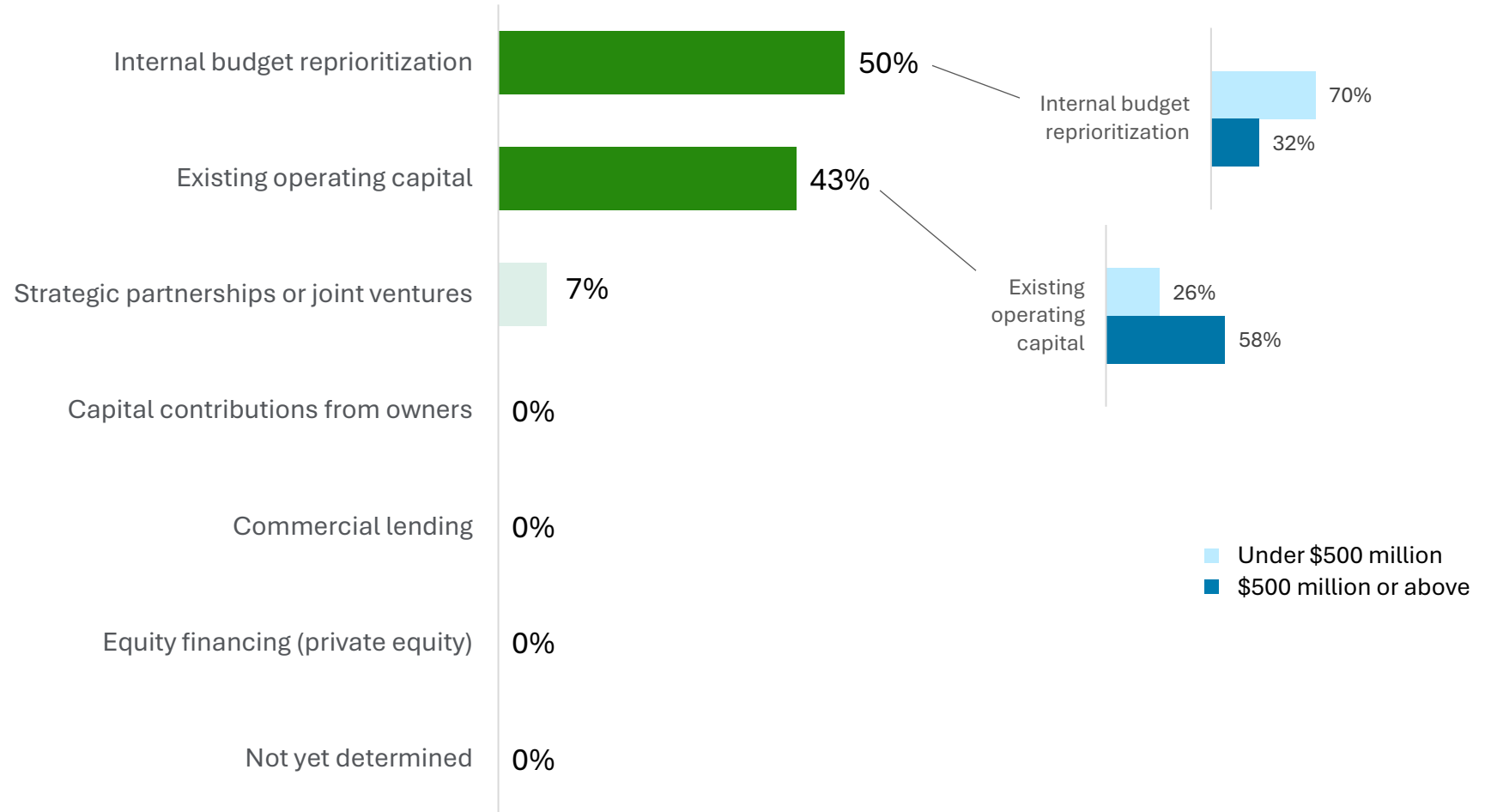
Where do you anticipate the most impact from your organization’s digital investments (including AI) over the next 12 months?



Executives surveyed indicate private companies are sourcing digital investments internally in the next 12 months. Companies in the higher-revenue range are largely reprioritizing budgets, while those in the lower-revenue category are turning to existing operating capital.

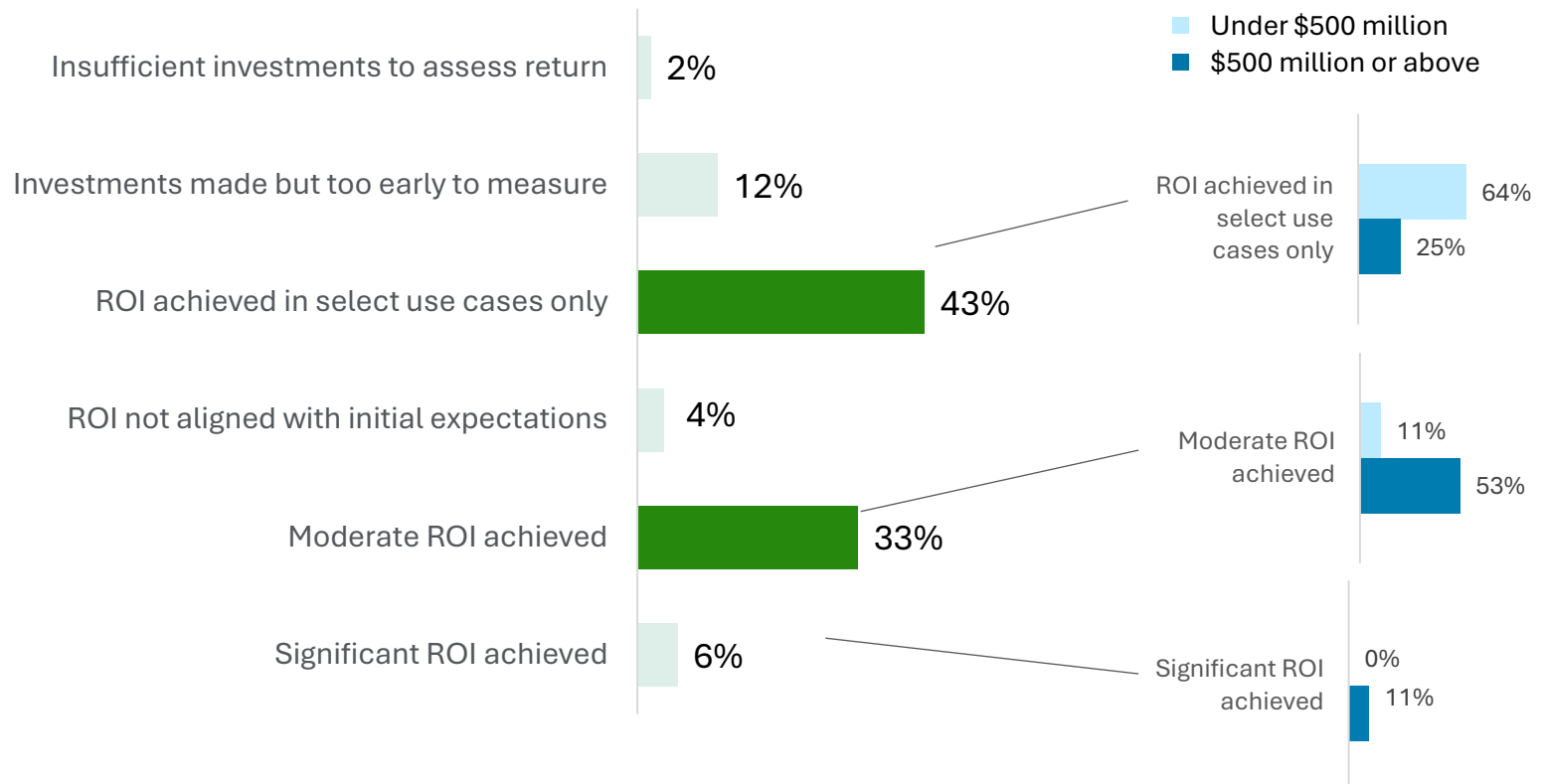
What is your organization's primary source of funding for these initiatives over the next 12 months?

Select one.



While ROI from AI is evident among respondents, returns are concentrated in select use cases among smaller-revenue private companies, whereas larger ones report more value.

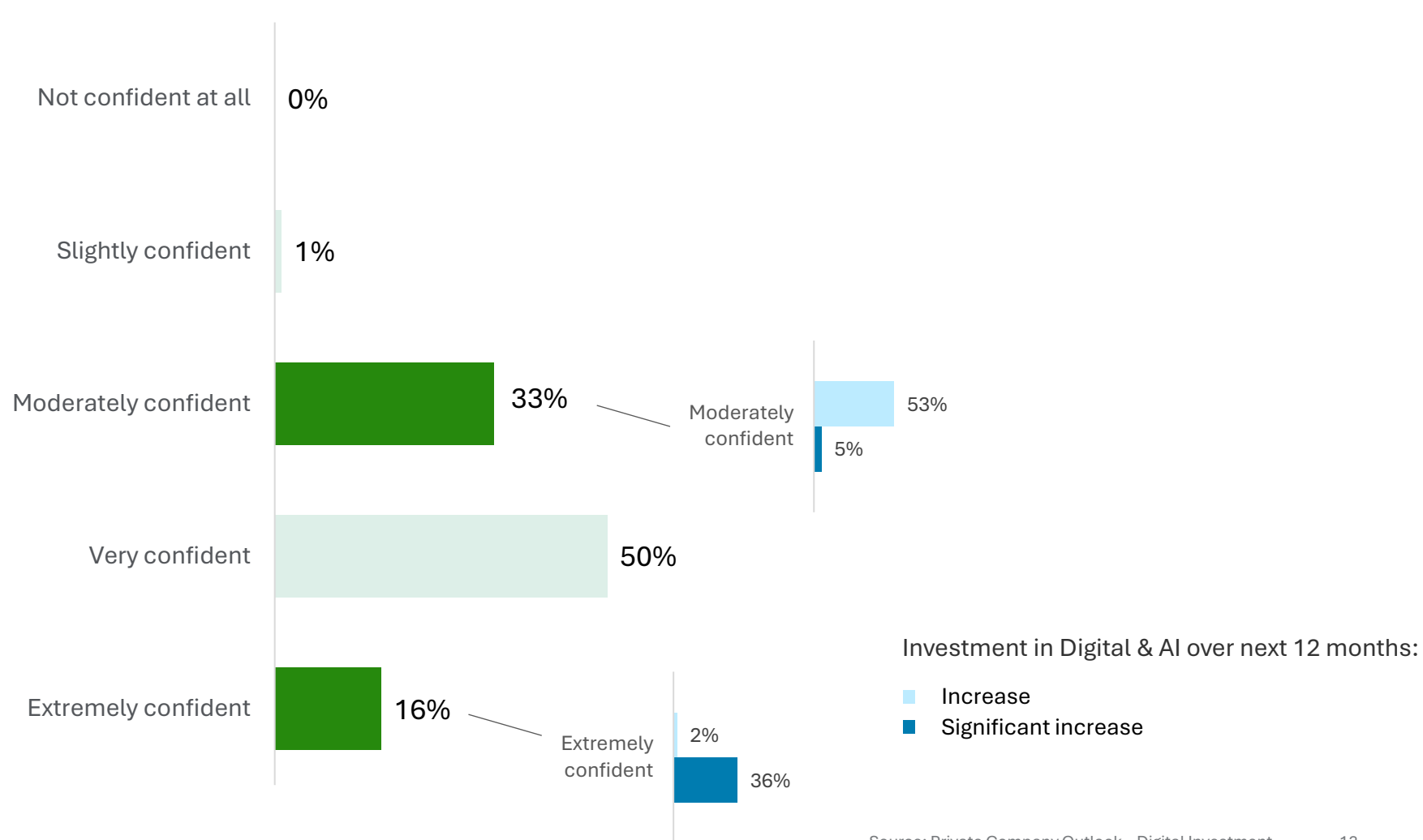
Did your organization see a financial return on investment in AI this past year?



A majority of organizations (58%) scaling AI across select functions reported a moderate ROI

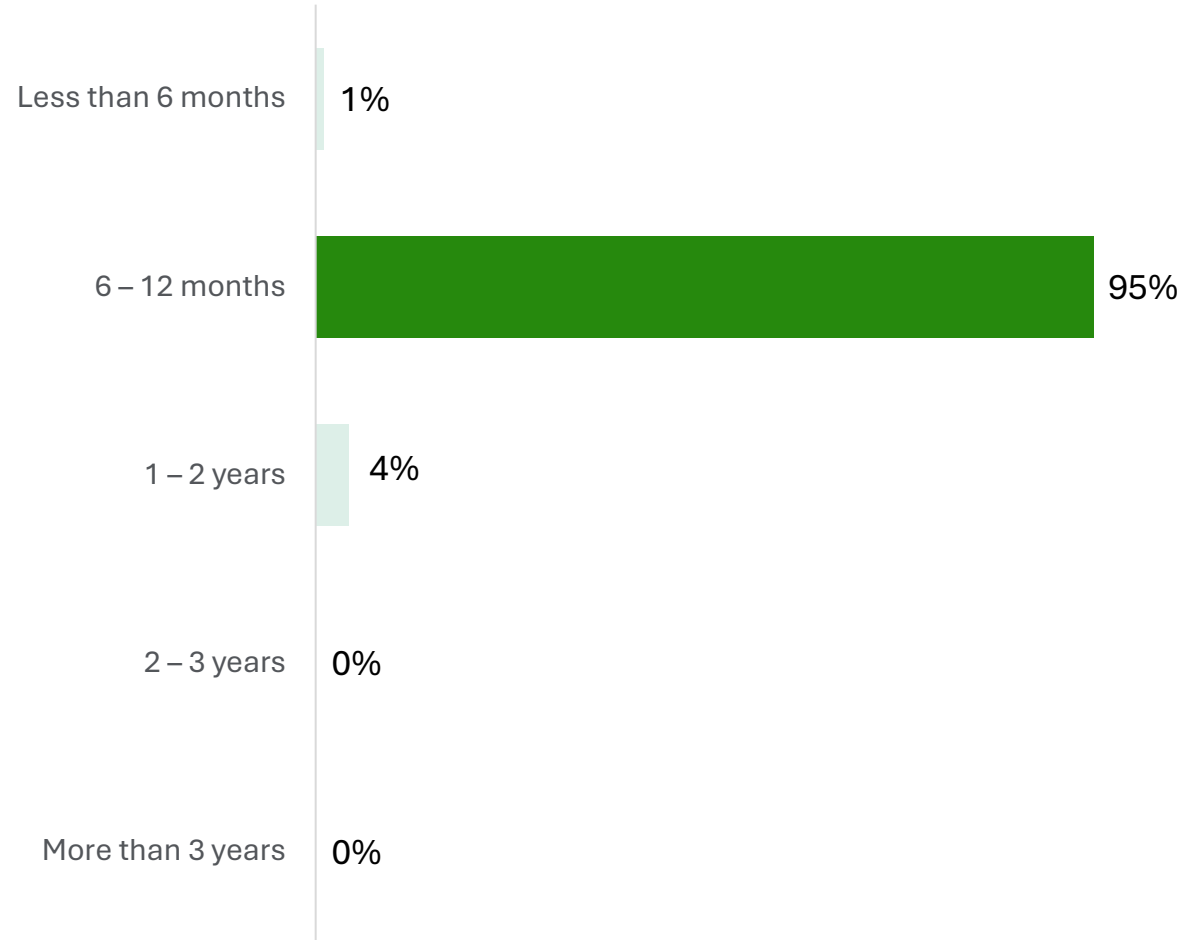
Organizations with higher confidence in the anticipated ROI from digital and AI investments are more likely to increase investment, while those with moderate confidence take a more cautious approach.

How confident are you that your organization will realize the expected ROI from its digital and AI investments over the next 12 months?



Private company executives' expectations for realizing digital and AI investments' value are concentrated in the near term, according to the survey.

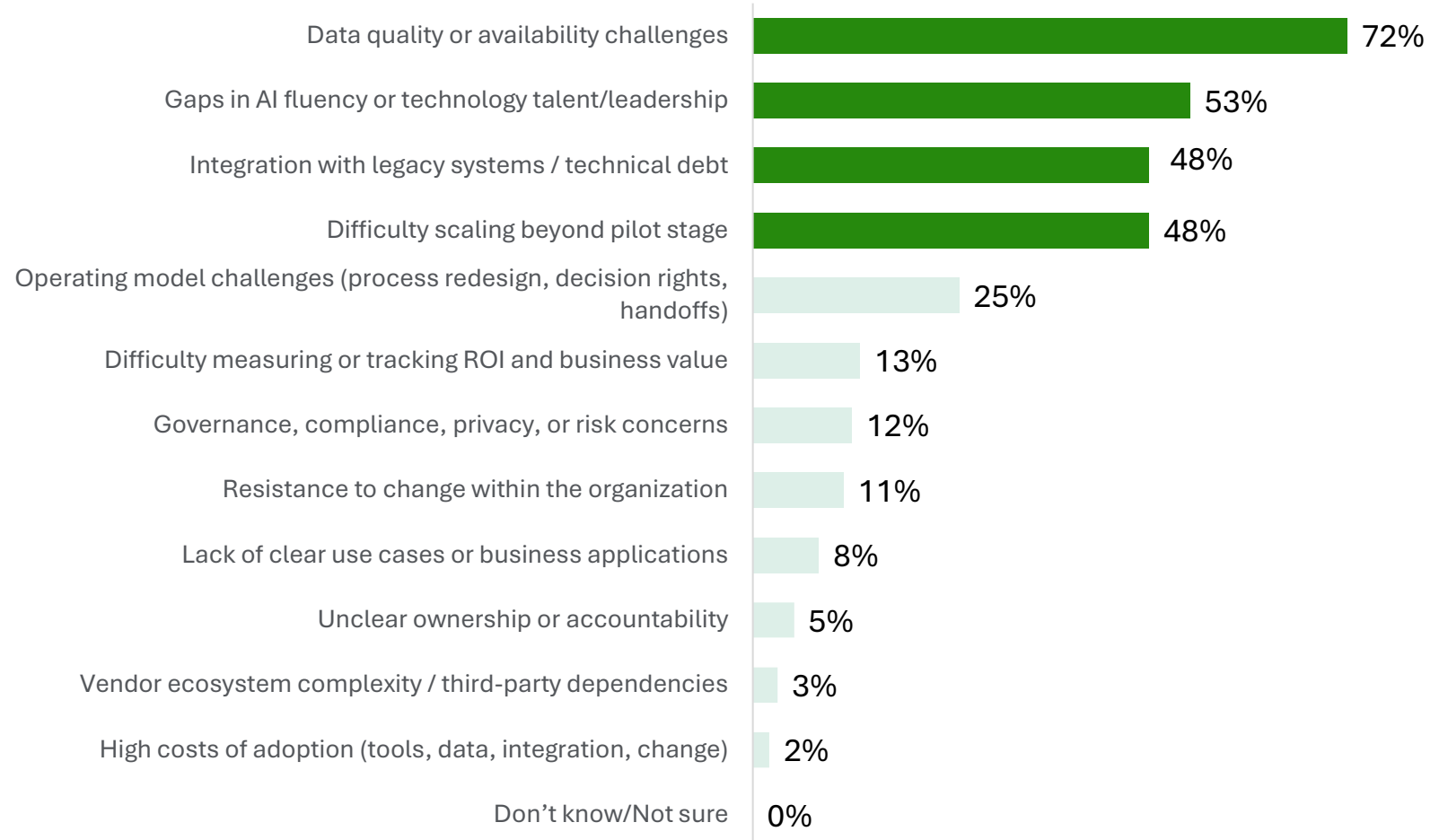
What is your organization's expected timeline for realizing measurable value from digital or AI investments?



Private company executives surveyed cite data quality, talent gaps, legacy system integration and scaling beyond pilots as the primary barriers to realizing the full value of digital transformation and AI.

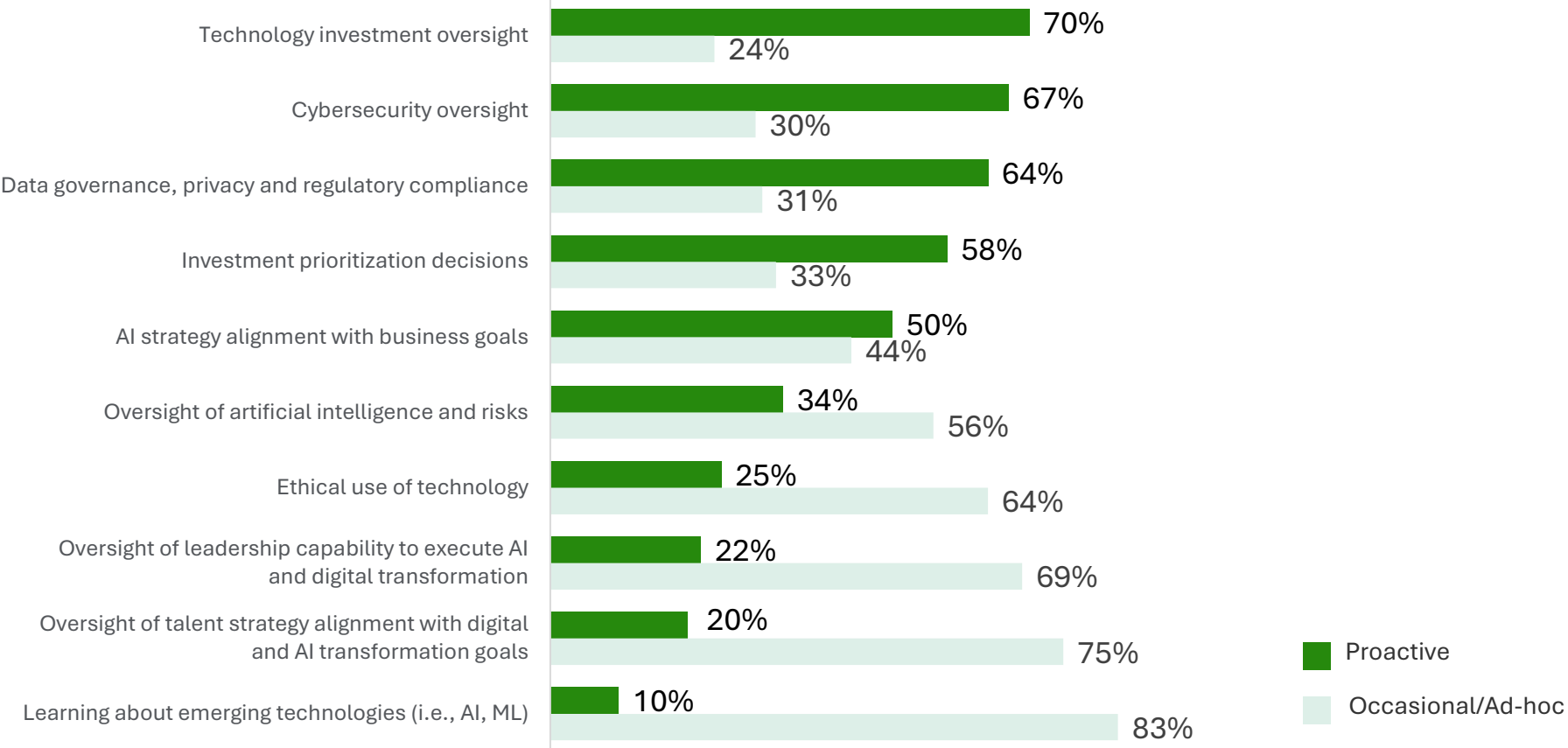
Which factors do you expect most limit your organization's ability to realize the full value of digital transformation & AI applications going forward?

Select top 3.



Private company boards are highly engaged in technology, cyber and data governance areas but less consistent across oversight of AI risks, ethics, execution and talent strategy associated with digital transformation and AI, according to executives surveyed.

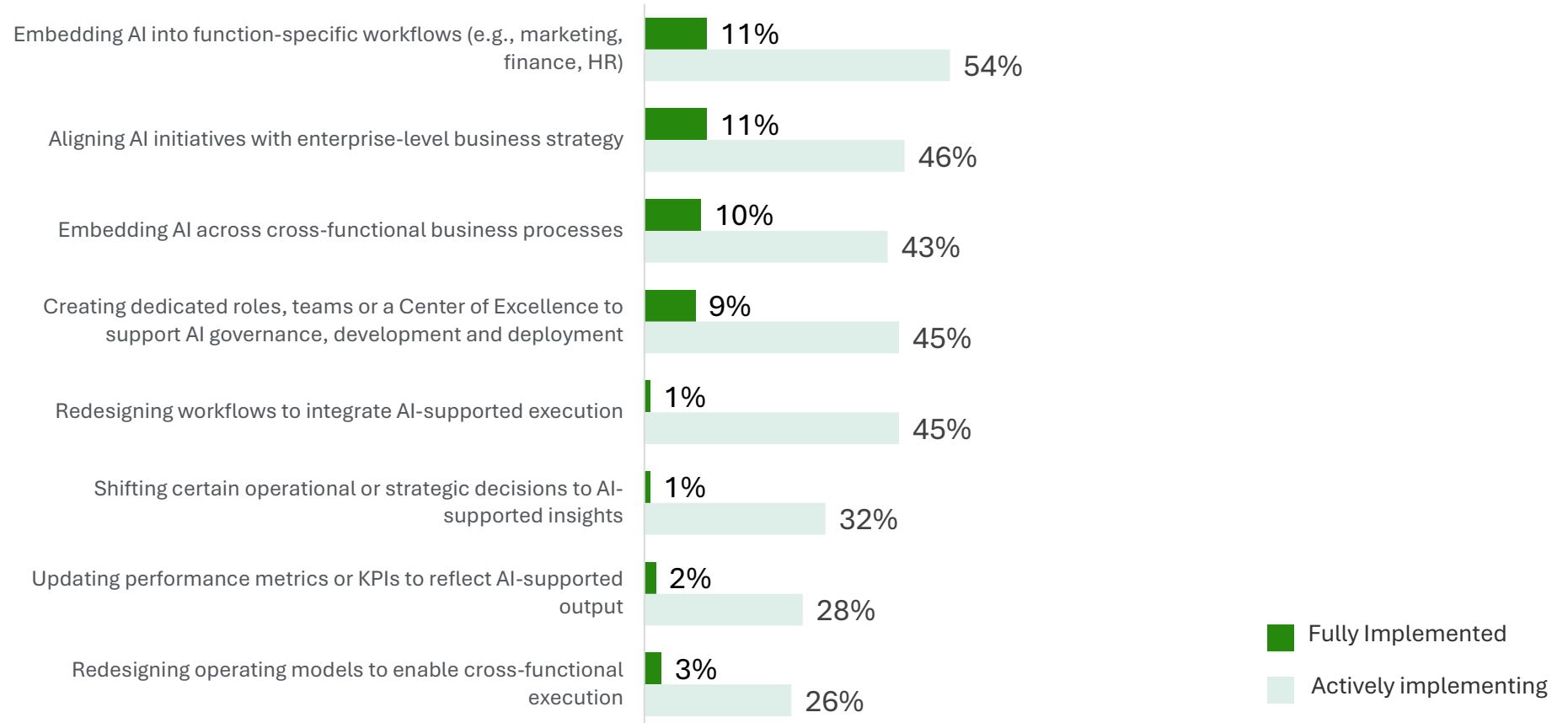
How would you describe the engagement from your board or governing body in the following areas related to digital transformation and risk oversight?



In response to digital or AI adoption, private companies surveyed are primarily implementing changes to workflows and enterprise strategy.

To what extent is your organization implementing the following changes in response to digital or AI adoption?

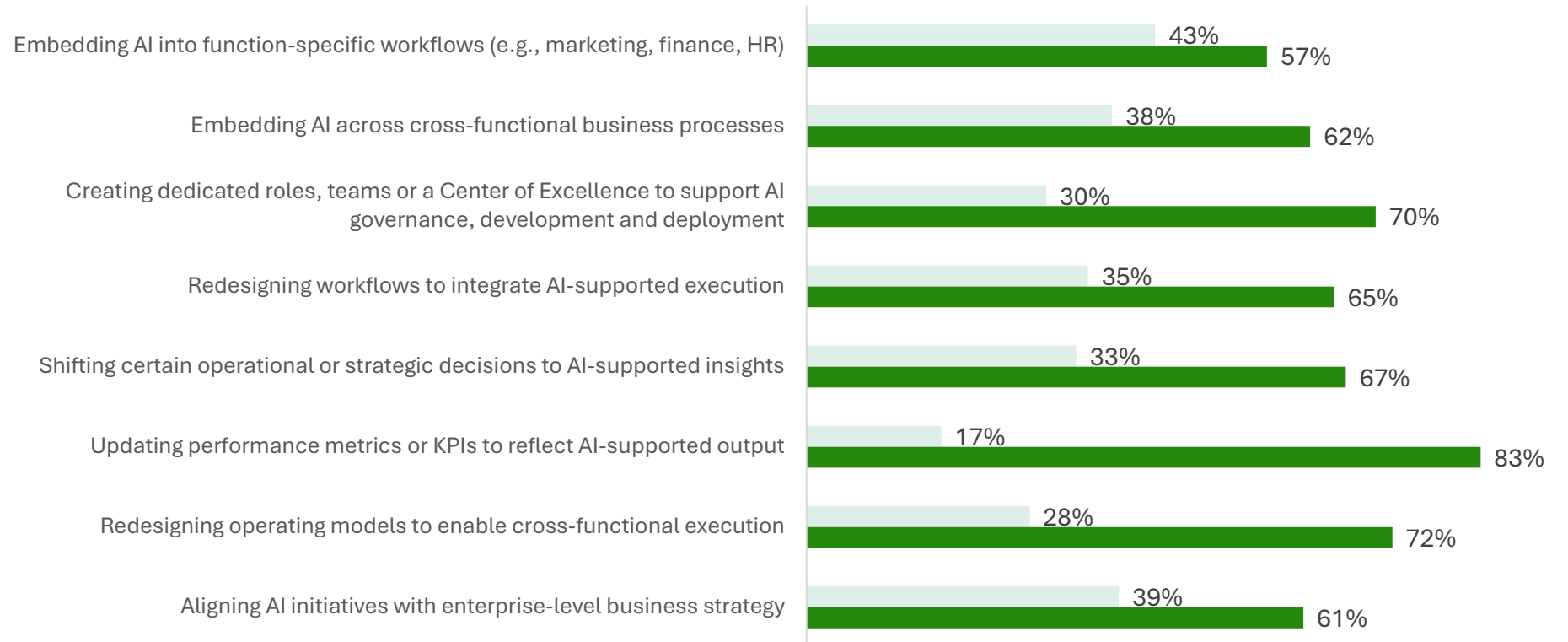
(T2B)



Organizations with higher revenues are translating AI adoption into structural change, aligning KPIs and redesigning operating structures, while those with smaller revenues are focused on functional deployment, according to respondents.

To what extent is your organization implementing the following changes in response to digital or AI adoption?

(Actively implementing and fully implemented)

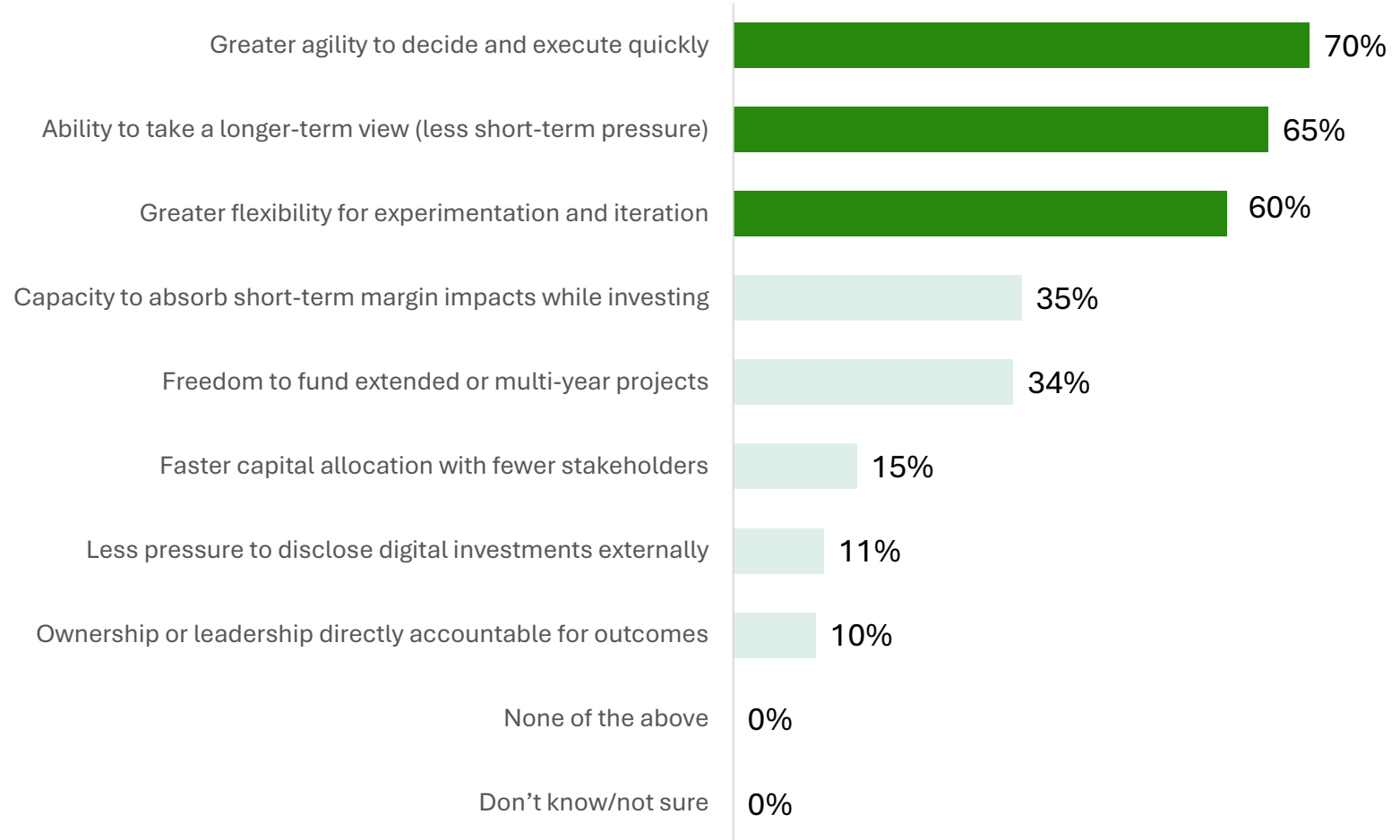


■ Under \$500 million
■ \$500 million or above

Speed, agility, and decision-making flexibility are seen as the key advantages of private companies when pursuing digital and AI transformation initiatives, according to executives surveyed.

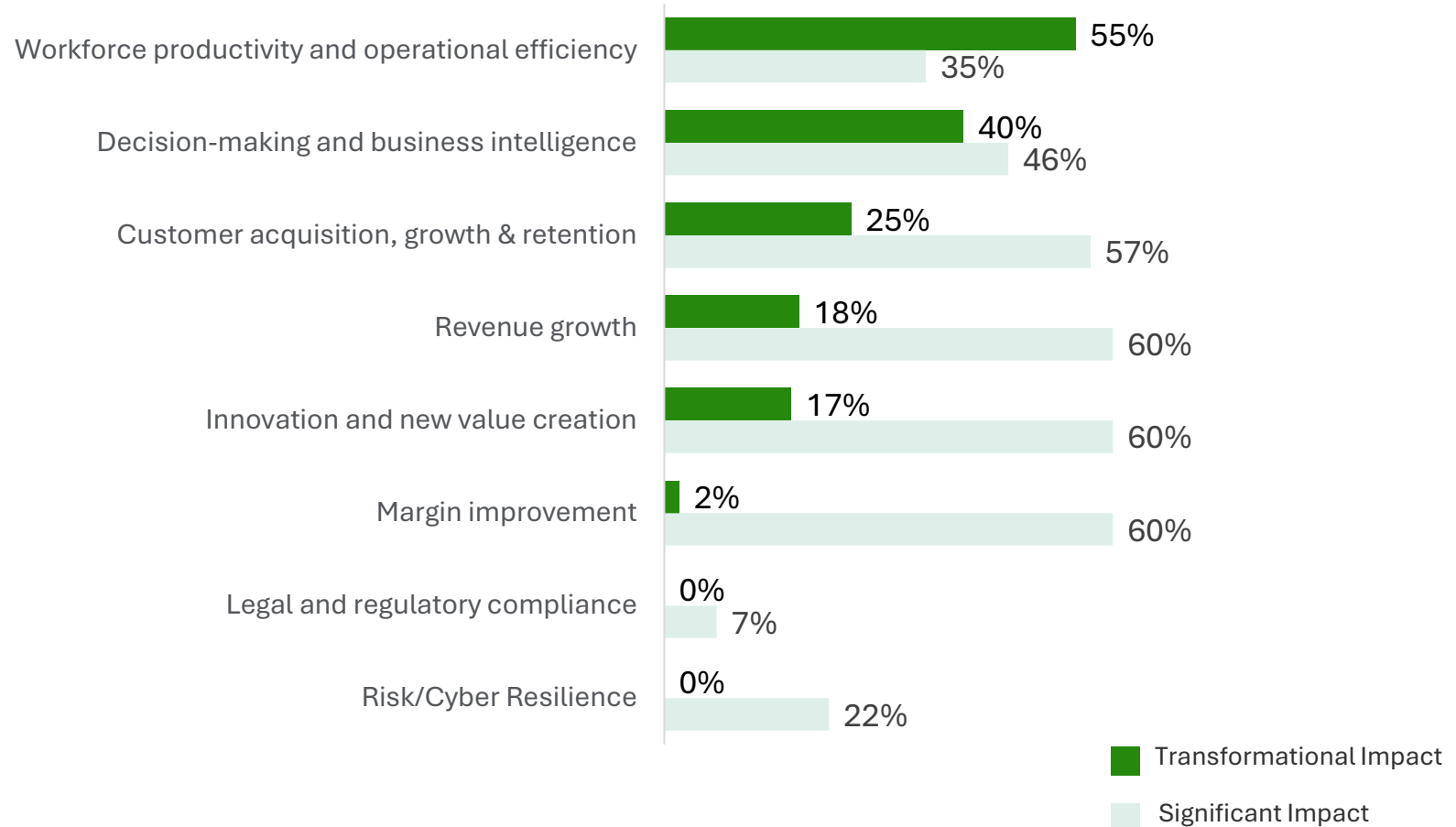
Which structural advantages of being a privately held company most enable your organization to pursue digital or AI transformation initiatives?

Select up to 3.



Over a 24-month horizon, private company leaders surveyed expect high-end impact in operational and growth outcomes.

Looking ahead to the next 24 months, how significant do you expect the overall business impact of your organization's digital and AI investments to be?





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