GITEX
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY REPORT 2024
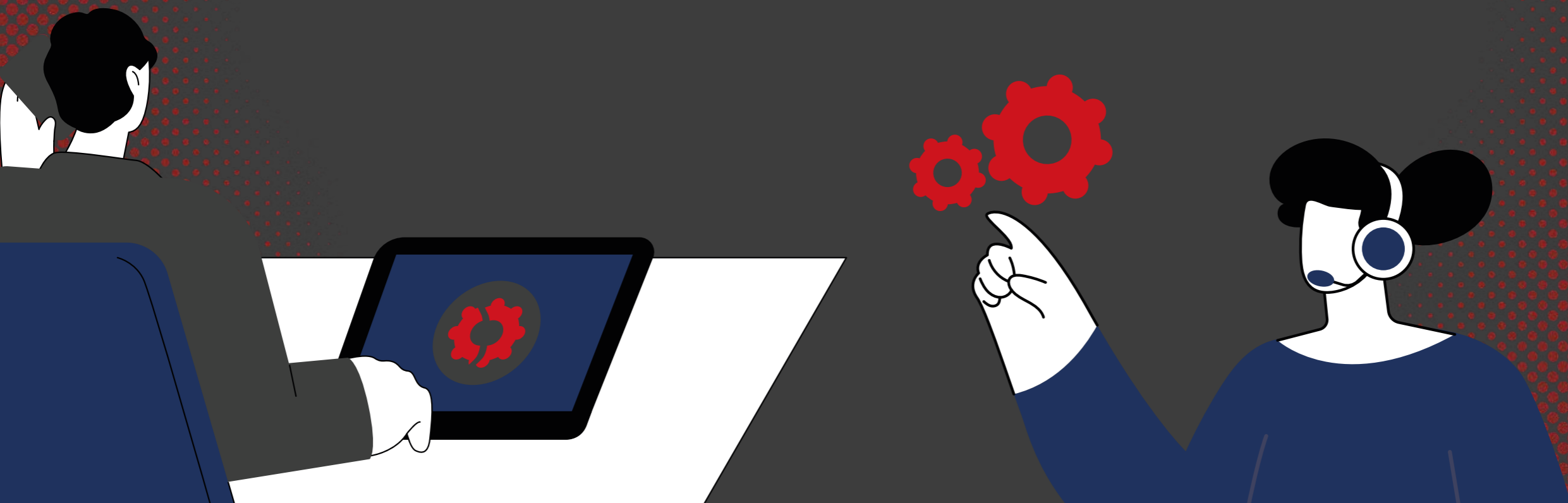
A CXO PRIORITIES | REPORTS, EVENTS & WEBINARS | Report

in collaboration with

GITEX GLOBAL

Knowledge Partner

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INTRODUCTION

The Middle East has long been a region at the forefront of innovation. From impressive Smart Cities to flying cars, AI to breathtaking BIM projects, there is no shortage of exciting technology success stories that are transforming the region and its people.

All industries are using technology to provide better experiences for customers while increasing productivity and, ultimately, driving business growth. For CIOs in the Middle East, understanding how best to approach technology investments is crucial – and can be challenging. With so many emerging technologies, solutions and vendors vying for business, being able to prioritise is key.

To better understand the regional technology landscape, CXO Priorities, in collaboration with GITEX Global, surveyed 150 C-level executives from across the Middle East to provide insights into the following key areas:

• Infrastructure
• Cybersecurity
• Automation and AI
• Investment priorities

Through our survey of 150 leaders, we have obtained key insights into digital technology strategies across the region and highlighted what businesses are looking for when it comes to prioritising investment.
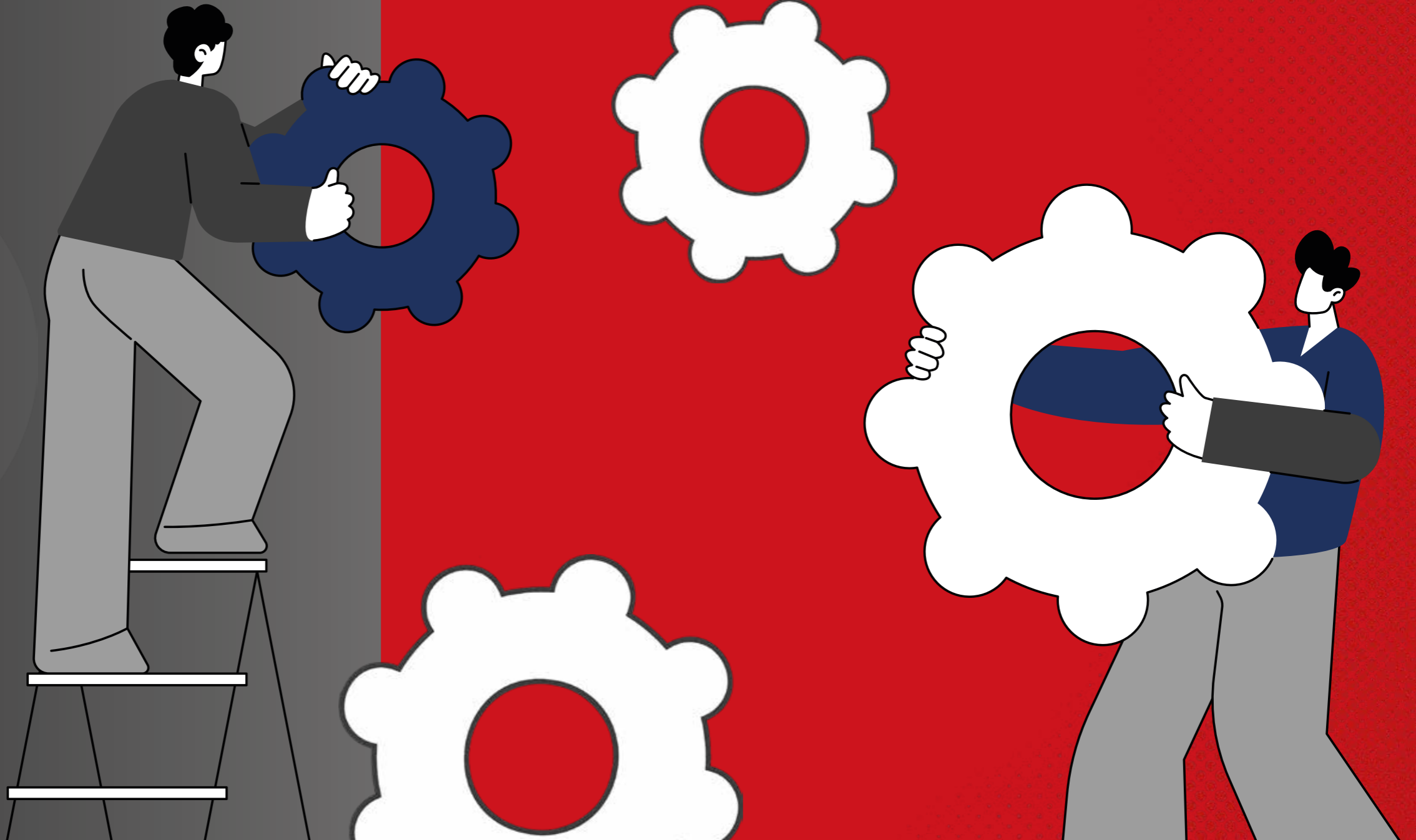
KEY FINDINGS

- Over four-fifths (**81%**) of organisations have **increased investment in Digital Transformation projects** over the past 12 months

- **Employee productivity (21%**) and **faster time to market (16%**) are the top priorities in digitalisation efforts, followed by **automation** and **enhancing customer experiences** (both **14%**)

- There is a noticeable shift towards **cloud solutions**, with **50%** adopting private, public, multi-cloud, or hybrid models

- The responses show **diverse long-term infrastructure strategies**, with **36%** of respondents favouring **hybrid models**, reflecting a balance between cloud and on-premises solutions

- **Cybersecurity** remains a critical focus, with businesses largely assured in their current defences, though a small portion still see room for improvement

- A significant majority of respondents feel **secure** about their organisation's **cybersecurity measures** with **89%** expressing either **confidence** or **strong confidence** in their protection against attacks

- The findings highlight a crucial shift towards **prioritising expertise over cost**, with **technology skills (21%**) and the number of **skilled resources** (**21%**) ranking highest

- More organisations are in the process of deploying **automation solutions** (**36%** compared to 24% last year)

- Almost half (**49%**) of respondents agreed that **automation** would enable them to achieve their **long-term business goals**

WHO TOOK PART IN THE SURVEY?

Job titles: CIO, CTO, CISO, Head of IT
Countries: United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA),
                      Qatar, Bahrain, Oman
Company size: 500+ (predominantly 1,000+)
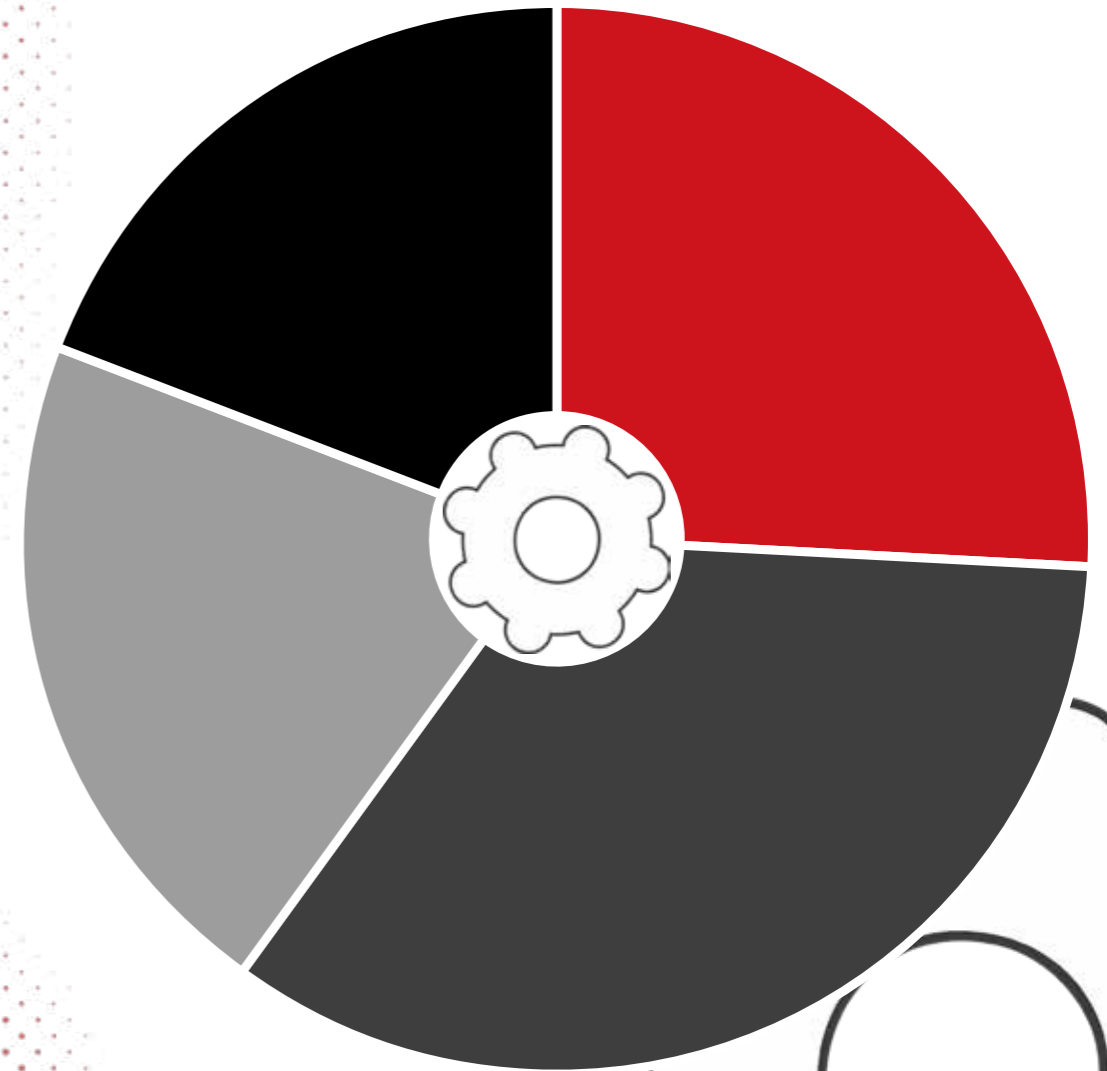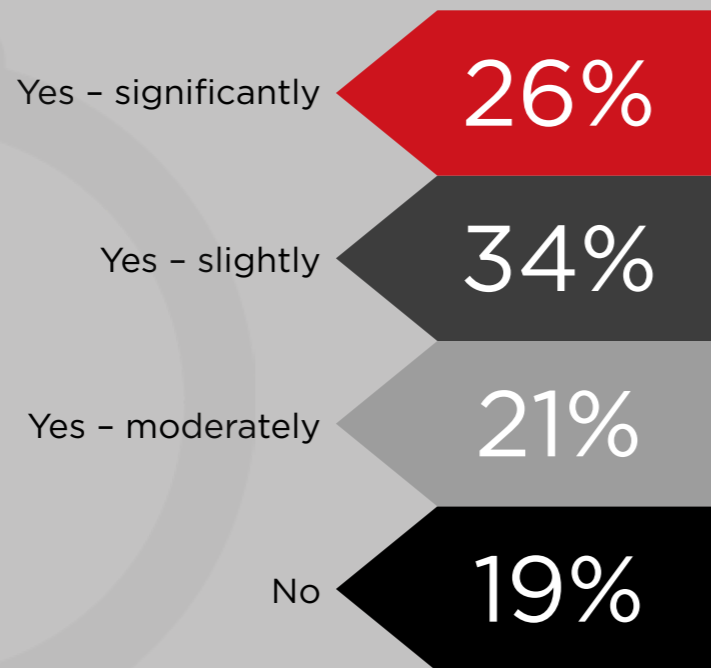**Verticals:**   All verticals excluding technology

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SECTION**1**
INFRASTRUCTURE

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Has your organisation increased investment in Digital Transformation projects in the last 12 months?

Yes – significantly **26%**

Yes – slightly **34%**

Yes – moderately **21%**

No **19%**

KEY FINDINGS

Over four-fifths (81%) of organisations have increased investment in Digital Transformation projects over the past 12 months. Among these, 34% report slight increases, 26% significant and 21% moderate. Only 19% have not increased their investment, reiterating the strong trend towards prioritising Digital Transformation.

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Cost-savings **10%**

Address technical skills shortages within the organisation **4%**

Faster time to market **16%**

Employee productivity **21%**

Automation **14%**

Offer better customer experiences **14%**

Increased agility **13%**

Greater security **8%**

QUESTION 2

Which of the following are most important to you in your digitalisation journey? Please select top two.
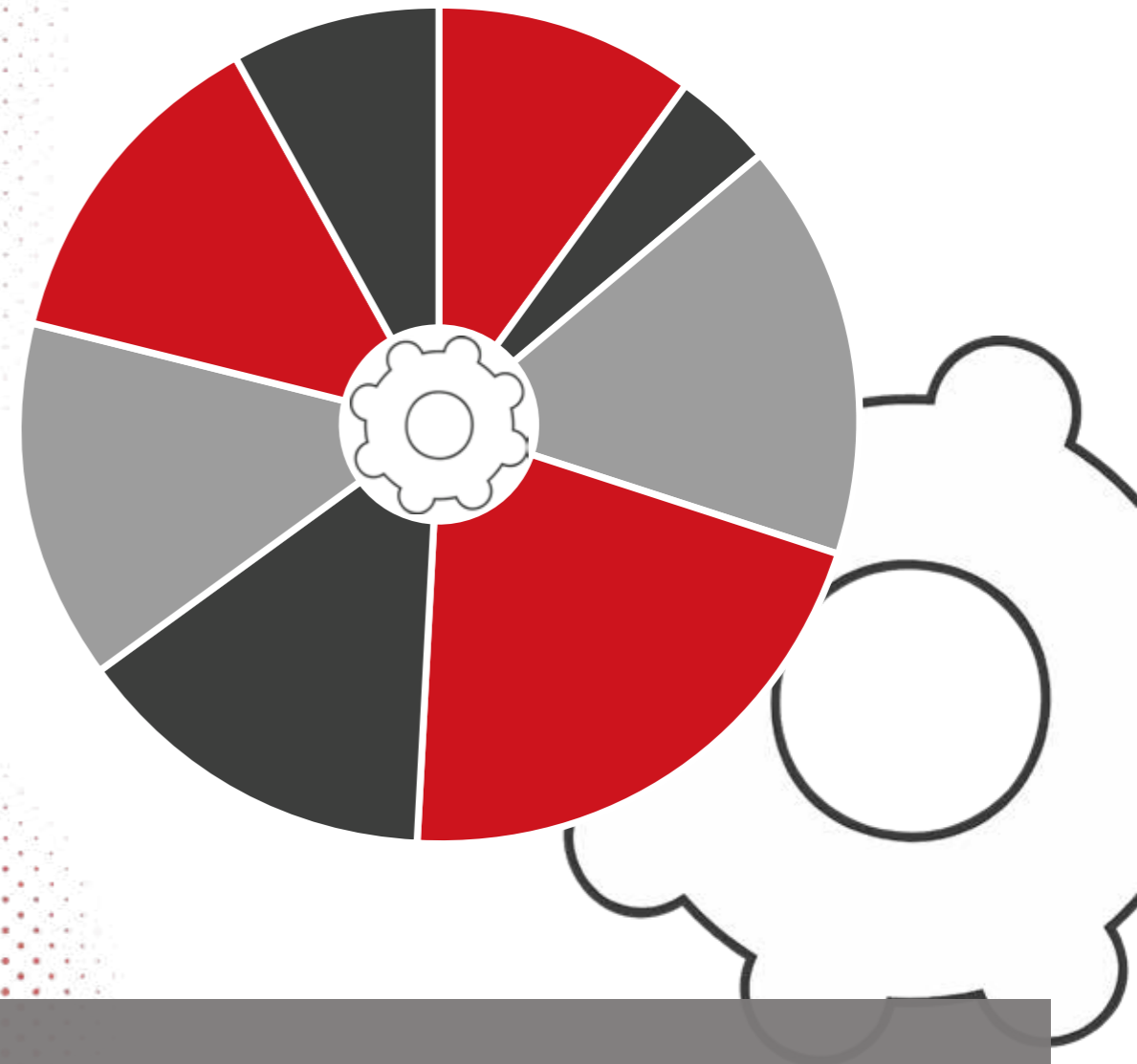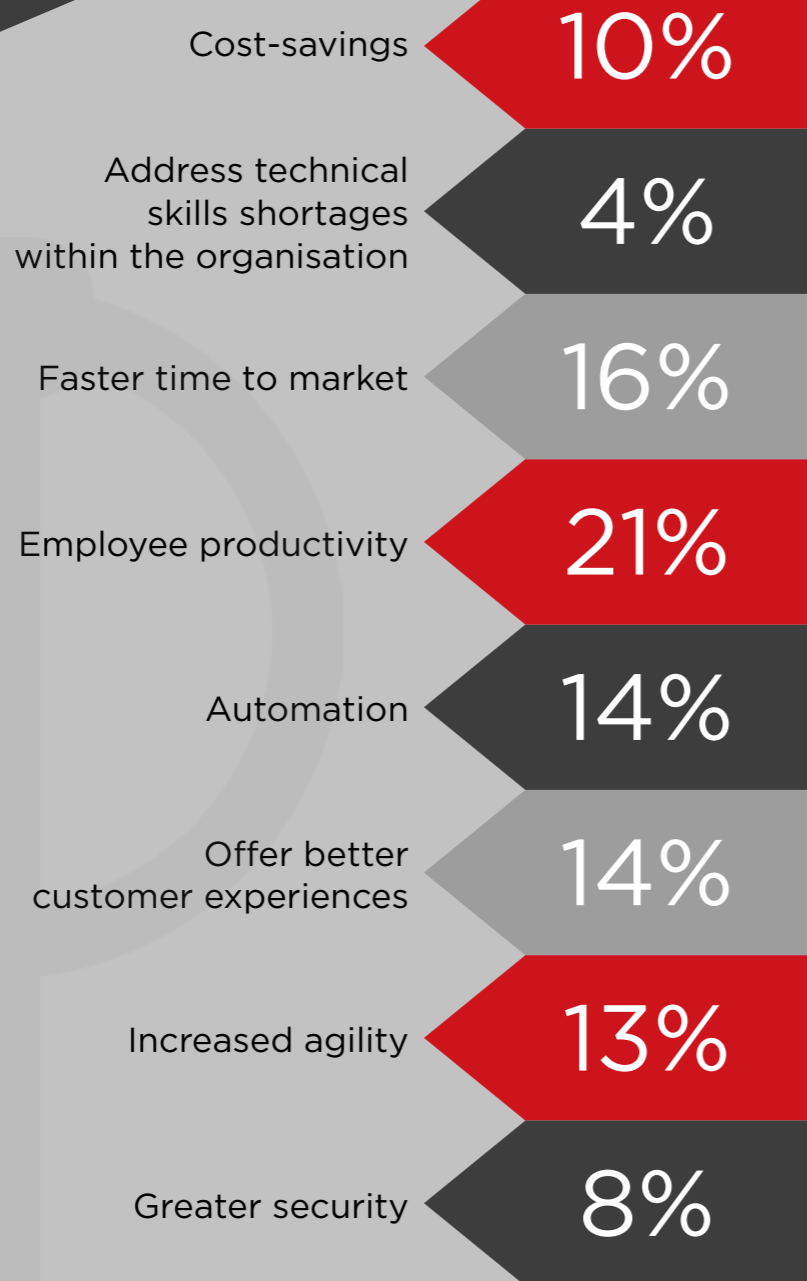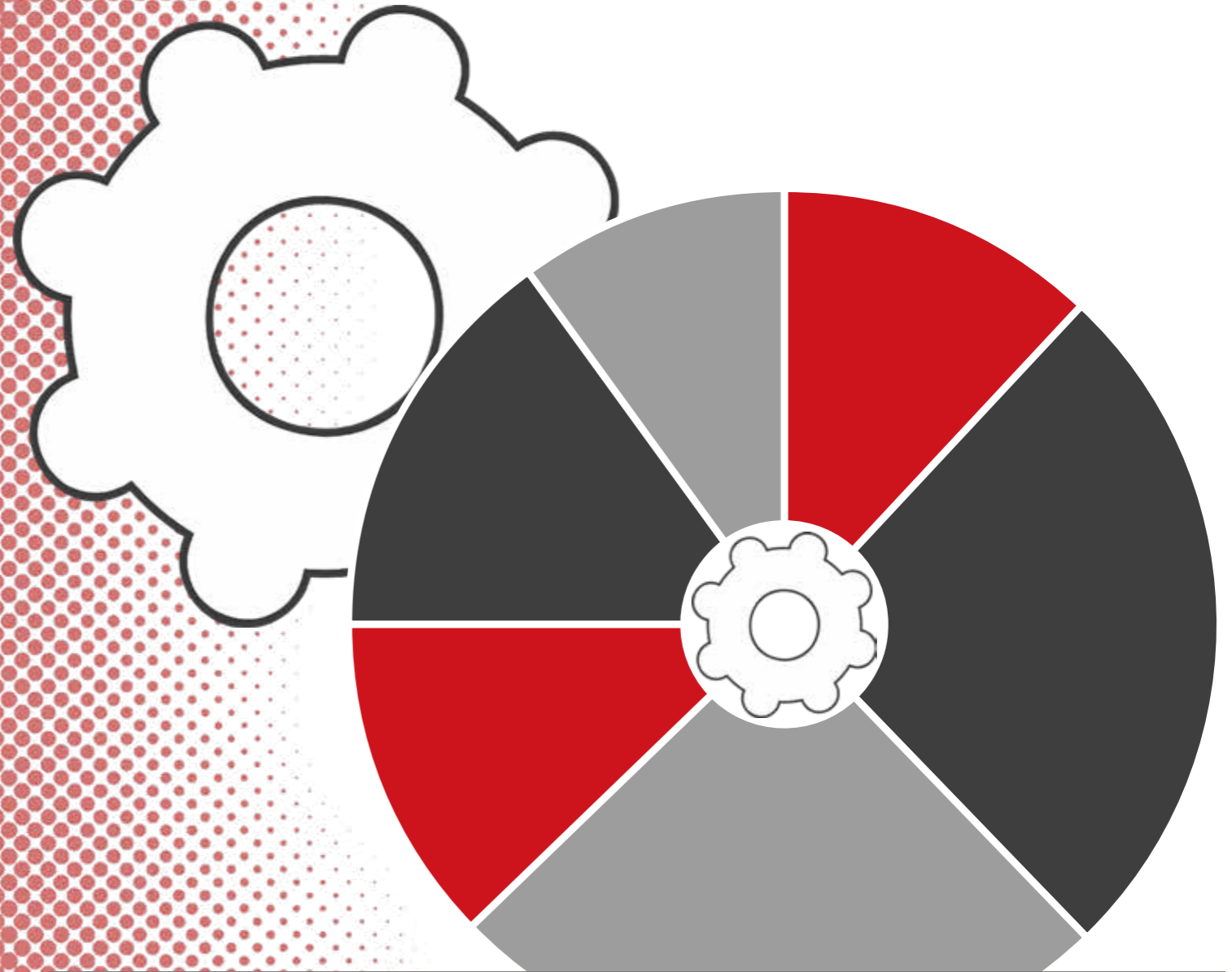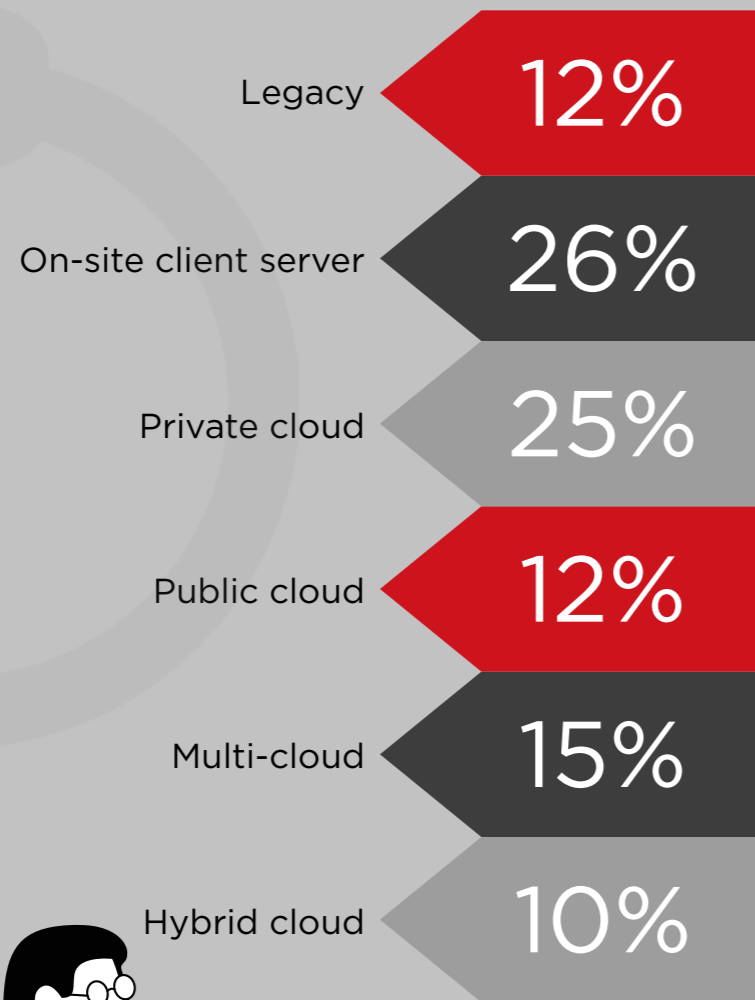
KEY FINDINGS

Employee productivity (21%) and faster time to market (16%) are the top priorities in digitalisation efforts, followed by automation and enhancing customer experiences (both 14%). Cost-savings and security are less emphasised, with only 10% and 8% prioritising them, respectively, highlighting a focus on efficiency and speed.

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QUESTION 3

Which of the following best describes your current infrastructure model?

Legacy **12%**

On-site client server **26%**

Private cloud **25%**

Public cloud **12%**
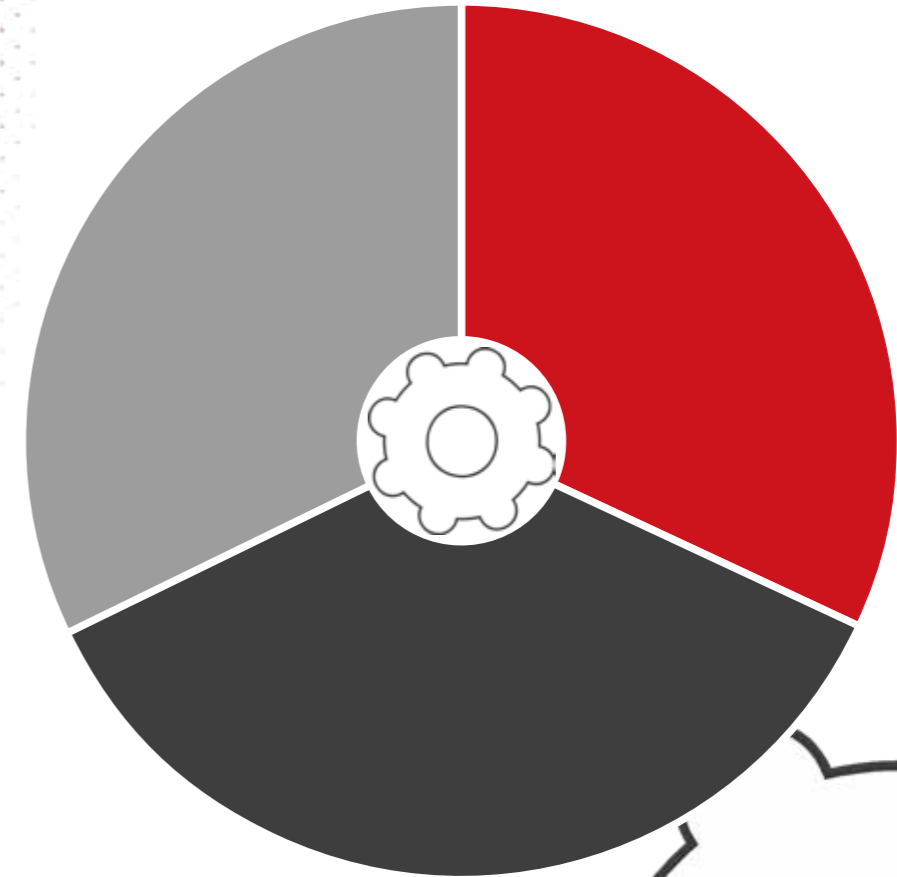
Multi-cloud **15%**

Hybrid cloud **10%**

KEY FINDINGS

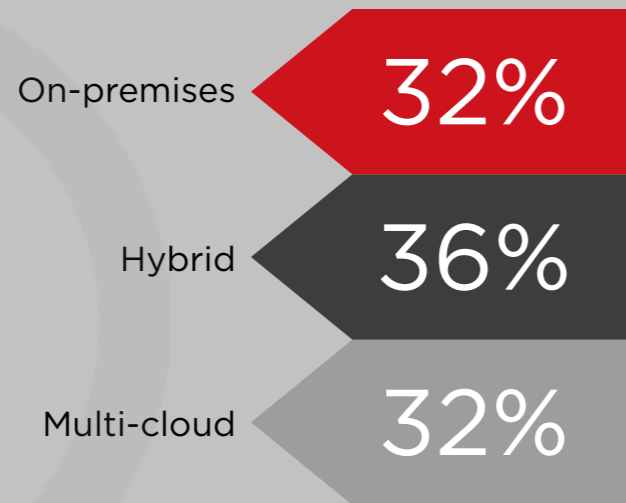The results reveal a significant reliance on traditional infrastructure models, with 38% still using legacy or on-site client server setups. However, the shift towards cloud solutions is evident, with 62% adopting private, public, multi-cloud, or hybrid models. This transition underscores the growing need for robust, cloud-centric cybersecurity strategies to protect increasingly dispersed digital assets.

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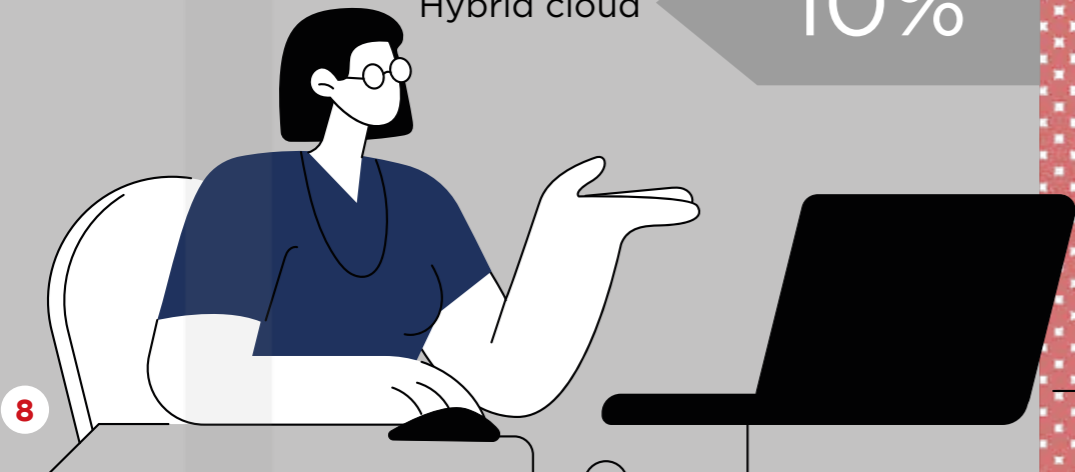
Which of the following best describes your long-term plans for infrastructure?

On-premises **32%**

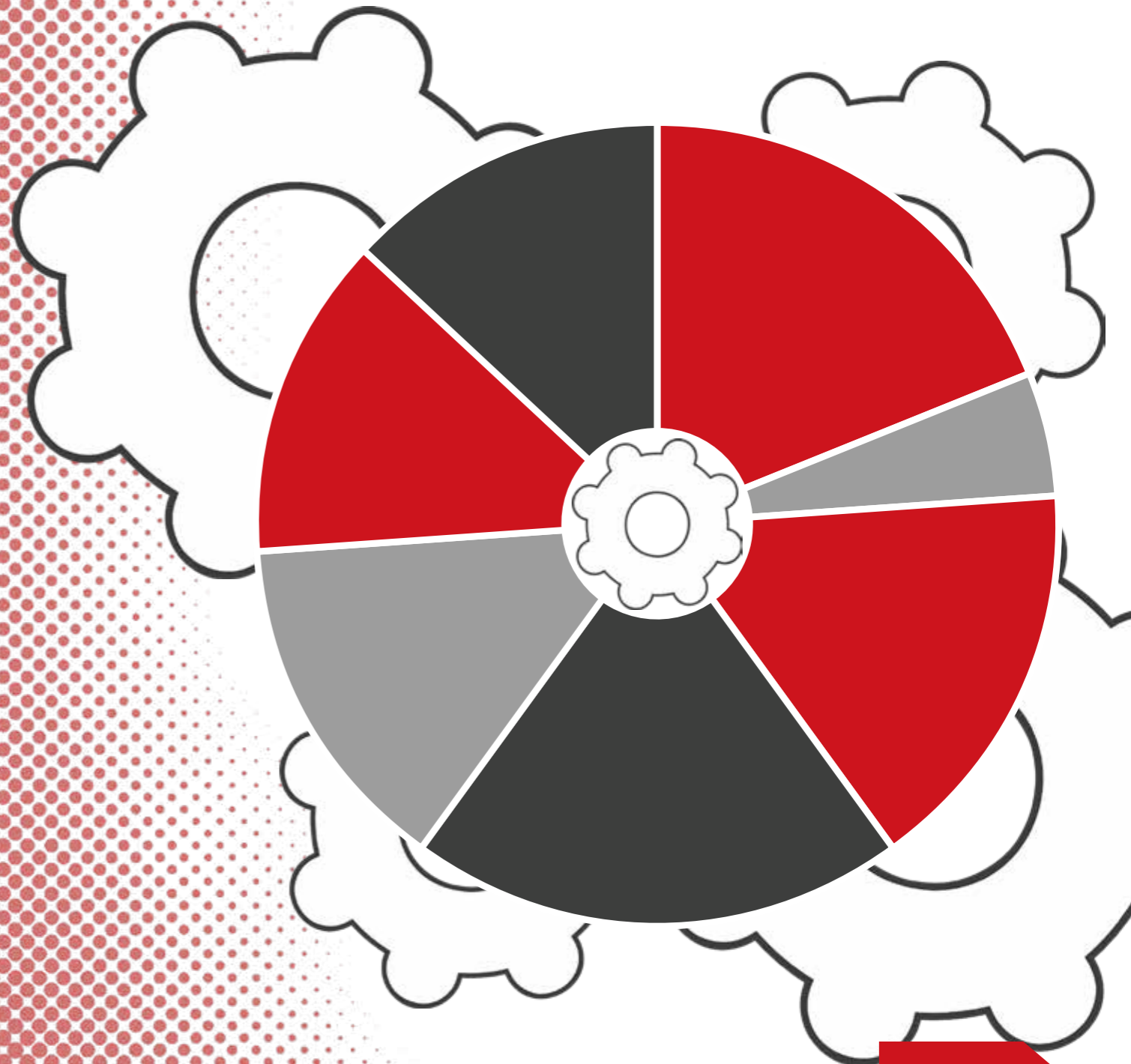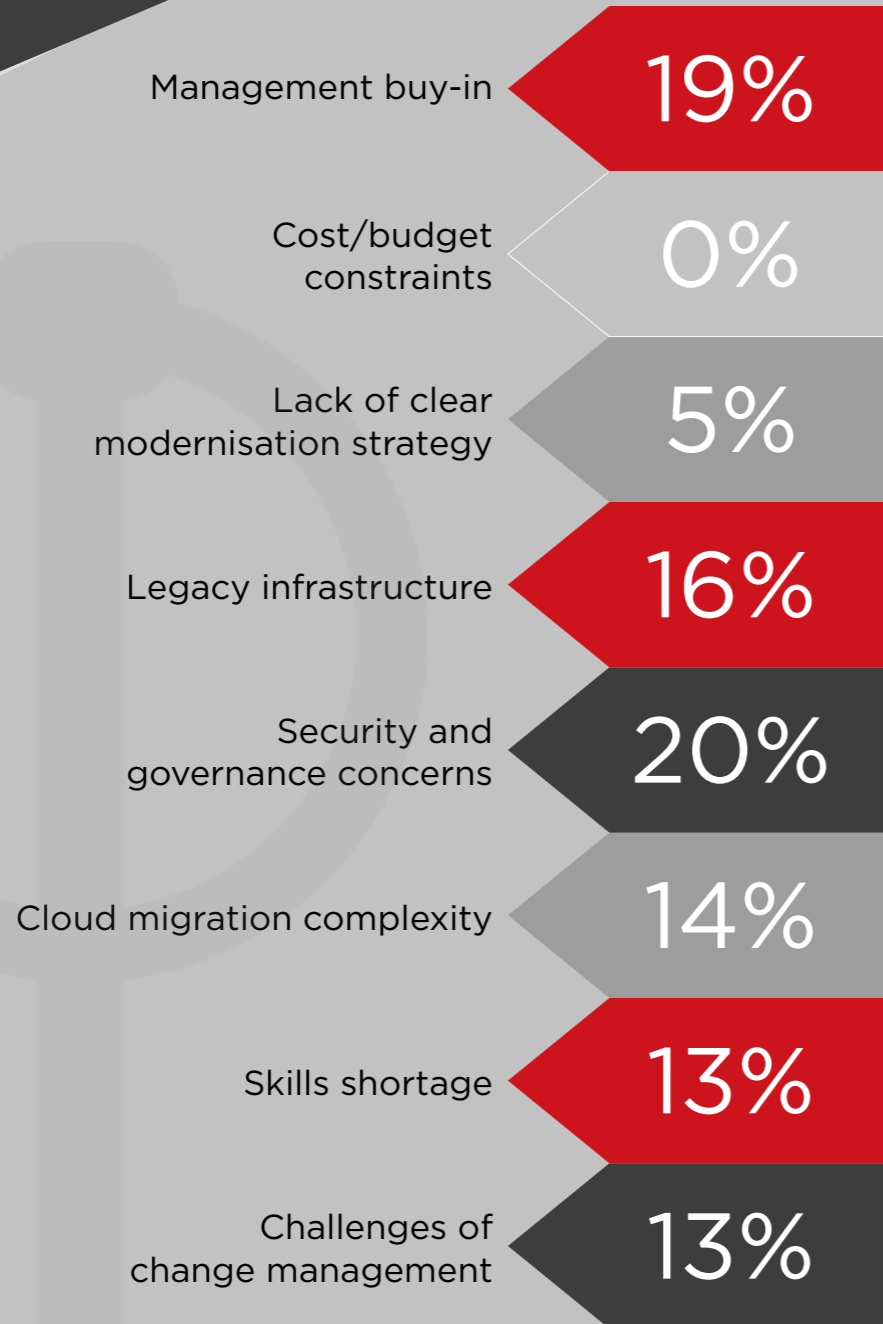Hybrid **36%**

Multi-cloud **32%**

KEY FINDINGS

The responses show diverse long-term infrastructure strategies, with 36% of respondents favouring hybrid models, reflecting a balance between cloud and on-premises solutions. Meanwhile, 32% are aiming for multi-cloud setups, indicating a trend towards flexibility and resilience in managing complex IT environments.

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What do you consider to be the biggest inhibitor to infrastructure modernisation (if any)?

Management buy-in — 19%

Cost/budget constraints — 0%

Lack of clear modernisation strategy — 5%

Legacy infrastructure — 16%

Security and governance concerns — 20%

Cloud migration complexity — 14%

Skills shortage — 13%

Challenges of change management — 13%

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Security **12%**

Cost **1%**

Reputation (track-record) **19%**

Location (in-country) **16%**

Vendor certifications **10%**

Technology skills **21%**
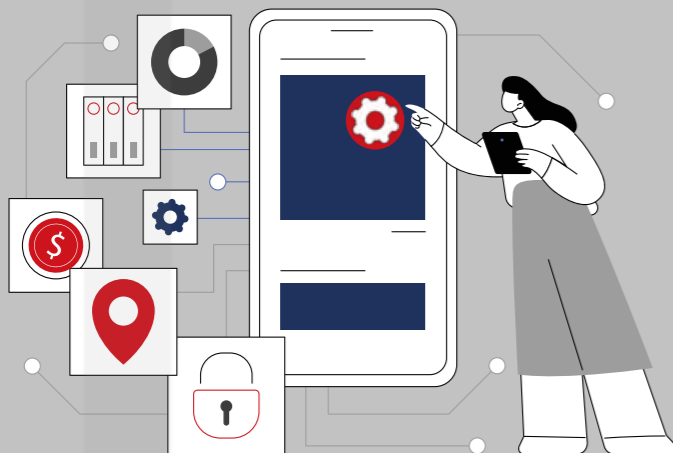
Number of skilled resources **21%**

QUESTION 6

What are the most important considerations for you when selecting an infrastructure partner? Select top two.
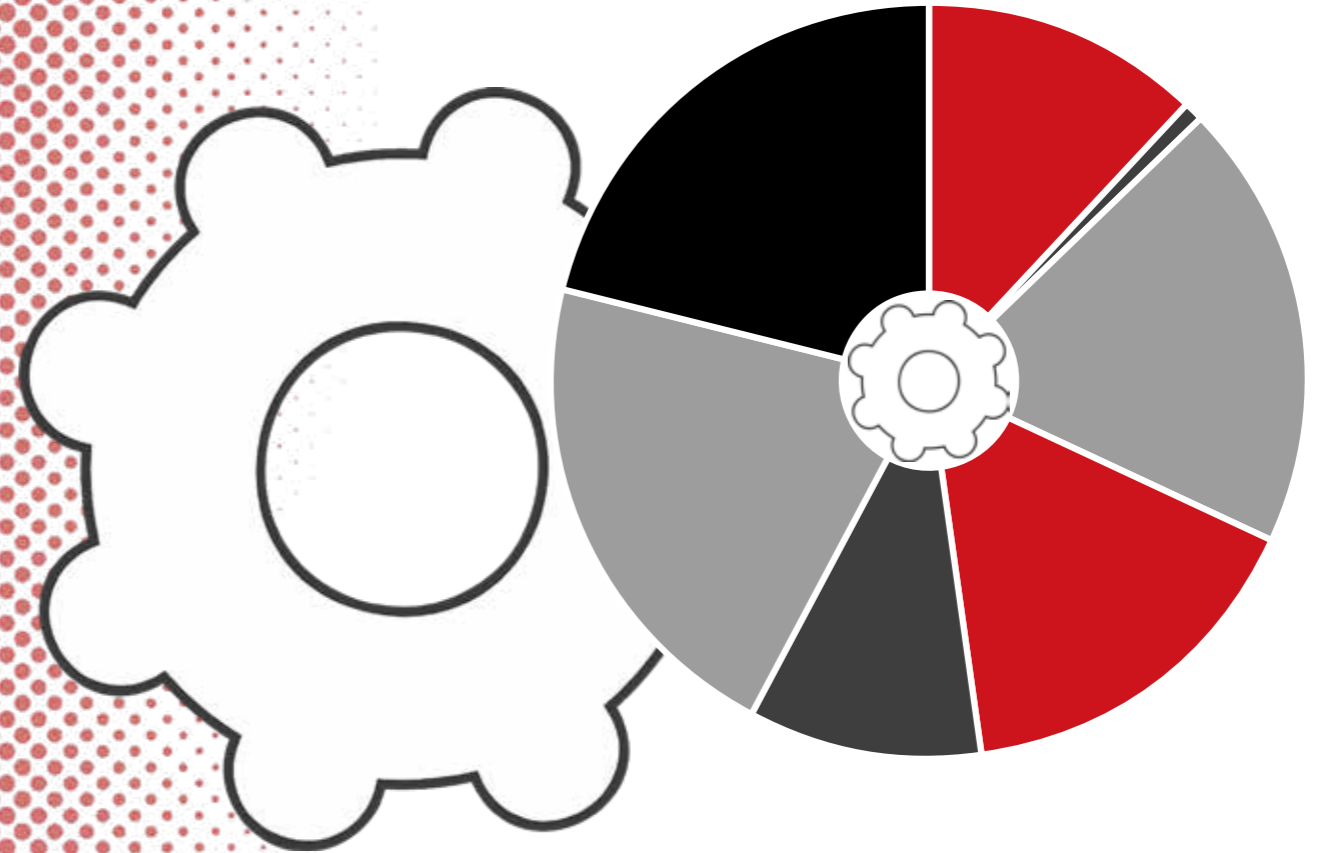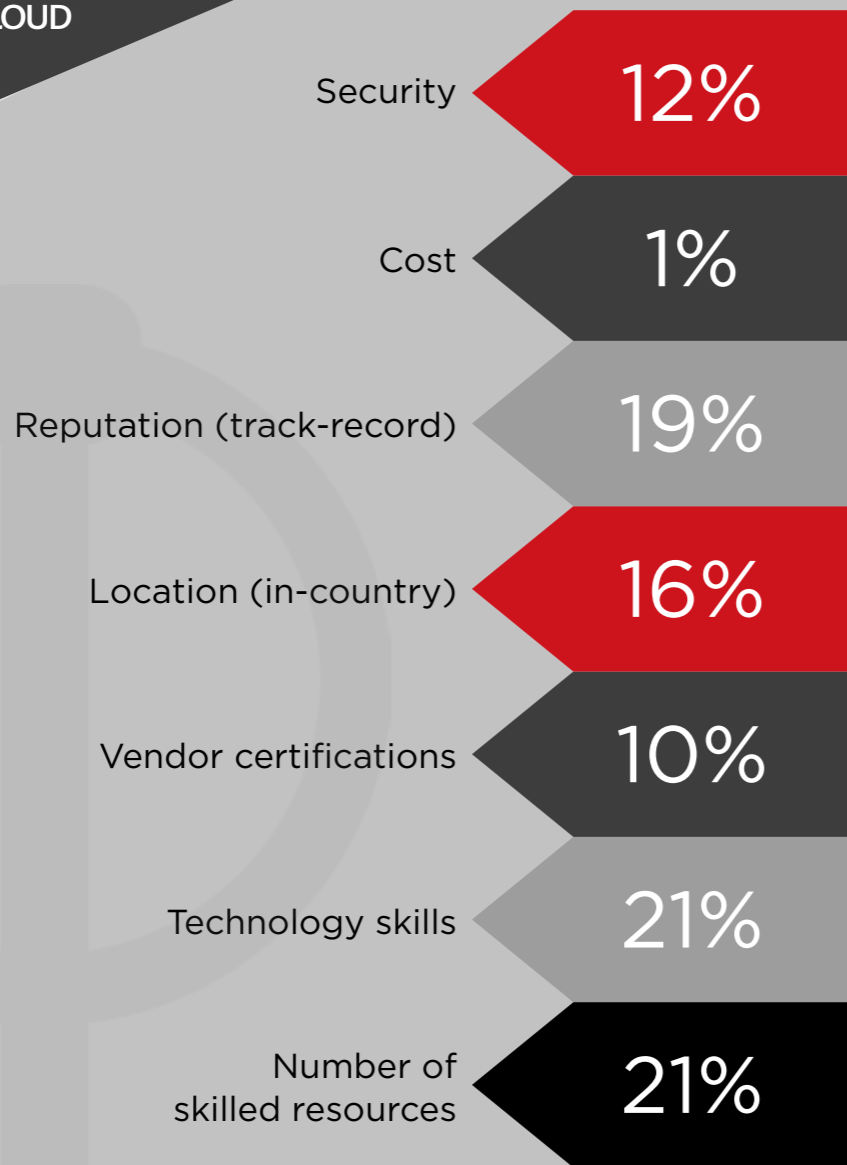
KEY FINDINGS

Results suggest an industry trend prioritising technical competence over cost, with 21% of respondents emphasising technology skills and skilled resources. Surprisingly, security is only a concern for 12%, suggesting a potential underestimation of cyber threats. The focus on reputation (19%) and in-country location (16%) reflects growing concerns over trust and regulatory compliance, particularly in light of increasing global cybersecurity challenges. This indicates a shift towards long-term resilience and localised expertise in infrastructure partnerships, crucial for navigating the evolving digital landscape.

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SECTION**2**
SECURITY

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Has your organisation seen a change in the number of attacks over the last 12 months?

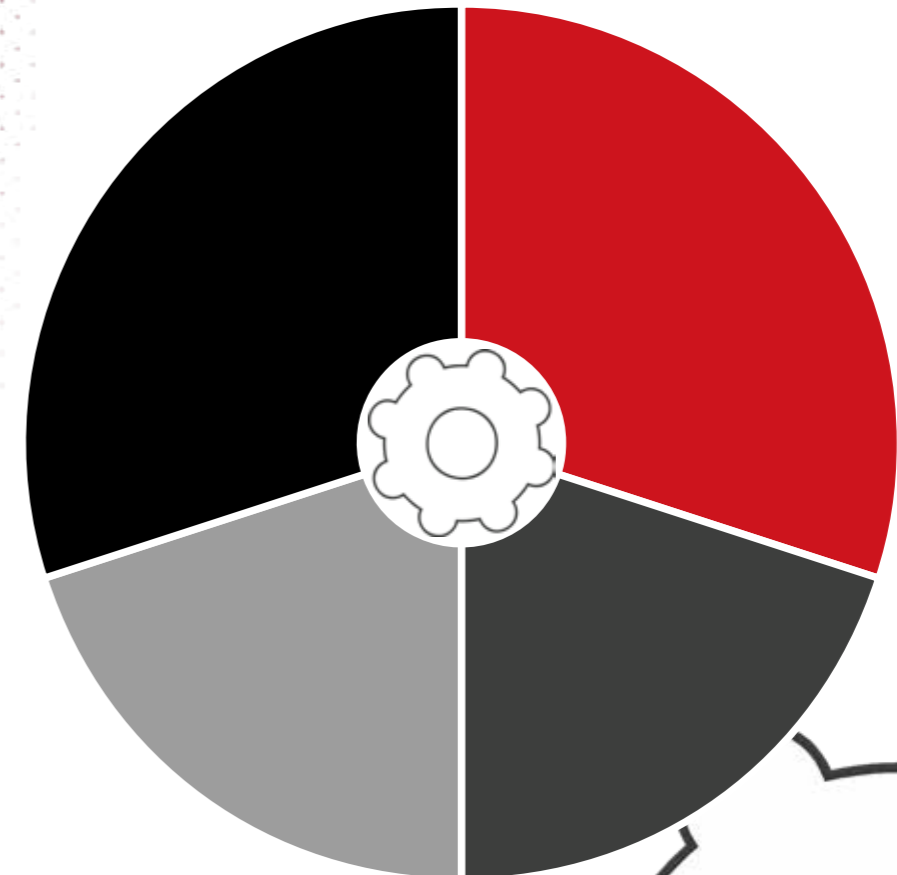Yes – a significant increase **30%**

Yes – a slight increase **20%**

No – it has remained the same **20%**

No – there has been a decrease **30%**

KEY FINDINGS

The survey data reveals a divided experience among organisations regarding cybersecurity threats over the past 12 months. While 50% of respondents observed an increase in attacks – split between a significant rise (30%) and a slight increase (20%) – the remaining half reported no change or a decrease in incidents, with 30% noting a reduction in attacks. This highlights that organisations need to prioritise robust cybersecurity strategies, as the threat environment remains unpredictable with some facing heightened risks while others achieve better defence outcomes.

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How confident are you that your organisation is protected from attacks?

Very confident **43%**

Confident **46%**

Not confident **11%**
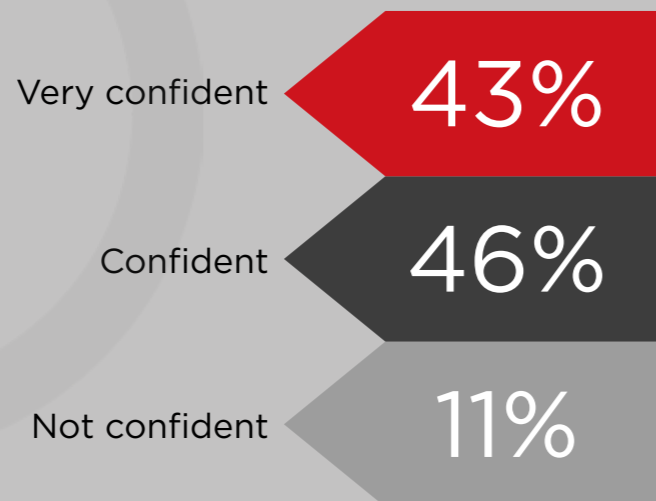
KEY FINDINGS

A significant majority of respondents feel secure about their organisation's cybersecurity measures with 89% expressing either confidence or strong confidence in their protection against attacks. Only a small minority, 11%, reported a lack of confidence. This suggests that most organisations in the region believe they are well-prepared to defend against cyber threats, reflecting a prioritisation of robust cybersecurity strategies among CIOs and the C-suite. The key takeaway is that cybersecurity remains a critical focus, with businesses largely assured in their current defences, though a small portion still see room for improvement.

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QUESTION 9

How confident are you that your current security measures are strong enough when implementing new IT projects?

Very confident   35%

Confident   46%

Not confident   18%

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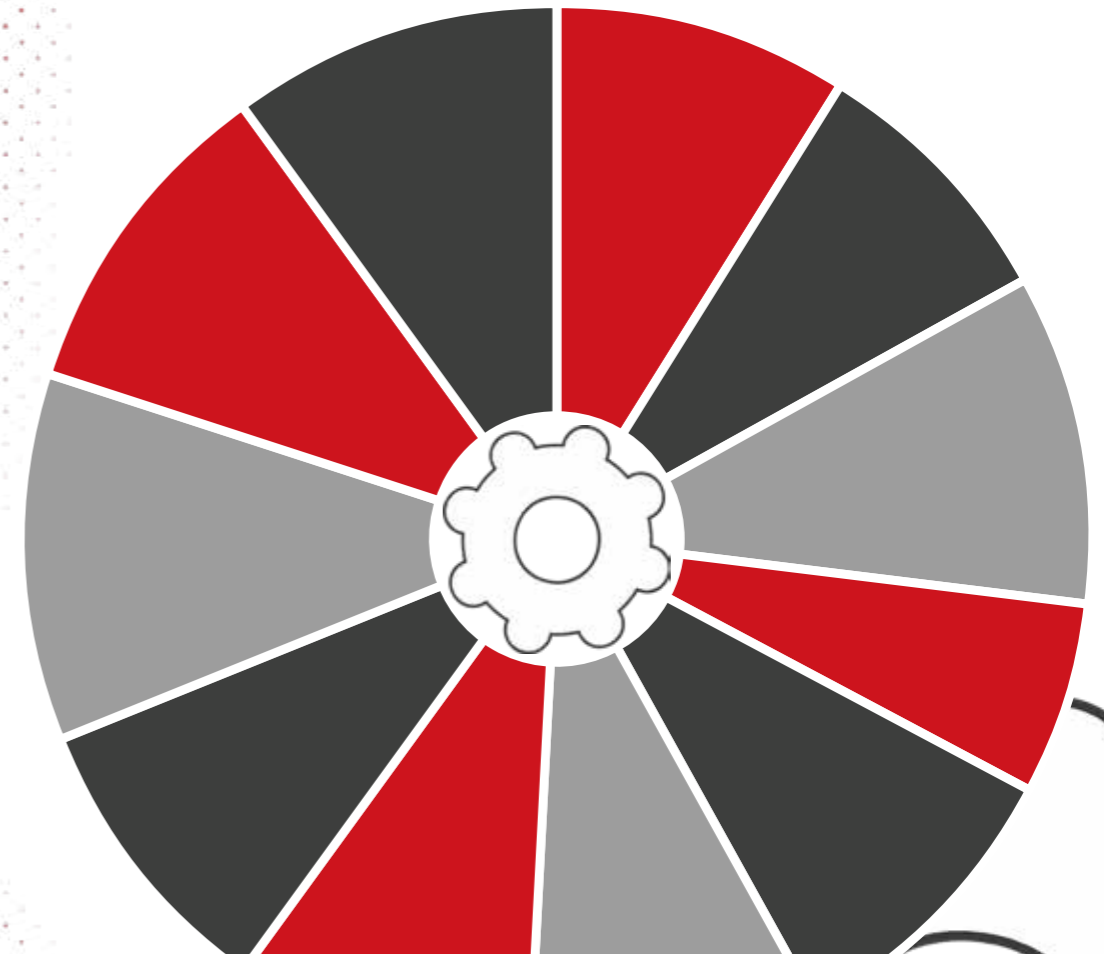|	
Cloud	9%
Network	8%
Application	10%
Email	6%
Operational technology and IIoT	9%
Threat hunting	9%
Penetration testing	9%
Data security	9%
Security culture and staff training	11%
Evolving technology landscape	10%
Compliance and regulation	10%
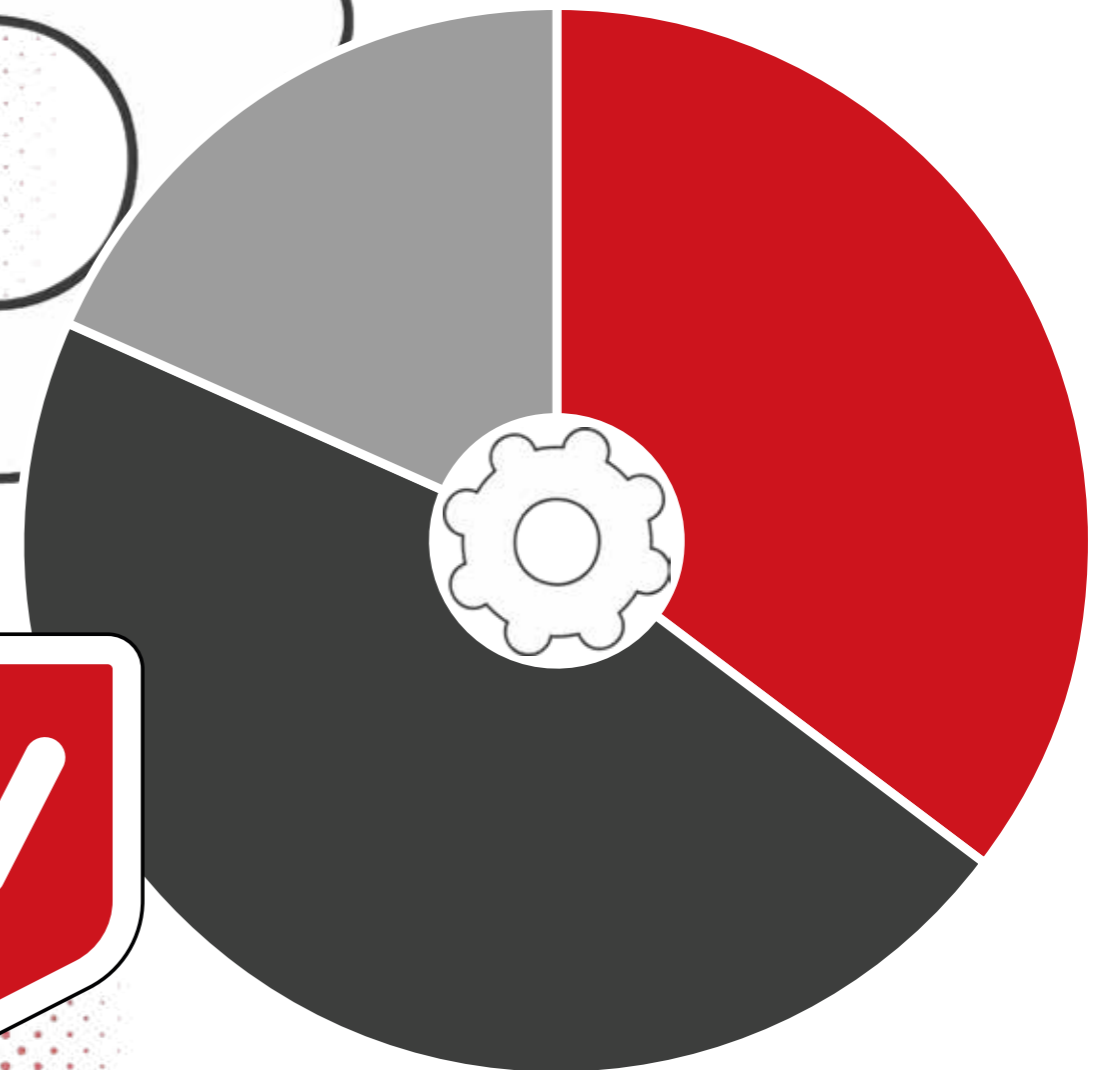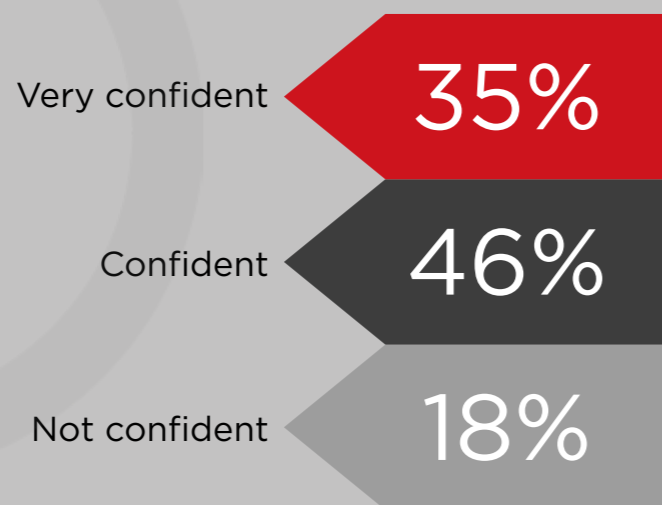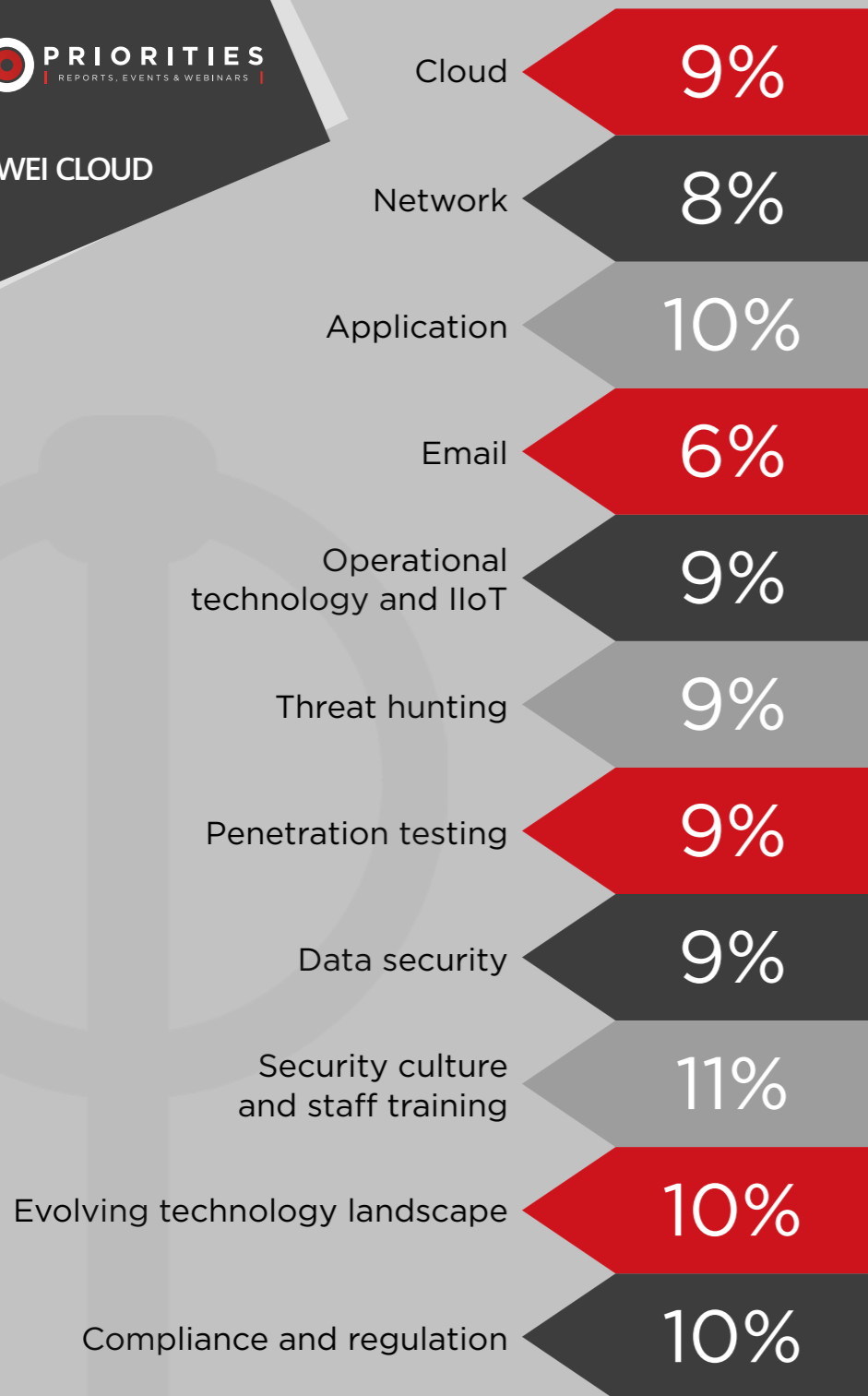
QUESTION 10

Which security areas are priorities for your organisation in the year ahead?

KEY FINDINGS

In the coming year, organisations will focus on several key cybersecurity areas. Major priorities include enhancing security culture and staff training (11%), application security (10%), adapting to evolving technology landscapes (10%) and ensuring compliance and regulation (10%). Other significant areas each voted by 9% of respondents are data security, threat hunting, penetration testing and operational technology and IIoT. Cloud, network and email security are relatively lower priorities with 9%, 8% and 6% respectively. The emphasis on security culture and staff training highlights a growing recognition of the need for a well-informed workforce to manage security risks effectively.

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QUESTION 11

Does your organisation have a strong security culture?

Yes **100%**

KEY FINDINGS

On assessing organisational security culture, 100% of respondents confirm that their organisations have a strong security culture. This unanimous agreement emphasises a high level of cybersecurity within businesses and indicates that security culture is a top priority for CIOs and the wider C-suite. Organisations prioritising the development and reinforcement of robust security practices is clear indication of a proactive approach to safeguarding digital assets and mitigating risks in their technology strategies.

SECTION**3**
AI

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QUESTION 12

How would you describe your organisation's readiness to deploy automation solutions?

We have not yet deployed AI solutions but are preparing to **30%**

We are in the process of deploying AI solutions **36%**

We do not plan to deploy AI solutions **34%**

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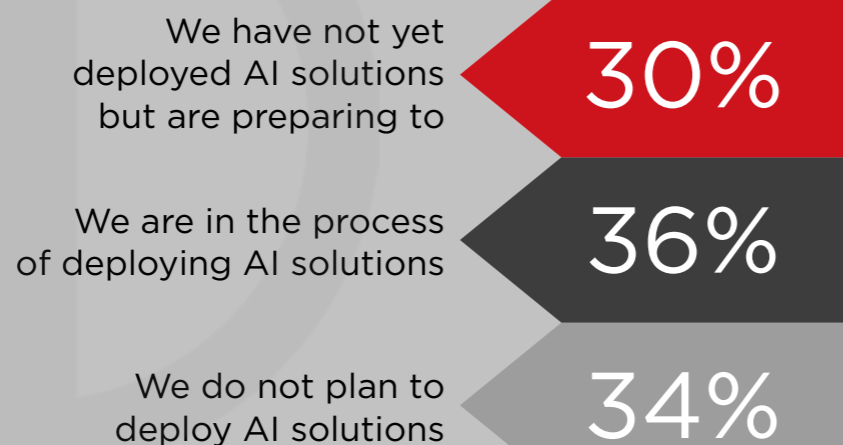
QUESTION 13

How far do you believe automation will enable you to achieve your long-term business goals?

Strongly agree **23%**

Agree **26%**

I don't know **20%**

Disagree **19%**

Strongly disagree **12%**

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Security — **18%**

Customer experience — **10%**

HR and employee experience — **10%**

Accounting and finance — **12%**

Data processing — **7%**

Sales and marketing — **13%**

IT (development) — **20%**

Product — **10%**
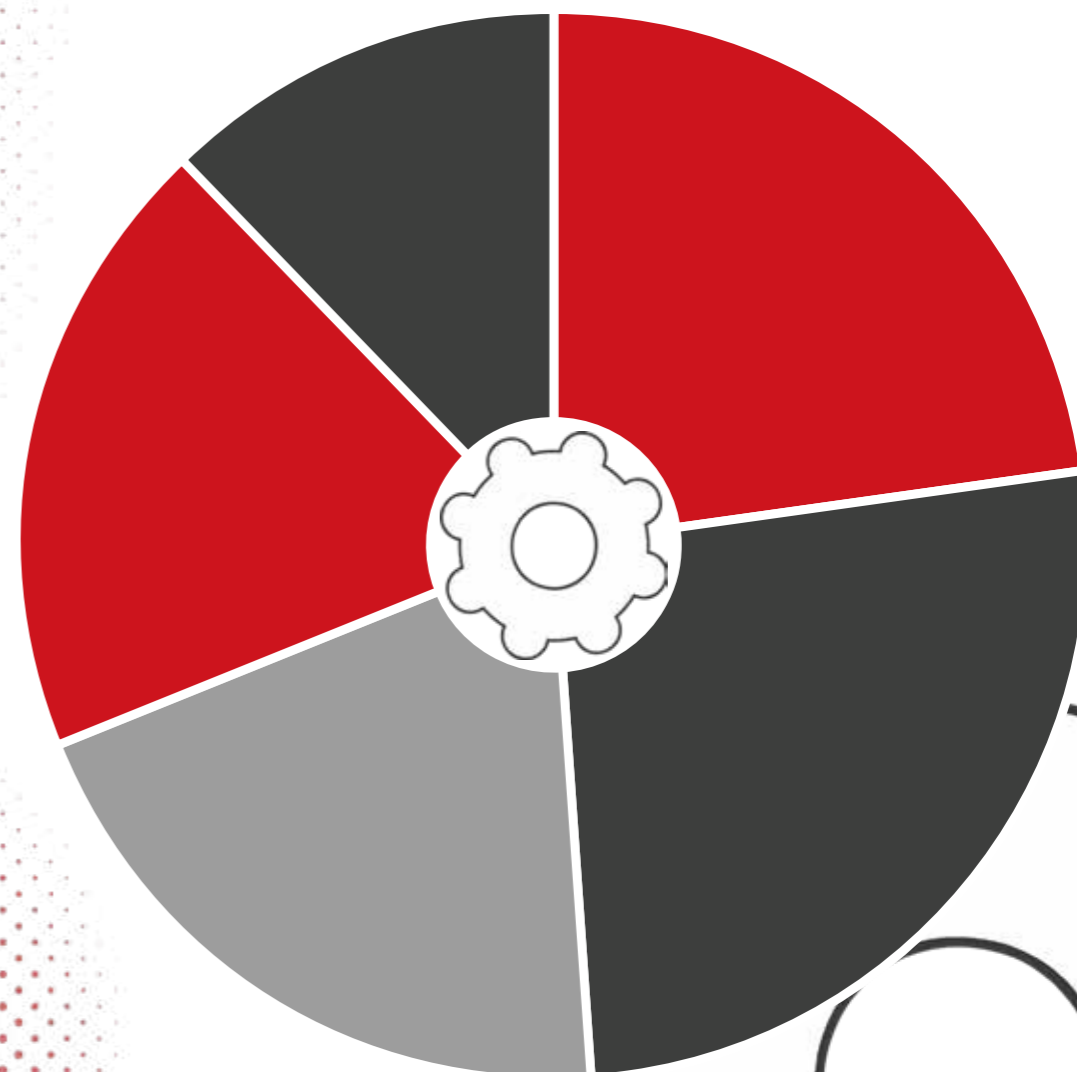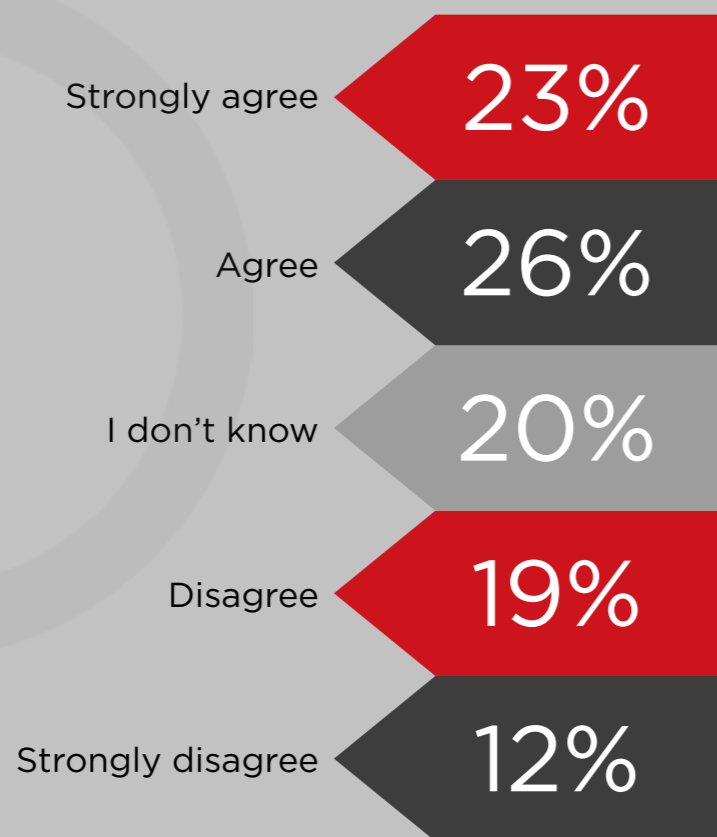
QUESTION 14

What are the priority areas for automation?

KEY FINDINGS

Compared to 2023, more organisations are in the process of deploying automation solutions (36% compared to 24% last year). With automation tools now more readily available, and more widely understood, it is unsurprising that CxOs are tapping into the benefits of this technology. An additional 30% of organisations are in the preparatory stages of AI deployment and could benefit from AI solution providers that can offer guidance, strategy development or pilot schemes.
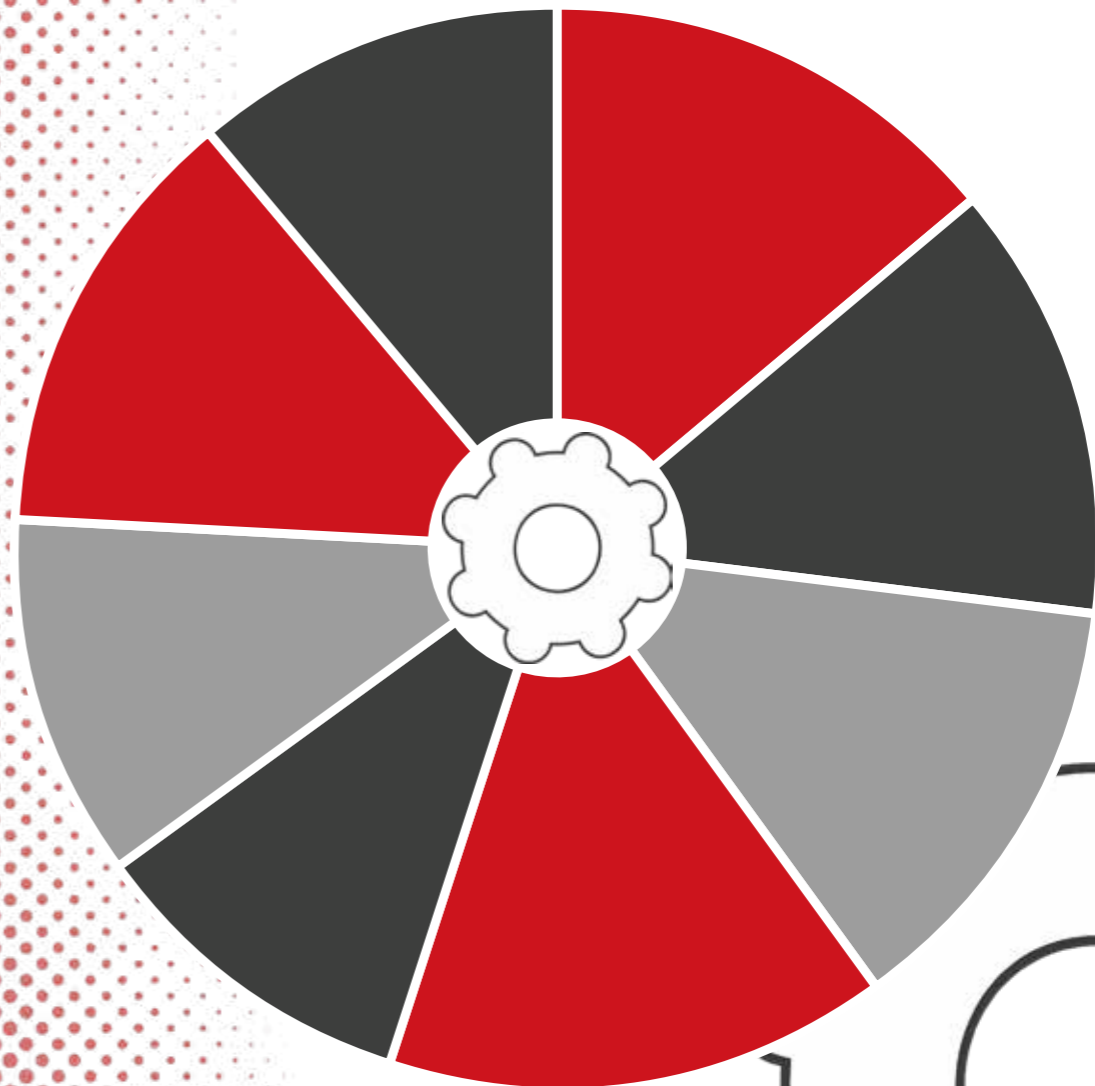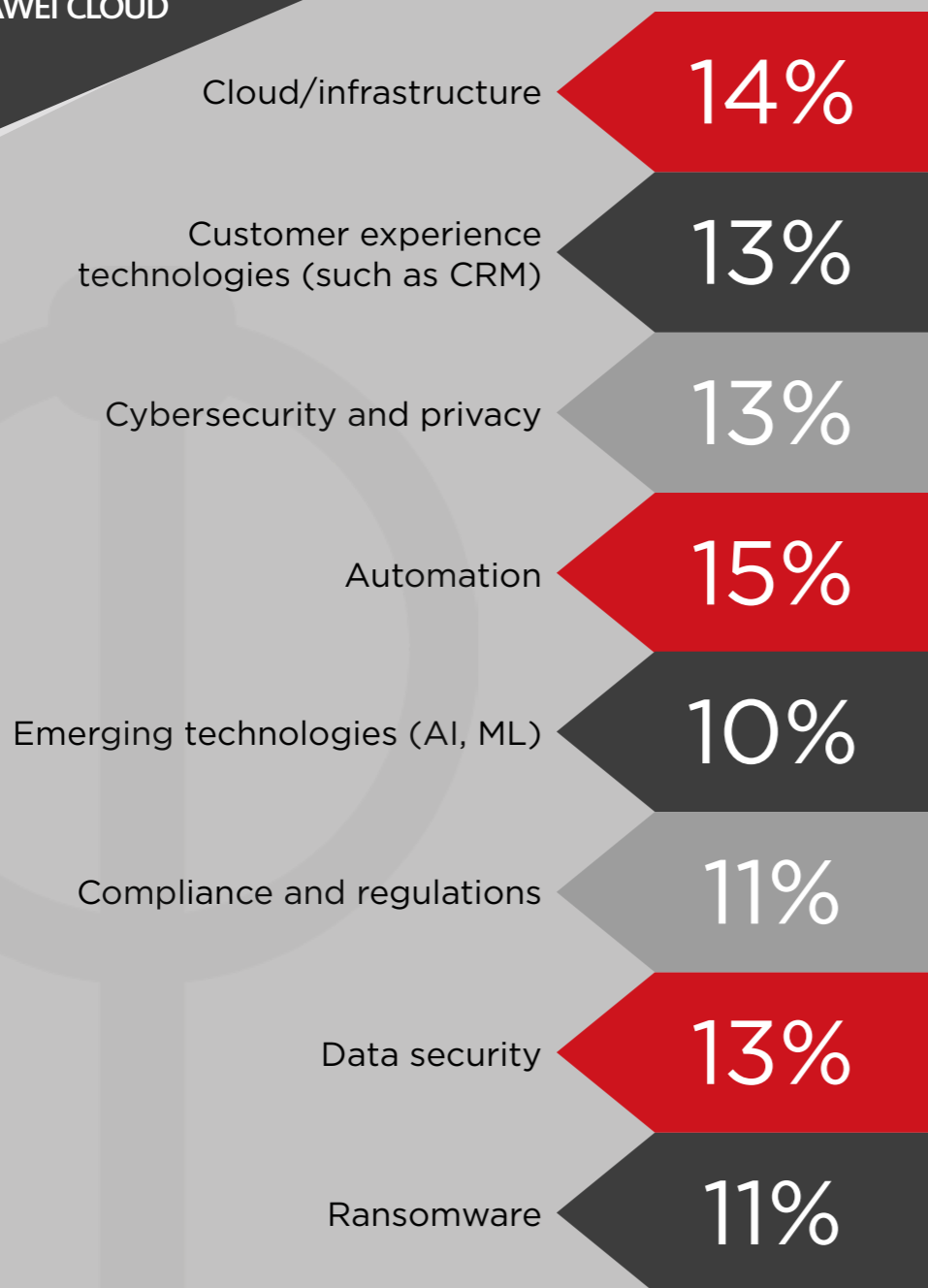
There are advantages for early adopters, such as achieving reduced costs and streamlined operations ahead of competitors. However, 34% of respondents said they did not plan to deploy AI solutions, suggesting there is still some resistance or a lack of immediate demand for adoption. As this is a significant portion of respondents, there may be barriers to consider such as costs and a lack of understanding.

Almost half (49%) of respondents agreed that automation would enable them to achieve their long-term business goals – up on last year's total of 44% – but 31% disagreed and a further 20% did not know, highlighting a need to continue to build awareness and trust around AI.

The two priority areas CIOs are focusing on for automation are IT (development) and security.

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What are your top two technology investment areas over the next 12 months?

Cloud/infrastructure	**14%**
Customer experience technologies (such as CRM)	**13%**
Cybersecurity and privacy	**13%**
Automation	**15%**
Emerging technologies (AI, ML)	**10%**
Compliance and regulations	**11%**
Data security	**13%**
Ransomware	**11%**

KEY FINDINGS

Investments are set to be split across multiple areas over the next 12 months, though automation, security and infrastructure were the most popular choices for respondents.

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CONCLUSION

Digitalisation remains high on the agenda of CIOs in the Middle East region, with more than three-quarters having invested in such initiatives over the last year – an increase on last year.

Our findings show that, in 2024, the key drivers for organisations' digital strategies were employee productivity (21%) and faster time to market (16%) which echoes 2023 and highlights the ongoing requirement to use technology to drive business efficiencies.

In addition, more than half of respondents indicated that they were using cloud as part of their infrastructure model – private (25%), public (12%), multi (15%) or hybrid (10%) and, moving forward, cloud will dominate organisations' digital strategies. A majority of survey respondents said cloud features in their long-term plans for infrastructure, though 32% do plan to retain an on-premises set-up.

A key barrier to infrastructure modernisation is security and governance concerns, as well as management buy-in. Interestingly, the findings pointed to a requirement for expertise, rather than cost-savings, when it comes to selecting an infrastructure partner.

In a region which is at the centre of geopolitical tensions, organisations require robust cybersecurity strategies and tools to safeguard against increased cyberthreats. The survey findings uncovered that half of respondents had witnessed an increase in attacks over the last year, reiterating the unpredictable nature of cyberthreats. However, overall, respondents had a high level of confidence that their organisation was protected from attacks and a majority felt confident that their security controls were strong enough when implementing IT projects. This could be indicative of the strong security cultures being established across the region, and a deeper understanding of the implications of a successful attack.

Finally, with automation and AI firmly on the agenda for most enterprises – as well as public sector organisations – we wanted to better understand how respondents' organisations were approaching it.

A total of 66% said they were considering deployment of automation solutions, with 36% already in the process of doing so. However, there were still a significant number of respondents not convinced automation would ultimately enable them to achieve their long-term business goals. There is a requirement for more education and awareness around automation and AI, and there are opportunities for vendors to play their part here.

In summary, organisations in the region are continuing to progress their digitalisation strategies, looking to cloud infrastructure to provide the agility and flexibility to aid this process, and they are keen to identify local expert partners who can support their goals. In addition, cybersecurity remains a key concern and will be a central tenet of Digital Transformation strategies looking ahead – although confidence is broadly high among CXOs as to their organisations' security posture.

And of course, automation is high on the agenda for many organisations as they plan their digital investments for the future – with this trend likely to continue and evolve over the coming years.

By

**Jess Abell,
Chief Content Officer,
Lynchpin Media**

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