Design Systems Report 2025

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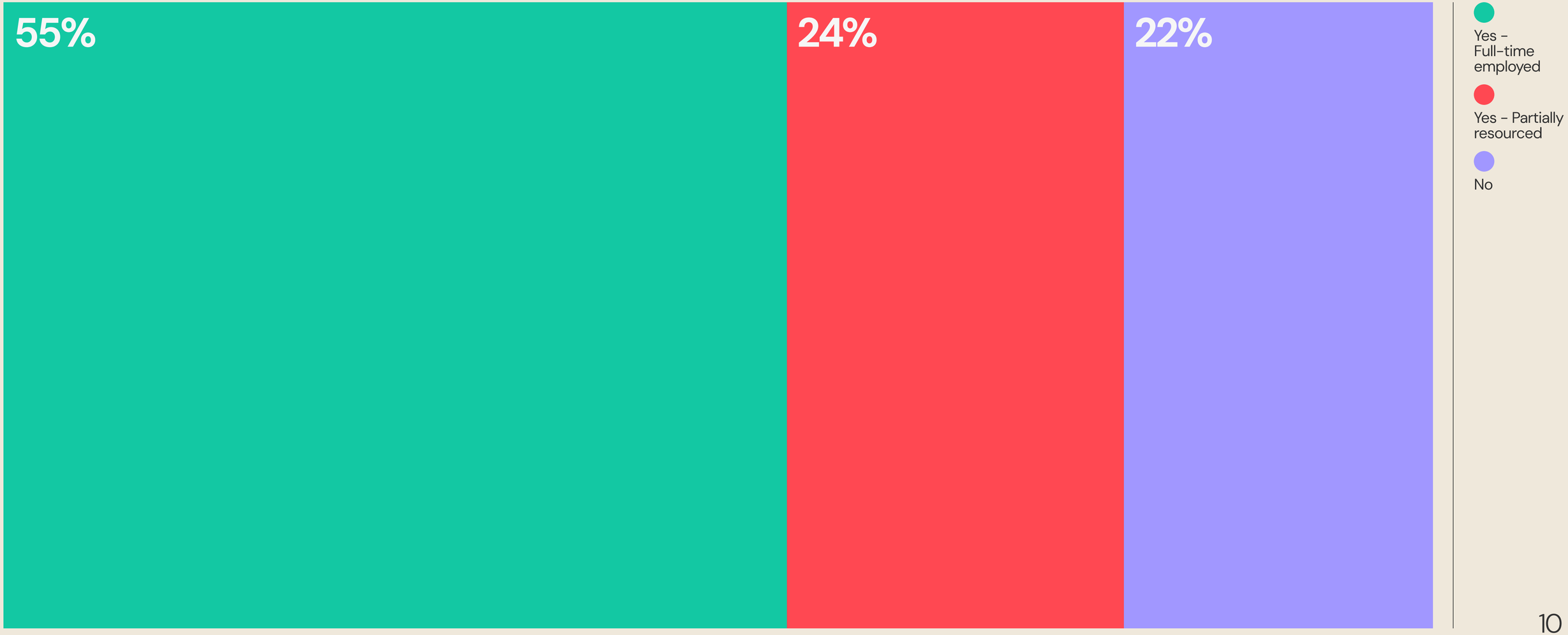
Do you have a design system team?

🔍 Dedicated design system teams are still growing

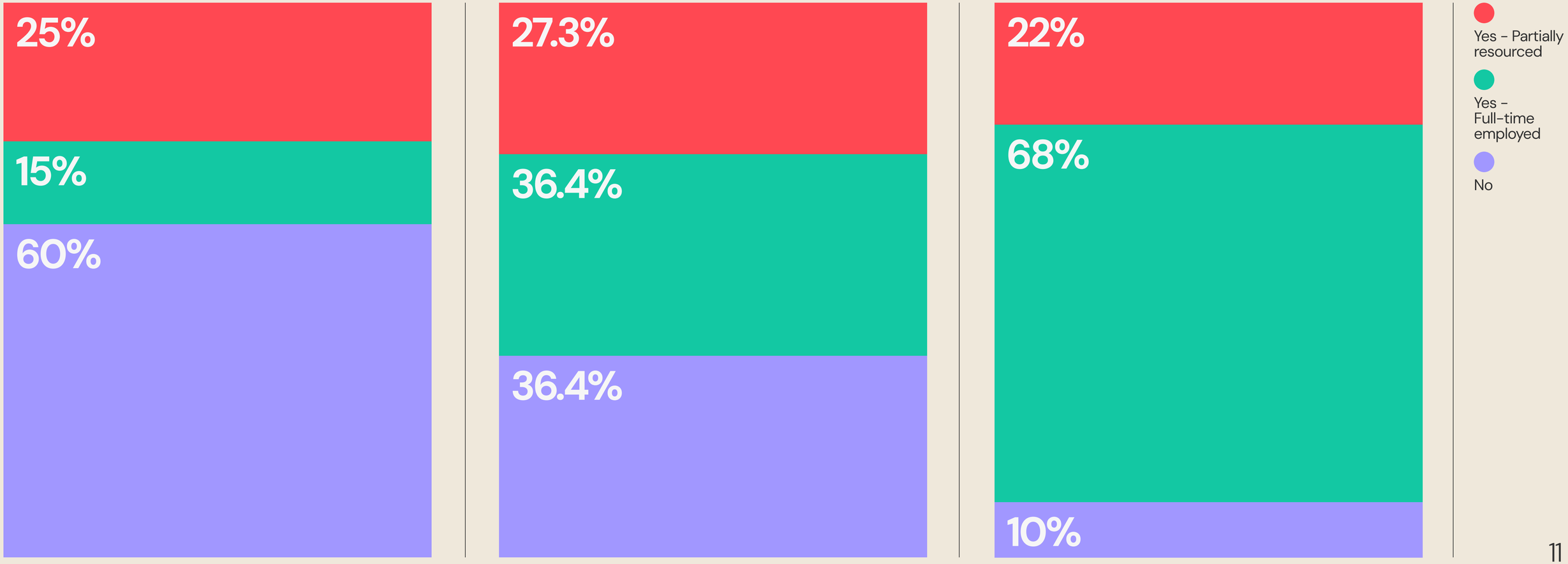
In previous years, we identified that having a dedicated design system team is correlated with not only having a better adopted design, but also a happier team. It seems the industry is moving further and further towards this, with a jump from 72% to 79% of teams having a dedicated design systems team between 2024 and 2025.



Do you have a design system team? By company size

🔍 Dedicated design system teams are growing, regardless of company size

The prevalence of design system teams is growing across the board, from small companies right up to mid-size. Each segment has seen an increase of design system teams by at least 10%, which suggests that investment in design systems continues to grow.



The size of your team

💡 Team size is growing in some segments and constricting in others

One of the most interesting changes this year is that the average team size has changed in most segments. Under 100 has gone from an average of 5 down to 3, 100-499 has stayed steady at 4, and over 500 has changed from 8 to 9. However, if we segment further, companies between 500 and 1000 have been the the most affected, with average team size going from 7 down to 5. This would suggest that companies between 500-1000 employees have been the hardest hit with layoffs in design systems.

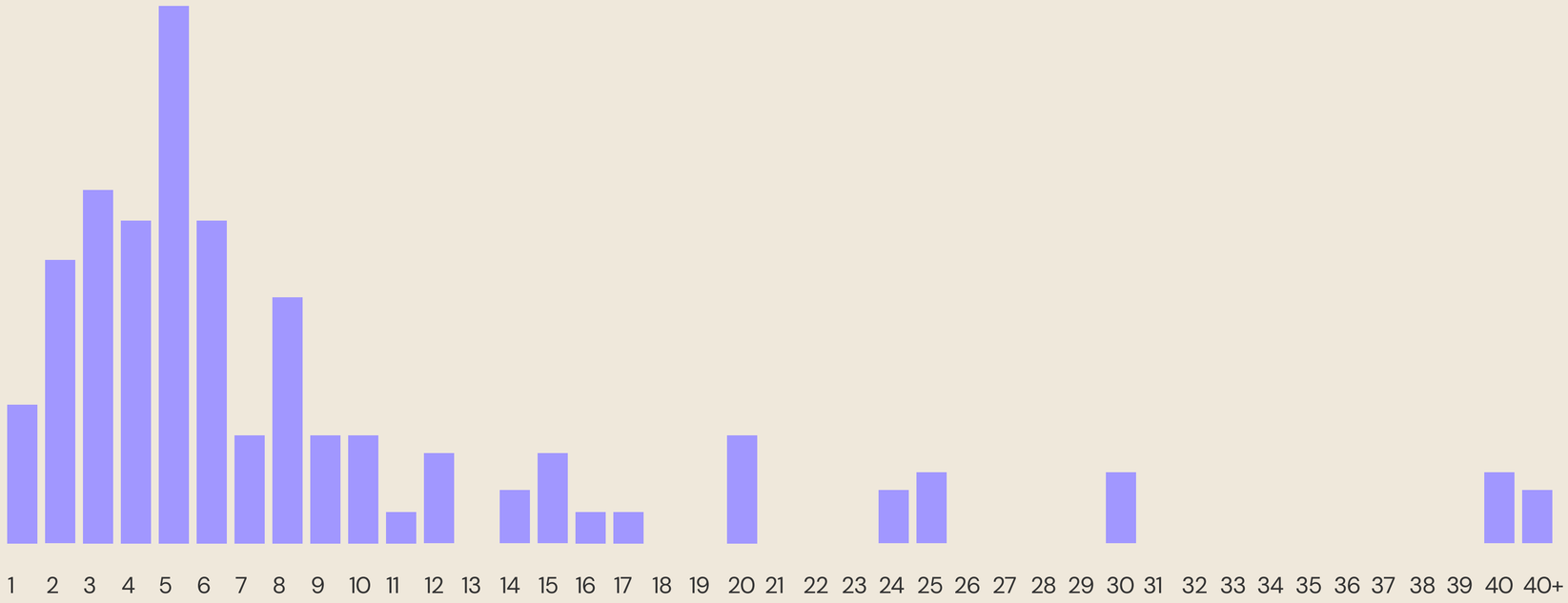
🔍 A design system team rarely goes over 20 people

Looking at the range of design team sizes, it still seems that most teams top out at 20-25 people. This hasn't changed much since the first time we did the survey in 2022, but that in itself is interesting considering these systems are three years more mature now, and yet the distribution of team sizes hasn't changed much. Why aren't our teams scaling with maturity?

Average team size based on company size

<100	100-499	500+
3	4	9

Range of design system team size for companies over 500 employees



Do you have enough people?

For smaller companies
(<500 employees)

41%

felt they didn't have enough people

For bigger companies
(+500 employees)

54%

felt they didn't have enough people

🔍 **Interestingly, the reasons for dissatisfaction were relatively similar across all org sizes. These include:**

- **De-funding** in 2024 made it impossible to manage or grow their design system
- **Lack of developer and PM resource** meant that the code side of their system was suffering, as well as developing their roadmaps
- Design system teams **aren't scaling as fast** as the rest of the product organization, meaning that demand is outpacing supply, and resulting in a high volume of requests that are often met with 'no' or 'not yet'.

Your design system model

By company size

🔍 Key Challenges - Centralized

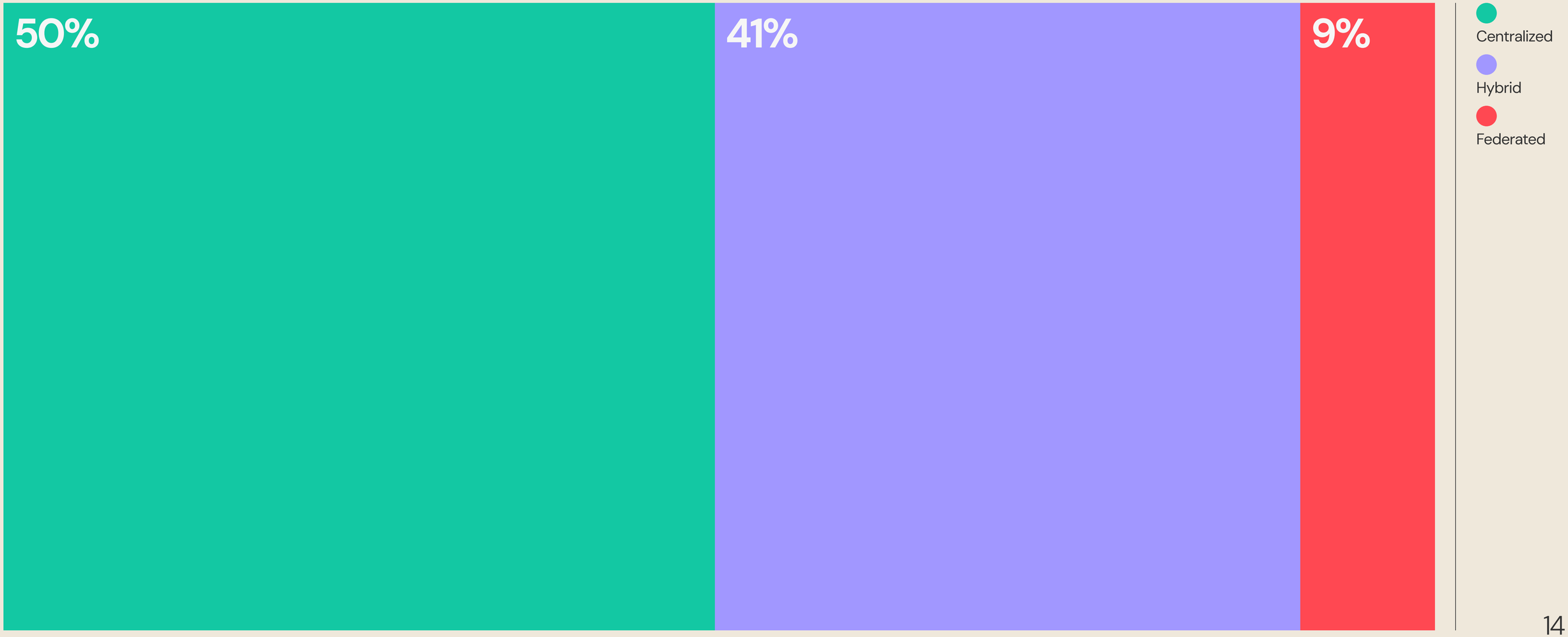
The key challenges with centralized models are around resourcing and the effects of silos. Centralized teams often still feel like they don't have enough resource to adequately serve the needs of the product org. Also, the siloed nature of centralized teams mean that communication issues often arise, as well as a lack of engagement and contribution.

🔍 Key Challenges - Hybrid

Managing and encouraging contribution seems to be the biggest challenge of a hybrid model. Some teams felt underprepared and under-resourced to do the work required to have a healthy flow of contribution from outside the core team.

🔍 Key Challenges - Federated

As expected, the key challenges from federated teams are the lack of resource dedicated to the design system and shifting priorities meaning that design system work gets de-prioritized. A common theme for federated teams was the feeling they were 'just keeping the lights on.'



What tools do you use to build and maintain your design system?

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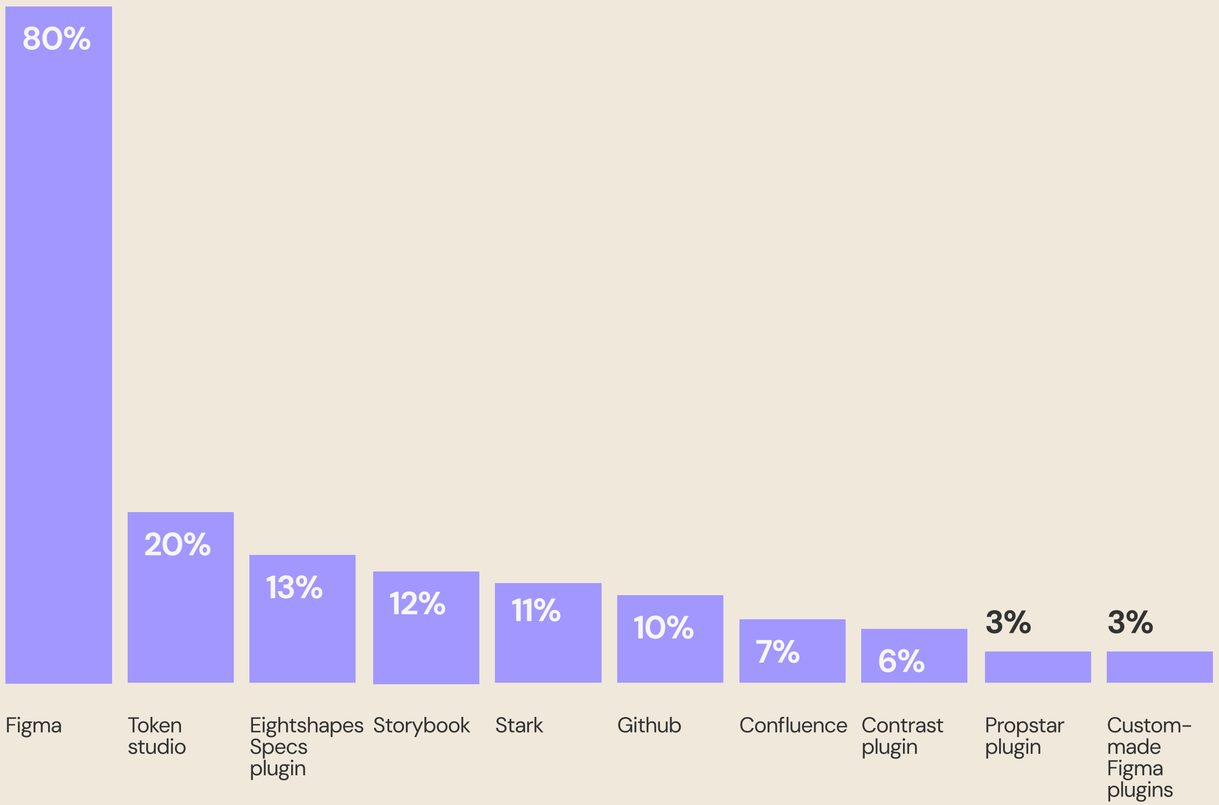
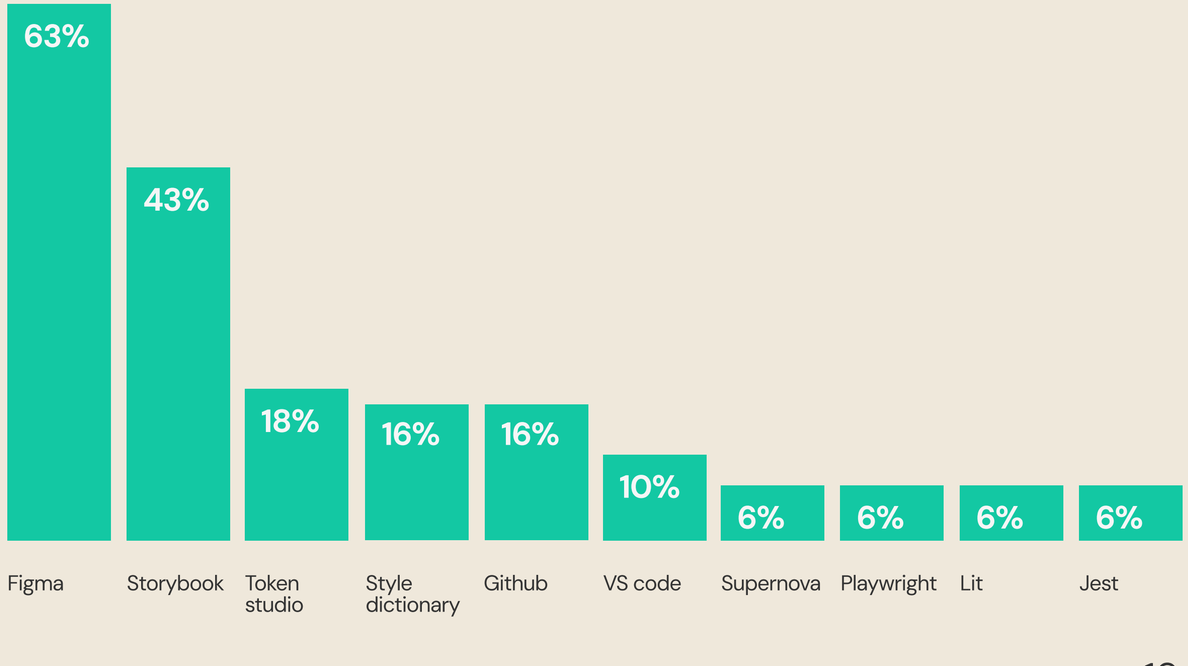
What tools do you use to create and maintain your design system?

(respondents could choose multiple)

Designers



Devs



🔍 Figma has a stranglehold on design systems

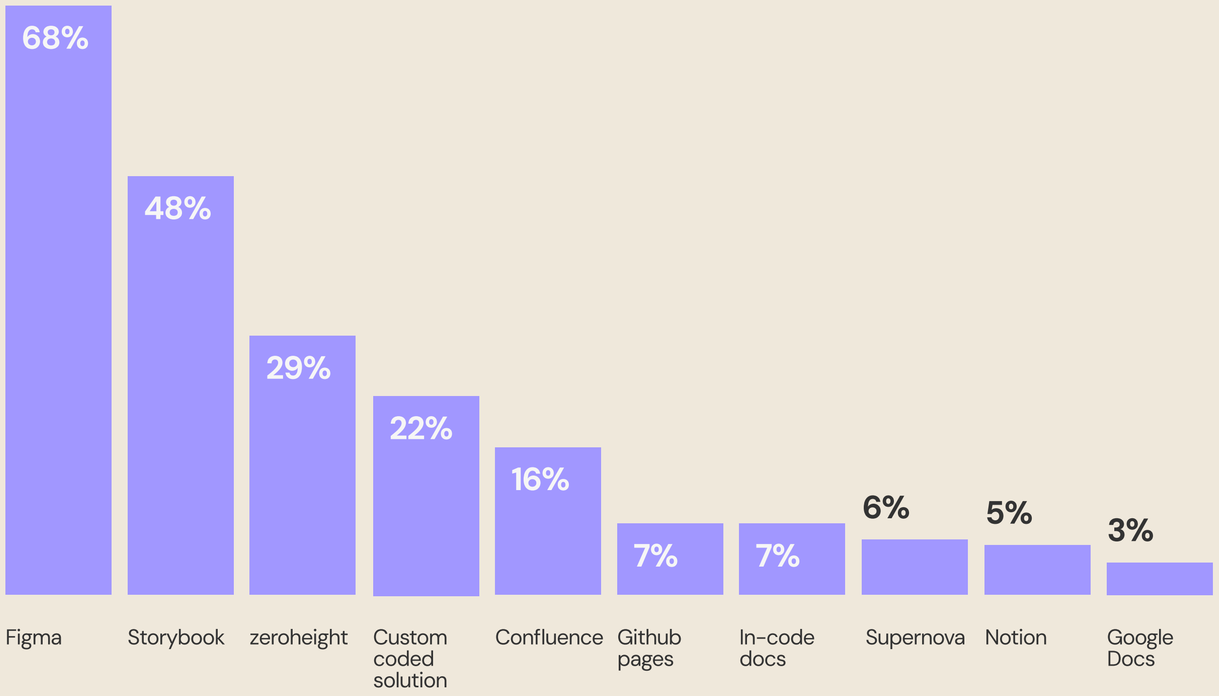
Unsurprisingly, Figma is dominating when it comes to creating and maintaining design systems. No other design tools accounted for more than 0.5% of respondents, and even 63% of devs use Figma as part of their day to day work.

💡 Custom plugins are on the rise

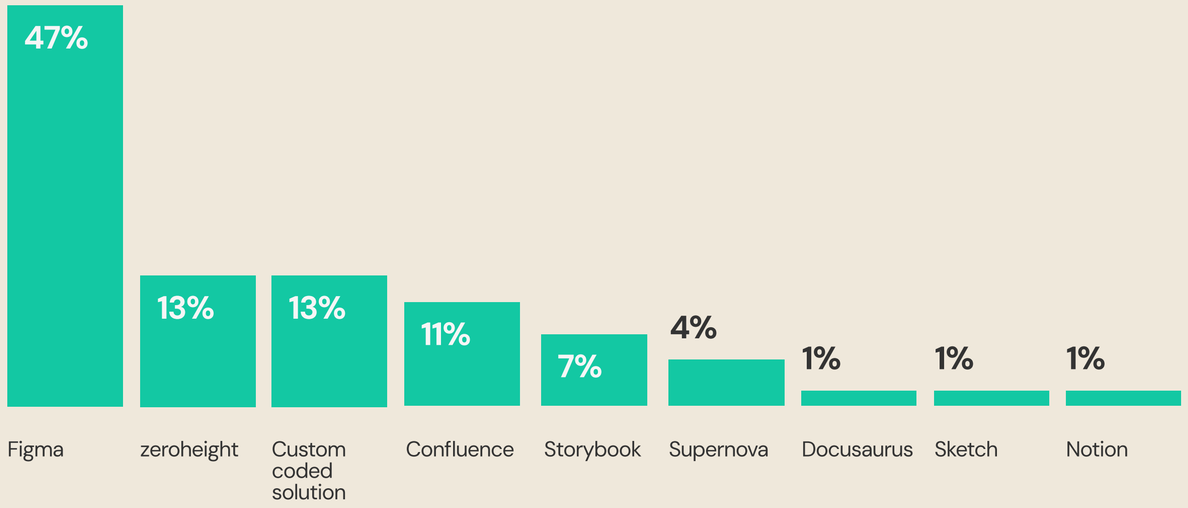
One interesting change from previous years is the emergence of companies creating their own custom tooling, specifically with Figma plugins. As our design systems grow, our needs from the tooling we use may start outpacing how fast those tools grow.

What do you use to document your design system? (respondents could choose multiple)

Tools used for documentation



What is the primary documentation tool?



What do you use to document your design system?

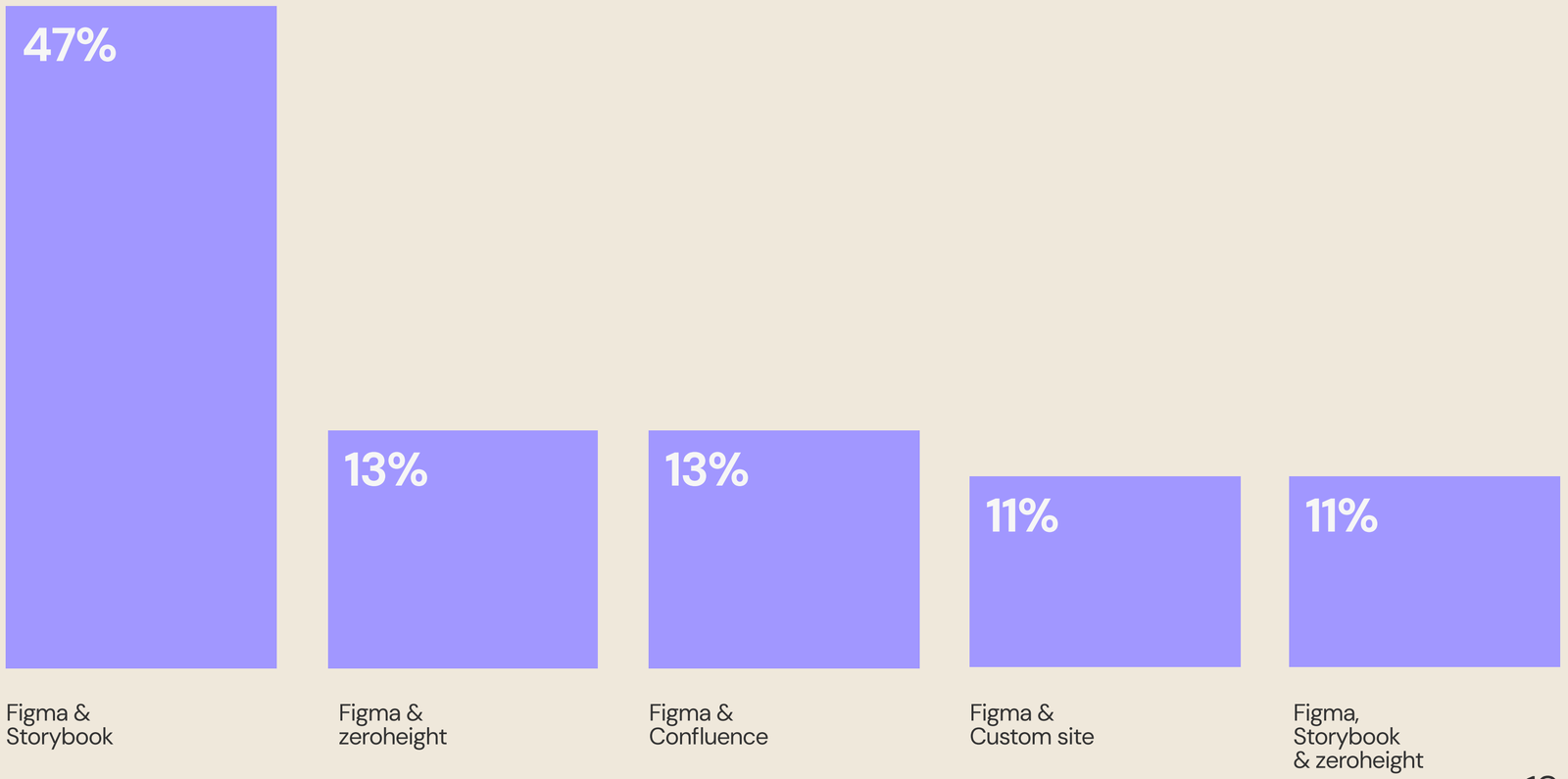
68%

document their design system in multiple places

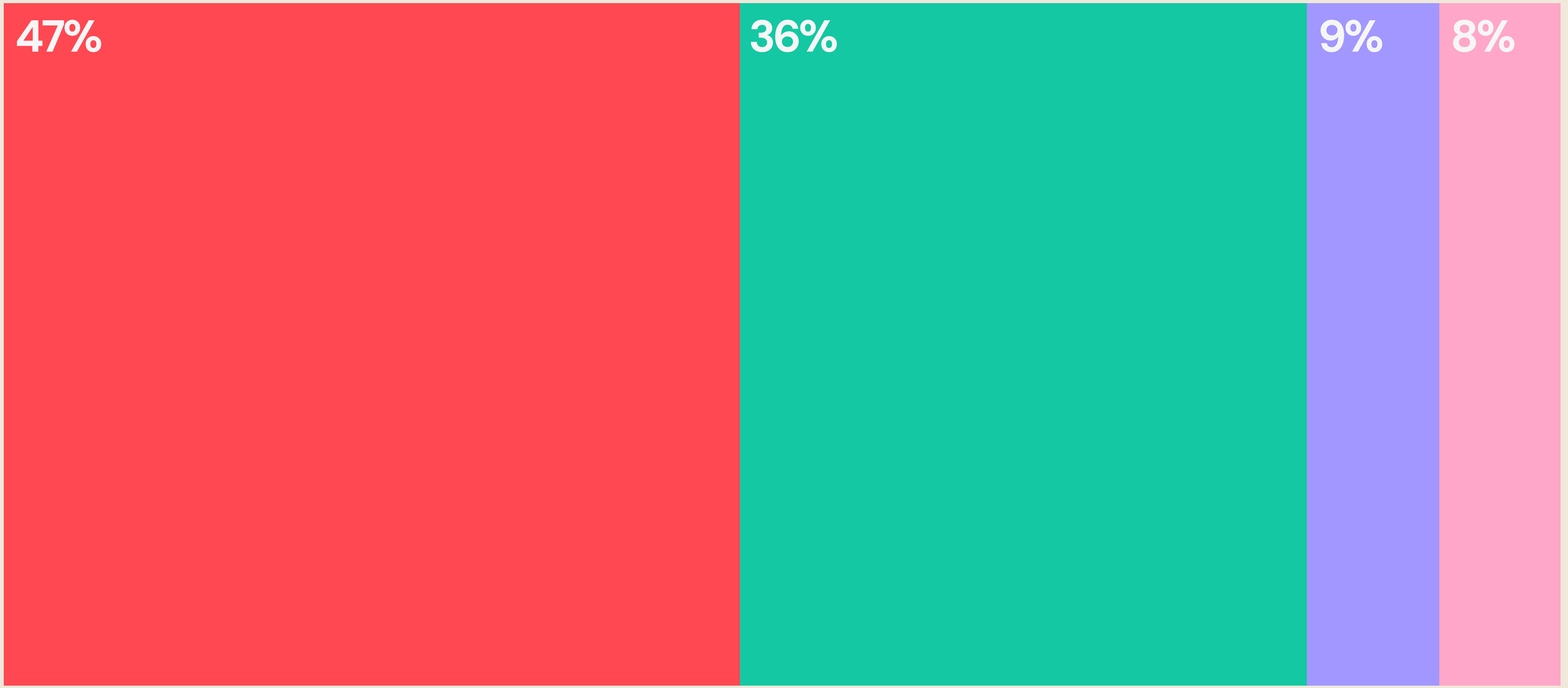
🔍 The tooling space is fragmenting even further

In previous years, we've seen a dominance in tooling, with Figma, Storybook and zeroheight being the most common. This year we've seen two interesting trends - one a fragmentation of tools, with people spreading their choices across loads of options, some not specifically created for design systems, and also a clear consolidation of tools, with Figma and Storybook becoming the clear dominant tool combination. This is likely an effect of design systems being underfunded, so teams are trying to find efficiencies where they can.

Most popular combination of tools



Who makes purchasing decisions for your tools?



Intro

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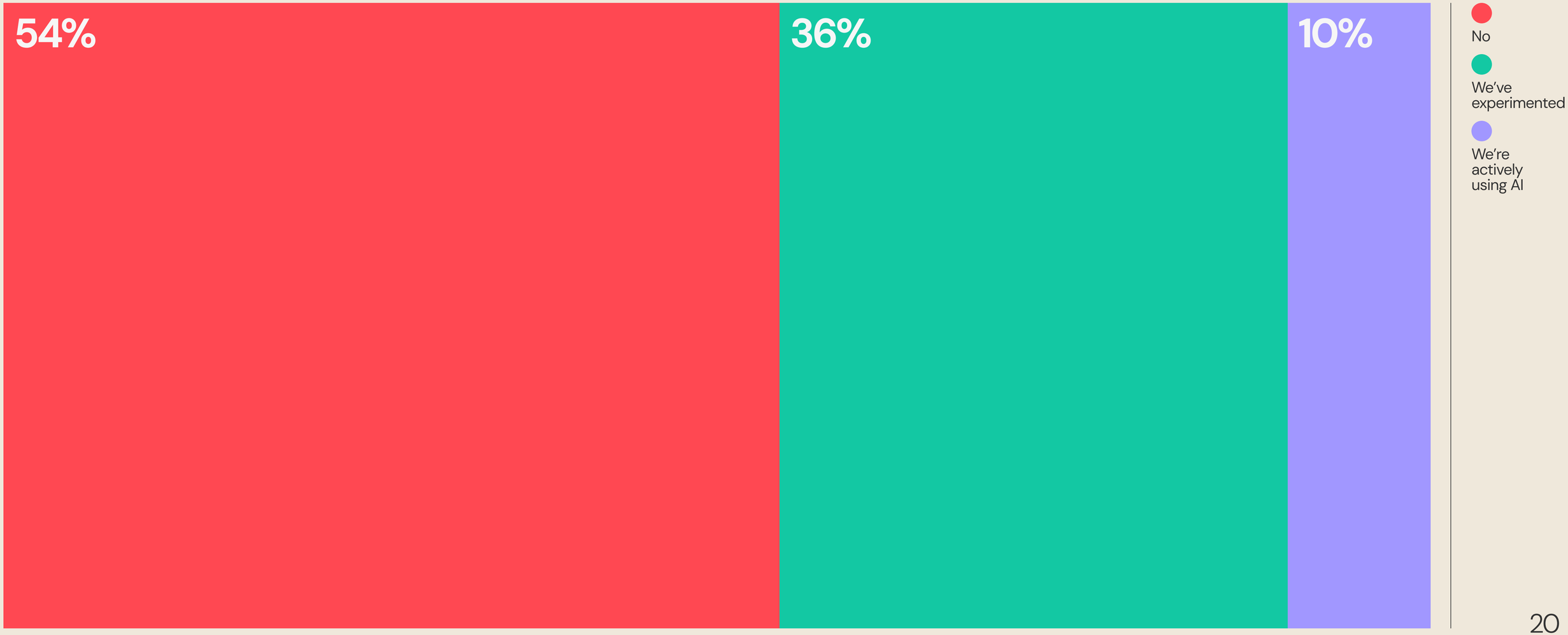
Design Systems Report 2025

Are you using AI in your design system work?

🔍 Design systems are still AI-sceptical

More than half the respondents don't use AI, and from the free text responses, have very little intention to. This is a double-edged sword. While it's good to be sceptical of AI, especially with a lot of the ethical concerns, sticking your head in the sand means you aren't part of the conversation of how AI will shape our industry.



How are you using AI?

💡 Top tips for using AI with your design system

Should you use AI for documentation?

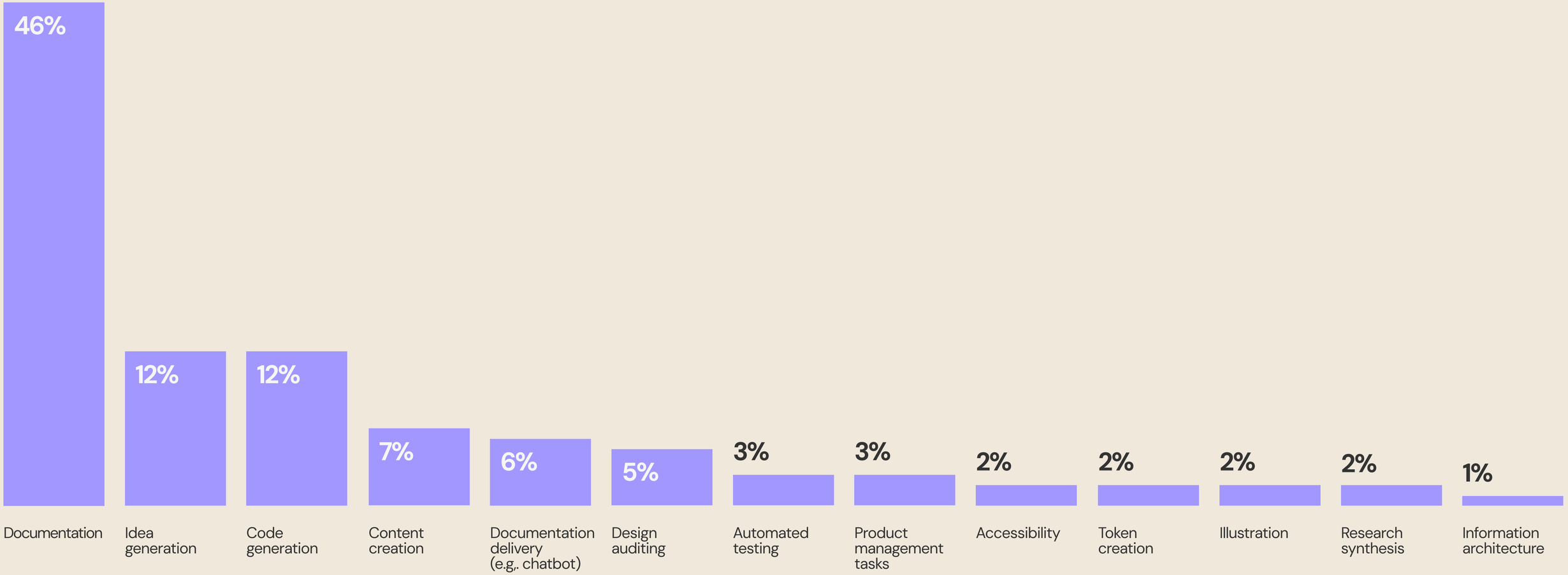
Documentation is by far the most common use case for AI, but should it be? Part of the power of documentation is what you find out when writing the guidance for your components or patterns, so having it do all the heavy lifting isn't great. However, short-cutting by creating templates, or rewriting so it's in the right language is a good place to look.

Is AI the new Clippy?

One of the strengths of AI is the way it can synthesize data. The slow rise of chatbot assistants is one we can embrace, as it provides a new way to consume the information in a way that makes sense to users. Similarly, using AI as an assistant to check things as you go along is great. Think of Clippy, but less anoying.

AI as another source of ideas

The second largest segment of AI use is using LLMs to act as a conversation partner and for idea generation. While you wouldn't use it as a sole source, it's a great way to sense check what you're thinking, and act as a starting point for ideas. After all, it does have access to most of the internet...



What tools do you use to measure?

Some of the tools mentioned

Code Analytics

Custom-built scripts
Github
Gitlab
zeroheight
Omlet

Website analytics

Google Analytics
Amplitude
zeroheight

Research tooling

Maze
Google Forms
Typeform

DSM

zeroheight

Accessibility

Axe
Lighthouse

Data tools

Datadog
Power BI
Qualtrics

Communication Tools

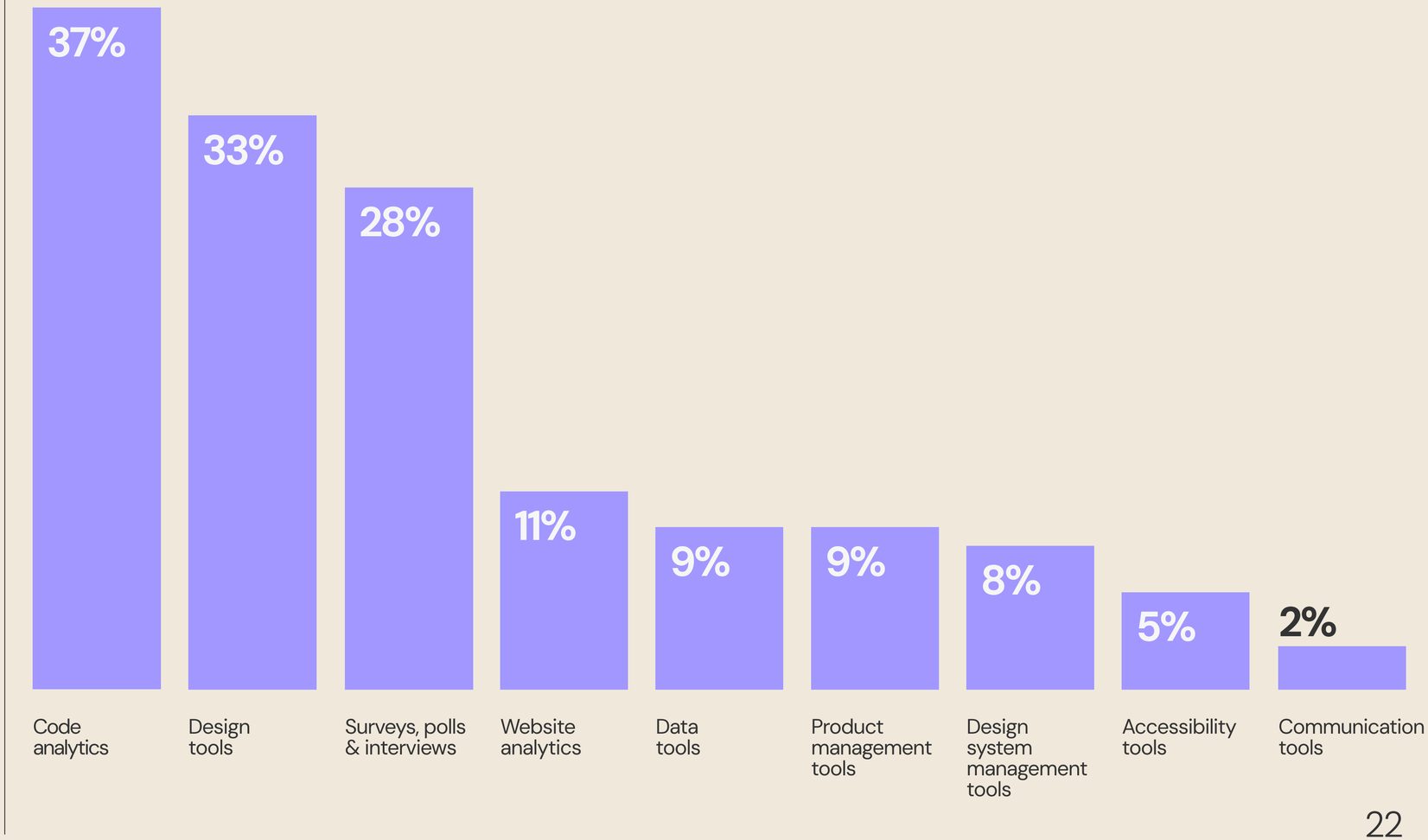
Slack
Microsoft Teams

Product Management Tools

JIRA

🔍 Tooling for measurement is incredibly fractured

Aside from Figma, there are no standout individual tools, and it seems a lot of tooling is custom, requiring teams to know what they want to measure, and actively maintain it. However, there are some inroads being made, with folks starting to use inbuilt analytics in DSMs, and specific tooling like Omlet. However, a lot of teams are still relying on manual qualitative measures. While this is a good thing, we anticipate that this space will grow over the coming years.



What is in your design system?

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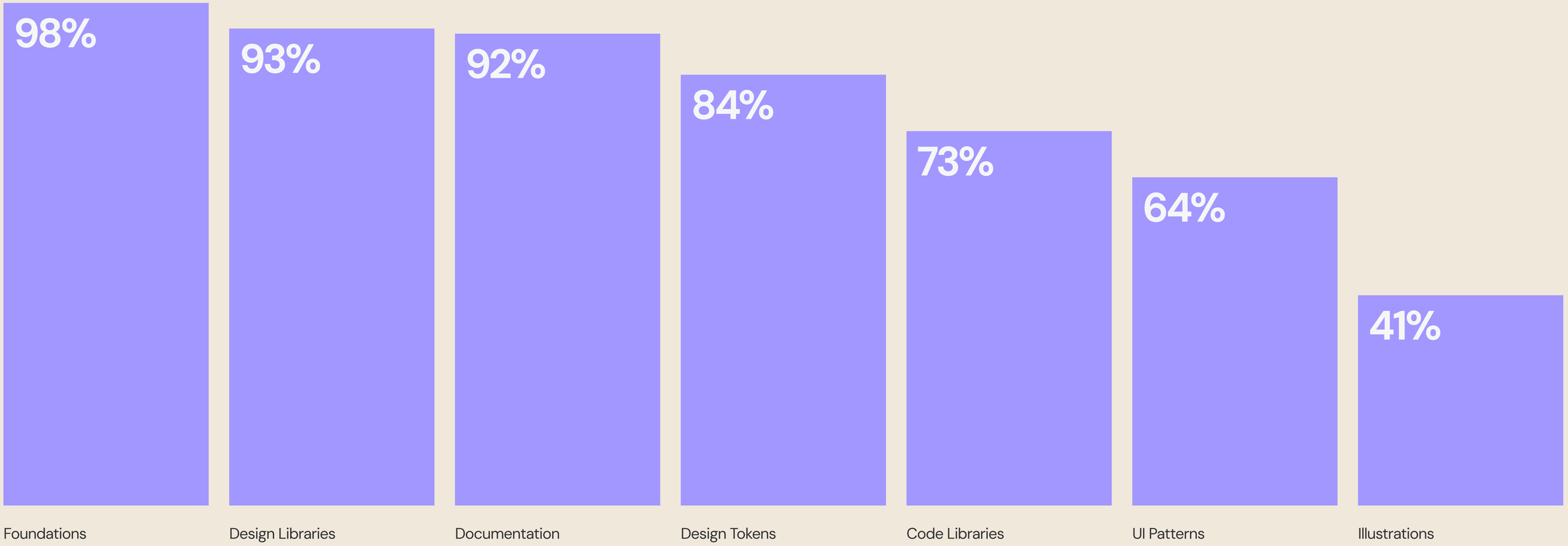
What do you include in your design system?

🔍 Design tokens are here to stay

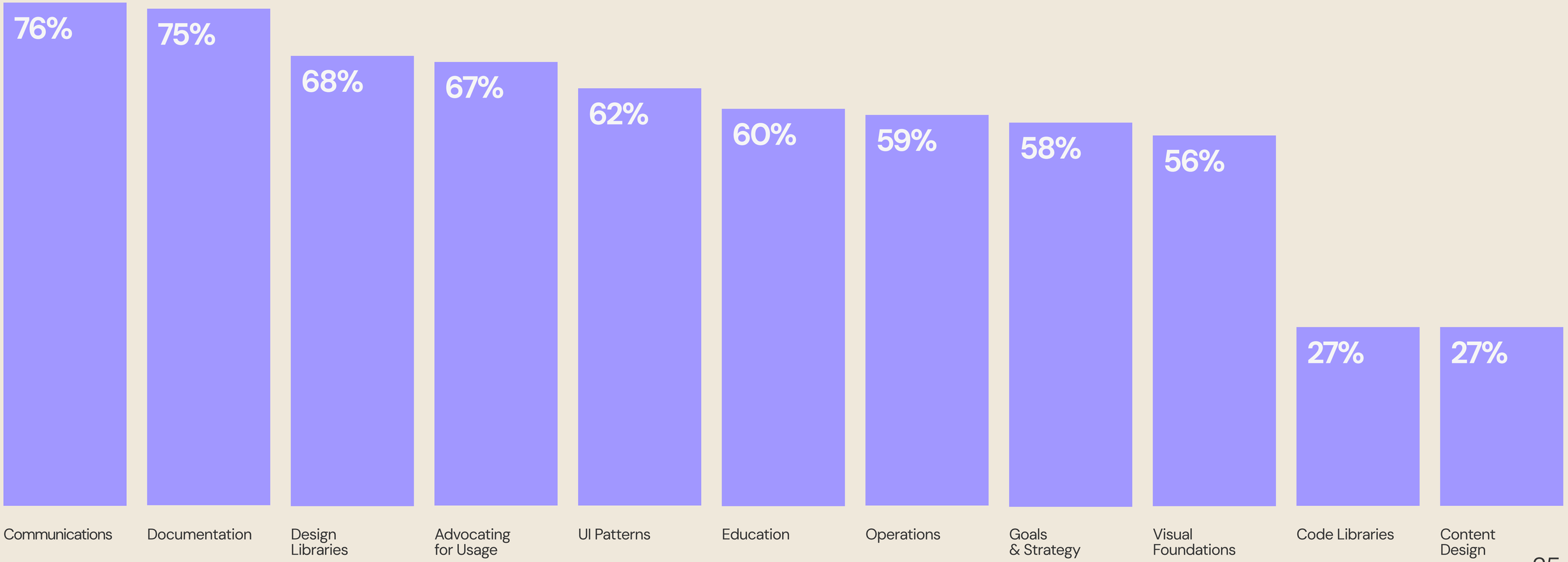
Design tokens have gone from 56% in 2024 to 84% this year, which shows that design tokens are at a point of mass adoption in design systems

💡 UI Patterns are still less prevalent than they should be

Only 64% of teams include UI Patterns in their documentation. As the most opinionated pieces of a design system, this is mildly concerning



What do you contribute to your design system?



What do you contribute to your design system?

Designers

Most contributed

Design libraries	93%
Documentation	88%
Communication	86%

Goals & strategy	62%
Content design	33%
Code libraries	20%

Least contributed

Developers

Most contributed

Code libraries	96%
Documentation	92%
Communication	90%

Design libraries	47%
Visual foundations	37%
Content design	22%

Least contributed

PMs and Leadership

Most contributed

Communication	90%
Operations	81%
Advocating for usage	81%

UI Patterns	50%
Content design	31%
Code libraries	21%

Least contributed

🔍 Who's responsible for communication?

It's interesting to note that communication is a top concern for almost all disciplines. While this is great on the surface, it does make me wonder whether we need to have clearer roles when it comes to communicating about the design system.

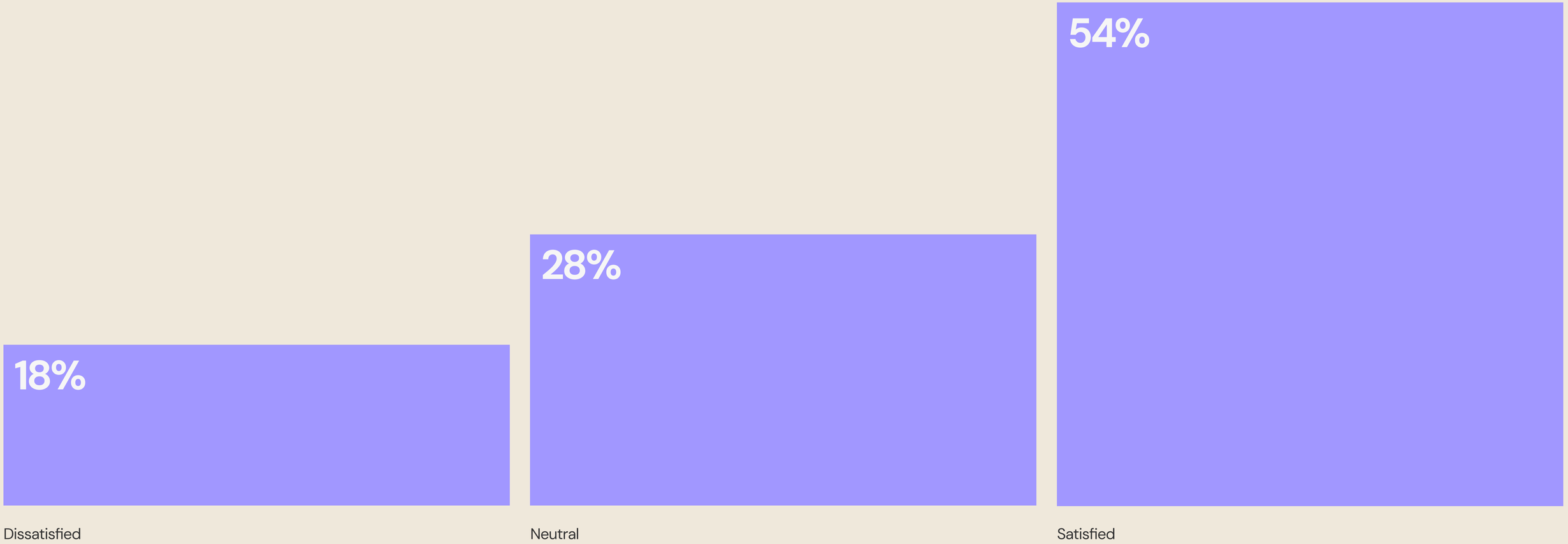
How satisfactory are our UI Patterns?

🔍 What makes satisfactory patterns?

While respondents pointed out the obvious points about reducing inefficiency through replicable experiences, and the power of consistency through their product, the most interesting point was about flexibility. A common theme with satisfied folks were that their patterns were flexible enough to truly scale to a diverse set of user needs.

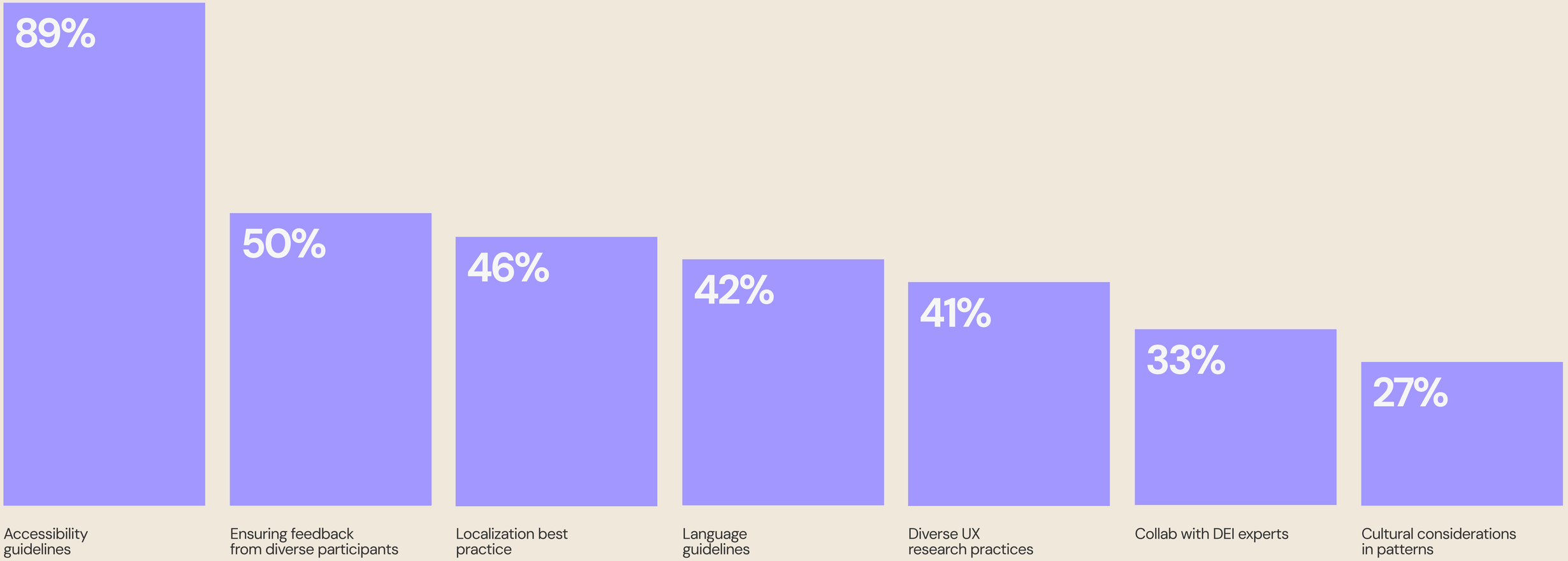
🔍 What makes unsatisfactory patterns?

Unsurprisingly, lack of resource to build and maintain patterns was a common theme in the dissatisfied. There was also a common theme of inconsistency and fragmentation within the patterns they offered. Rigidity, lack of support for multiple products, poor information architecture and differing levels of documentation were all mentioned.



How does your design system account for diverse needs?

(respondents could choose multiple)

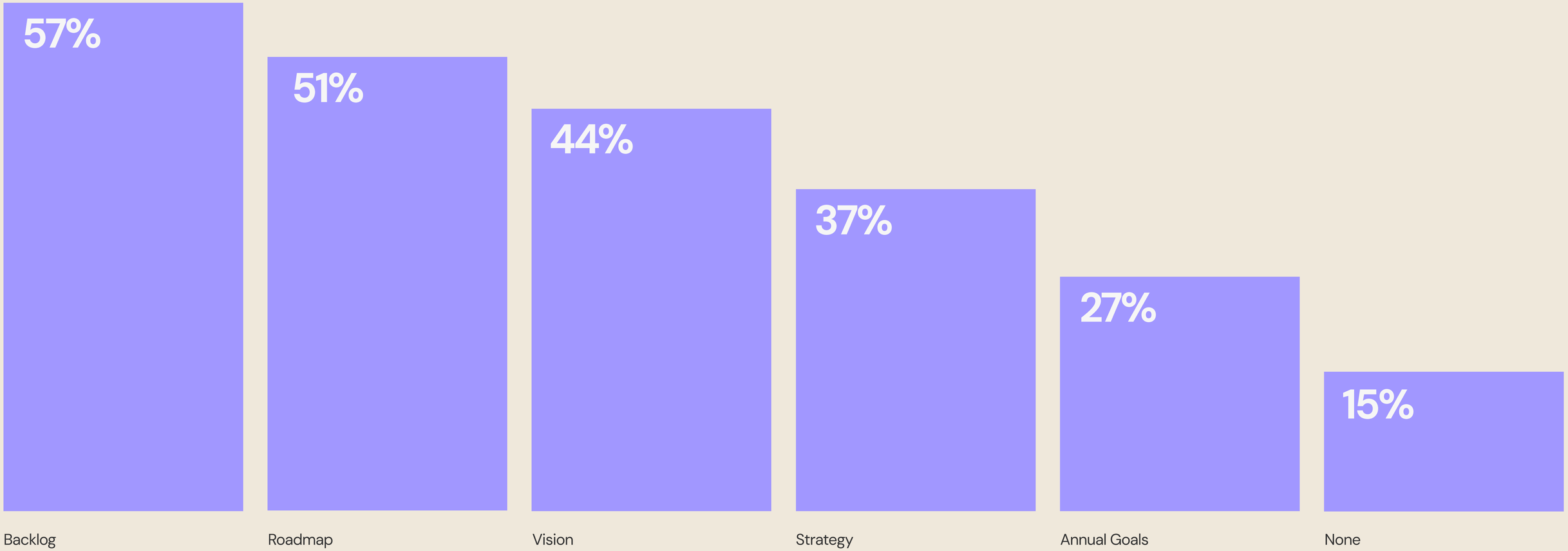


💡 Are accessibility guidelines enough?

While most respondents include accessibility guidelines in their design system, there's still a relative lack of inclusive activities and guidelines from most of our design systems. While some of these are definitely use-case specific (such as localization and cultural consideration), others like diverse UX research practices need to see an increase in our design systems across the board.

What strategic elements do you include in your design system?

(respondents could choose multiple)



💡 Where's the strategy?

While there are some pieces of strategic communication that are included in respondents' design systems, the fact that vision, strategy, and annual goals all fall below 45% is surprising. Sure, sharing your backlog and roadmap is important to explain the what, but sharing your vision, strategy and goals are important pieces for making the why and how, and keeping your team accountable.

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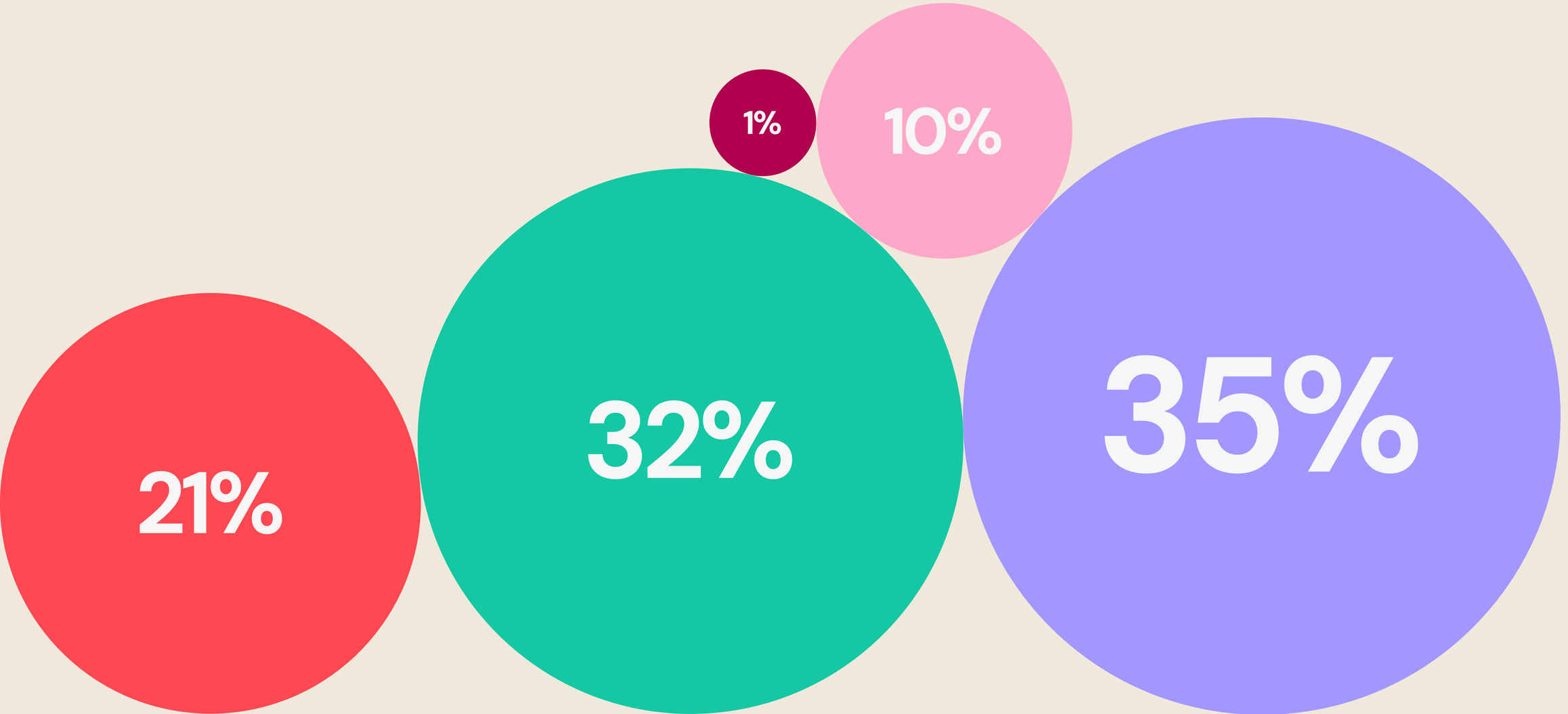
How automated is your design system?

💡 Automation is a space we should all be watching

Over half the respondents have minimal automation or none at all, yet when we talk to folks, this is a big future vision for a lot of teams. We foresee more and more tooling that makes automation through the design system possible, not only with tokens, but with components, documentation and prototyping.



How do you automate your design system?

Over half the respondents have minimal automation or none at all, yet when we talk to folks, this is a big future vision for a lot of teams. We foresee more and more tooling that makes automation through the design system possible, not only with tokens, but with components, documentation and prototyping.

🔍 Some documentation automation, mostly for code

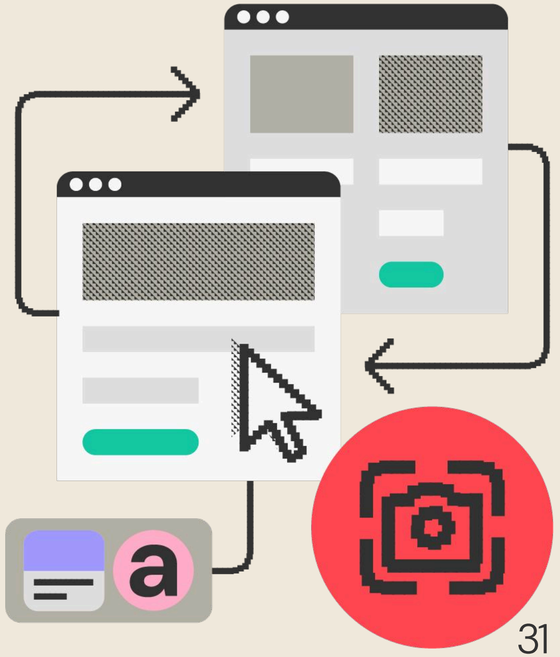
Some teams automatically create component API docs using Storybook, while other teams are using custom Figma plugins to automatically generate specs and documentation for components.

🔍 CI/CD for design tokens is the most common

The most common automation is continuous integration and deployment for tokens. This includes syncing variables from figma to tokens in code, automated testing, and publishing tokens to packages for consumption.

🔍 Visual regression testing

Visual regression testing is an area that I assumed would be more commonplace than the survey suggests. While a few folks mentioned that they have visual regression testing in place for their components, it's still a far way behind our core product compadres.



What do you wish you could automate?

While automation is low, there were a lot of responses highlighting things we wish were automated. While some of these do exist, others are harder to find. Will 2025 be the year of automating our design systems?

Tools for diffing between variables in Figma and tokens in code

Accessibility checking and screen reader compatibility at a component level

Token usage tools – seeing a birds eye view of what tokens are used where

Automated changelogs and release notes, as well automated communication of those updates

Updates of design changes in dev environments (IDEs, Storybook, Github)

Automatic code updates based on changes to the designs outside of tokens

Automated documentation from changes in the component in design

Helpers that alert or update for naming conventions and organization

Automated ticket creation for component updates

Automated messaging when components are updated, including which parts of the product are affected

Alerts for potential system redundancies, and optimization opportunities

How healthy is your design system?

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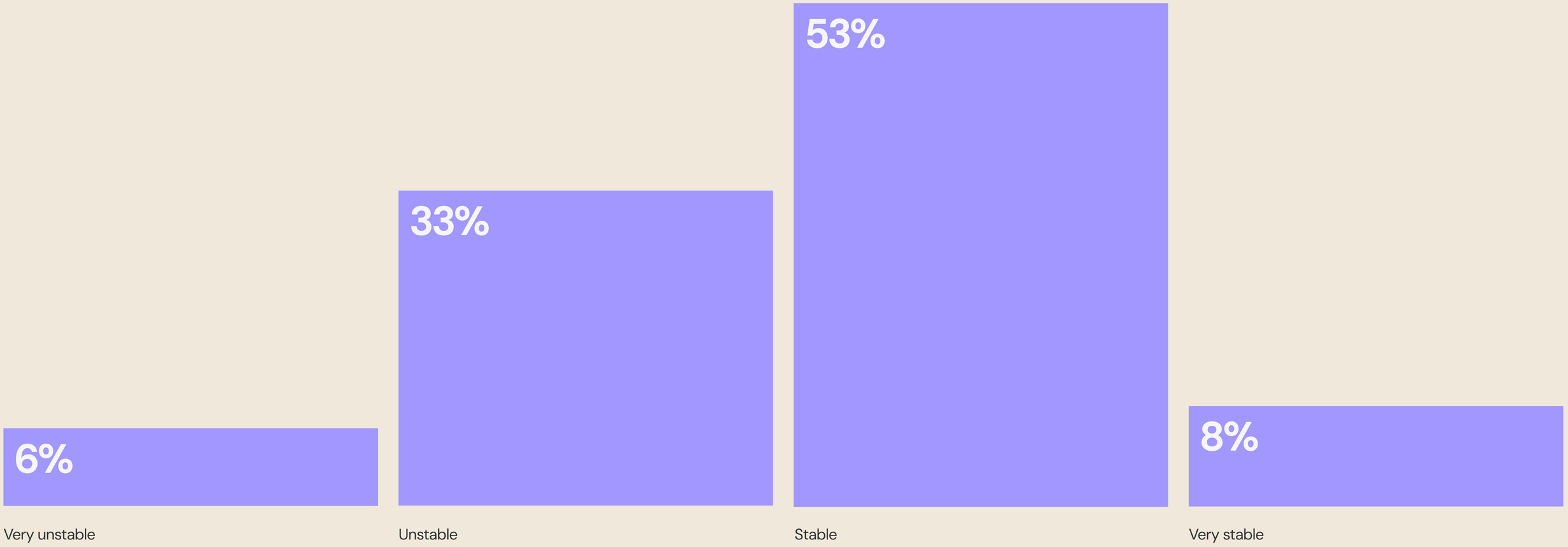
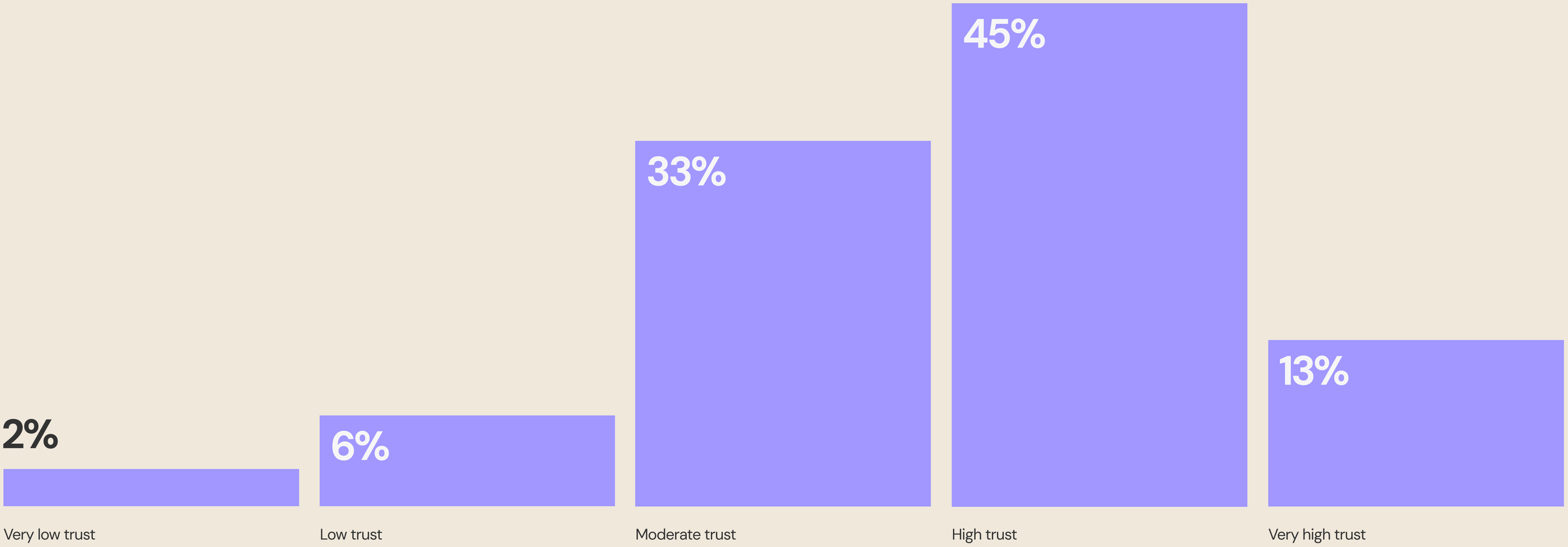
Design Systems Report 2025

How stable is your design system?



How much trust do you have in your design system?



How much trust do you have in your design system?

These are the markers of high trust

Strong foundation in collaboration

Collaboration was a common marker of high trust, with product, engineering and design feeling involved and valued around their needs, contribution and insight.

Stability at the core

A lot of the more mature teams suggested that a well cultivated sense of stability and robustness in the system, built over years, is one of the key factors in their system having high trust.

Responsiveness and a culture of improvement

Teams that are open to feedback, and then action the feedback with regular updates and optimization are also more likely to have higher levels of trust.

> “The design system is not just a tool but a dynamic resource that adapts to the changing requirements of the organization.”

These are the markers of low trust

Dealing with legacy

One common theme in systems with low trust was having components that are inconsistent or outdated, usually because of legacy. While this is a reality a lot of teams face, it’s also something that should be actively worked on to avoid low trust.

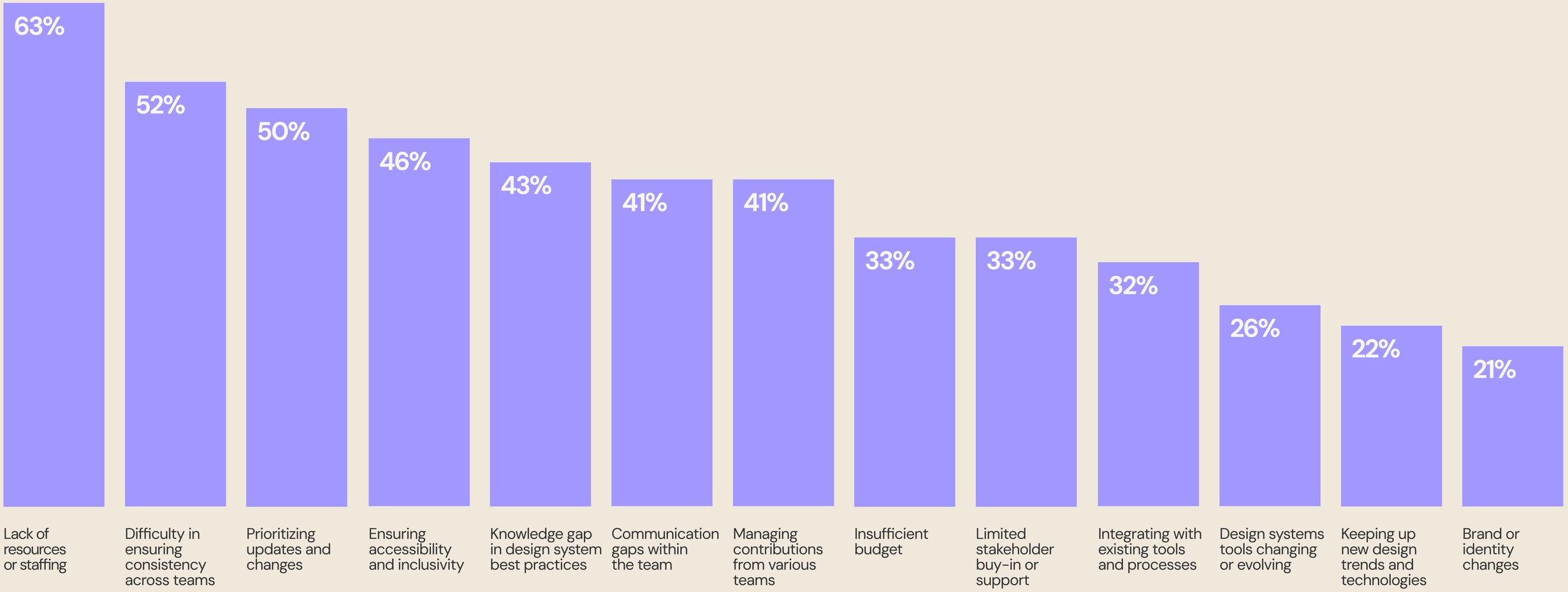
Insufficient resource

Unsurprisingly, a very common theme with low trust was a lack of people and time, coupled with lack of ‘buy-in’ from leadership. Lack of resource often ends with ruthless prioritization, and important elements like accessibility or documentation being left to rot.

Lack of communication that leads to lack of adoption

Another area, often combined with lack of resource, is lack of attention to communication, resulting in teams deviating from the system and a lack of awareness about what the design system offers.

What are your biggest challenges?



Successes and challenges in creating and implementing a design system strategy

👍 Successes

Focusing on long-term strategy

Recognizing that design systems aren't a one-off project, and that you need to establish a strategy that goes beyond this quarter or year.

Focus on adoption and engagement

Having a clear focus on adoption and engagement across the organization, with clear steps for communication as well as what's being released.

Performance metrics and continuous improvement

Measurement has never been more important for design systems. Focusing on performance metrics and effective feedback loops leads to more trusted systems.

Managing expectations and deliverables

Another key success has been effective product management practices – setting expectations and effective communication are key to success.

👎 Challenges

Aligning with company goals

One of the most significant hurdles is aligning to the broader company goals, especially when goals and OKRs are focused on product and go-to-market teams.

Organizational changes

Frequent restructuring, shifting priorities and changing company strategies have been huge headwinds for teams when setting an effective strategy for the design system.

Having the time to focus on strategy

Unsurprisingly, resource is a very common complaint when it comes to creating an effective strategy. If you don't have enough people to do the work, you don't have the time and space you need to zoom out.

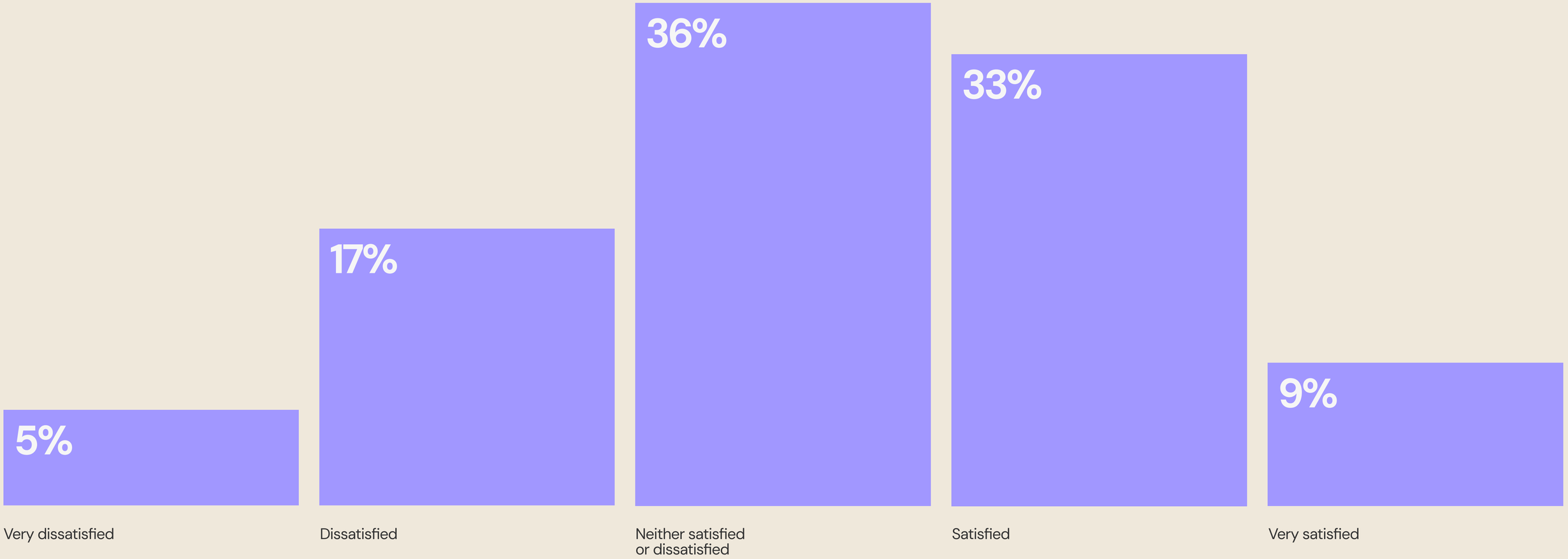
A culture of resistance

Sometimes it's really difficult to overcome embedded practices and habits within the product organization, which can stand in the way of implementing an effective strategy.

How satisfied are you with your ability to secure buy-in?

🔍 Securing buy-in for design systems is a challenge

While just under 50% are satisfied with their ability to get buy-in, there are still over half of the respondents who find buy-in a challenge. The common themes all seem to revolve around a lack of understanding and perceived value in senior leadership, competing priorities with the rest of the product org, and communication gaps in communicating the value of the design system to the wider organization.



Welcome

Some fine print

The data for this report was collected between September and November 2024. In our commitment to clarity and precision in presenting the survey findings, we've adhered to a few guiding principles in our data representation. Firstly, we rounded all percentages to the nearest whole number for easy understanding. As a result, some totals may slightly exceed or fall short of 100%. Secondly, we indicate where participants could select multiple answers; the total percentages may exceed 100%.

Welcome to the Design Systems Report (formerly known as How We Document), our annual report that dives into the state of design systems. We're into the fourth year of our report, and once again we've gathered the data on your teams, how you structure your design systems, the challenges you face and what makes a well adopted, highly trusted design system. Just under 300 of you participated in the survey, with the highest mix of roles we've had in the four years of running this report.

As well as serving the data itself so you can form your own opinions, we've offered our insight and tips to help you action what we found. One of the big takeaways we took from the analysis is that design systems is in a state of flux at the moment. We seem to have moved beyond the early stages of hype, where everyone invested heavily in design systems with inflated expectations, and now we're into the difficult second stage, where not everyone has been able to deliver on those early promises. This especially surfaces through four key trends in the report:

Design Systems are on their way to mass adoption — One of the more heartening trends is that dedicated design system teams are becoming more and more commonplace. We're maturing in our approach to design system organization, and underpinning technologies like design tokens have achieved strong adoption relatively quickly. Even the growing pains we're having are indicative of design systems moving into the next stage towards being a natural component of any modern product organization. There's hope for the future!

Resources are more constrained than they've ever been — The Great Layoff is still hitting our design system teams hard. We've yet to bounce back, yet the expectations on teams are growing day by day, with organizations requiring solid, measurable impact on the bottom line. With lack of resource, time and budget being a common complaint, we need to either figure out how to do more with less, or figure out how we sell in the value of design systems to get the investment we need to grow.

How we communicate is our next biggest hurdle — A common theme throughout the responses was communication. Whether it's establishing strong buy-in with leaders, or educating the organization to drive adoption, it feels like we're still relatively early on in our journey to figuring out how to speak about our design systems. At the same time, communication is one of the things that gets deprioritized when we're resource constrained, so how do we make time to advocate for our work?

We would like everything to be automated, but we still don't know how — Design systems promise us a world where product delivery is a highly efficient machine, with every cog optimized and greased to perfection. However, we've only scratched the surface when it comes to automation. This was clear in the responses, with the number of people automating their systems not moving much from previous surveys. This year we also asked what respondents *wish* they could automate, which highlighted the work we still need to do in this space from both a tooling and an ideas perspective.

While the trends may appear a little pessimistic, we've never been more excited about the potential of design systems, and where we're striving to arrive. As an industry, it's clear we're continuing to grow and innovate, and the responses to the Design Systems Report accurately reflects this. It's time to level up and work together to make design systems as amazing as they can be.

So, sit back, grab a coffee and let's dive into the data..

The team at

zeroheight

How do you get buy-in in your organization?

Find your champions within leadership and work on a mandate

Unsurprisingly, having a mandate from leadership for design system use is a common theme for well-adopted, stable and high-trust design systems. One way to work towards this is to spend time working with leadership to find who your champions could be. Communicate value to them in a way that paves the way for a design system that sits at the core of product strategy!

Get your engineering org onboard

Another challenge seems to be getting engineering orgs onboard with the design system. Make sure you aren't only focusing on your Figma libraries, and make sure that engineering have a strong voice in how you take your system forward. Without engineering buy-in, your design system is just a UI library.

Focus on advocacy as a top concern

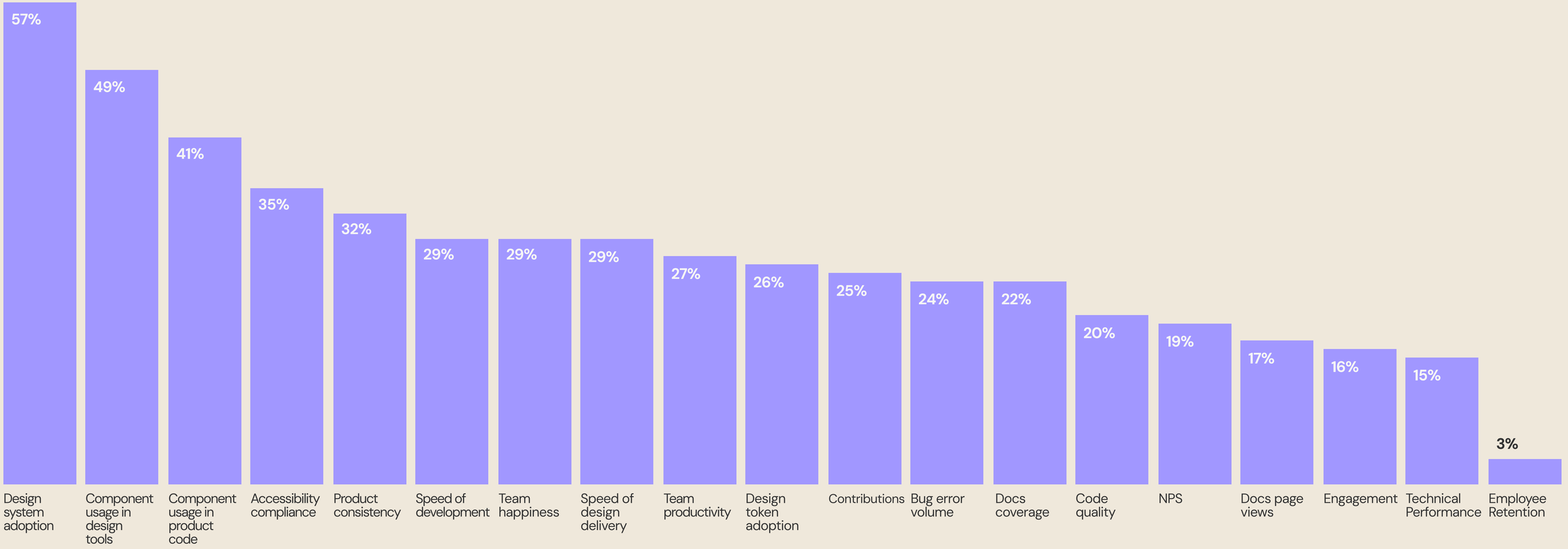
As mentioned at multiple points through the report, communication is a key focus for successful design systems. It may feel counter intuitive to focus on talking about the design system instead of building it, but make sure that advocating for your design system through education, communicating progress and fostering active participation is high on your agenda, especially in the early days.

> "The team spent a lot of time on promoting a design system and we secured buy-in for the design system from the executive levels. Once we got buy-in from them, it was a bit easier to promote the design system."

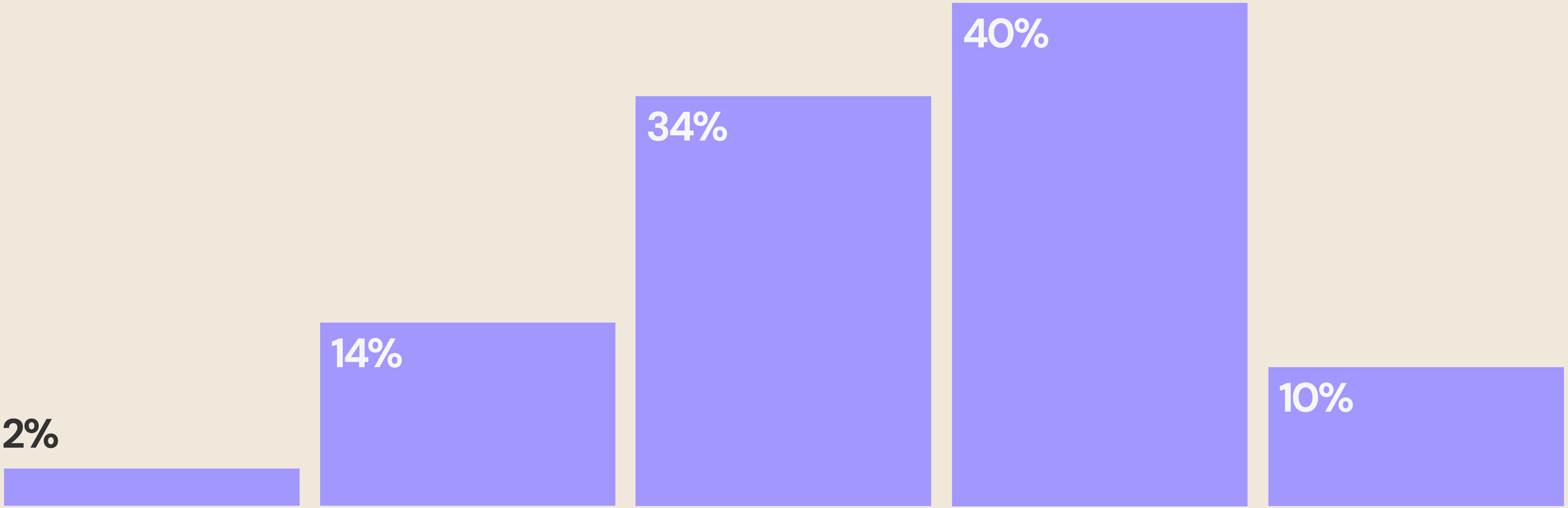
How well adopted is your design system?

7

What metrics do you use to track the success of the design system?



How widely is the design system adopted throughout your company?



What are the markers of a well adopted design system?

We looked at the most adopted design systems and tried to see what commonalities are amongst them when compared to the other respondents

Team makeup

Dedicate design system team

81% (+2%)

Hybrid model

68% (+27%)

While a dedicated design system team was as prevalent as other teams, use of a 'hybrid' model seems to be more common in well established, adopted system teams.

Buy-in from leadership

Ability to get stakeholder buy-in

75% (+33%)

One big correlation is that well-adopted systems are satisfied with their ability to get stakeholder buy-in. However, is this a chicken and egg situation?

AI use

Teams who have used AI for their design systems

37% (-9%)

It's probably still too early to tell, but one interesting trend is that well adopted are actively using AI less than other teams (4%), with fewer also experimenting with AI. Do we need AI to have well adopted design systems? Possibly not...

Stability and trust

High trust in their system

96% (+37%)

High stability in their system

90% (+29%)

Well adopted systems have fostered a feeling of trust in their system, as well as built something that is viewed as 'stable'

Communications

Satisfaction with communication

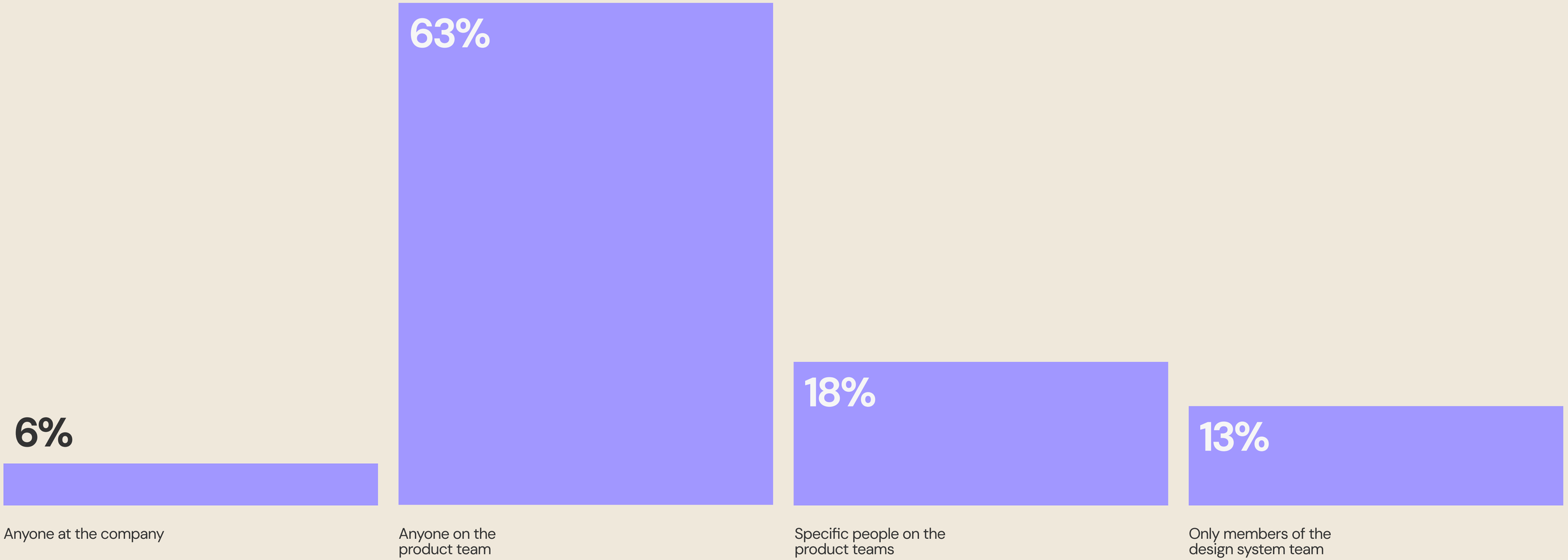
75% (+32%)

Another big correlation is satisfaction with communication. This matches with a lot of reported problems in non-adopted systems as well, that communication is one of the biggest challenges.

Governance, contribution and communication

8

Who is allowed to contribute to the design system?



💡 Why do a third of companies restrict contribution?

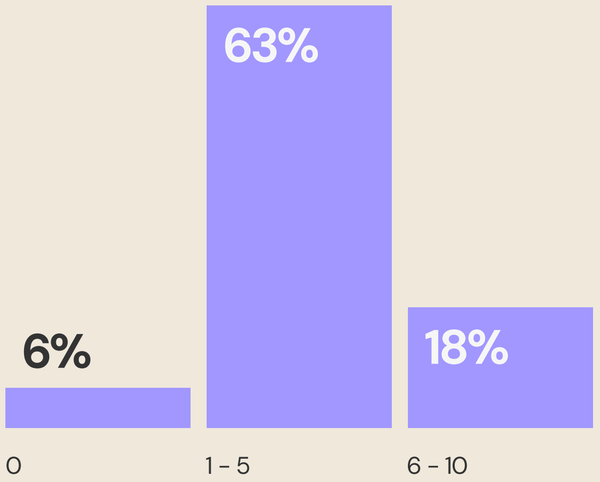
A third of the respondents either only allow contribution from members of their design system team, or specific people on product teams. Restricting contribution to your design system could be seen as authoritarian or like an ‘ivory tower’. At the same time, having a contribution model that isn’t well thought out or documented could also lead to a lack of trust in the system and subpar contributions.

How many people contribute to your design system?

🔍 Satisfaction with contribution diminishes as company size grows

It's clear that contribution is a problem that isn't scaling, shown both by the dramatic reduction in proportional contribution as company size grows, as well as the satisfaction. Once a company gets over 500 employees, it seems common to only have 1% of the overall company contributing.

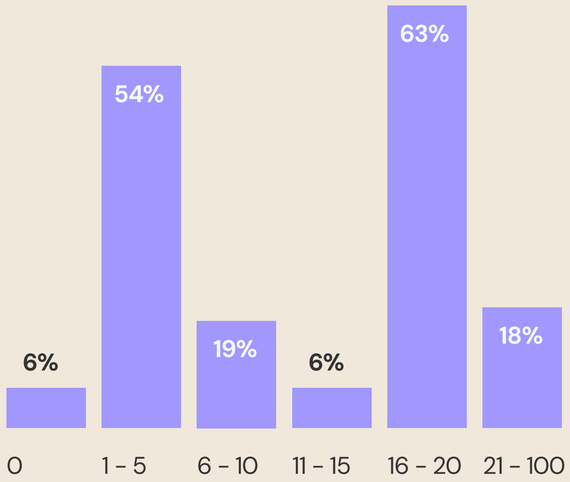
<100 employees



Satisfaction rate

44%

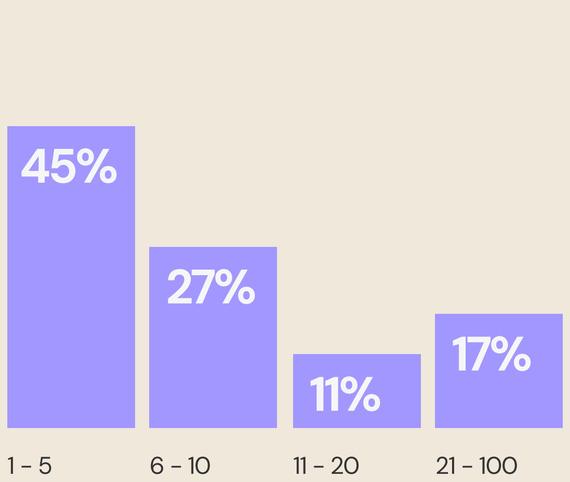
100-499 employees



Satisfaction rate

42%

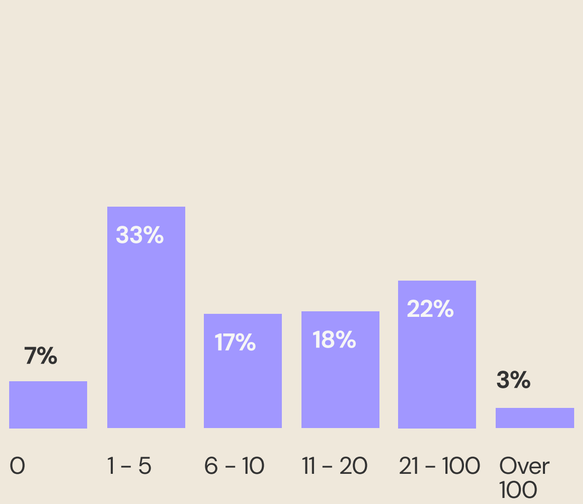
500-999 employees



Satisfaction rate

28%

1000+ employees



Satisfaction rate

32%

What are the main issues with contribution?

Communication

For folks that have a contribution model, communication is a key issue. How do you effectively communicate your contribution model and it's importance in a way that product teams understand and respect?

"It is simple enough, but not widely communicated or taken up - it's mostly a communication issue."

Integration

At a deeper level, there are common issues with integration of the design system with the product org. A lack of respect and integration means that the design system work ends up siloed and ignored.

"Engineers do whatever they want. We don't have clear processes to stop them doing that, but when we do, they complain they get blocked by those processes."

Time & resource

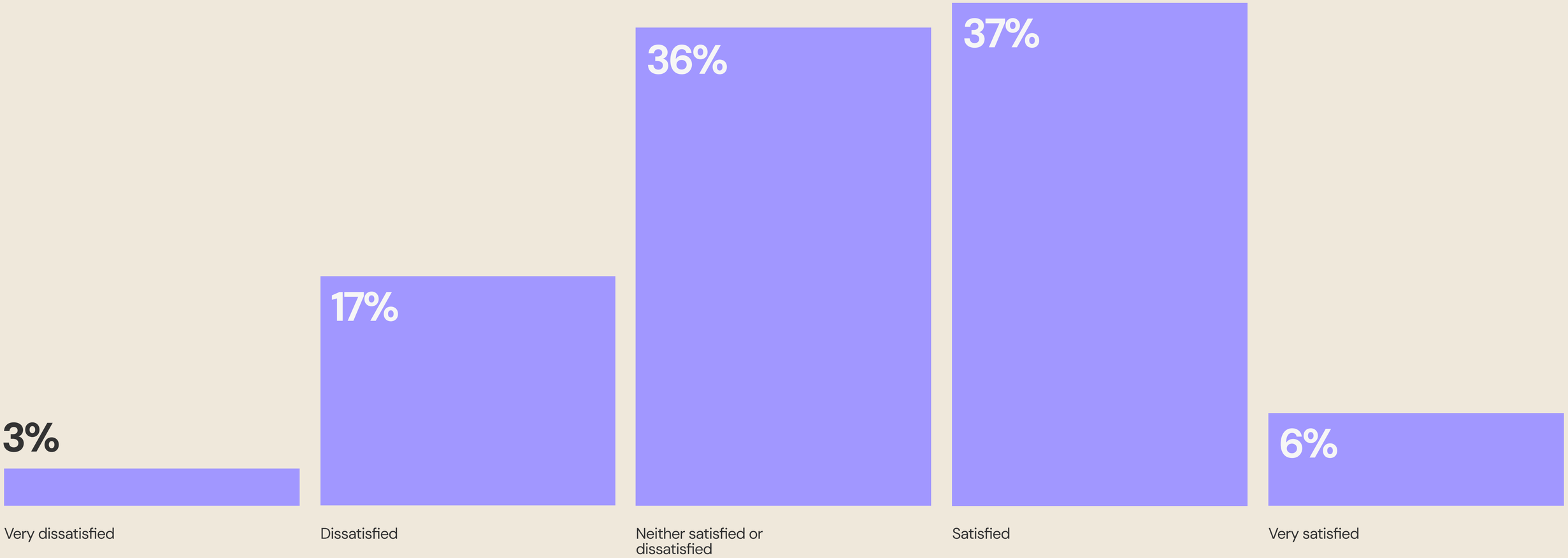
Underpinning this is our favourite challenge with design system - having enough people and time to make a significant impact. Both having time to establish a contribution model, having time to communicate it effectively, and the product team having enough time to actually contribute.

"Because teams prioritise shipping features, they want to use what already exists rather than spend time adding to it"

How satisfied are you with communication?

💡 Something doesn't add up with our satisfaction with communication

Interestingly, a common frustration through all the responses has pointed to communication being a major issue with respondents. At the same time, the rate of dissatisfaction on this particular question doesn't match. It points towards communication being an under appreciated area in design systems, despite it being extremely important to gaining high adoption.



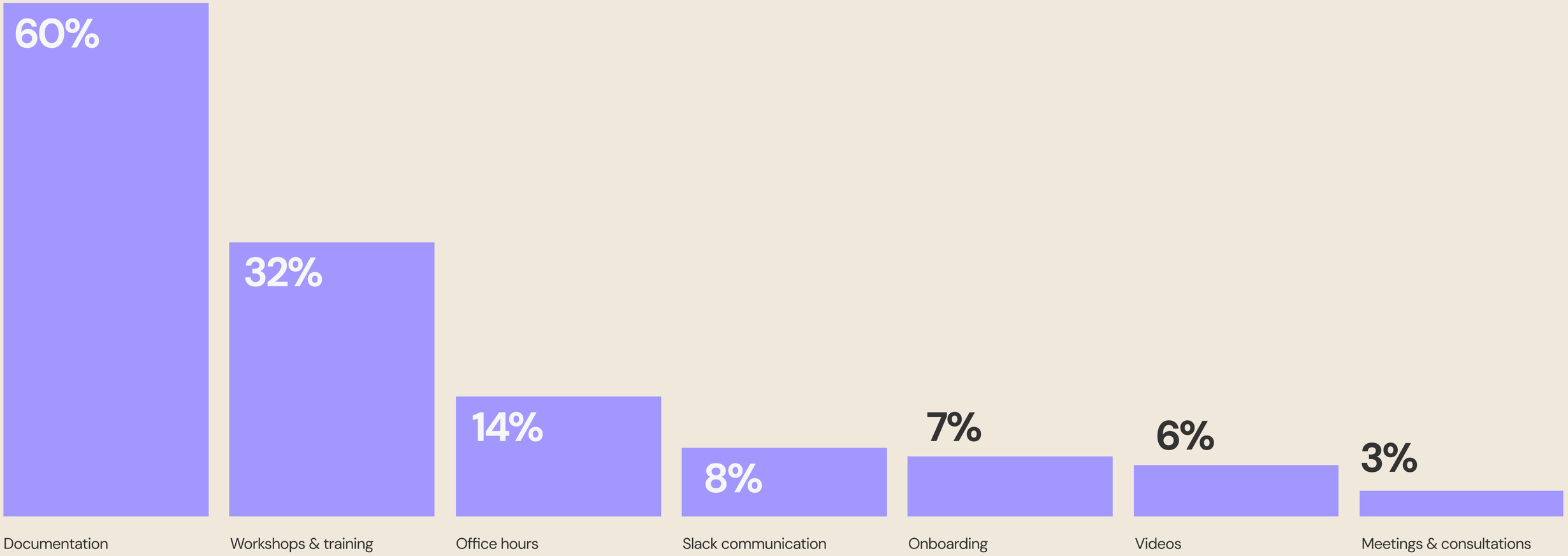
Who took this survey

2

What education or training resources do you provide?

💡 “Build it and they will come” is not a good communication strategy

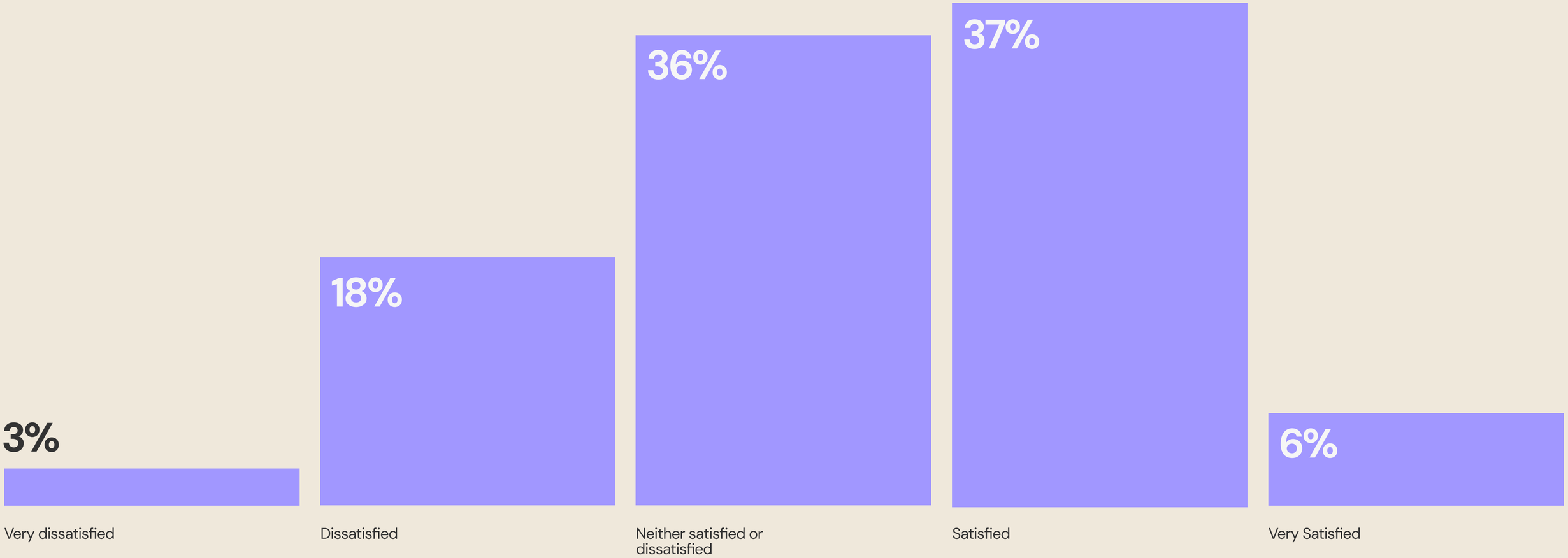
Documentation is important. However, documentation alone is only going to get you so far. Far too few teams are focusing on in-person training and other education opportunities to communicate progress and educate about the value of your design system!



How satisfied are you with your governance?

💡 Is basic governance enough?

With relatively low dissatisfaction rates with your governance practices, we looked into the reasons why, and a common theme was having light, basic governance. This tracks with the conversations we have with customers, where figuring out your 'just enough' level of governance is the happy place for effectiveness and widespread adoption of governance models.



Design tokens

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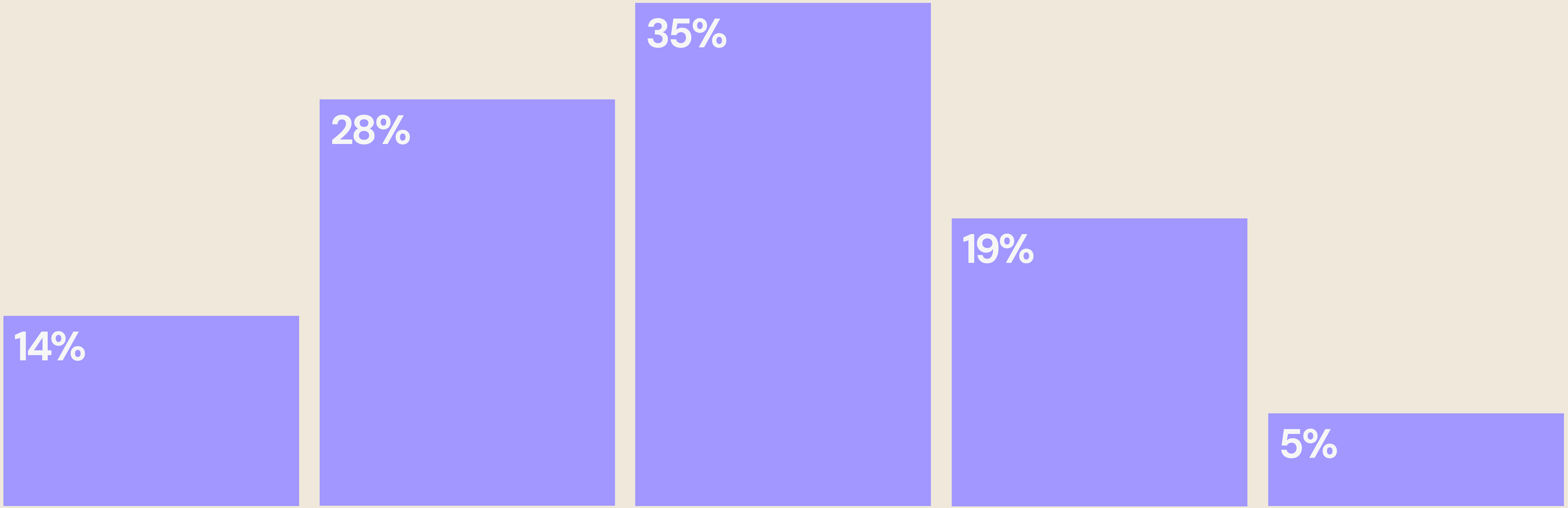
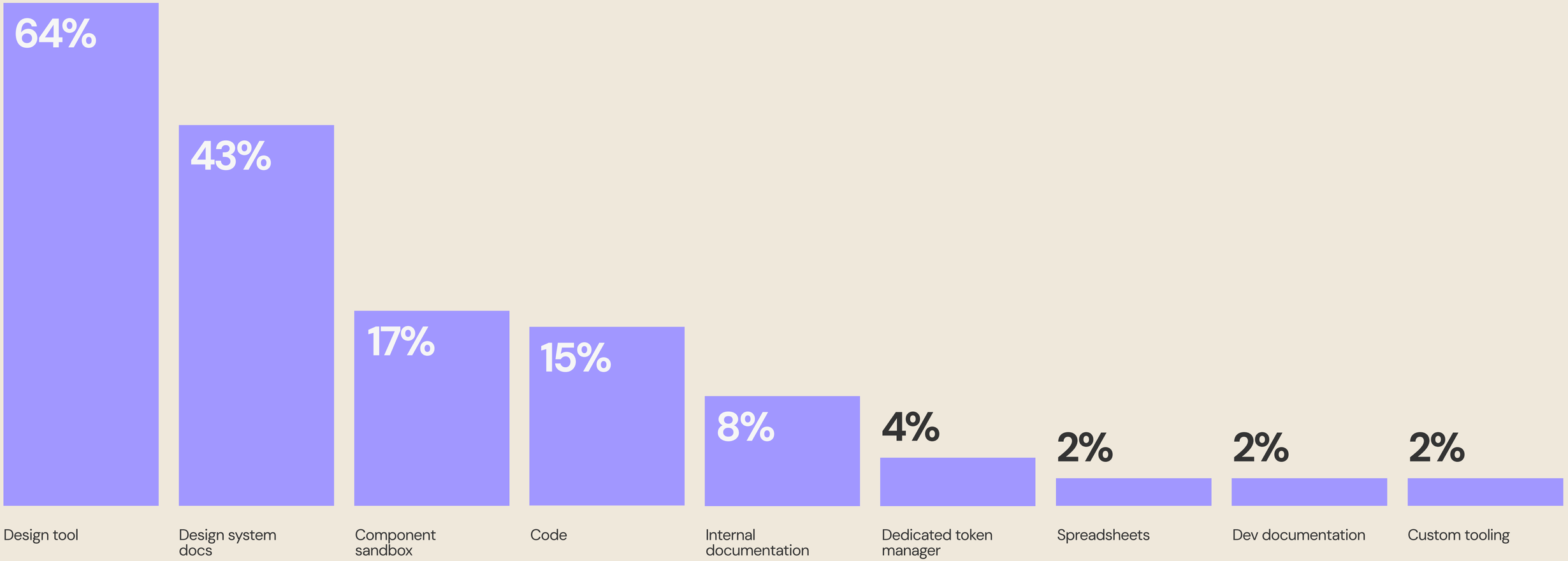
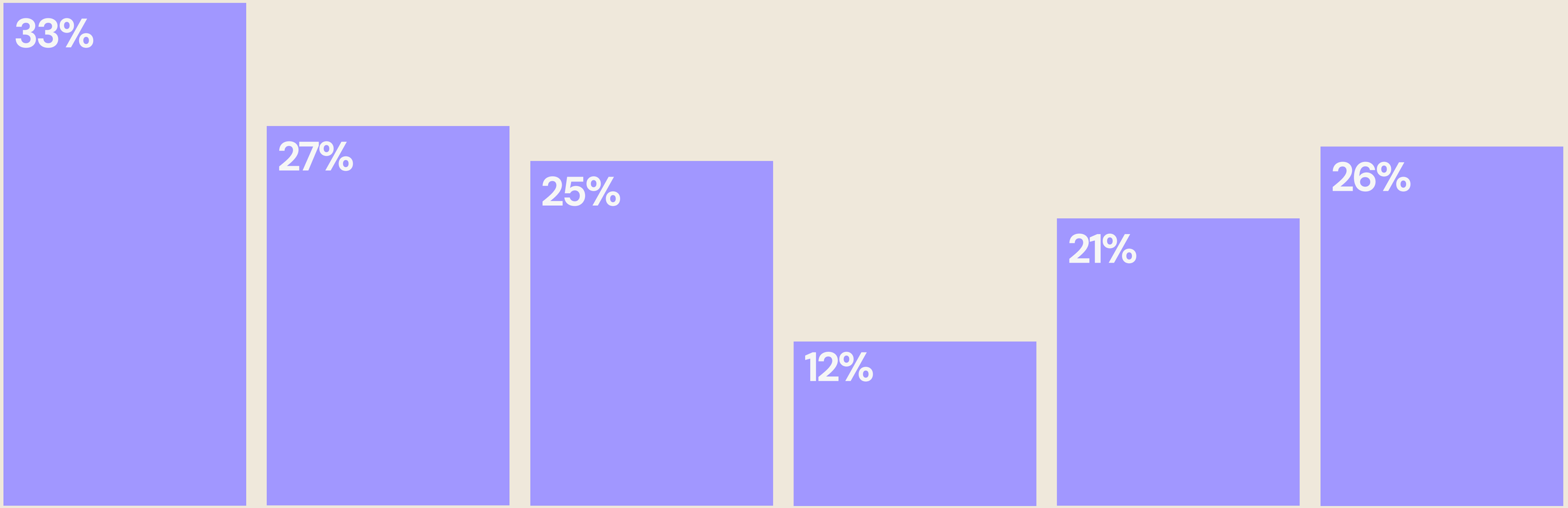
How long has the design system been using design tokens?



Where are your design tokens documented?



What aspects of design token usage are automated in your workflow?



💡 Why are we only syncing tokens from design to code?

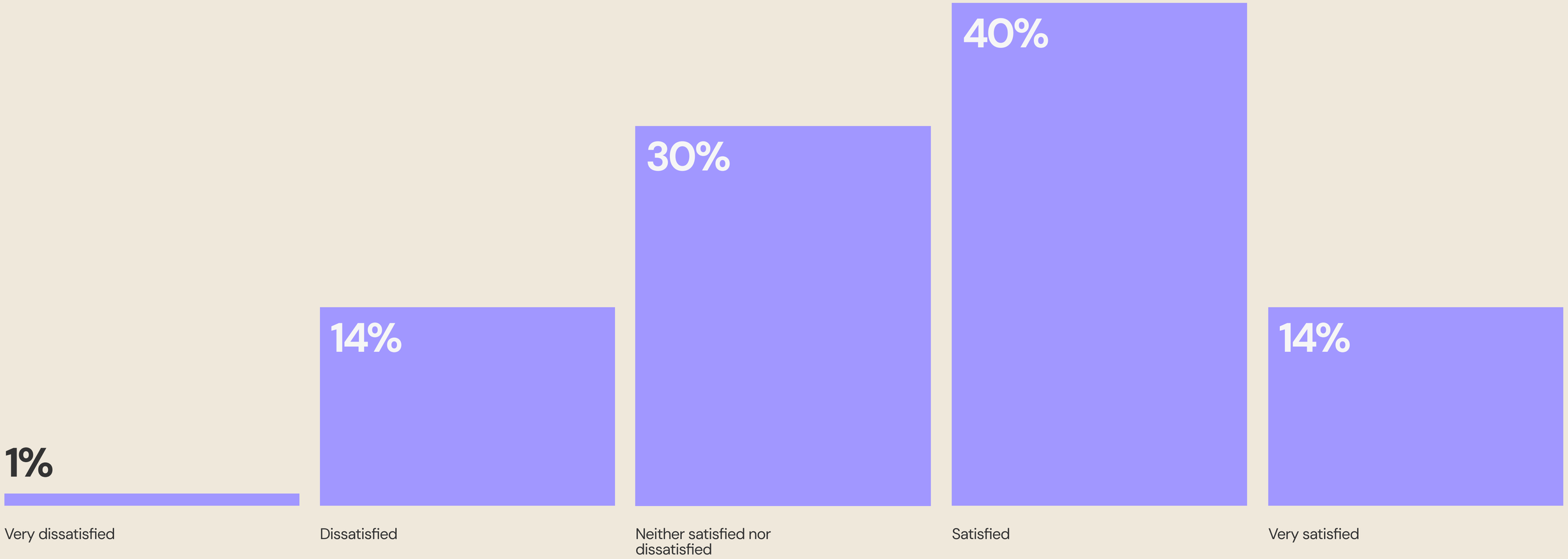
One of the major promises of design tokens is that we will have a way to effectively keep our design decisions in sync between design and code. However, those design decisions aren't only made in the design tool... Wouldn't it be valuable to have a way to centrally manage tokens that can push and pull to both design and code, with the appropriate levels of governance to make it so?

How satisfied are you with your implementation of design tokens?

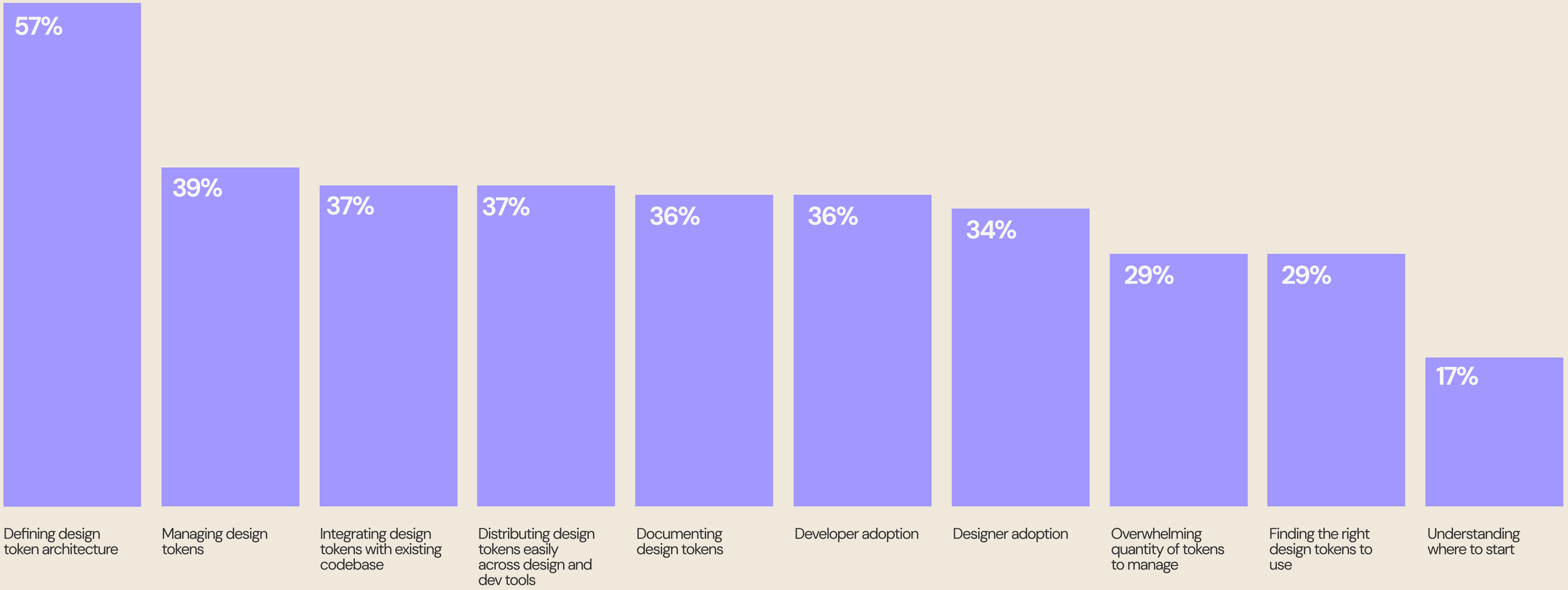
💡 Tokens are the one area we all seem to be quite satisfied

While there's always room for improvement, tokens seem to be the one area where we've seen the value realized relatively early on. Teams talk about the improved consistency and collaboration, and having a shared language to talk about design decisions via tokens, as well as the ease of streamlining the processes via automation.

However, there is a point to call out on the dissatisfied few, as some teams are getting to a level of maturity where token architecture is growing in complexity and surfacing problems when new needs arise.



What are your biggest challenges with design tokens?



Until next year...

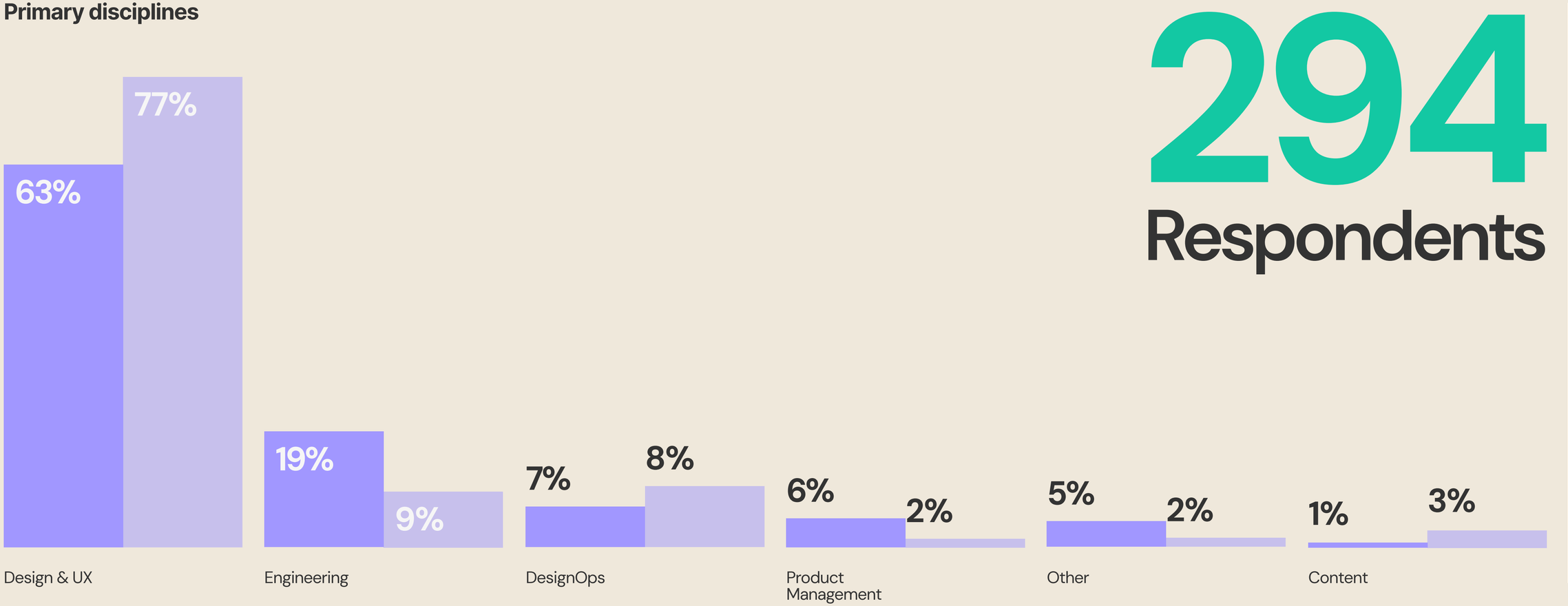
Thanks for diving into the data for this year's Design Systems Report. This report was lovingly put together by the team at zeroheight, the design systems management platform that aims to solve a lot of the problems that have been highlighted in this year's report.

Who took the survey

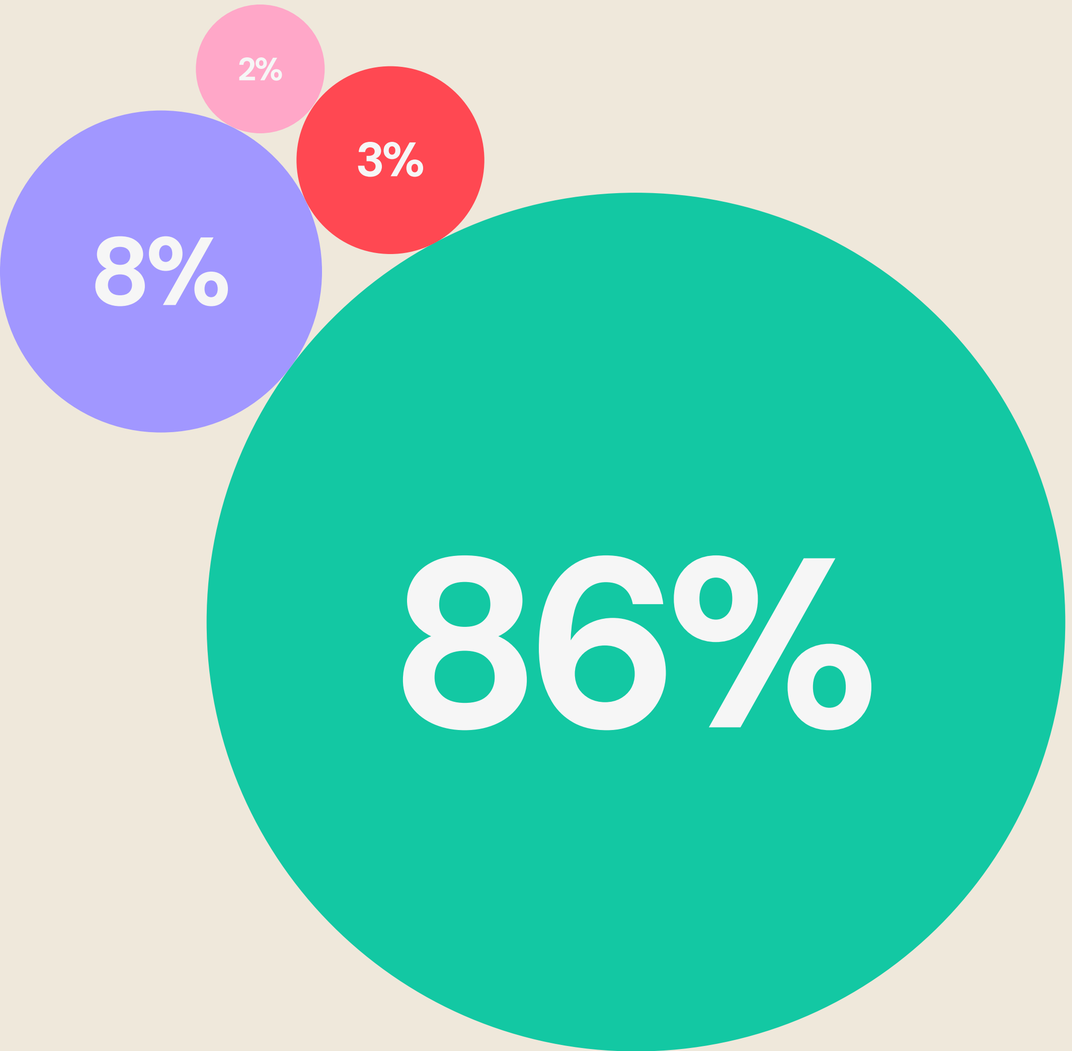
🔍 More engineers took the survey for 2025

Out of the 294 respondents, we had a better split of disciplines than in previous years of this report. Designers still make up the majority of respondents, at 63% compared to 77% of last year. We had over twice as many engineers respond in comparison to 2024.

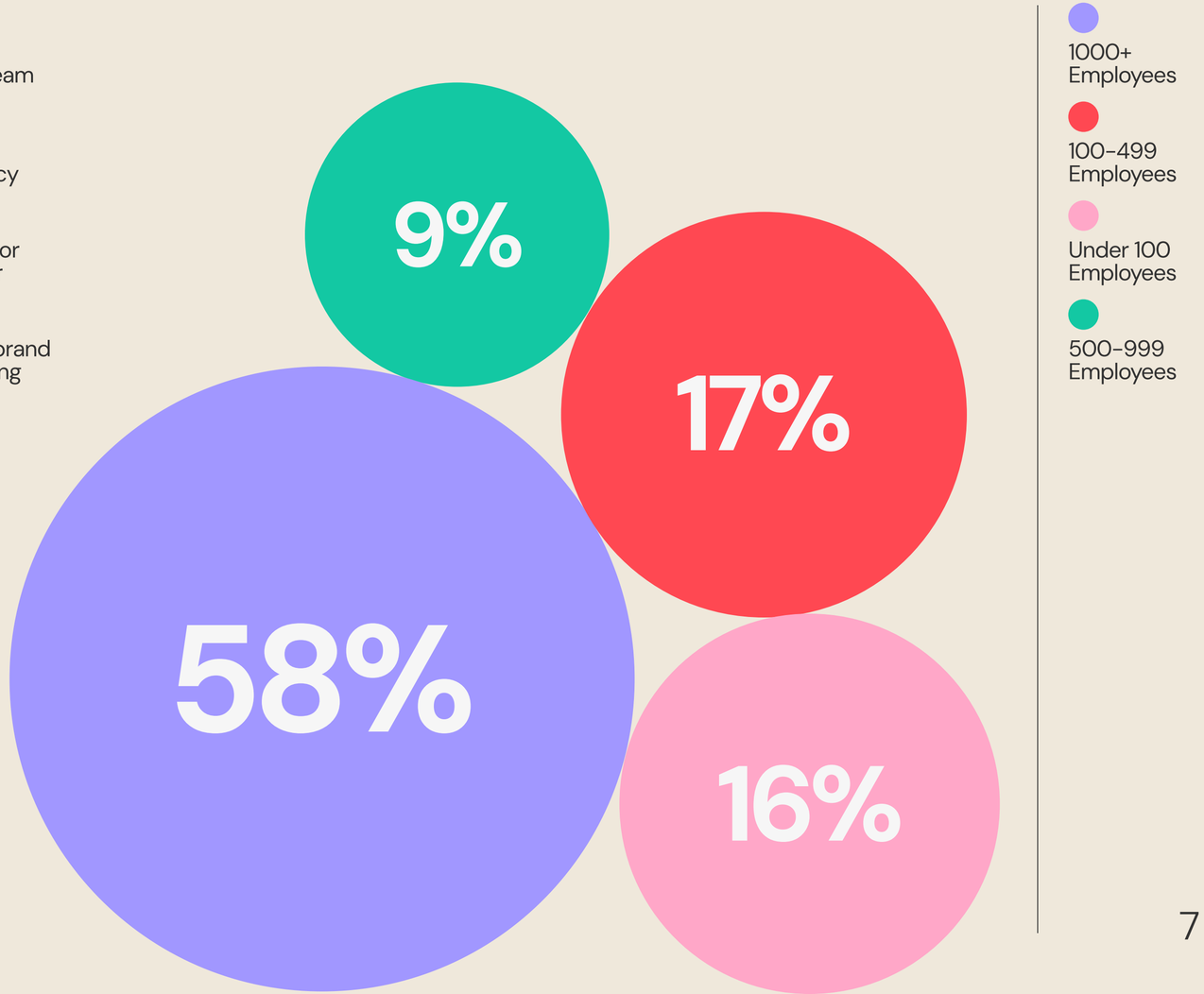
Primary disciplines



Agency vs in-house



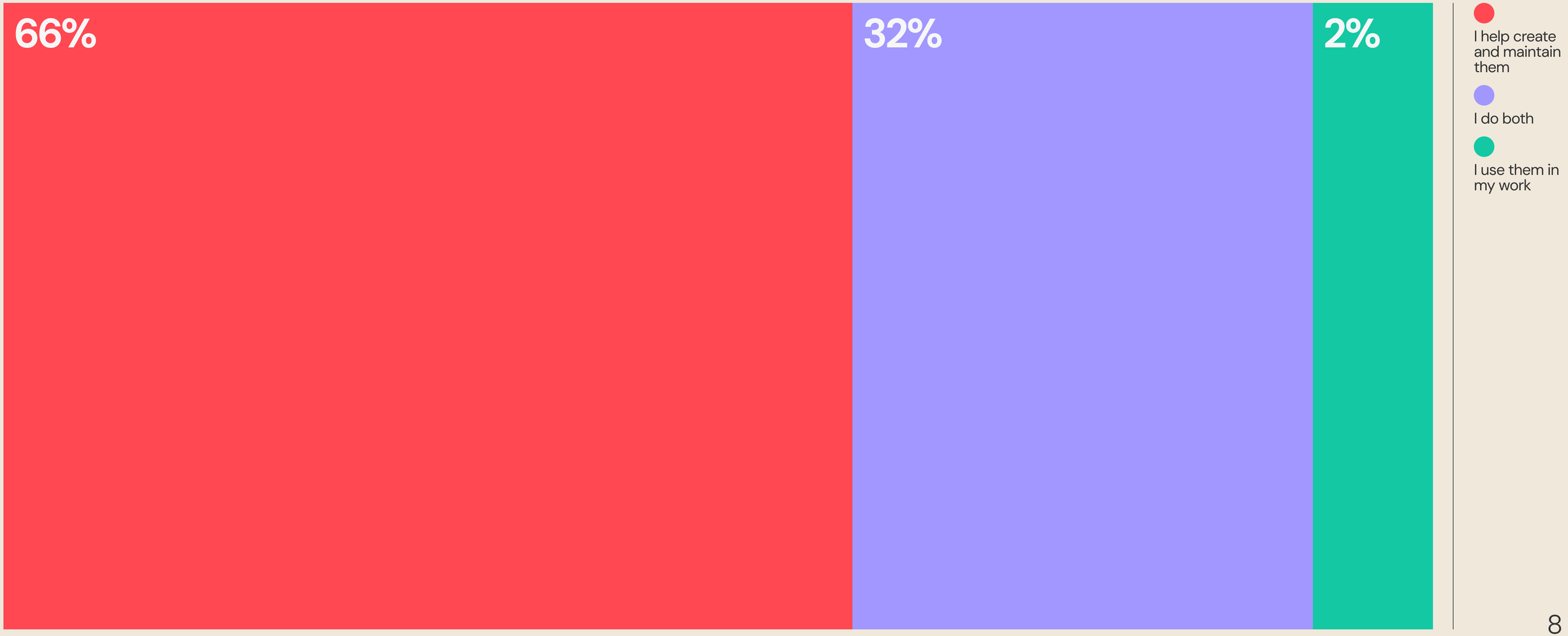
Organization size



Your role in the design system

🔍 Most people actively build and use their design system

While the majority of respondents solely work on building and maintaining the design system, 32% both work on and actively use the design system. This suggests that federated approaches that push for active contribution are still relatively commonplace. Only 2% of respondents were pure design system consumers, which suggests that design system consumers are not particularly active within the community.



Your design system team

3

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