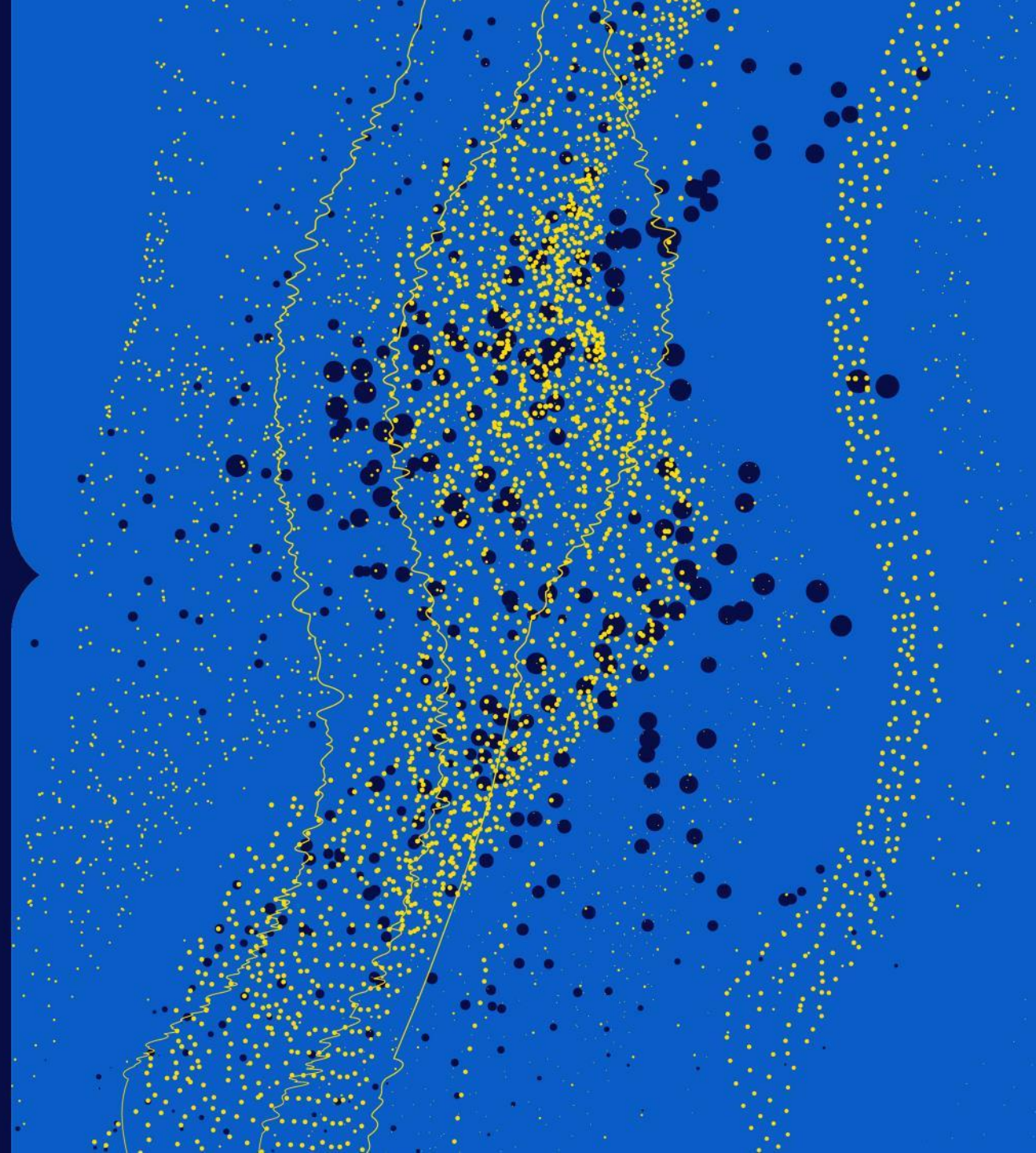


CPA Australia Business Technology Report 2024

A survey of technology usage by businesses
in the Asia-Pacific



ISBN

1-922690-56-2

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Contents

<u>Executive Summary</u>	4
<u>Key findings</u>	5
<u>About the survey</u>	6
<u>Impact of technologies on business performance</u>	7
<u>Artificial intelligence</u>	14
<u>Cybersecurity</u>	21
<u>Technology and ESG</u>	27
<u>Technology use and initiatives in the past 12 months</u>	31
<u>Technology use in the next 12 months</u>	38
<u>Digital strategy</u>	42
<u>Technology skills shortage</u>	47
<u>Demographics</u>	50
<u>Recommendations</u>	52

Executive Summary

The survey findings demonstrate the importance of technology to business success. Organisations that use a range of technologies are more likely to be profitable and efficient.

The survey results show that investment in technology improves business across a range of areas, especially operational efficiency, cybersecurity, the customer experience and employee satisfaction. The main barrier to such investment are costs and the low return on investment, with cost being an increasing concern.

There was a large jump in the percentage of businesses that used AI in the past 12 months from the previous survey. Businesses that adopted AI reported improvements in efficiency, productivity and decision-making. However, AI is not yet a day-to-day tool for most businesses, with only a third of respondents ranking their employer's adoption as significant or moderate.

Cybersecurity remains the most popular technology initiative for businesses in the past 12 months. Possibly related to this focus, nearly nine in ten respondents rated their employer's cybersecurity proficiency as average or above. This level of proficiency and focus is helping to protect businesses, with less than a quarter stating that their business lost time or money due to a cyber incident in the past 12 months; compared with 41 per cent of respondents to CPA Australia's most recent [Asia-Pacific Small Business Survey](#).

Encouragingly, almost 70 per cent of respondents reported that their employer's investment in technology is helping them meet their sustainability goals. In relation to the use of technology to support environmental, social and governance (ESG) goals, respondents reported that their employers are most likely to use technology to identify sustainability risks and opportunities, and to help with sustainability reporting.

In the next 12 months, businesses are expecting to increase their use of a variety of technologies, especially "data analytics and visualisation software" and AI. Investments in these tools could be complementary, as better data quality and management can lead to higher-quality AI outcomes.

The survey indicates that most companies have a digital strategy. Businesses that have adopted such a strategy were marginally more likely to be profitable. Larger companies were significantly more likely to have a digital strategy than smaller businesses.

In response to shortages of tech talent, more businesses focused on upskilling and reskilling their existing employees, and investing in automation, rather than adding new employees.

Key findings



“Increased cybersecurity protections” was the **most popular technology initiative** of the past 12 months.



Larger businesses were more likely than smaller businesses to build their technology talent from within by **upskilling and reskilling existing staff**.



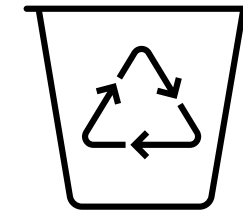
Three quarters of respondents have **adopted artificial intelligence (AI)** to varying levels into their business. Smaller businesses were less likely to adopt AI than larger businesses.



Larger businesses were more likely to rate their **employer’s cybersecurity proficiency** as “**above average** or “**excellent**” than smaller businesses.



“Improved efficiency through the automation of repetitive tasks” was the **most popular impact that AI is having on business**, regardless of size.



“Identification of sustainability-related risks and opportunities” and “internal and external reporting of sustainability performance” are the **most popular ESG-related technology initiatives** for the next 12 months.

About the Survey

This survey report provides data on the technology businesses are using and their impact on performance. It also provides observations on the cybersecurity proficiency of businesses and the influence that artificial intelligence is having on business and accounting and finance professionals.

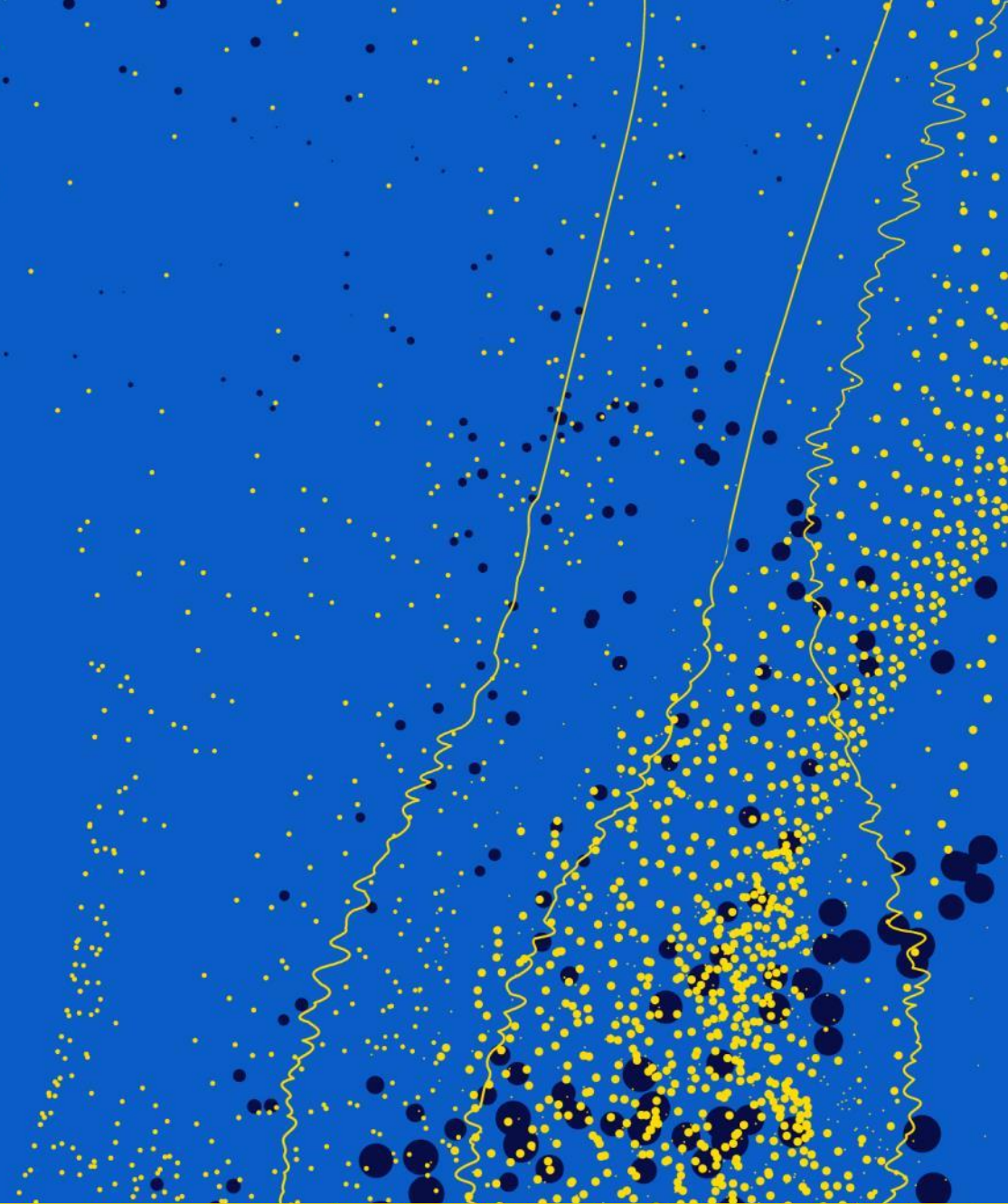
This is CPA Australia's fourth survey of technology usage by business. The survey was conducted from 10 June to 15 July 2024. A total of 1060 valid responses were received from accounting and finance professionals working in different markets, including Australia, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam.

Respondents came from a wide variety of industries, with respondents most likely to come from business and professional services firms (20 per cent), banking, finance and insurance (11 per cent), and public practice/CPA firms (10 per cent).

Forty-two per cent of respondents worked in a company with 500 or more employees, 28 per cent in a company with 50 to 499 employees and 30 per cent in a company with fewer than 50 employees.

A third of respondents hold c-suite or other senior positions. People in middle management positions made up another third. Nineteen per cent described themselves as professionals, with the remaining 15 per cent holding junior positions or are self-employed.

Impact of technologies on business performance



Impact of technologies on business performance

Profitable companies were somewhat more inclined to adopt a broader array of technologies, particularly in areas like data analytics and visualisation software and robotic process automation, than their less profitable counterparts.

These profitable businesses were also more likely to increase their investment in technology and focus on upskilling and reskilling their technology talent.

The survey data shows that technology has helped businesses to improve operational efficiency, enhance cybersecurity measures and boost the customer experience. However, companies of all sizes cited increasing costs and low return on investment as significant barriers to technology adoption - a challenge that has intensified recently, most likely due to rising business costs.

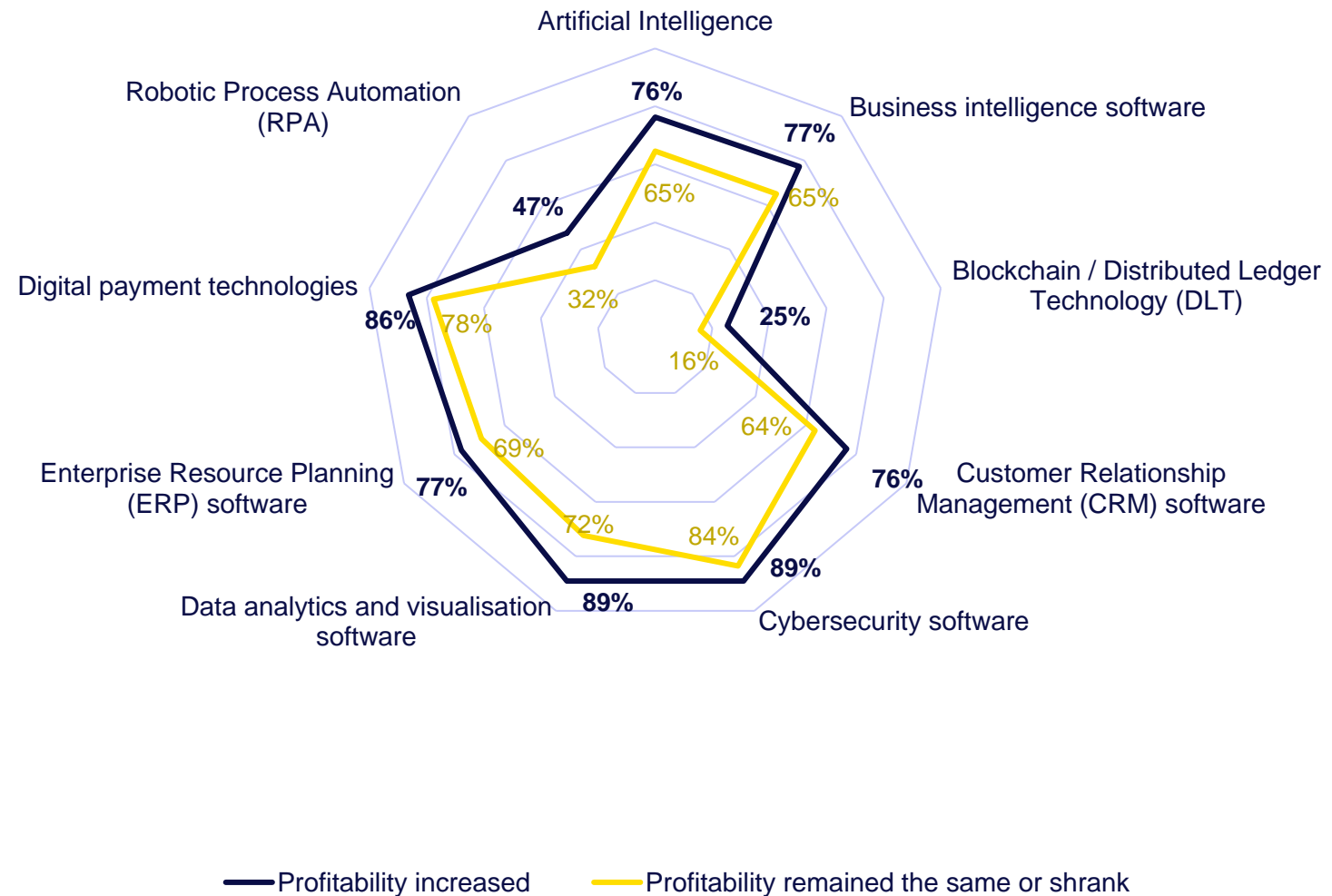
Larger businesses often struggled with transitioning from complex legacy systems and faced a shortage of talent. In contrast, smaller businesses encountered challenges related to data privacy and cybersecurity, possibly stemming from a lack of qualified staff and/or insufficient investment in cybersecurity and data governance.



Technologies use in the past 12 months – by performance

Businesses experiencing an increase in profitability are more likely to use a range of technologies, especially data analytics and visualisation software and robotic process automation.

However, businesses struggling with their profitability continue to have reasonable technology uptake despite their performance.



Most popular technology initiatives – by performance

Profitable businesses were more likely to build technology talent by upskilling and reskilling existing staff/senior management or board members.

As global competition for technology talent continues, it would be sensible for companies to allocate adequate time and resources to upskill or reskill employees and use innovative ways to attract and retain talent.

Profitable businesses were also more likely to increase their investment in technology or upgraded their technology. As our [Asia-Pacific Small Business Survey](#) also shows, there is a strong correlation between tech investment and business growth.



Key benefits of technology adoption

Adopting technology has brought numerous advantages to business, especially enhancing operational efficiency, cybersecurity and customer experience.

Automation and cloud-based solutions streamline operations, reduce costs, and boost productivity. Cybersecurity measures protect sensitive data and maintain trust.

Additionally, technologies like CRM systems and AI-driven customer service tools personalise interactions and ensure responsive support, significantly improving customer satisfaction and loyalty. Embracing these technologies is essential to remaining competitive.

My business / employer's investment in technology is helping us to:



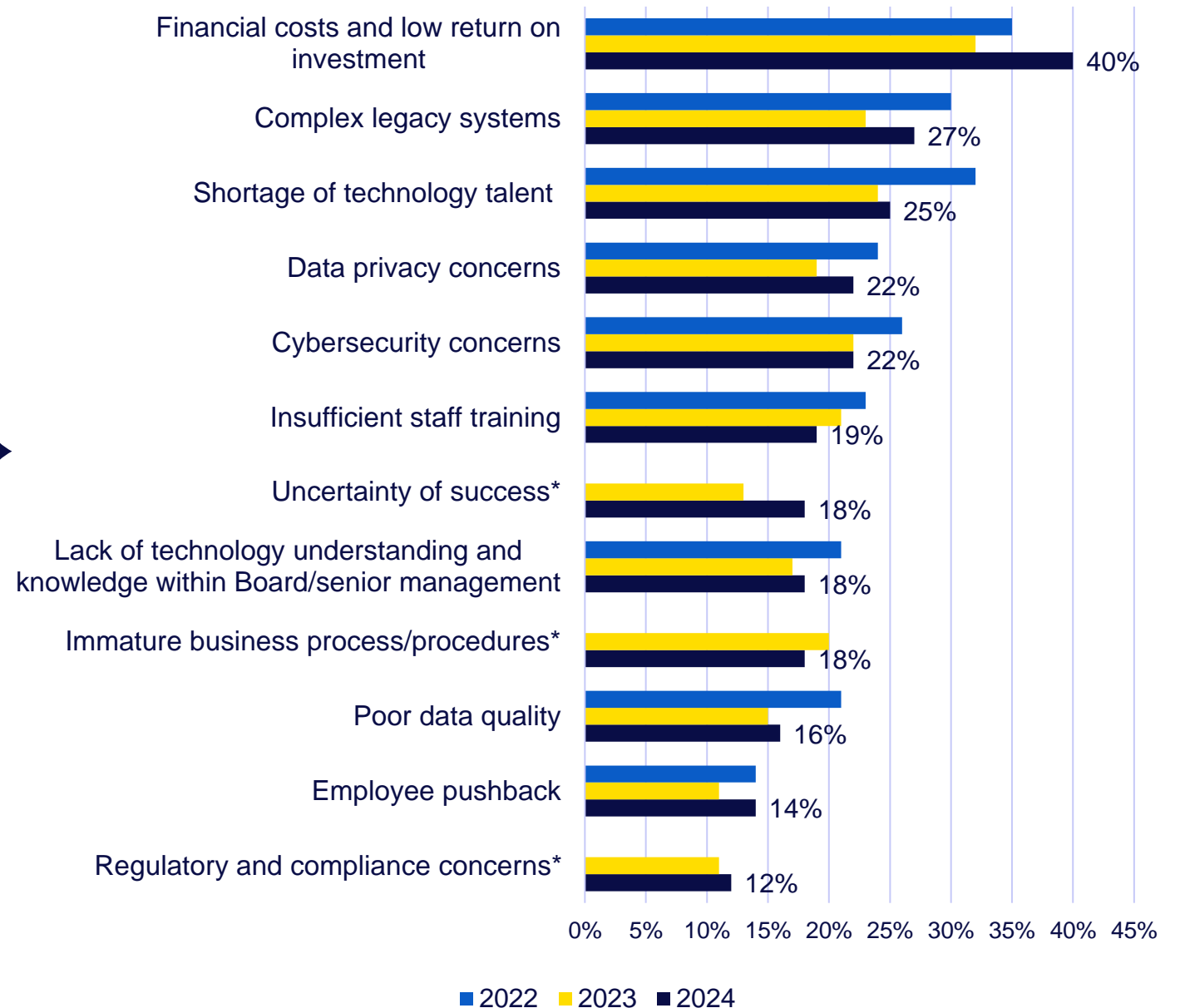
Key challenges to technology adoption

The main barriers to technology adoption remain costs, issues with replacing legacy systems and shortage of technology talent. There is a noticeable increase in the percentage nominating ‘costs’ as a barrier to investment, which given the high inflationary environment in many markets, is not surprising.

There were decreases in the percentage nominating “shortage of technology talent” and “poor data quality” as a barrier to tech investment.

This suggest that businesses have made progress in addressing these barriers to technology adoption. This could be due to investments to improve their existing talent, and a growing focus on data quality and governance.

Key challenges affecting technology uptake



*new option in 2023

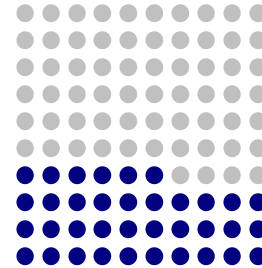
Key challenges to technology adoption – by size

Respondents from both larger and smaller businesses were most inclined to nominate “financial costs and low return on investment” as a challenge to technology adoption.

Larger businesses are more likely to struggle with complex legacy systems and shortage of tech talent. While smaller businesses are more concerned with data privacy and cybersecurity issues.

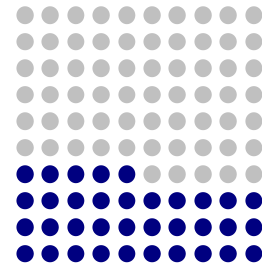
Key challenges affecting technology uptake – by business size

Larger businesses
(500 or above employees)



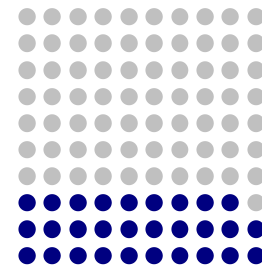
36%

Financial costs and low return on investment



35%

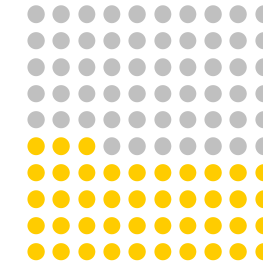
Complex legacy systems



29%

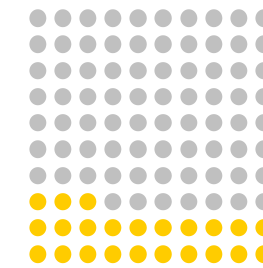
Shortage of technology talent

Smaller businesses
(Under 500 employees)



43%

Financial costs and low return on investment



23%

Data privacy concerns



23%

Cybersecurity concerns

Artificial Intelligence

The background of the slide is a vibrant blue. On the right side, there is a complex, abstract pattern of small yellow and black dots, some of which are larger and more prominent. Thin, wavy yellow lines meander through the dots, creating a sense of movement and connectivity. The overall aesthetic is modern and technological.

AI trends

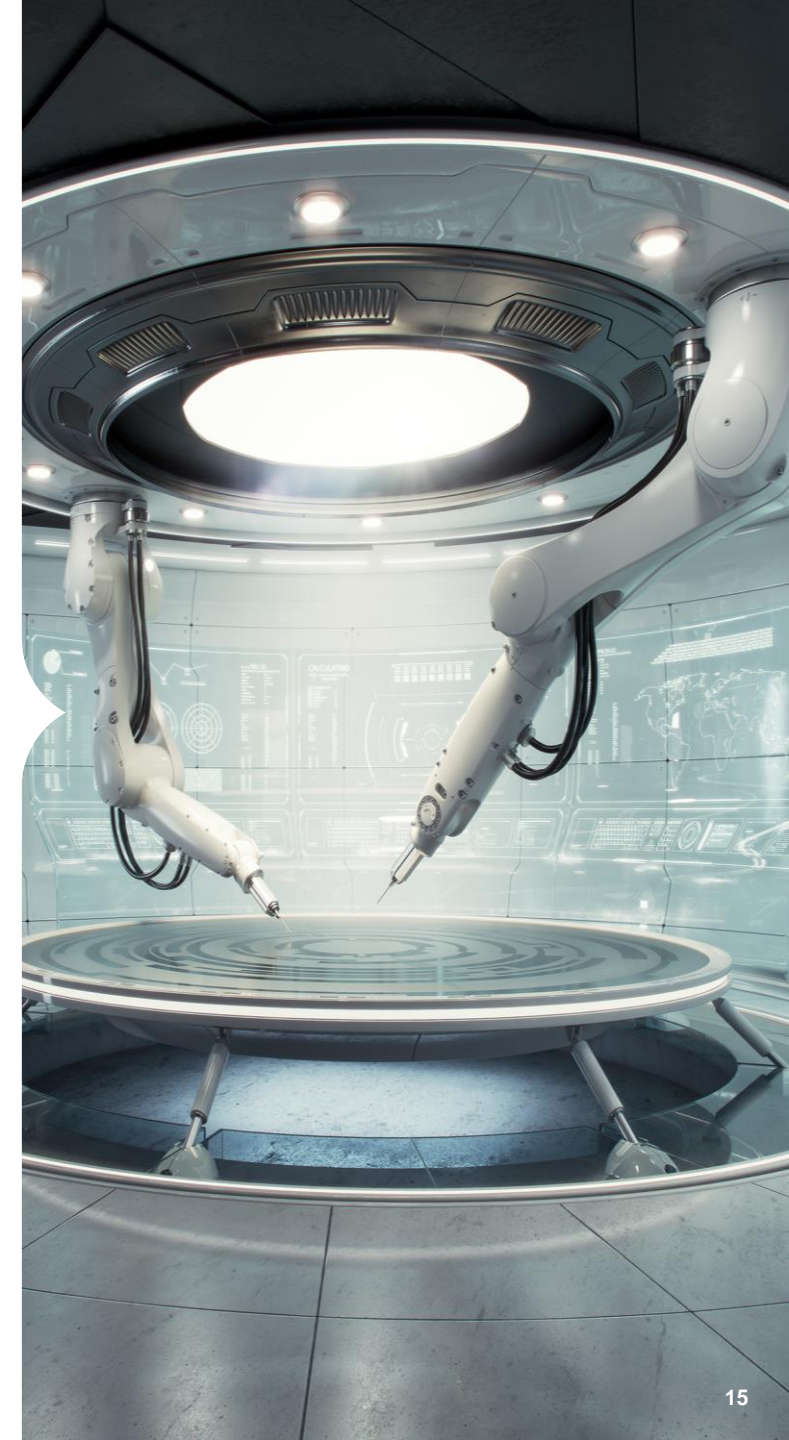
The percentage of businesses using AI increased to 69 per cent in this survey, from 55 per cent in the 2023 survey. Both large and small businesses reported that AI improved their efficiency, increased productivity and enhanced decision-making. Only 14 per cent noted that AI usage led to a reduction in employee numbers, and just 4 per cent cited implementation costs as a significant impact of AI adoption.

Furthermore, 52 per cent of businesses expect to increase their AI use in the next 12 months.

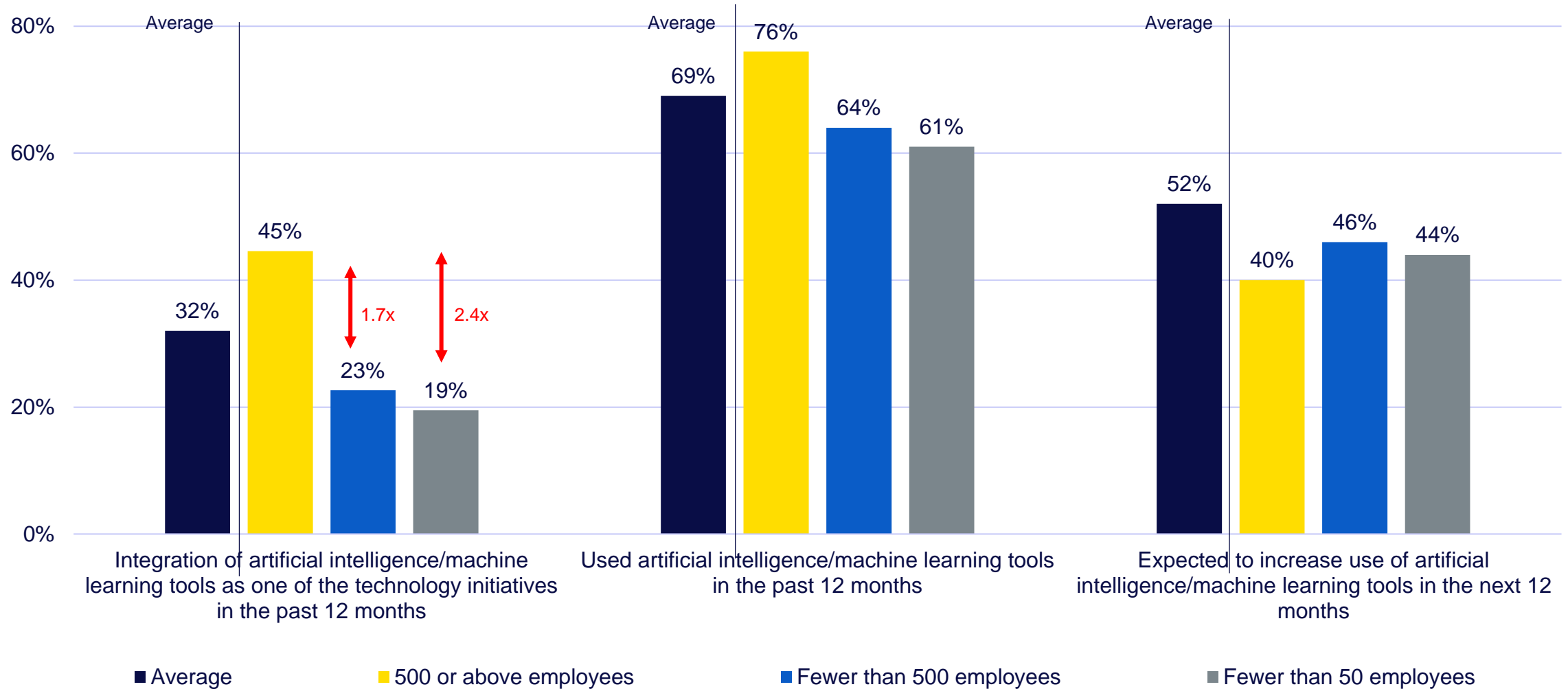
Despite the increasing number of businesses investing in AI, it has yet to become a day-to-day tool for most businesses. Only 29 per cent reported using it all the time, and eight per cent reported their employer's adoption of AI is significant.

Smaller companies were less likely to adopt AI, possibly due to a lack of capital and expertise in the technology.

In contrast, larger companies were twice as likely to cite the integration of AI tools as a key technology initiative in the past 12 months.



Overall trends for AI



Level of AI adoption

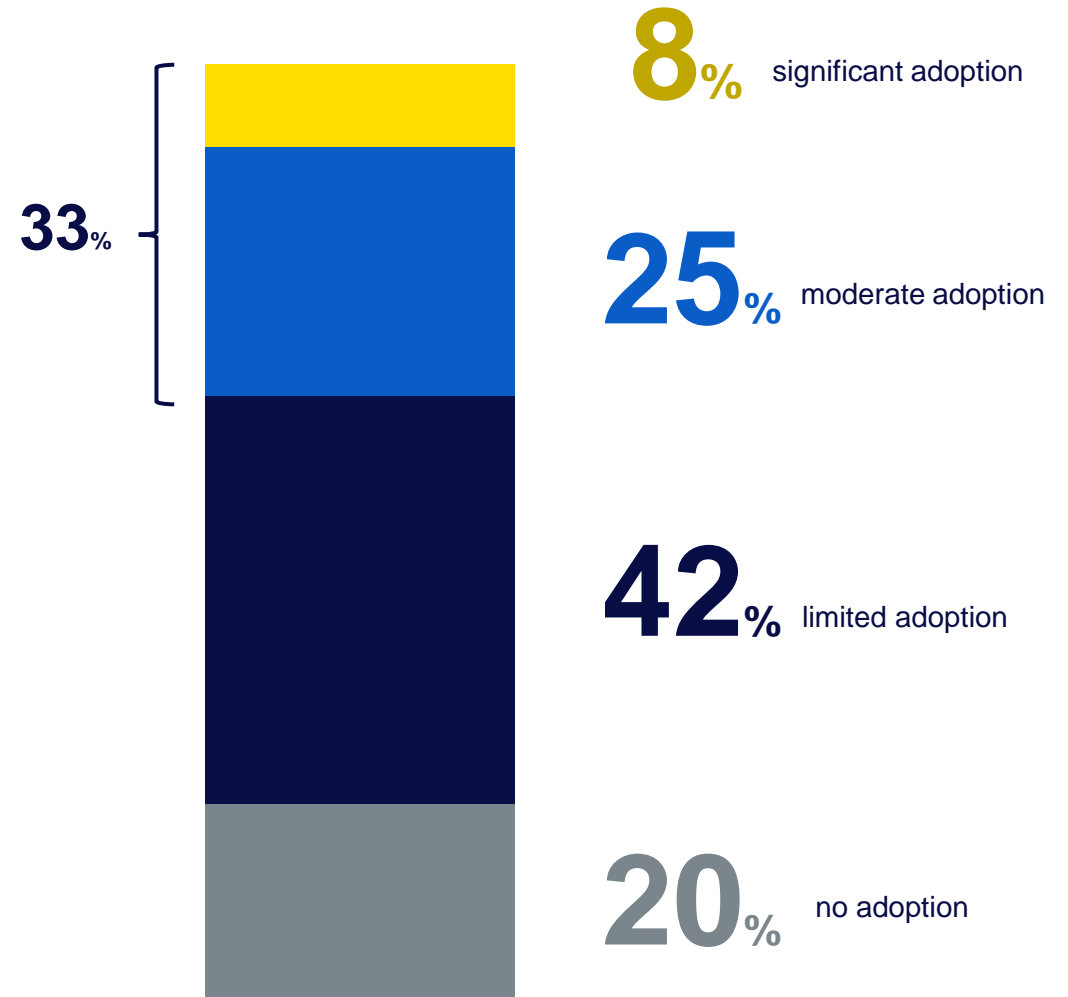
Three quarters of respondents stated their business/employer has adopted AI in their business.

The level of adoption however varies, with most companies taking a measured approach to embracing this technology.

Only 8 per cent stated that their business/employer have adopted AI significantly in their business.

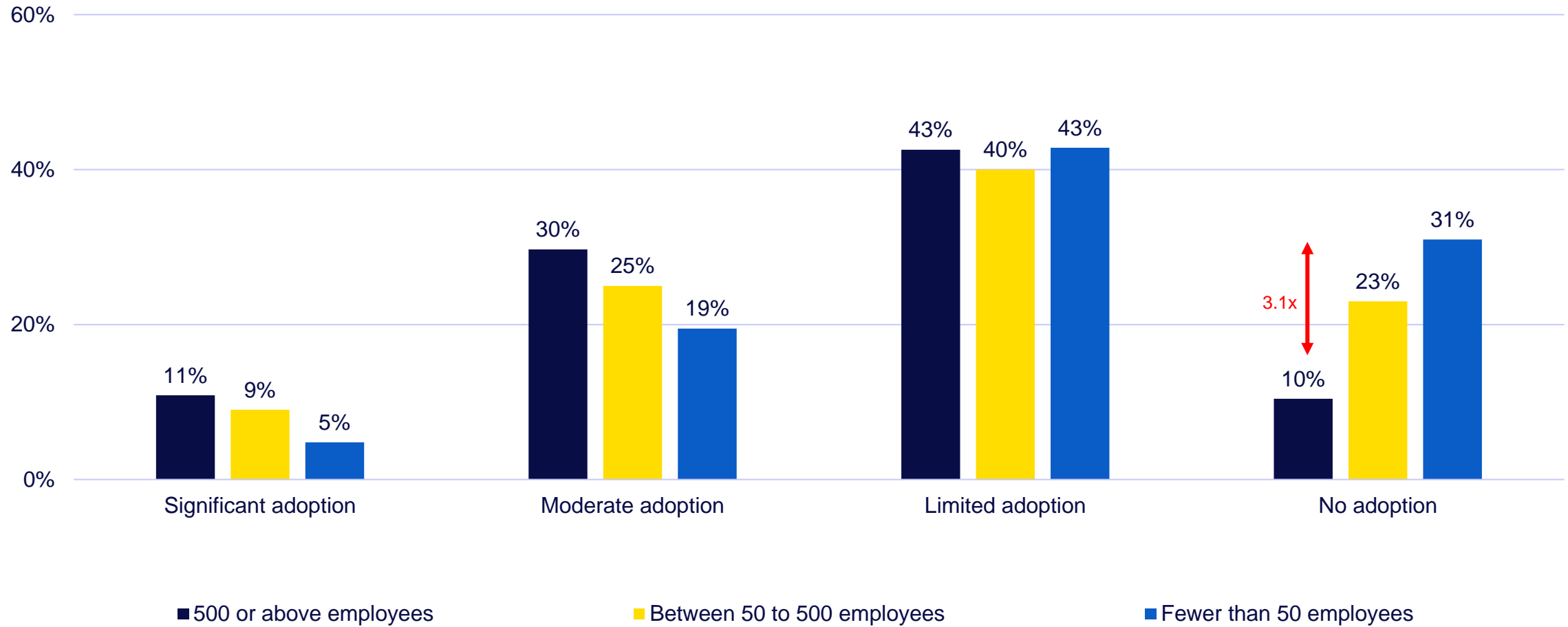
Smaller business are three times more likely than large businesses to say their business has not adopted AI.

How would you describe the level of AI adoption by your business / employer?

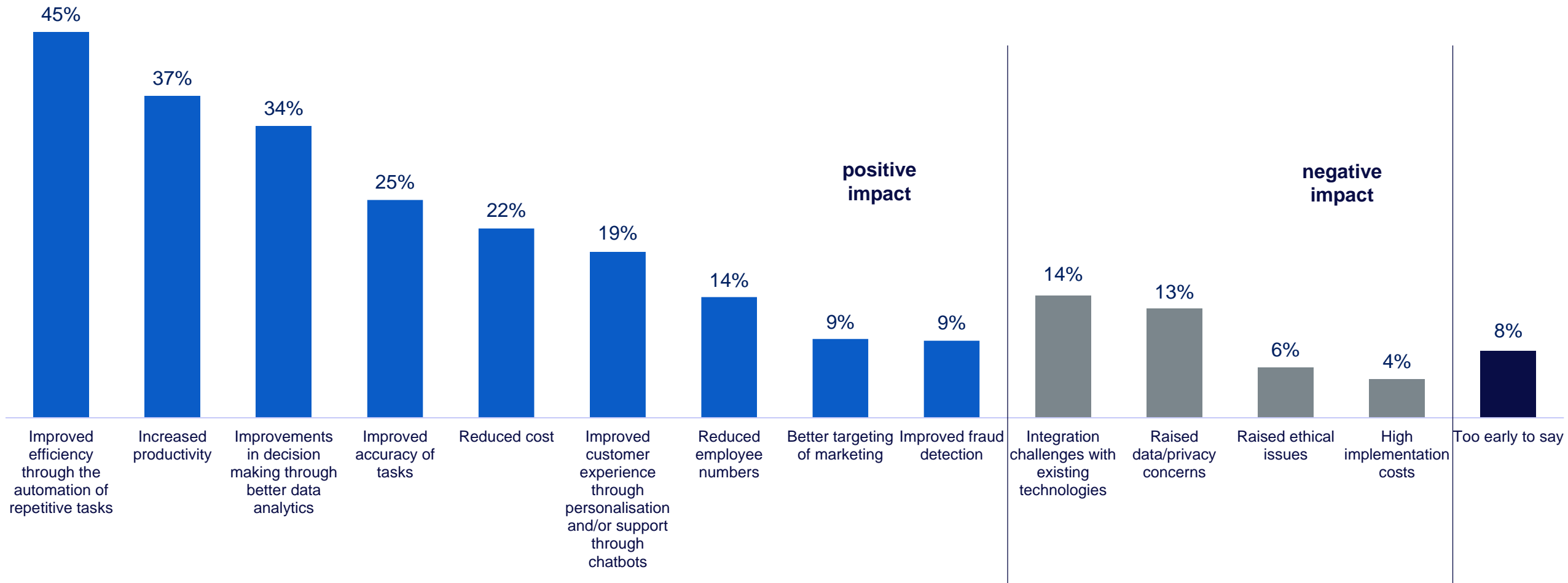


* Responses for “Don’t know” are not shown

Level of AI adoption – by business size

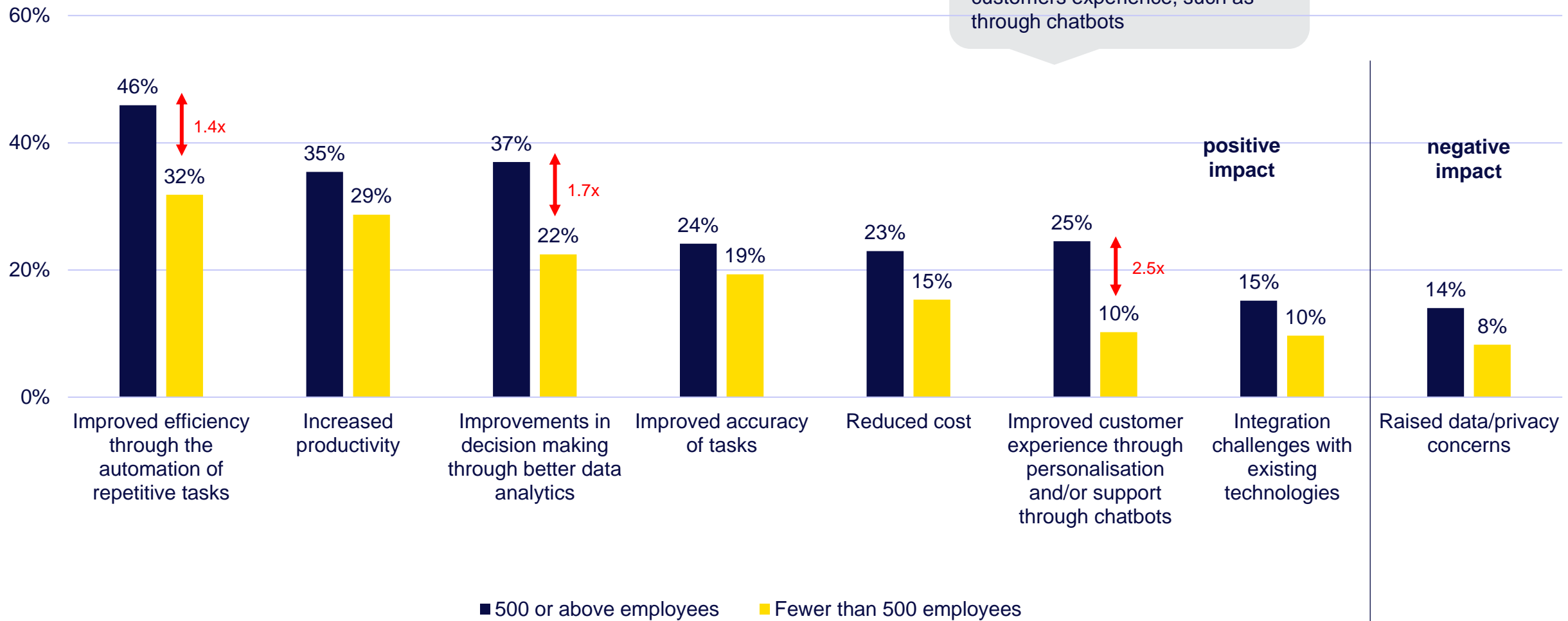


The biggest impact that AI is having on business is improving its efficiency, productivity and decision making



Top 8 AI impacts – by size

Larger businesses were more likely to find AI improved their customers experience, such as through chatbots



Cybersecurity

The background of the slide is a vibrant blue. On the right side, there is a complex, abstract pattern of small yellow and black dots, some of which are larger and more prominent. Several thin, wavy yellow lines meander across the right side of the image, creating a sense of movement and digital connectivity. The overall aesthetic is modern and tech-oriented.

Key results for cybersecurity

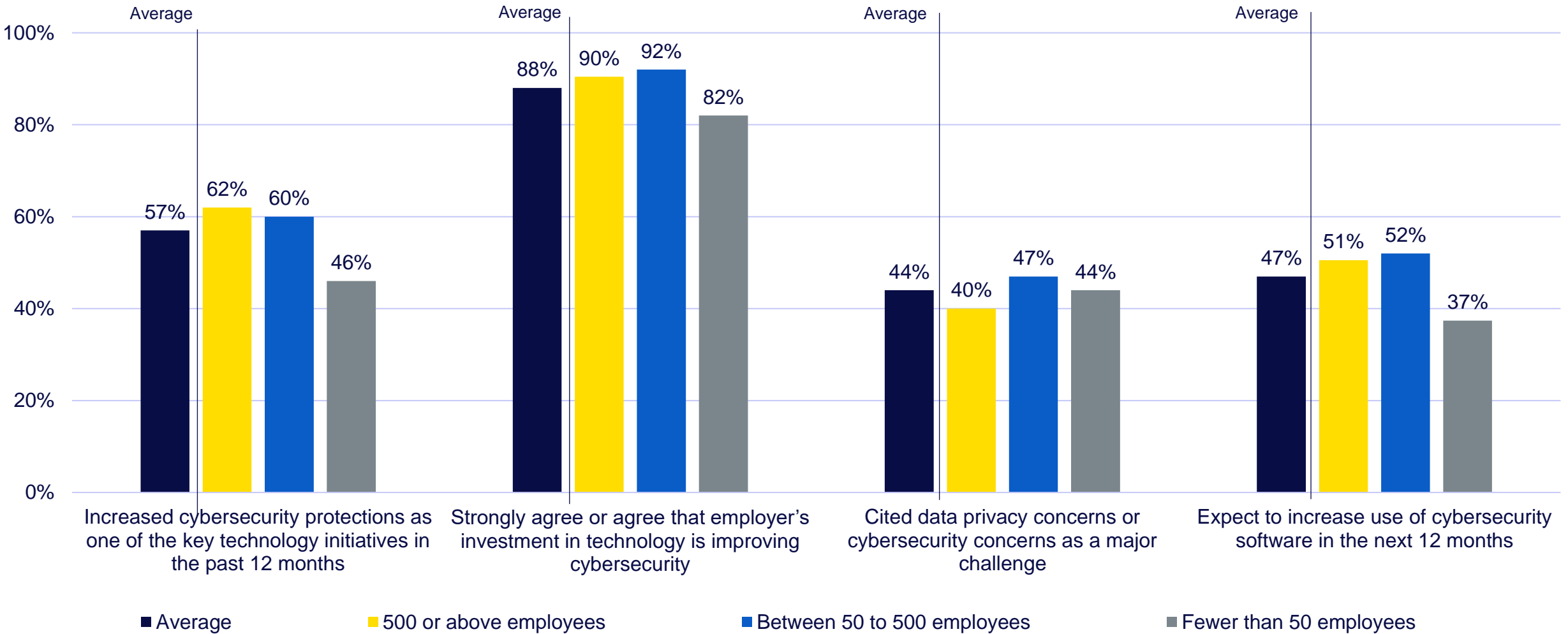
Cybersecurity was the most popular technology initiative for business in the past 12 months. This is not surprising given 44 per cent of respondents reported data privacy and cybersecurity concerns as major challenges for their business, and nearly a quarter stated their business/employer lost time or money due to a cyber incident in the past 12 months.

The focus on cybersecurity as a technology initiative is however having results - nearly 90 per cent of respondents agreed that their employer's investment in technology had improved their cybersecurity. Further, half of respondents rated their employer's cybersecurity proficiency as "excellent" or "above average".

Larger businesses performed better across all cybersecurity metrics, likely due to higher levels of investment, more staffing, better processes and more frequent or higher-quality training.



Overall trends in cybersecurity

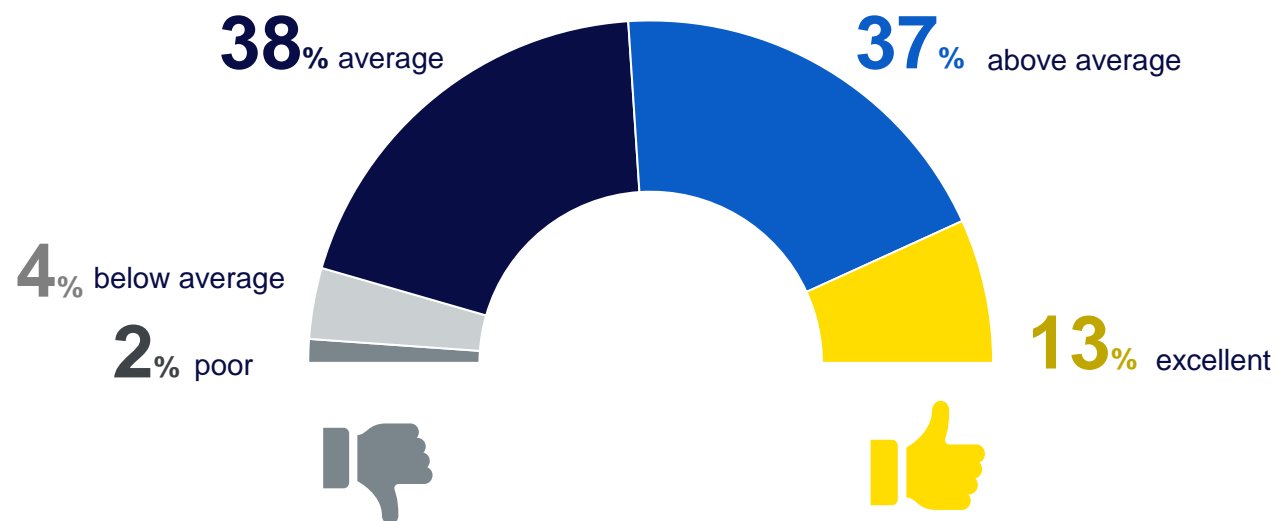


Cybersecurity proficiency in businesses

Encouragingly on 6 per cent of respondents reported that their employer's cybersecurity proficiency was below average or poor.

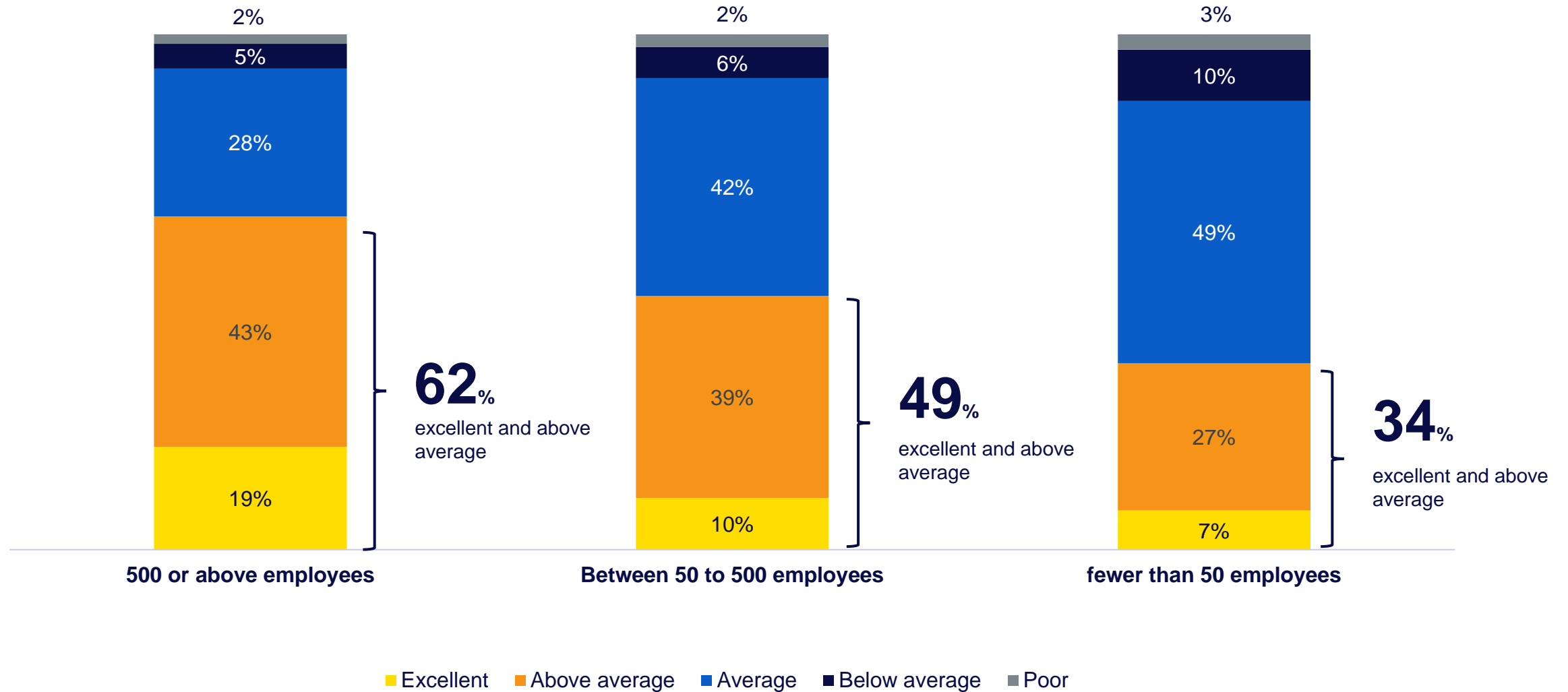
A substantially higher percentage of respondents from larger businesses rated their employer's cybersecurity proficiency as "excellent" or "above average" than from smaller businesses.

How would you rate your business or employer's cybersecurity proficiency?



* Responses for "Don't know" are not shown

Cybersecurity proficiency in businesses – by size

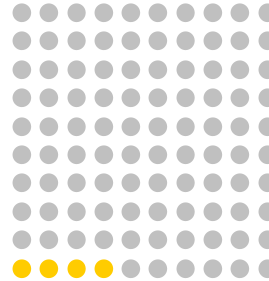


Cybersecurity proficiency in businesses

60 per cent of businesses did not lose any time/or money due to a cybersecurity incident in the past 12 months.

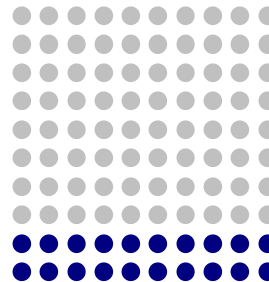
There was no major differences between small and larger businesses when it came to losses caused by cybersecurity incidents.

Business lost time and/or money due to a cybersecurity incident in the past 12 months



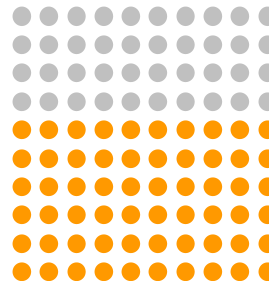
4%

lost time and/or money to a **significant** extent



20%


lost time and/or money to a **small** extent



60%

did **not** lost time and/or money

* Responses for "Don't know" are not shown

The background of the slide is a vibrant blue field filled with a dense pattern of small yellow and black dots. Several thin, wavy yellow lines meander across the right side of the image, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall aesthetic is modern and data-driven.

How technology is being used to assist business with environmental, social, governance issues

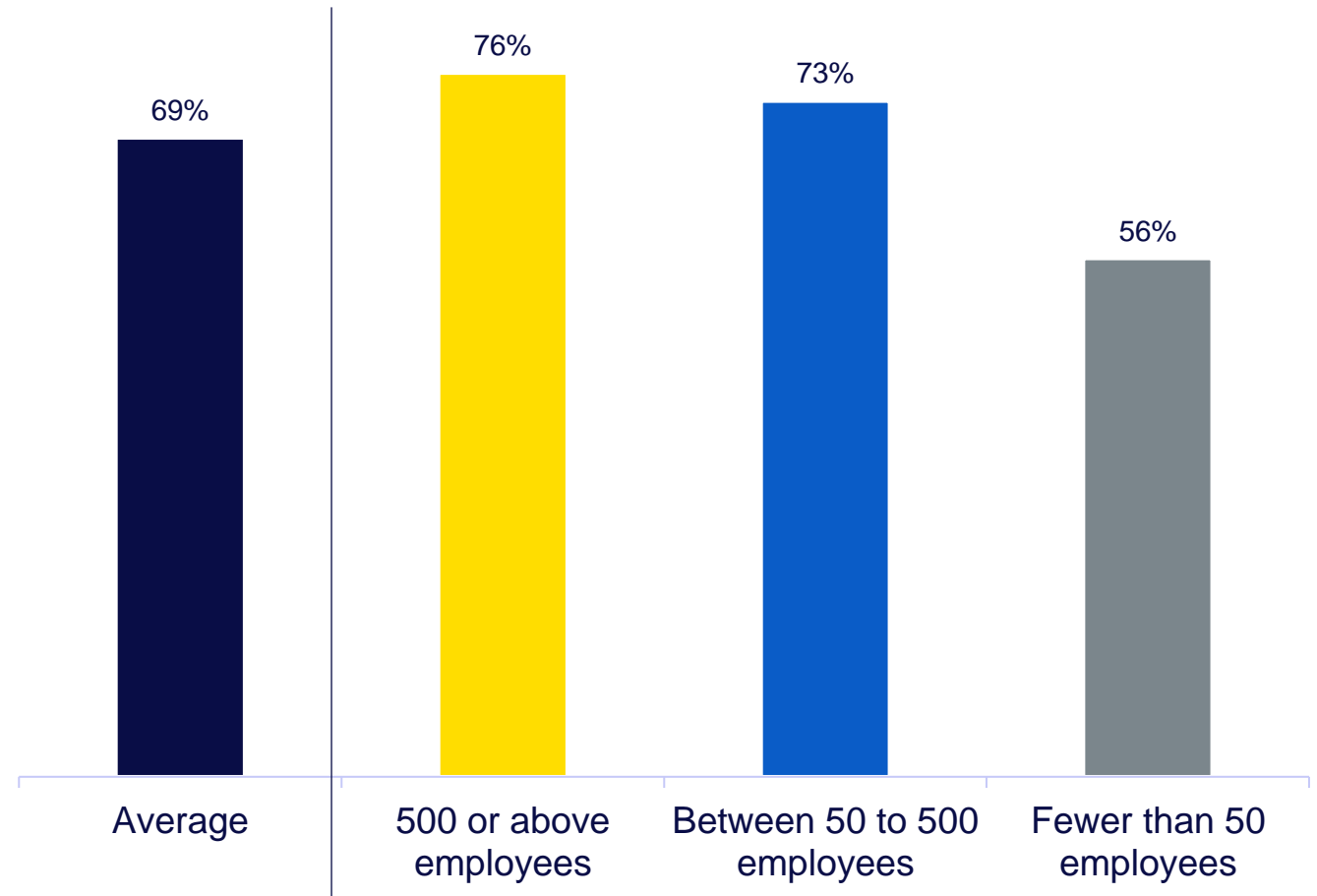
Technology and ESG

It's encouraging that almost 70 per cent of respondents found that their business/employer's investment in technology has helped them meet their sustainability goals.

Larger businesses were more likely than smaller businesses to use technology for their sustainability needs.

Smaller businesses should look to identify key technologies that can help them with reaching their sustainability goals. This can be achieved by seeking advice from IT/business consultants.

Strongly agree or agree that my business/employer's investment in technology is helping meet sustainability goals

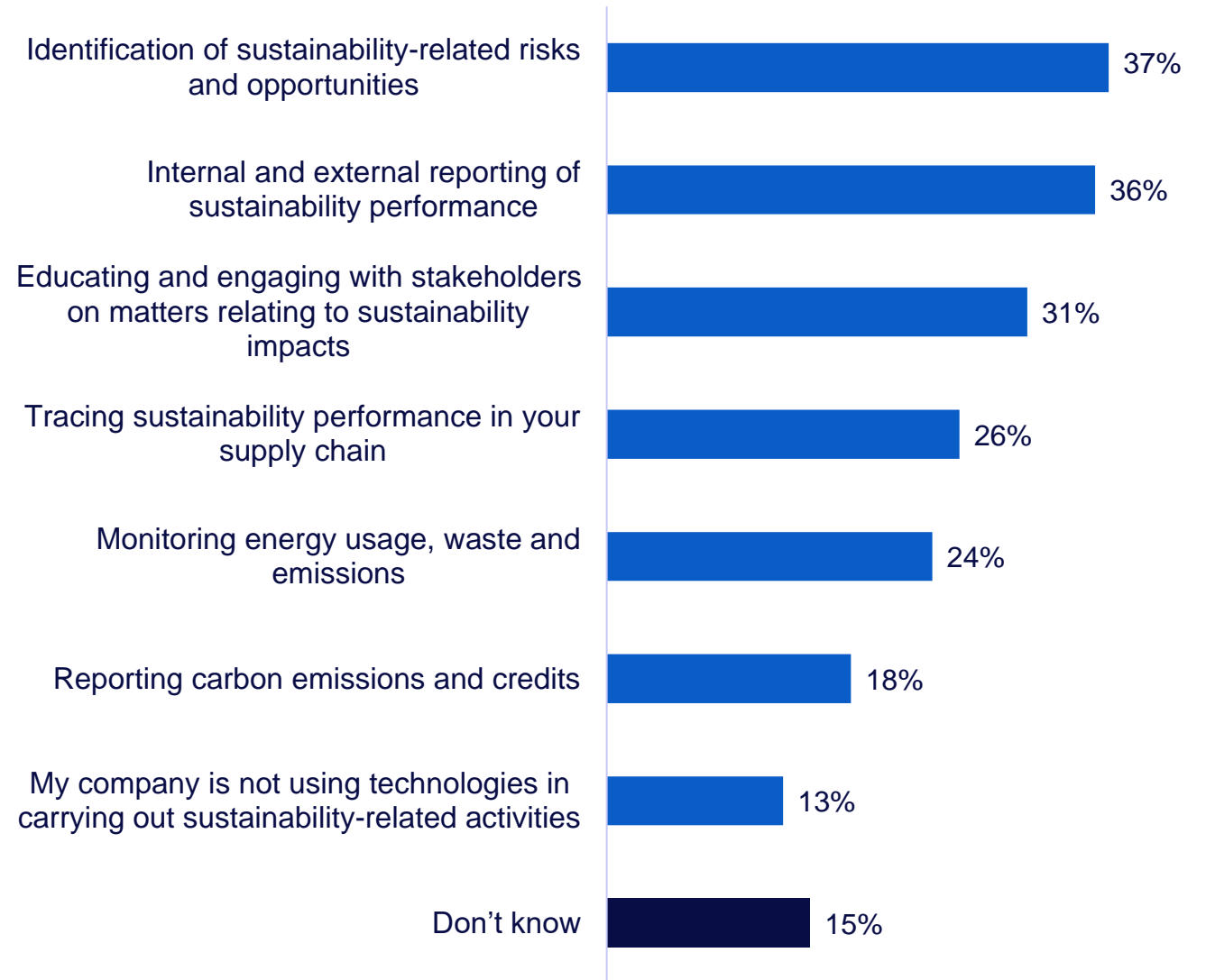


ESG-related technology initiative in the next 12 months

In the next 12 months, businesses will be most likely to use technology for ESG to identify sustainability related risks and opportunities, reporting of sustainability performance and engaging with stakeholders.

Ideally, business should also expand the use of technology to increase tracking of emissions and supply chain issues.

In the next 12 months, my business/employer is likely to use technology in



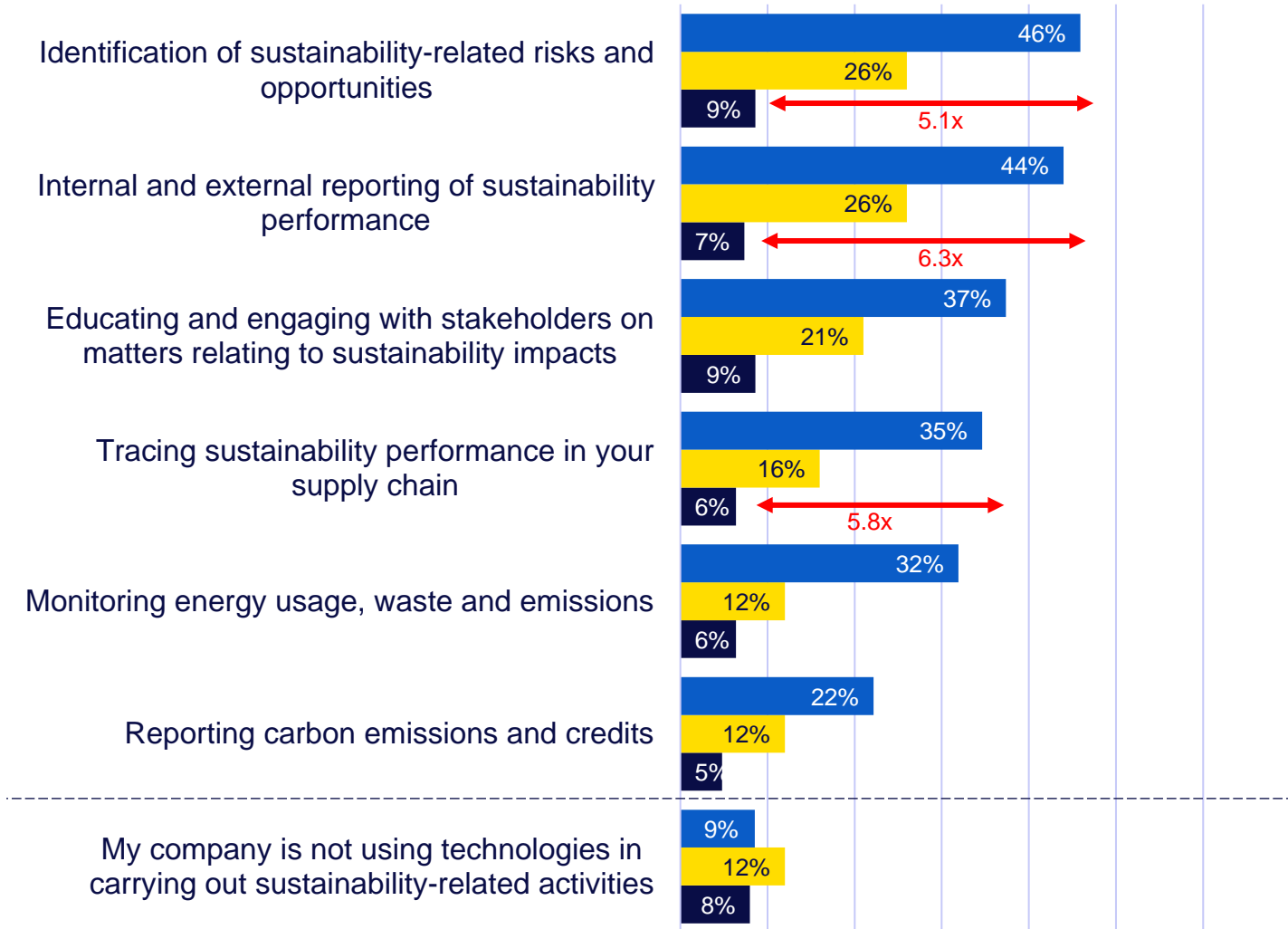
ESG-related technology initiative in the next 12 months – by business size

As with most other metrics, larger businesses are more likely to expect to use technology in ESG-related initiatives in the next 12 months.

The largest difference between large and small businesses is in “internal and external reporting of sustainability performance”. This is not surprising as it is unlikely that smaller businesses will have an ESG-related disclosure requirement.

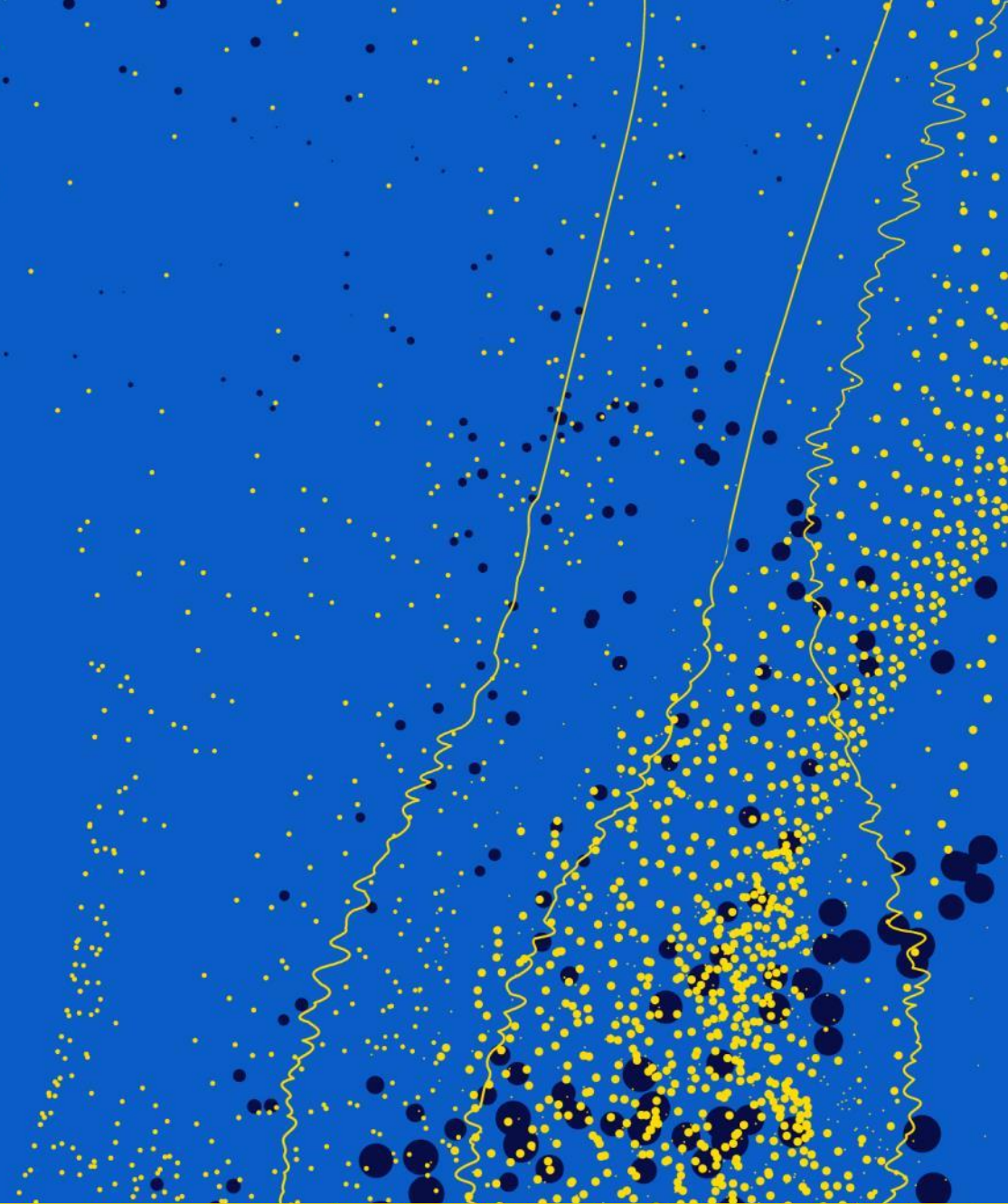
Smaller businesses are also more likely to expect they will not use technology when carrying out sustainability-related activities in the next 12 months.

In the next 12 months, my business/employer is likely to use technology in...



■ 500 or above employees ■ Between 50 to 500 employees ■ fewer than 50 employees

Technology use and initiatives in the past 12 months

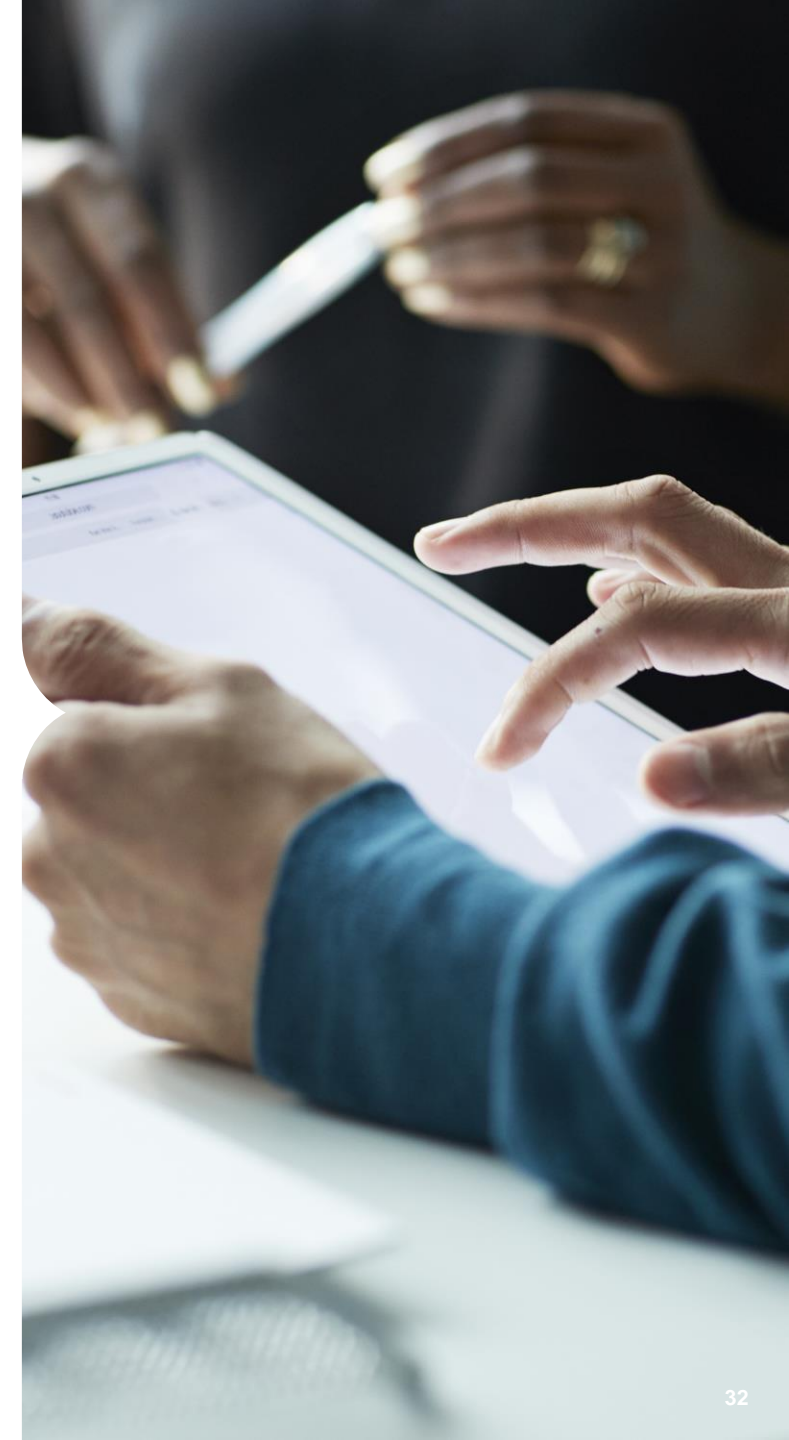


Key results for technology use in the past 12 months

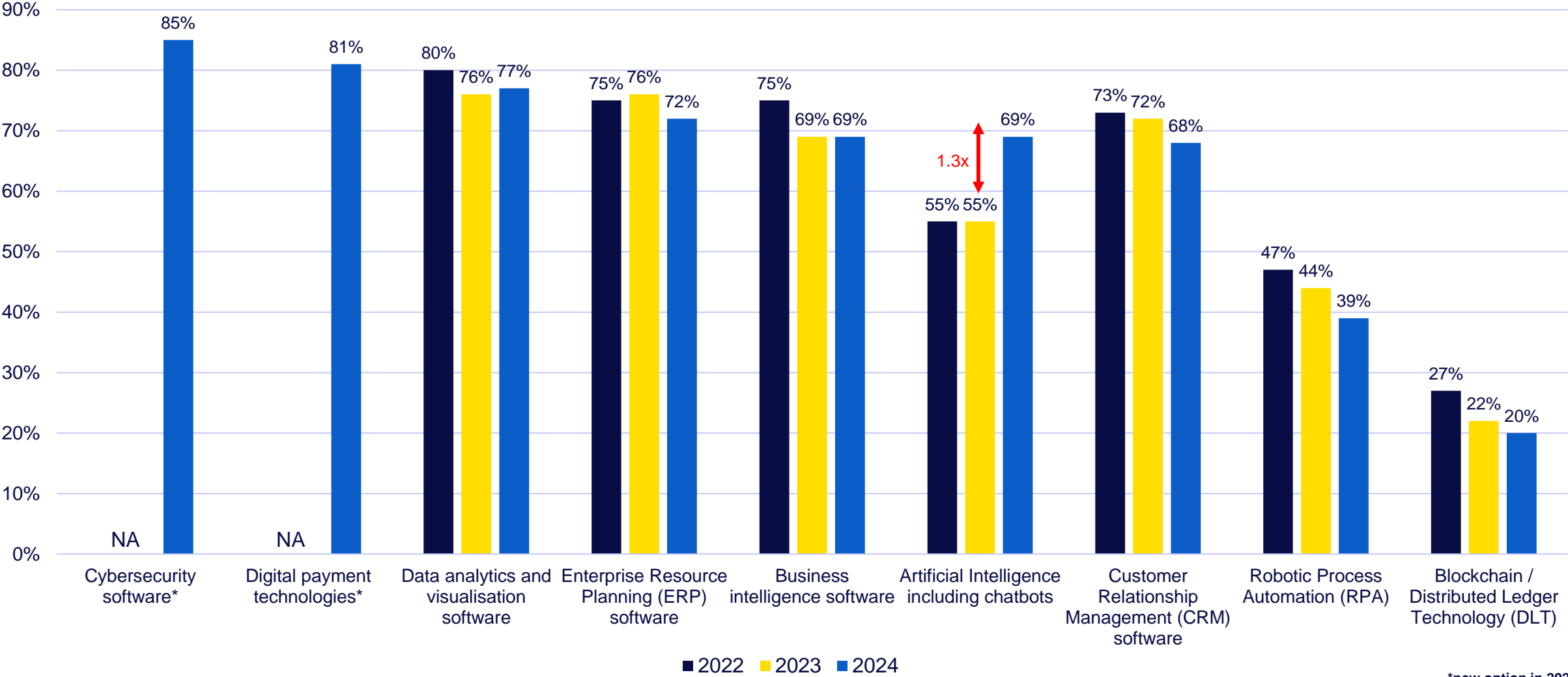
There was little difference between which technologies businesses used in the past 12 months to the preceding 12 months except for an increase in the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

Business size appears to have a bigger impact on technologies used than performance. Again, with smaller businesses having less access to resources, knowledge and talent, it follows that they reported lower usage of emerging technologies, especially robotic process automation (RPA). On the other hand, larger companies with more data reported higher usage of data-driven technologies such as enterprise resource planning, data analytics and visualisation software and business intelligence software.

Blockchain continues to be the technology least used by businesses. This could be because there are currently only a limited number of commercially available blockchain applications that businesses could use.

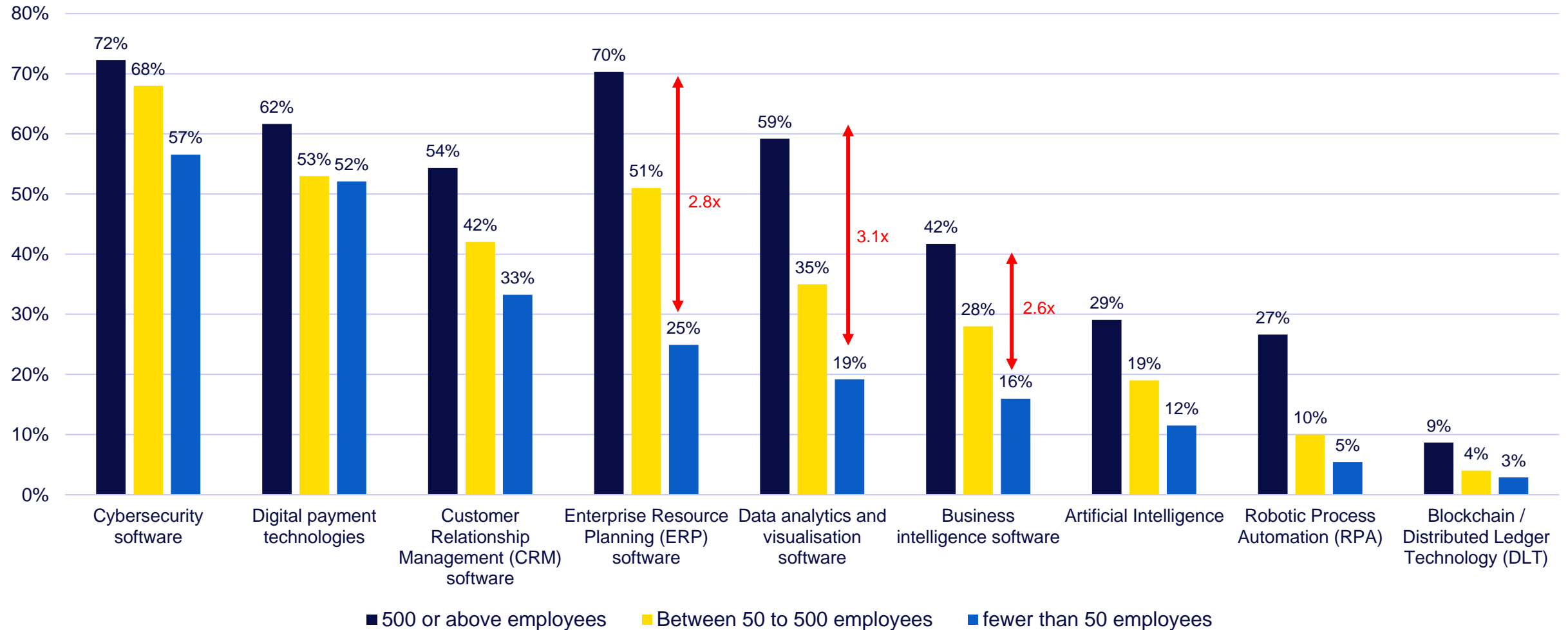


Technologies used in the past 12 months



*new option in 2024

Technologies used “all the time” in the past 12 months – by size



Most popular technology initiatives

Overall, there were slight declines in the percentage of respondents that stated their business had undertaken technology initiatives in the past 12 months, such as increased cybersecurity protections and increased investment in technology from previous survey results.

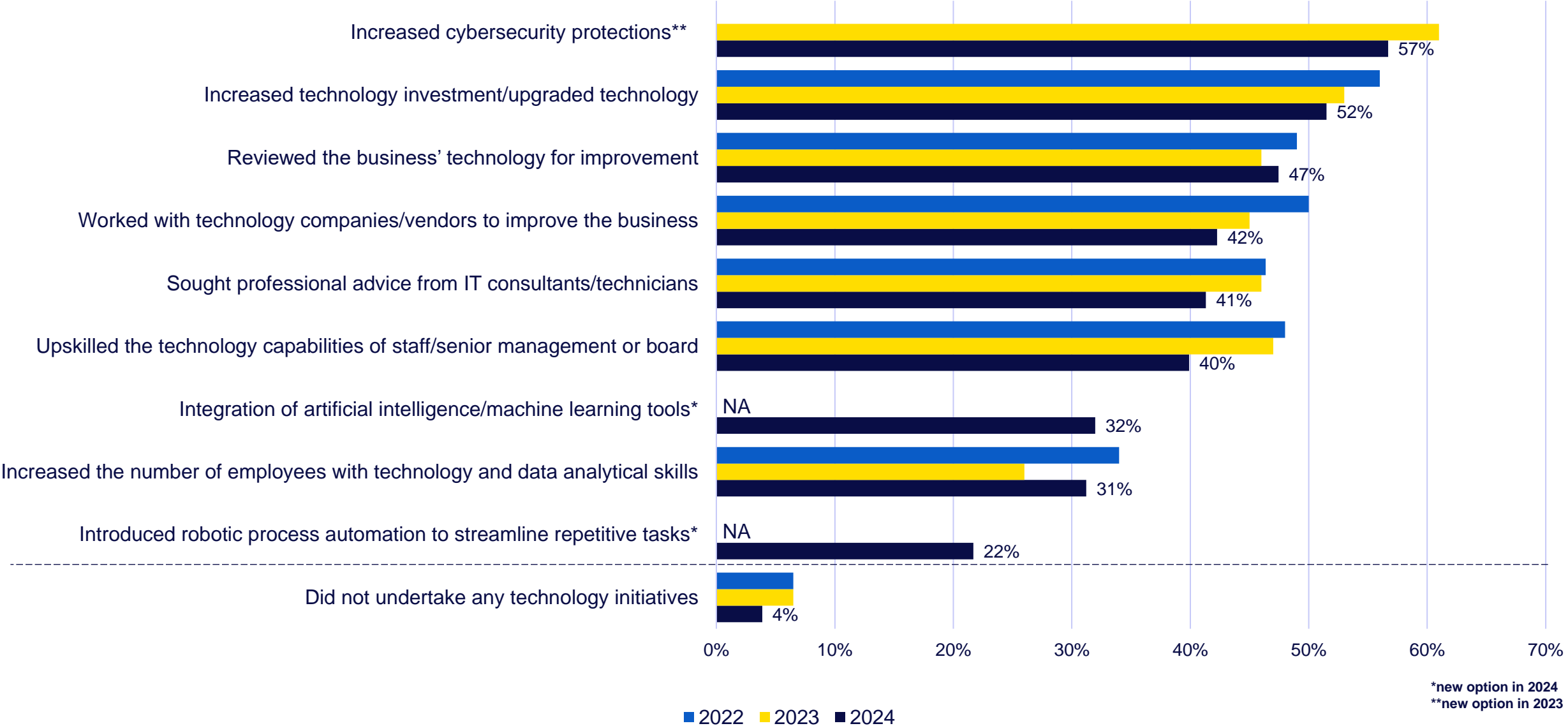
A possible reason for the decline could be cyclical. For example, businesses may have recently completed a large investment in technology and therefore have shifted their focus to other business needs. Other reasons could be they are currently satisfied with their level of technology adoption or are prioritising addressing other business challenges.

Unsurprisingly, larger and more profitable business were more likely to have undertaken the technology initiatives listed in the survey.

Ideally, business should look to embed technology into their operations to ensure that they remain competitive.



Most popular technology initiatives in the past 12 months

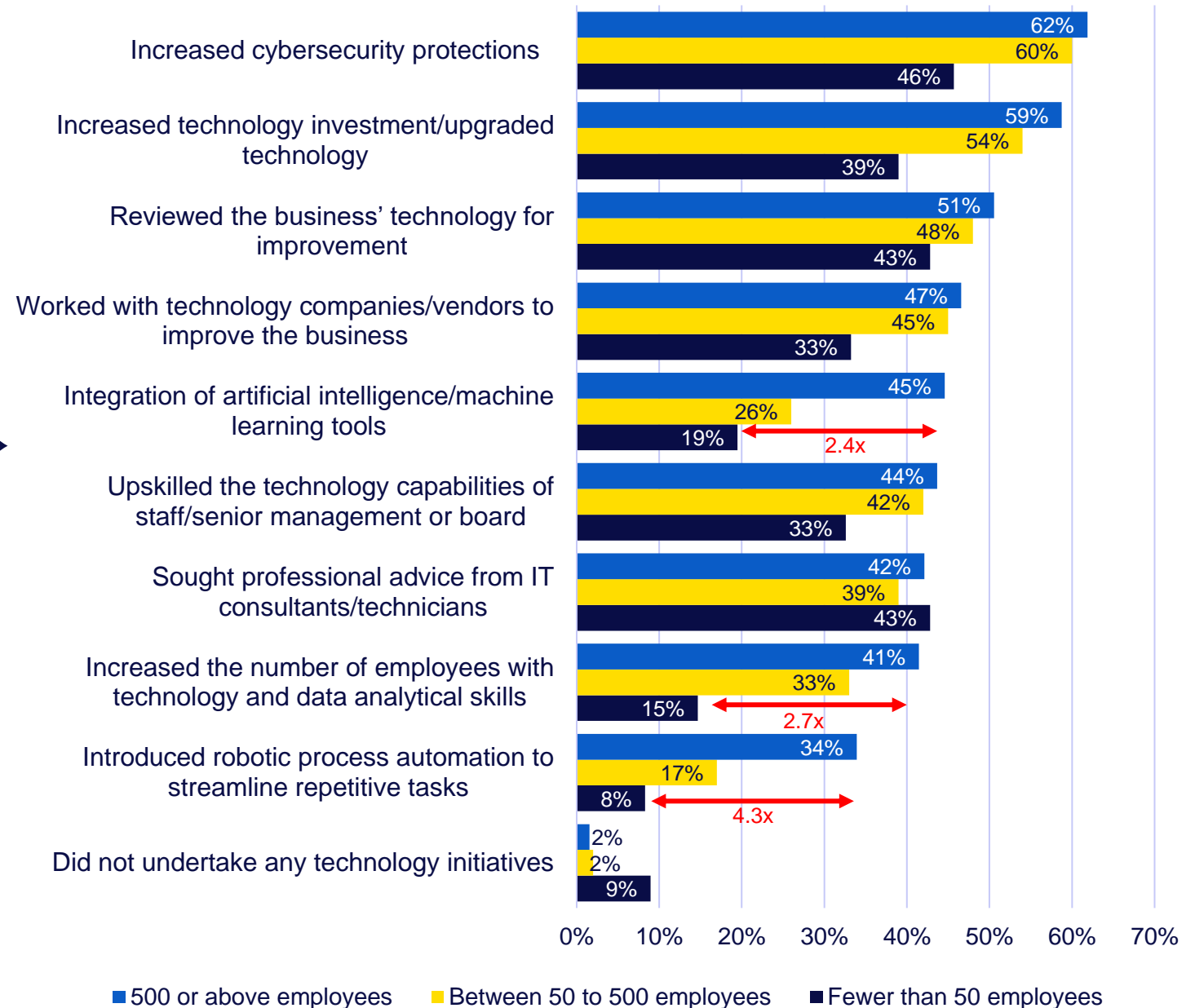


Most popular technology initiatives – by size

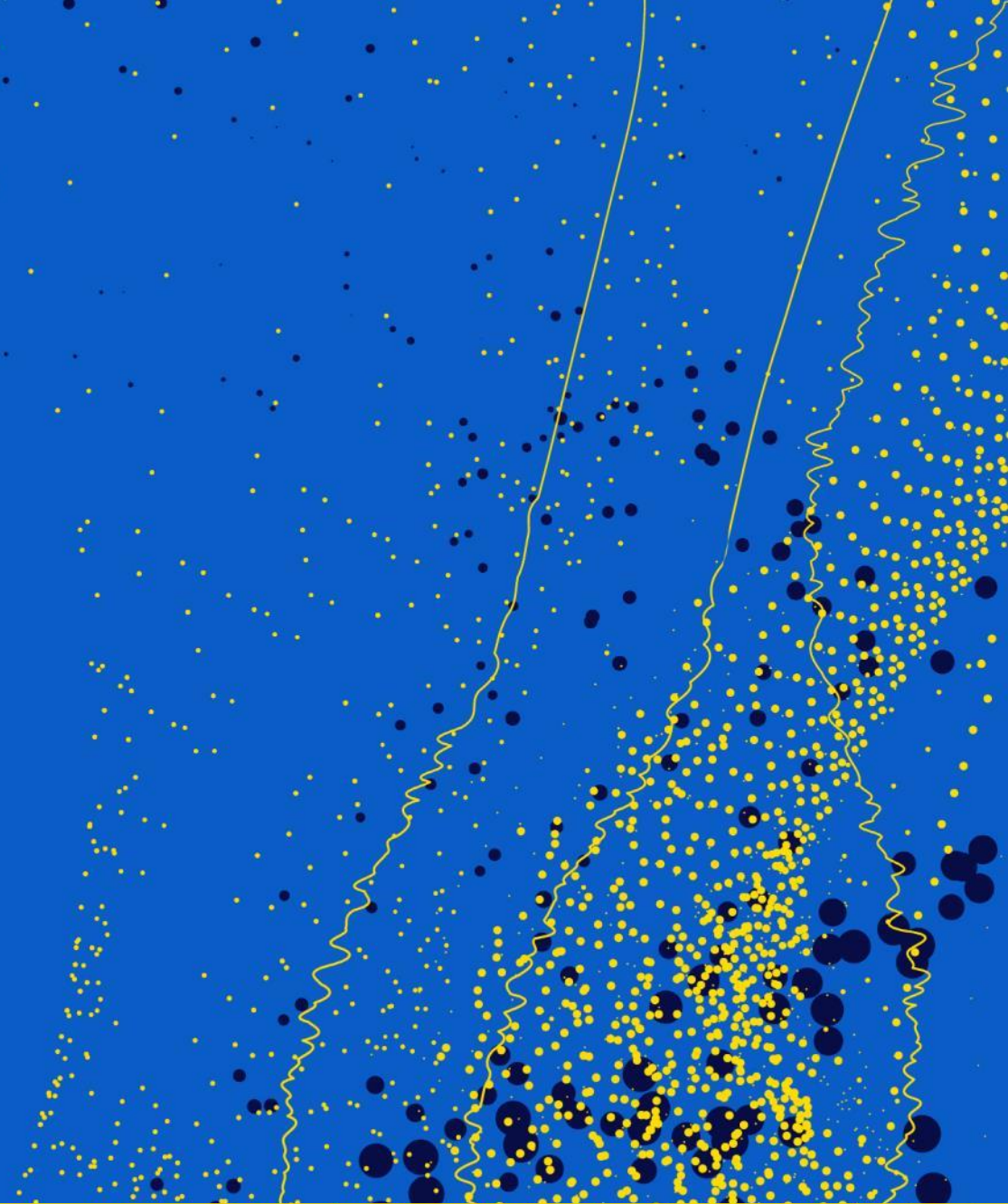
Smaller businesses were less inclined than larger businesses to have undertaken technology initiatives in the past 12 months. This may reflect considerable asymmetries in resources, data assets and access to technical expertise between smaller and larger businesses.

It is encouraging to note that more smaller businesses are seeking professional advice from IT consultants/technicians. As our [Asia Pacific Small Business Survey](#) shows, this can lead to increased growth and greater investment in technologies that are more likely to improve profitability and productivity

Most popular technology initiatives in the past 12 months – by business size



Expected technology use in the next 12 months



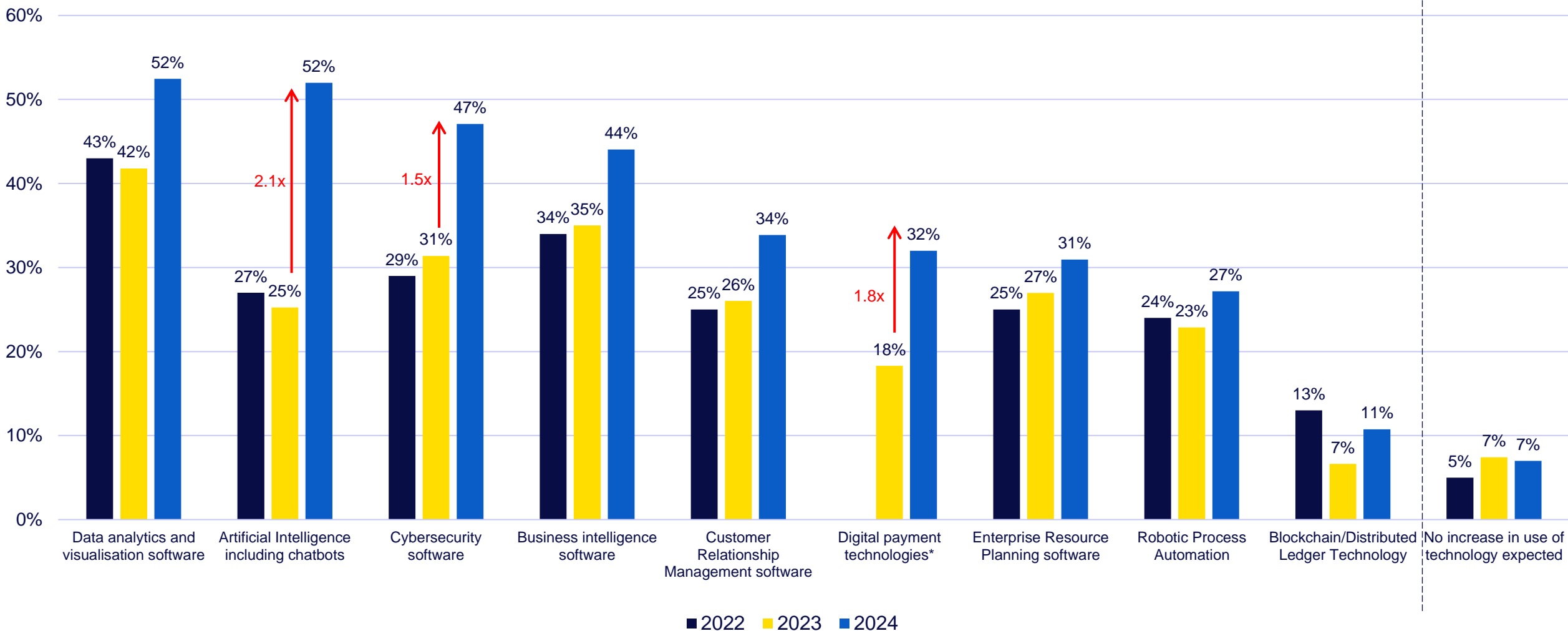
Expected increase of use in technology in the next 12 months

There is a significant increase in the percentage of respondents expecting their business to use various technologies in the next 12 months compared with previous survey results. For example, the use of AI is expected to double and the use of cybersecurity software is expected to increase by one and half times.

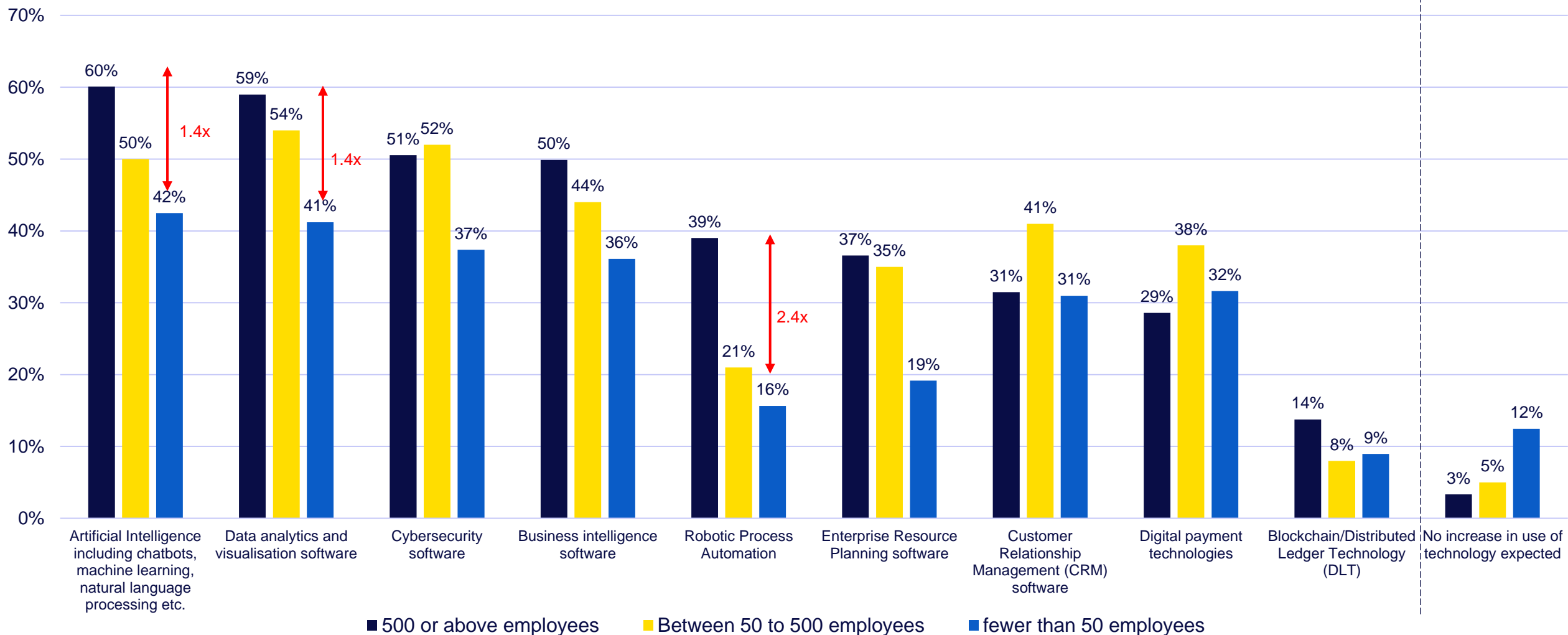
Results by business size followed a similar pattern to other findings. A higher percentage of respondents from larger companies expect their business to use a range of technologies in the next 12 months than smaller companies. This is especially the case for robotic process automation, AI and data analytics and visualisation software.



Technologies business expect to use more in the next 12 months



Technologies business expect to use more in the next 12 months – by size



Digital strategy

Digital Strategy

There has been a decline in the number of businesses reporting the implementation of a dedicated digital strategy.

This may be due to the integration of digital initiatives into broader organisational strategies, rather than treating them as separate efforts.

Profitable businesses were more likely to have a digital strategy in place, indicating a potential positive correlation between technology adoption and profitability.

Business size also plays a significant role in the adoption of digital strategies, with larger businesses being more likely to implement such strategies compared to smaller businesses.



Digital strategy as an organisational strategy

Overall, 63 per cent of those surveyed said their business has a digital strategy. This is lower than the 69 per cent from last year.

The decline could be due to some businesses moving away from separate digital strategies to incorporating digital themes into their overall strategy.

However, this year's result is still positive as most businesses continue to incorporate technology and digital transformation into their organisational strategy. As the survey data shows, such businesses are more likely to experience some improvement in their profitability than those that aren't.



Digital strategy – by performance

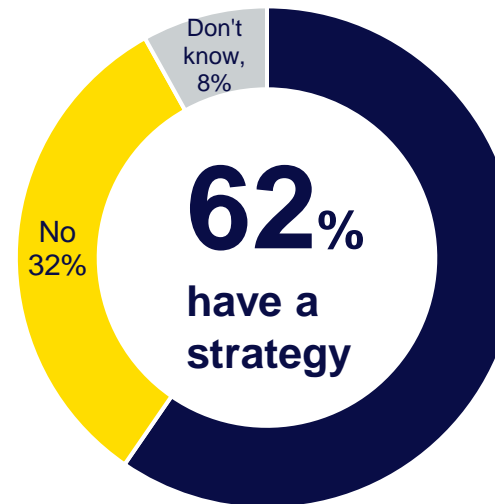
The survey data shows a small positive association between business profitability and the presence of a digital strategy.

Therefore, we suggest that organisations without a digital strategy should consider taking steps to design and implement one.

For smaller businesses, they could work with their external advisers to develop such a strategy.



Profitability increased



Profitability remained largely the same or shrank

Digital strategy – by size

A significantly higher percentage of larger businesses have a digital strategy than smaller businesses. This gap is most likely due to resourcing constraints in smaller businesses.

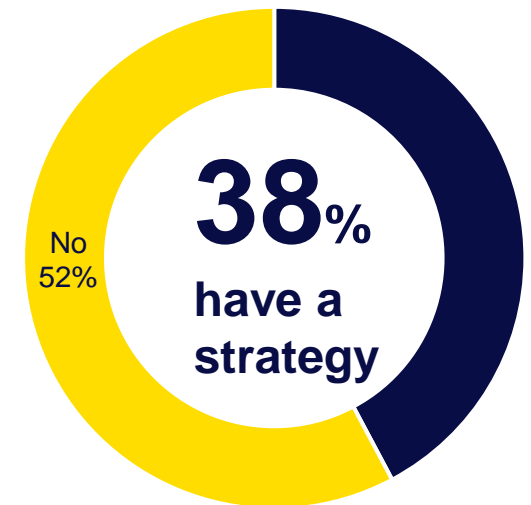
Government and professional support for smaller companies may encourage more small businesses to digitally transform, which in turn may improve their profitability and productivity.



500 or more employees



Between 50 to 500 employees



Fewer than 50 employees

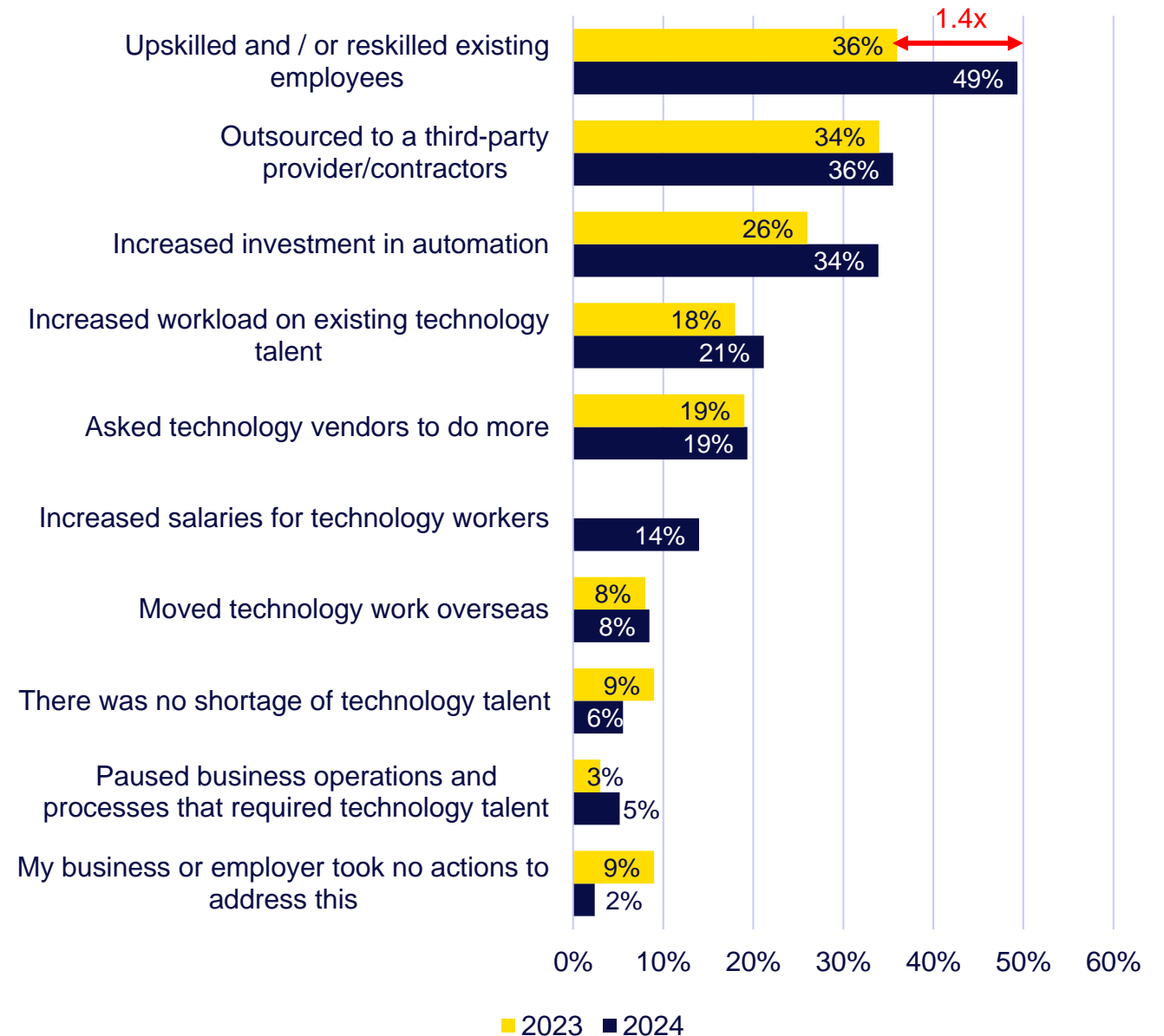
Technology skills shortage

Actions businesses undertook to address a shortage of technology talent

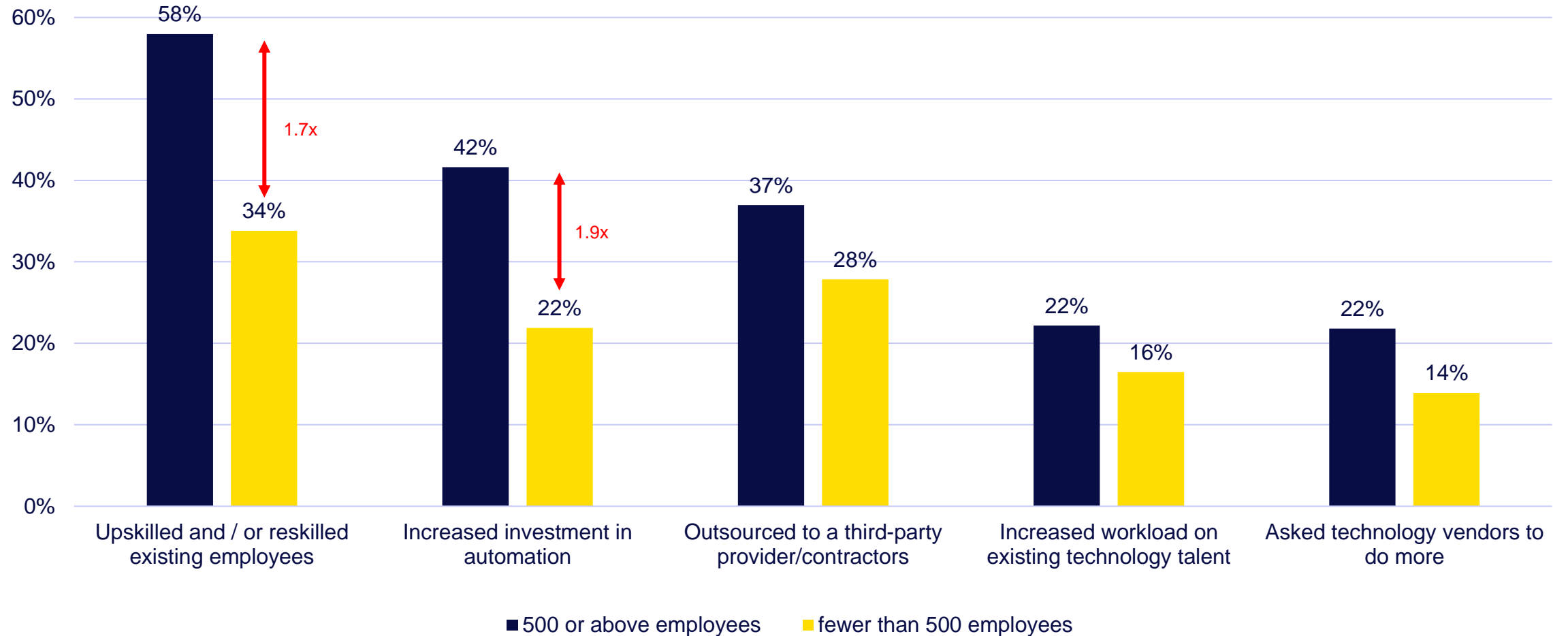
Both large and small businesses recognise the importance of upskilling and reskilling current employees as a means of addressing talent shortages.

Businesses also placed greater importance in automation to help address the talent shortage challenge.

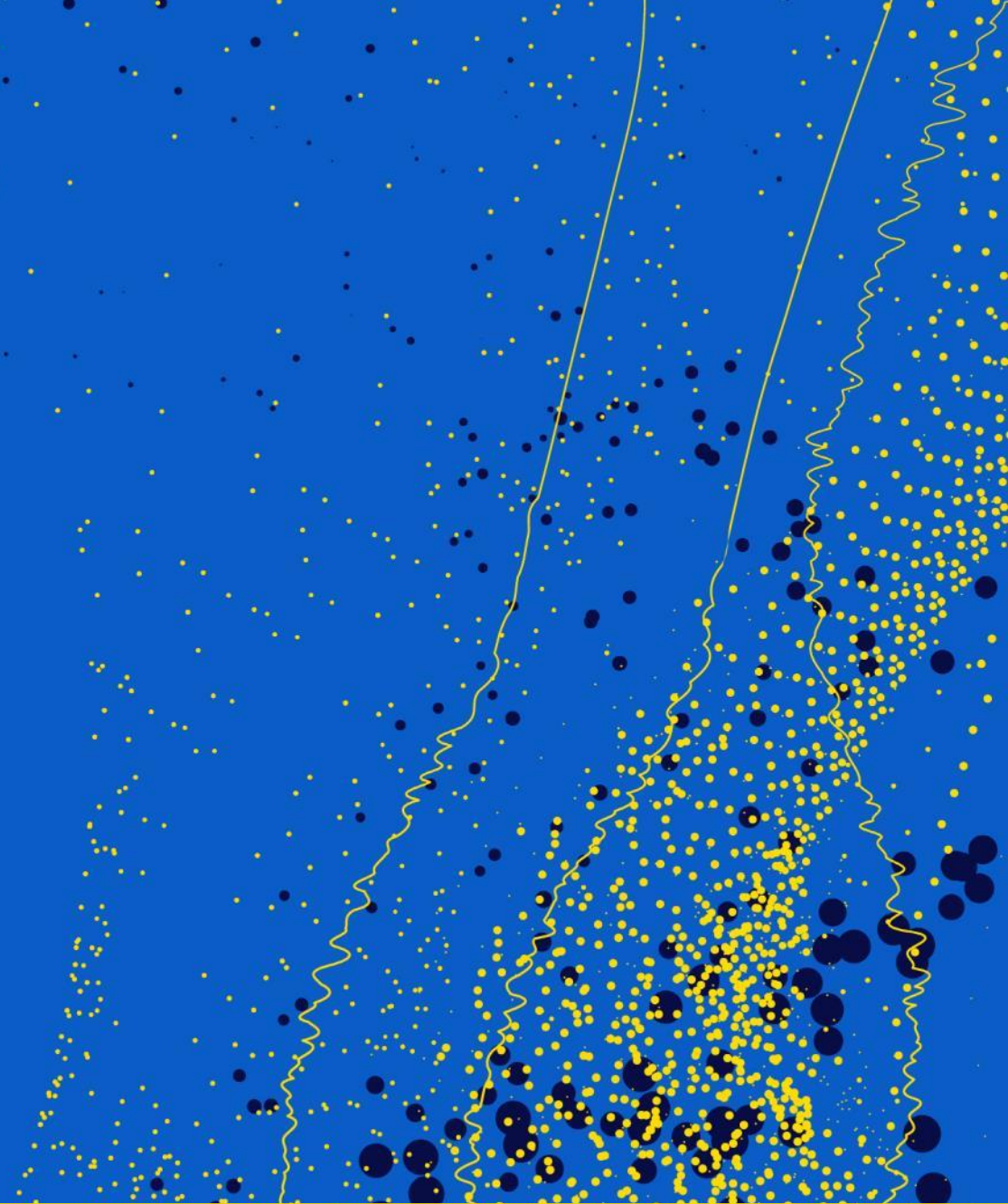
Actions to address shortage of technology talent – by year



Top five actions businesses undertook to address a shortage of technology talent – by size

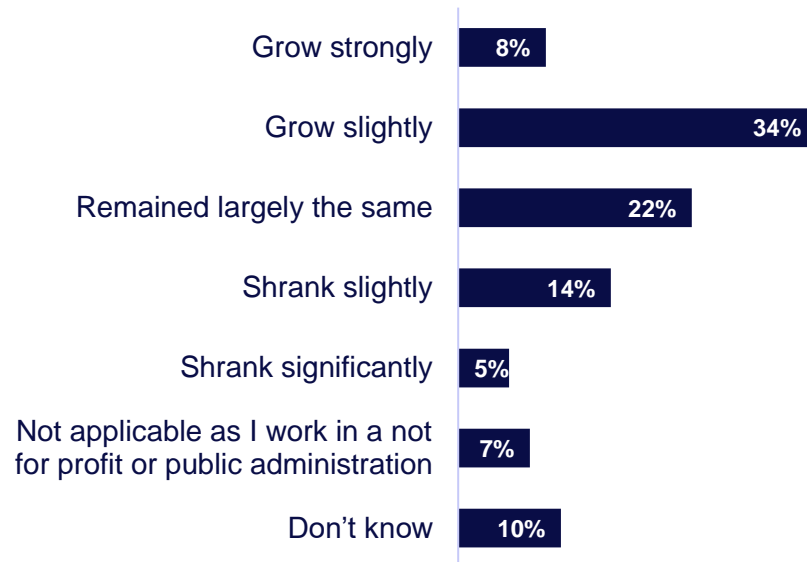


Demographics

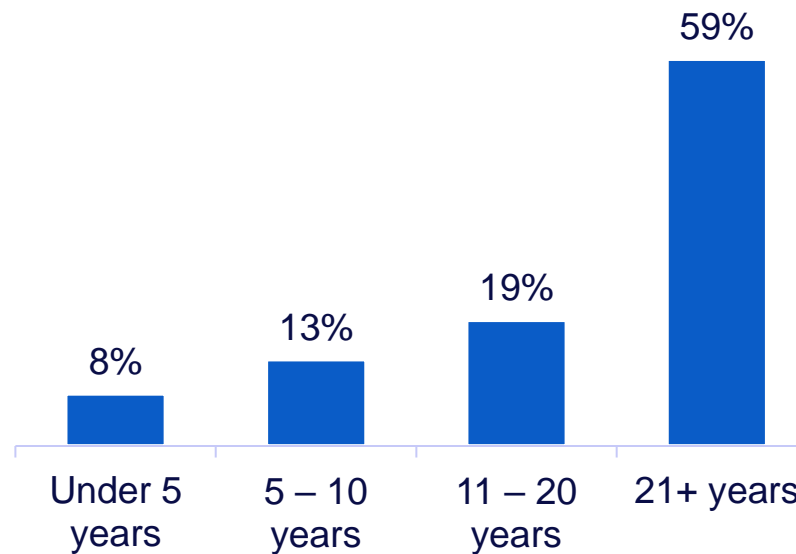


Profitability, business size and establishment year

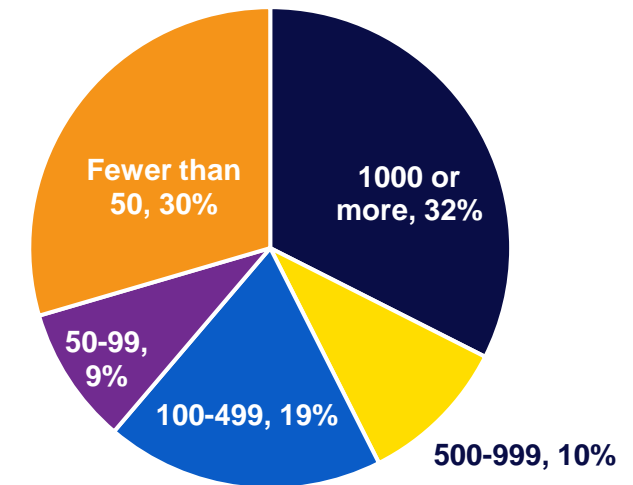
Profitability



Business age



Business Size



*Grow strongly (30% or more)
 *Grow slightly (2% to 29%)
 *Remained largely the same (increase or decrease less than 2%)
 *Shrank slightly (2% to 29%)
 *Shrank significantly (30% or more)

Recommendations

Recommendations



Business strategy

- Develop and implement a digital strategy focused on improving productivity and the customer experience.
- Invest in technology that can be used to meet sustainability goals, including technology that assists with ESG compliance.
- Identify opportunities to enhance operational efficiency, lower costs and/or improve the customer experience through AI.



Business operations

- Invest in technology that turns quality data into actionable insights, such as data analytics and visualisation software.
- Prioritise and regularly review technology for its return on investment (ROI), relevance and effectiveness rather than following the hype cycle of new technologies.



Risk management

- Implement measures to mitigate the risks of cybersecurity incidents.
- Regularly review existing cybersecurity tools and processes to ensure they are updated against emerging technologies and threats.



Talent support

- Provide upskilling or reskilling training to employees to improve the effectiveness of the technology deployed.