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# The State of User-Facing Knowledge and Knowledge Management in 2019

HDI

# Inside


3 Introduction

4 The State of Knowledge Management Programs

9 The State of User-Facing Knowledge

14 Measuring the Success of User-Facing Knowledge and Knowledge Management

16 Quick Reference Guide to Knowledge Management Metrics

17 Investing in Knowledge Management

21 Conclusion

22 About the Study

# Introduction

There's increasing interest by end users in being able to resolve issues and find answers on their own, without contacting support. Many users will turn to colleagues or to the internet looking for resolutions and answers. The result is that support and—as we will see—other departments are left out of the loop and don't know what users or customers are looking for. Providing user-facing knowledge not only gets the right answers to the people who need them, it can also help support organizations better understand what users need. This report provides insight into key areas of organizations' expectations, investments, and results with regard to user-facing knowledge specifically and knowledge management in general.

The survey was conducted during January and February 2019 via an online survey tool. This report includes responses from 852 survey takers. Demographics on industry, organization size, and survey-takers' roles appear at the end of this summary.

*Overall confidence of 95% with a margin of error of +/- 3.2%. Note that questions where respondents could select more than one option will total > 100%, while some charts will total < 100% due to rounding.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Low satisfaction:** While most organizations have a knowledge management plan in place, about two-thirds of those organization are less then completely satisfied with its results.
- **Driven by user demand:** The largest segment of organizations that have put user-facing knowledge in place did so because users asked for it. Since demand for self-help is clear.
- **Misaligned goals and KPIs:** Many organizations set goals for self-help that would be better considered as the results of success: freeing up resources, reducing contacts and costs, and diminishing the need to hire more staff. More attention needs to be paid to providing a user experience that draws end users in and invites them back if these results are to be achieved.
- **Missing methodology:** While support staff are very much involved in managing knowledge, in most organizations they aren't being guided by a true KM methodology. They're either using the tool that came with their ticketing system or aren't using any particular methodology at all. Where a methodology is in use, Knowledge-Centered Service (KCS®) accounts for the largest percentage.
- **Open to AI:** Artificial Intelligence is a sought-after component in a KM solution. Organizations look upon AI favorably and believe their analysts and end users would be willing to use it if they understand how.
- **Demonstrating ROI:** KM metrics aren't being gathered in many organizations. This means that the path to improvement in those organizations is cloudy at best and makes it difficult to show return on investment (ROI).

# The State of Knowledge Management Programs

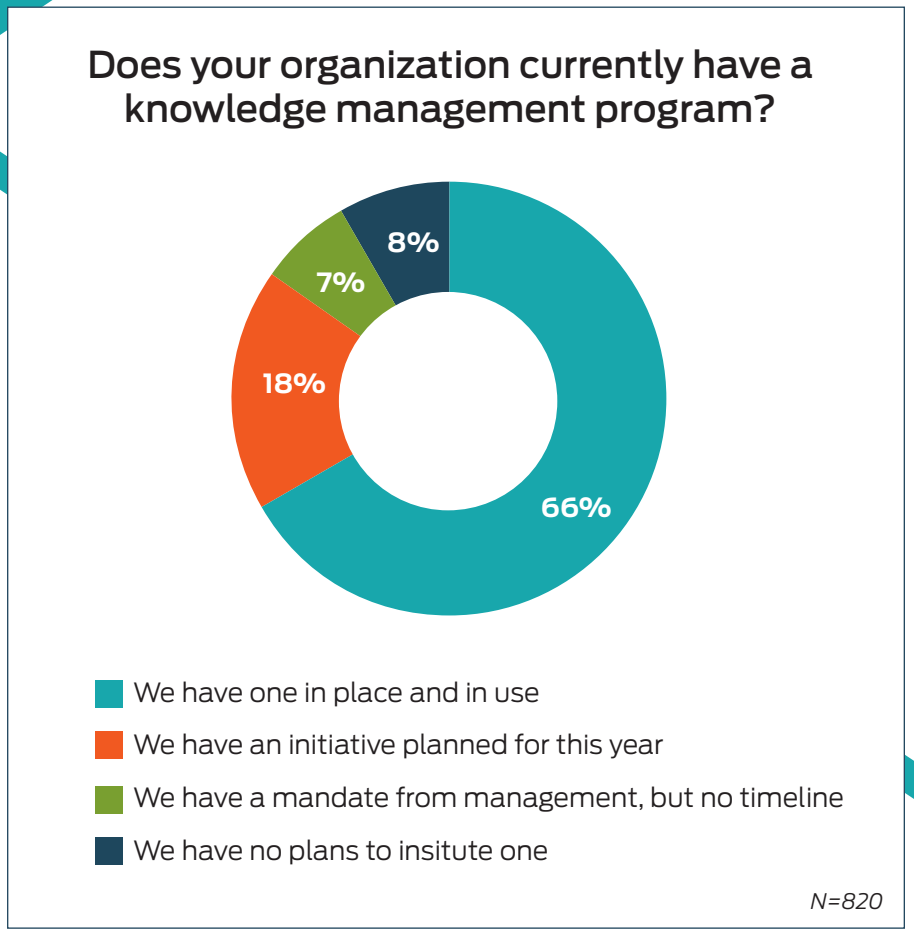
Two-thirds of respondent organizations have a knowledge management (KM) program of one type or another in place, and an additional 18% have an initiative planned for this year.

Having a mandate but no timeline generally means one of two things: either the mandate is very new and hasn't yet made its way into the queue, or it's not a firm mandate, but rather one more thing added to the "things we'll get around to eventually" backlog.

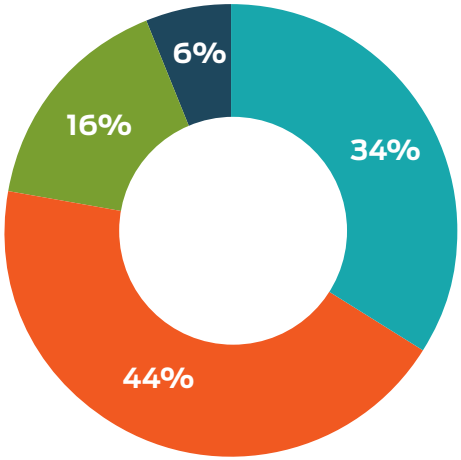
## Methodology and Technology

In terms of methodology, for those organizations that have a KM program in place, it should be no surprise that nearly half report that they use "what came with their ticketing tool" rather than a complete knowledge management methodology. Using the built-in tool simplifies analysts work, at least to a degree, since they don't have to search elsewhere. On the other hand, this approach often limits flexibility.

Almost as many organizations use Knowledge-Centered Service (KCS), and several comments by respondents who chose "Other" indicated that they are exploring KCS, working toward using KCS, or using "modified KCS."



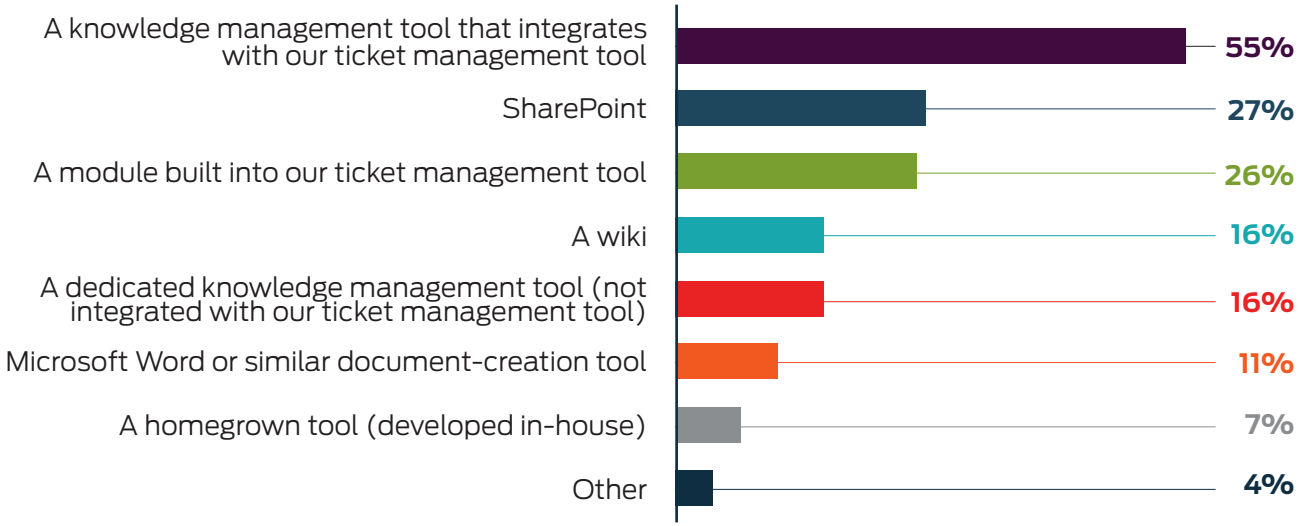
## Does your organization use a particular KM methodology?




*N=520*

Many respondents mistook methodology for technology and responded with the names of particular tools or tool types, such as SharePoint or "a wiki" which, as it happens, are two of the common technologies currently in use.

## What technology solutions does your organization use for KM?



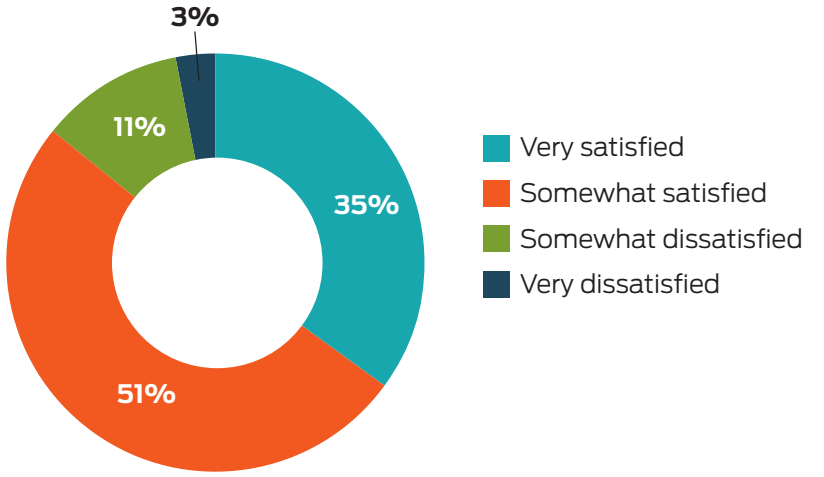

*N=565*

## *Goals, Expectations, and Satisfaction*

While a little over one-third of organizations say they're very satisfied with how their KM program has met expectations, an additional 51% report that they're somewhat satisfied; 11% are somewhat dissatisfied, and just 3% are very dissatisfied.

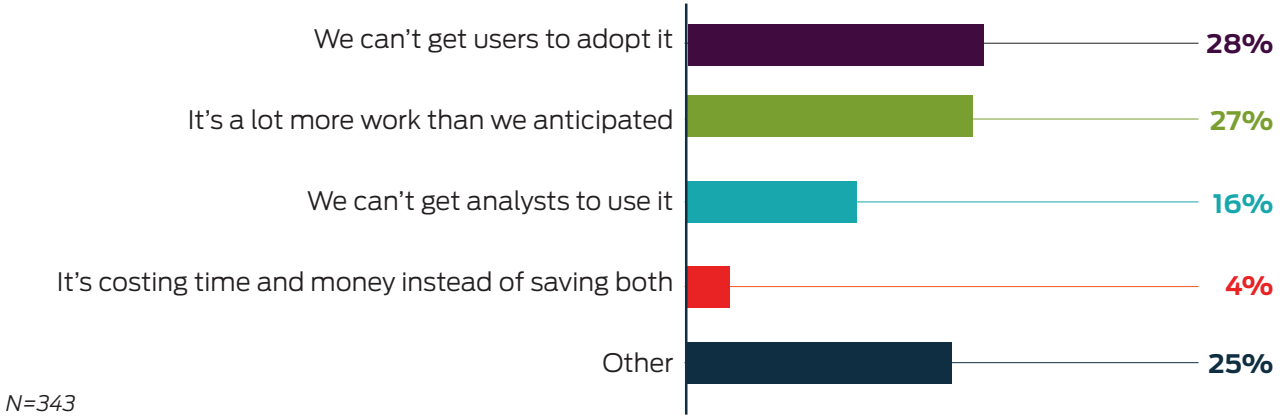
The most often cited reason the KM program has not fully met expectations was no surprise: low user adoption, reported by a little more than one-quarter of respondents. Many organizations (27%) also underestimate the amount of work it takes to launch a successful program. Knowledge management does yield great rewards, but many come later as the result of the work. As knowledge bases are built up and become more frequently used and reused, rewards increase and the start-up work decreases, as is true in most types of initiatives. Planning for and celebrating some quick wins can help produce a sense of accomplishment early on and can ensure that analysts are more invested in it (a problem for 16% of organizations).

### Has your KM program met your organization's expectations?




*N=531*

### What's the primary reason your KM program hasn't met your organization's expectations?




*N=343*

A high percentage (25%) of respondents identified other reasons for the failure of their KM programs to meet expectations, and they fall into four main groups:

**Culture**

- Reluctance to create knowledge
- Reluctance to use and share knowledge

**Technology**

- Need a good user interface
- Need better search
- Need a less "clunky" tool

**Workload**

- No time for keeping it up to date
- Too much duplication of information
- Have other priorities

**Buy-in**

- Needs leadership support
- Needs higher priority

For those organizations that aren't planning to institute a knowledge management program, lack of management support or buy-in is the primary reason.

- "There's a perception that it will be of little value for the time and money spent developing it."
- "Other projects are being implemented that have more value in terms of ROI."
- "Our senior management is resistant to change."
- "I don't think our management realizes there even is such a thing. We hear 'If Person X was hit by a bus tomorrow, what would we do?' all the time. Something like knowledge management might be the solution, but I'm not sure there's anyone who has the time to implement it."

**The *right* tool:**

- **Makes it easier to create and share knowledge**
- **Reduces workload**
- **Drives knowledge consumption**

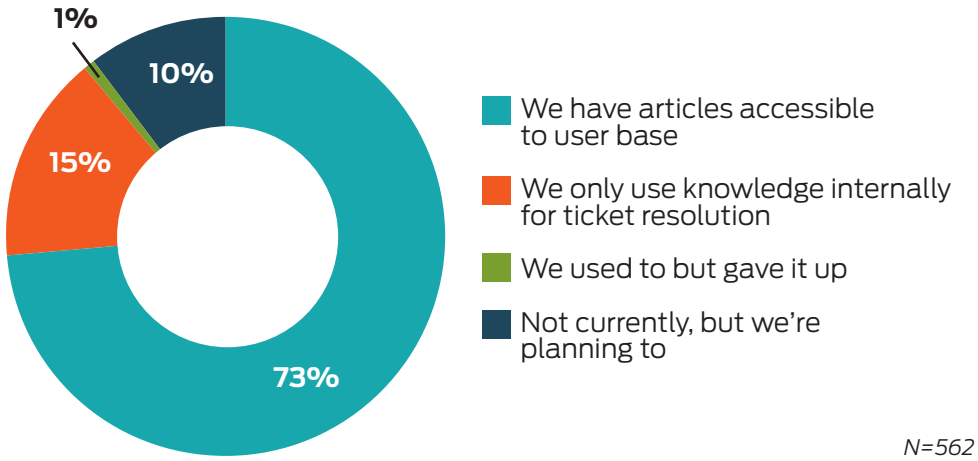
# The State of User-Facing Knowledge

In those organizations that have a KM program, nearly three-quarters have user-facing knowledge (self-help). Even though users *want* self-help, 28% of respondents told us that not being able to get users to adopt self-help is why their program isn't meeting expectations. If end users want self-help but they aren't adopting it when it's offered, the problem is somewhere in the execution. Low adoption can have many causes, including but not limited to:

- Inadequate awareness due to lack of marketing
- Failure to create an attractive, easy-to-use knowledge system (user experience)
- Inability to find relevant content
- Poor, missing, or out-of-date content
- Organizational culture that doesn't encourage users to help themselves, or perhaps even *discourages* users from doing so

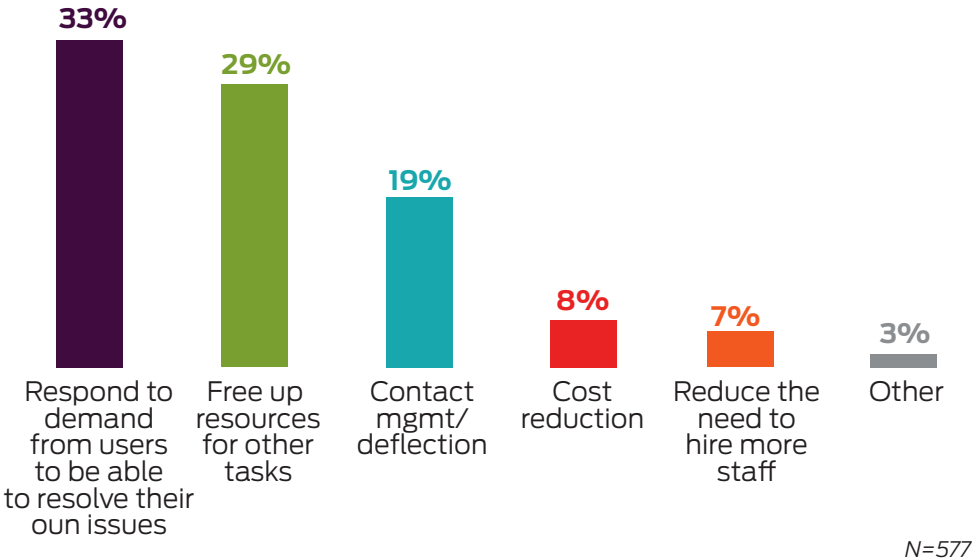
If those things are done right, users will adopt the self-help they're asking for, resources will be freed up, contact volume will go down, and the organization will save money they otherwise would have spent on headcount and other resources.

## Does your KM program include user-facing knowledge?




*N=562*

## What was the primary goal of setting up user-facing knowledge?




*N=577*

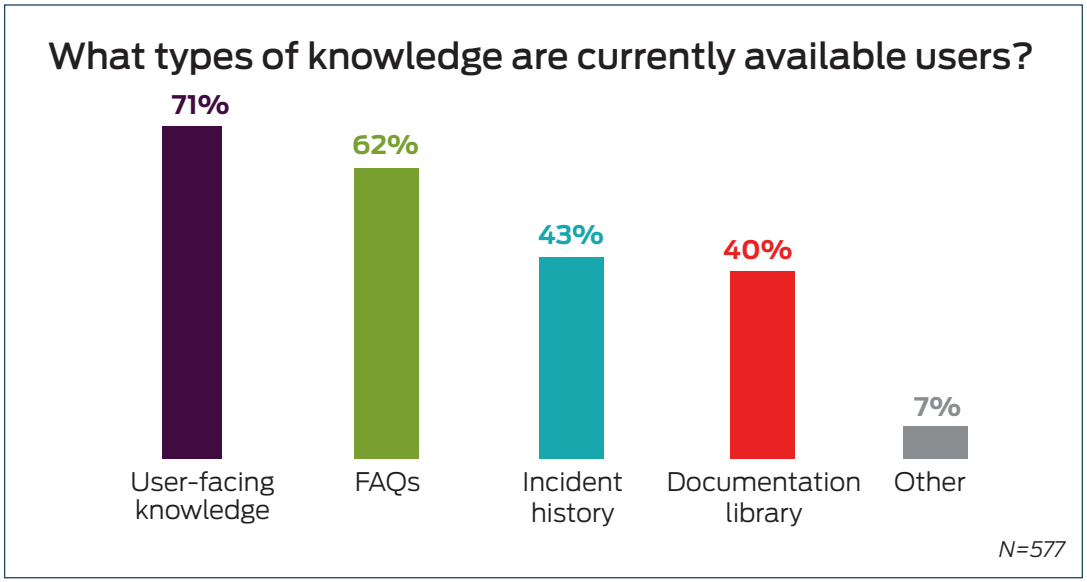
**Organizations that want to have successful self-help need to:**

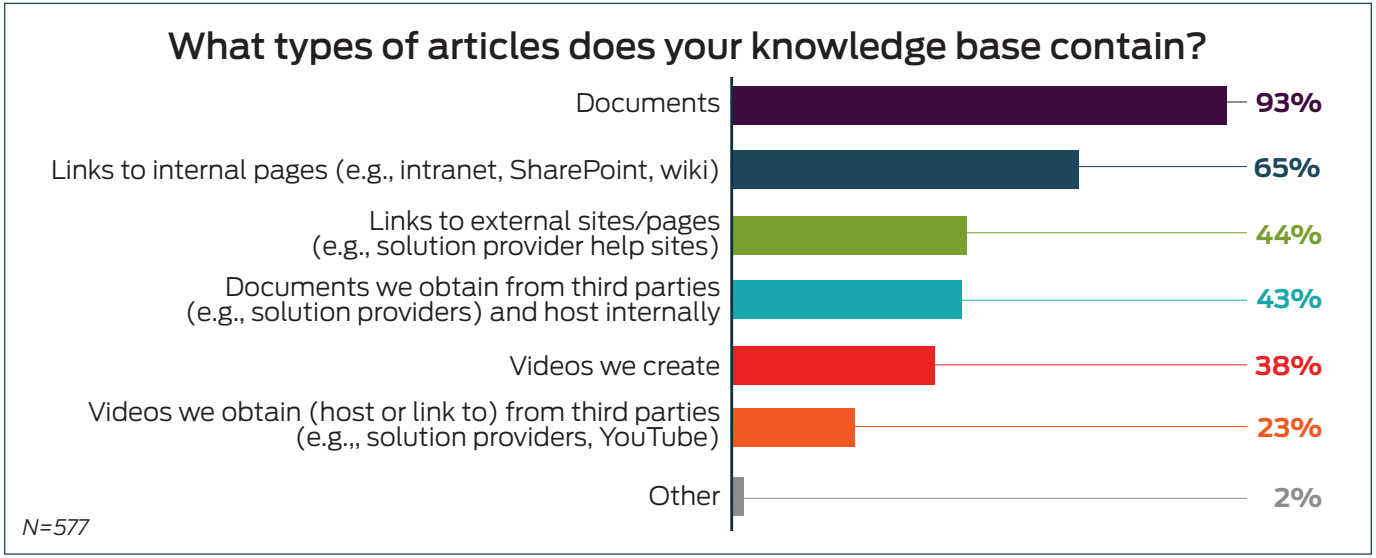
- **Make it a better user experience**
- **Make it easily accessible (easy to find, easy to search)**
- **Market the program well**

### *What Is Included in Self-Help?*

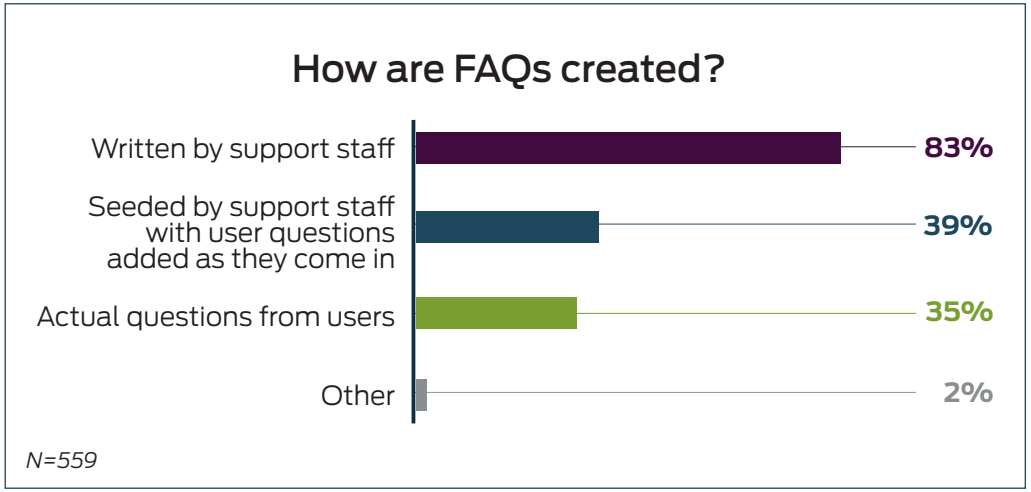
Self-help takes many forms; the form most commonly reported by respondents is the user-facing knowledge base (71%), followed by FAQs (62%). In most organizations, the knowledge base is populated by documents written by staff (93%), but these are supplemented by a variety of other resources, including wikis, YouTube, solution provider sites, etc.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs), according to respondents, are not frequently asked at all, but rather are written by support staff (83%). Most often this happens in advance, anticipating the types of questions users might ask, as opposed to the types of questions they actually ask. This type of content tends to clutter user-facing knowledge with language used by technical staff, not end users, making searches less fruitful for those seeking knowledge. These would be considered just-in-case knowledge rather than just-in-time knowledge, and much of the work invested in answering unasked questions is of little value. Only 35% of FAQs come directly from users; however, 39% of organizations add user questions after seeding the FAQs, which holds promise for improvement.



**One respondent left a comment that may give an idea to other organizations: *include questions from new hires*. Understanding what new colleagues need to know can be very useful in building out your knowledge, and it can get them up to speed faster.**



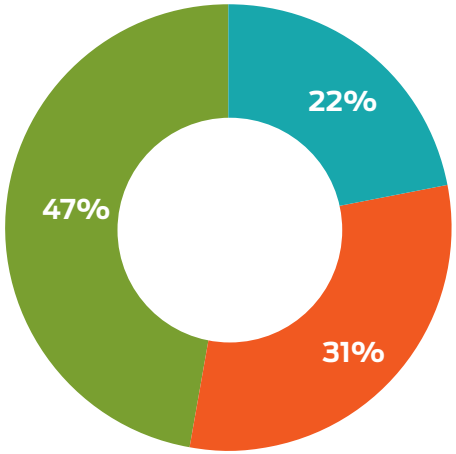

While in just under half of the organizations, the entire support staff are involved at one level or another in managing the user-facing knowledge, in most others the tasks are handled by small teams, or even one knowledge manager. Getting the whole team involved can have cultural as well as practical advantages.

There are four or five basic functions in the production and maintenance of managed knowledge, depending on which methodology, if any, is being followed. Staff members are usually given privileges at various levels: they can use articles at the most basic level, flag existing knowledge that needs improvement, modify articles as needed when given the authority to do so, contribute new ones once they have earned that right, and/or review and publish articles for others to use.

In some organizations, knowledge may be produced, edited, and managed by a separate group outside of support dedicated to KM, or by people from other business areas, such as networking, development, systems administration, and so on.

Specifically, in the case of user-facing knowledge, the farther from the end user the production of knowledge gets, the less likely it is to be relevant and useful to those end users. Articles written by systems administrators, for example, are less likely to be in language end users understand or can put to use, and failure to find relevant knowledge is one reason users abandon self-help and contact the service desk.

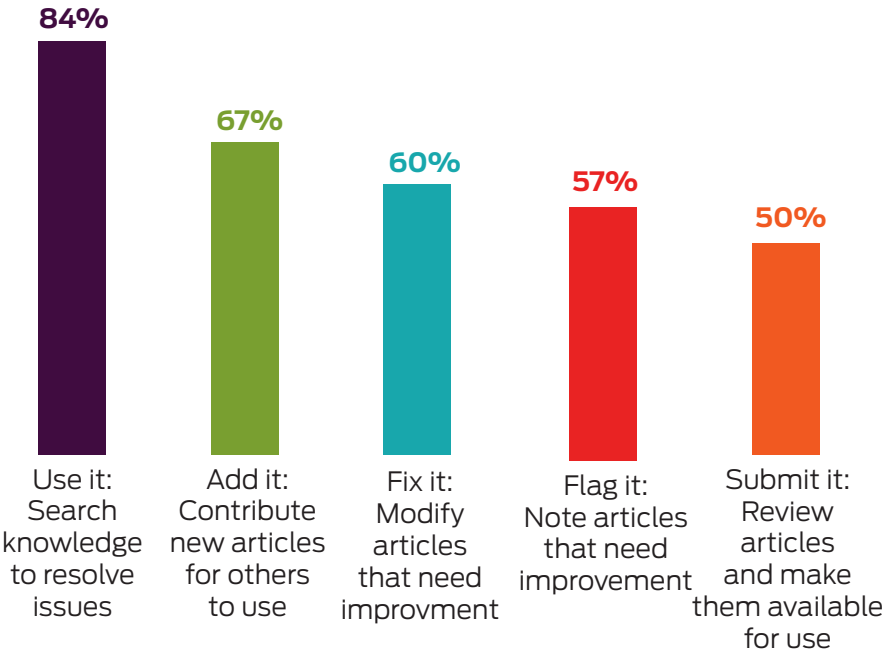
## Who manages user-facing knowledge?




- A dedicated knowledge manger (no team)
- A dedicated knowledge management team (with or without a dedicated manager)
- The entire support team is responsible for creating knowledge, and the support manager decided what goes to user-facing knowledge

*N=525*

## What level involvemant do support staff have with user-facing knowledge?

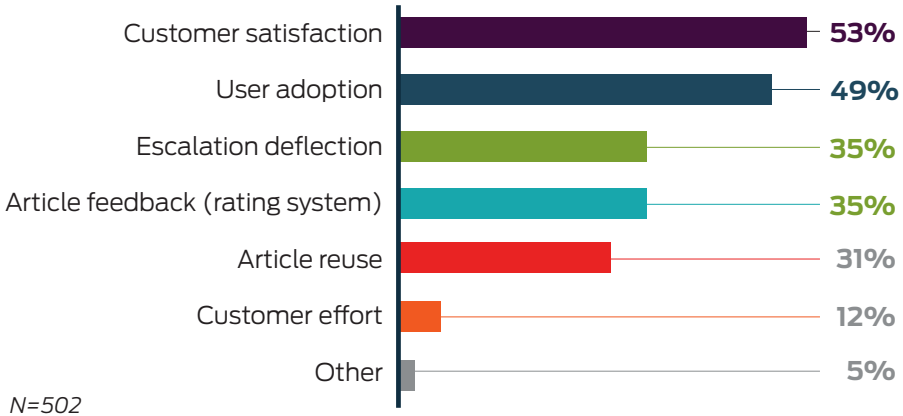



*N=532*

# Measuring the Success of User-Facing Knowledge and Knowledge Management

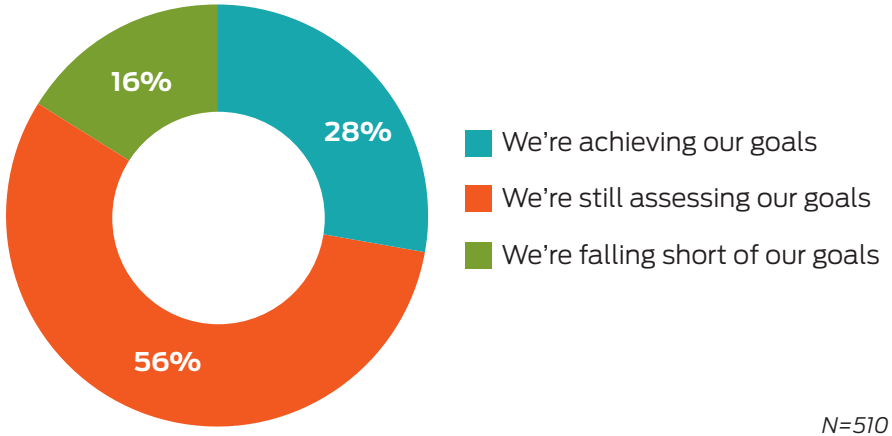
For 53% of organizations, customer satisfaction is the top indicator of a successful user-facing knowledge program, followed by user adoption (49%), escalation deflection (35%), and article feedback and reuse (35% and 31% respectively). However, more than a quarter of organizations report that their user-facing knowledge program is actually successful, showing that this can be done successfully. More than half are still assessing their achievements.

## How does your organization measure the success of your user-facing knowledge program?



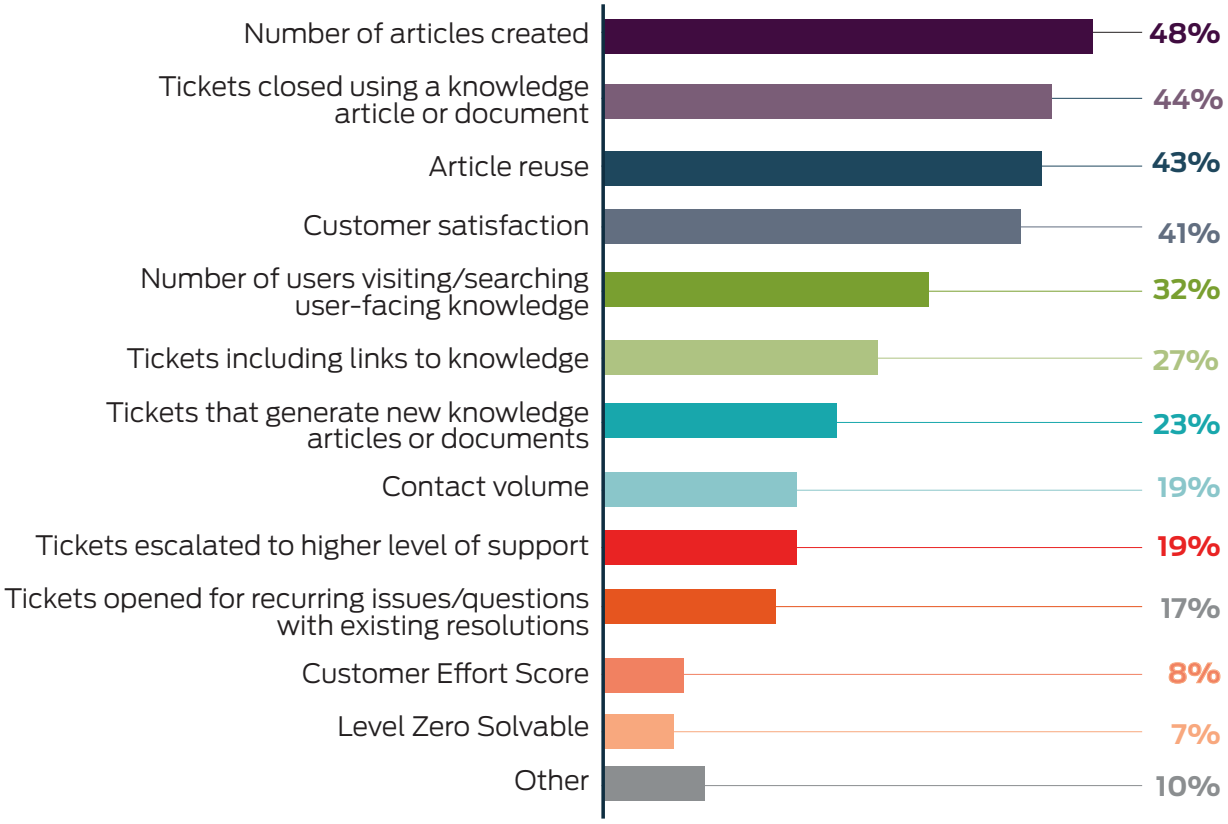

*N=502*

## Does your organization consider your user-facing knowledge program to be successful?




*N=510*

## What metrics do you use to measure knowledge management?




*N=577*

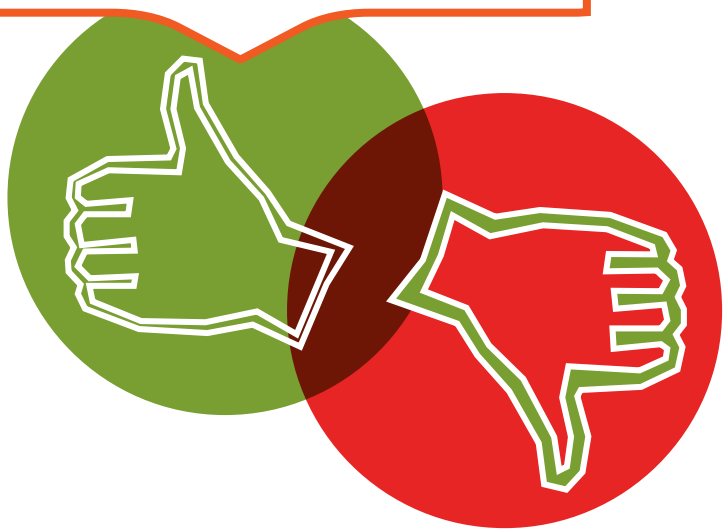
Among the 10% who selected "Other," the most common thread indicated that some organizations aren't measuring at all, at least not at the present time. There are too many management quotes about using met-rics to ensure success to pick one, but not measuring at all demonstrates a lack of commitment to improvement.

On the other hand, one respondent reported using a "multifaceted knowl-edge scorecard with many inputs," while another reported tracking "knowledge requested but not found," indicating a desire to increase user success in finding relevant articles.

## Quick Reference Guide to Knowledge Management Metrics

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Number of knowledge articles created in a month | 11-25 | median |
| Percentage of articles reused | 11-30% | median |
| Percentage of user base that has accessed/searched your user-facing knowledge | 26-50% | median |
| Percentage of tickets escalated that could have been resolved by the support team | 11-15% | median |
| Percentage of tickets resolved by the support team that could have been resolved by the user | 16-20% | median |
| Percentage of tickets opened for recurring issues that could have been resolved using knowledge | 16-20% | median |
| Increase in CSAT due to implementing a knowledge management program | 64% | |
| Decrease in contact volume due to implementing a knowledge management program | 46% | |

You can't improve if you don't know how successful or unsuccessful your efforts are now.

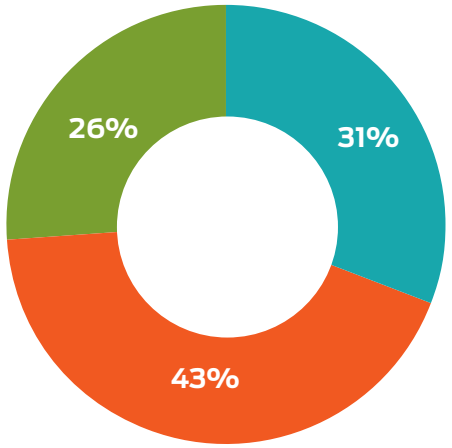


# Investing in Knowledge Management

If the current technologies, described by many respondents as "clunky," aren't serving the needs of organizations, are they planning to invest in improvements?

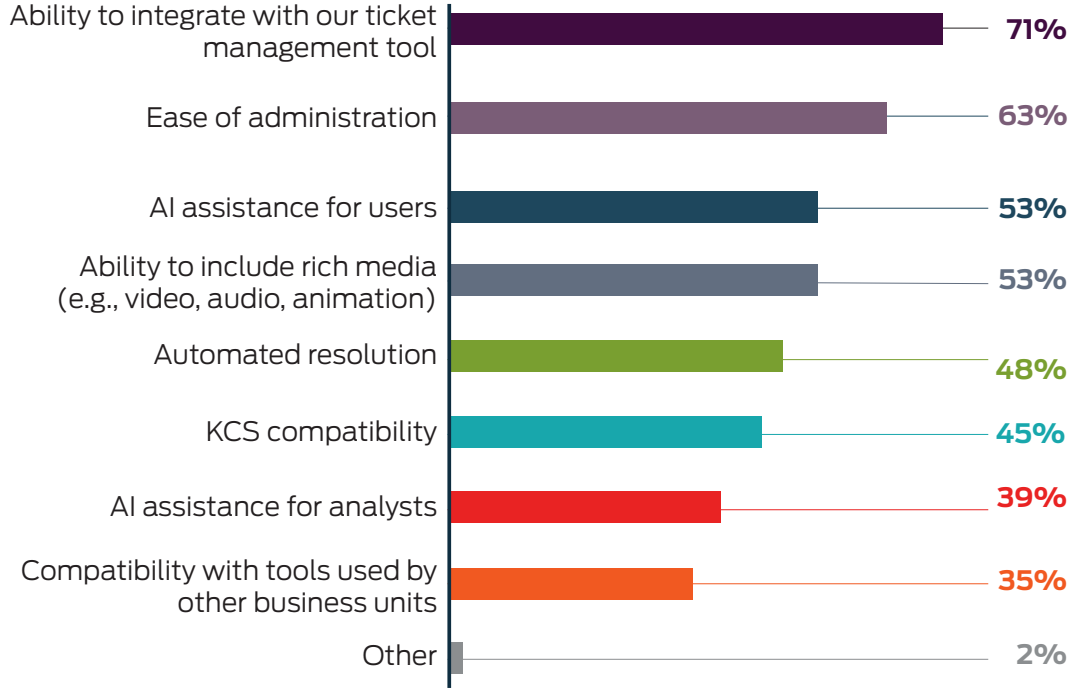
Nearly one-third of organizations have a plan and a budget for KM improvement, and 43% are ready, once they have the budget and a plan. But while technology certainly is not the whole story when it comes to investment—training certainly comes into play as well—tools that can power and simplify the work of knowledge management can yield substantial benefits. What are organizations looking for in a technology to power-up their knowledge management effort?

## Does your organization plan to invest in KM in the next 12-18 months?




*N=578*

## What features/benefits would you want in a dedicated KM tool?



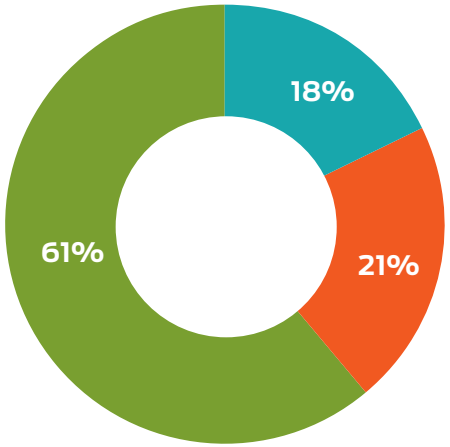

*N=747*

Velocity is key in every organization, so it's no surprise that tool integration and ease of administration top the list. Additionally, gone are the days when text documentation alone would appeal to end users. They are already using how-to sources like YouTube, and they expect video, audio, and animation (rich media). This goes directly to user experience and responds to the call to increase self-help adoption.

A desire for AI also ranked. That organizations want artificial intelligence (AI) to assist both users and analysts (53% and 39% respectively) means that they expect solution providers to deliver on the hype of emerging technologies. Most organizations have a favorable view of AI-assisted self-service and think both their analysts and end users are willing to use it. However, just 18% of organizations have an overall AI strategy of any kind, with or without a plan for AI self-service specifically.

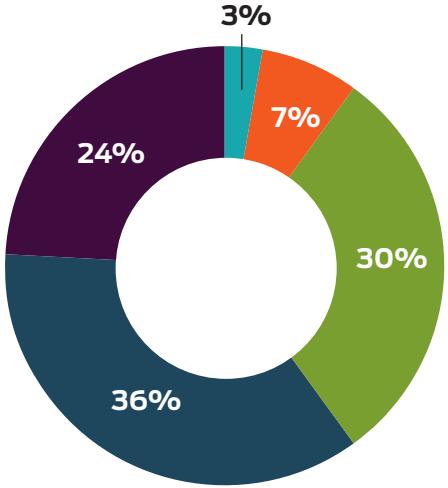
# It's time to stop talking about AI and start using it.

## Does your company have an overall AI strategy?



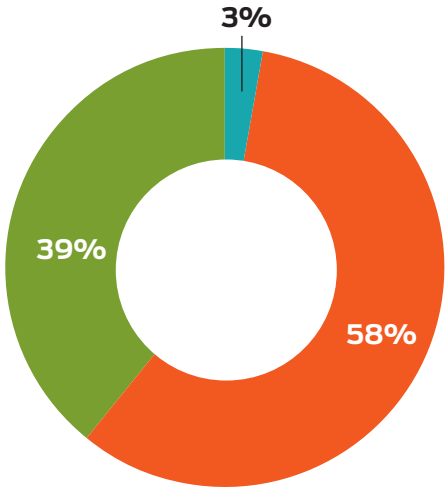

*N=564*

## How familiar are you with AI self-service solutions?




*N=785*

## What is your perception of AI self-service?

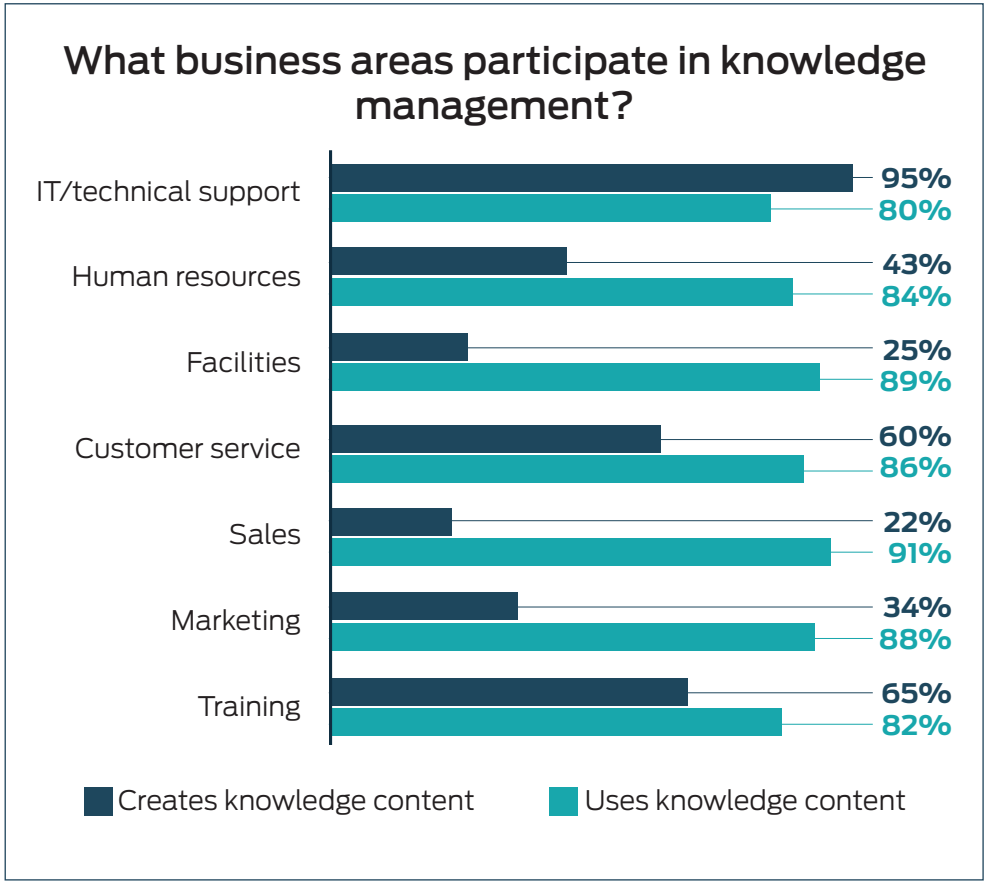



*N=576*

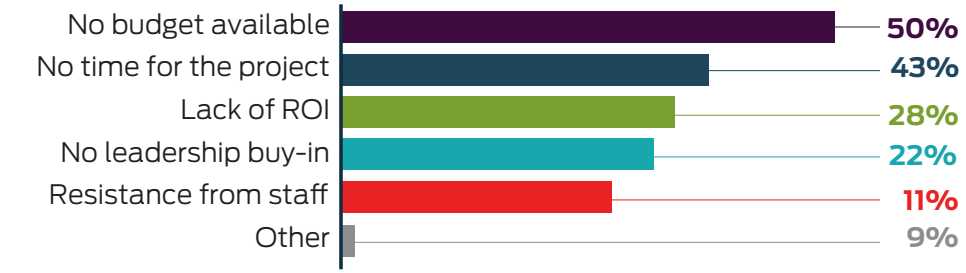
| _____ would be willing to use AI self-service provided they understood the benefits/functionalities. | Yes | Maybe | No | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| End Users | 59% | 40% | 1% | 383 |
| Analysts | 83% | 17% | 0% | 282 |

One-third of organizations are looking for compatibility with tools used outside IT, and with good reason. While IT is still a major producer of knowledge—at least with regard to information technology—other lines of business are consuming knowledge and often producing their own. HR, customer service, and training are contributing knowledge in more than half of respondent organizations. Knowledge management isn't just about closing trouble tickets.

For organizations that haven't moved forward with KM, the question then becomes, "What is holding you back?" If users want to consume knowledge and technologies exist that can make it easier for them to do so, why aren't organizations charging ahead? It comes down to resource constraints and competing priorities.



## What are the barriers preventing your organization from investing in KM?

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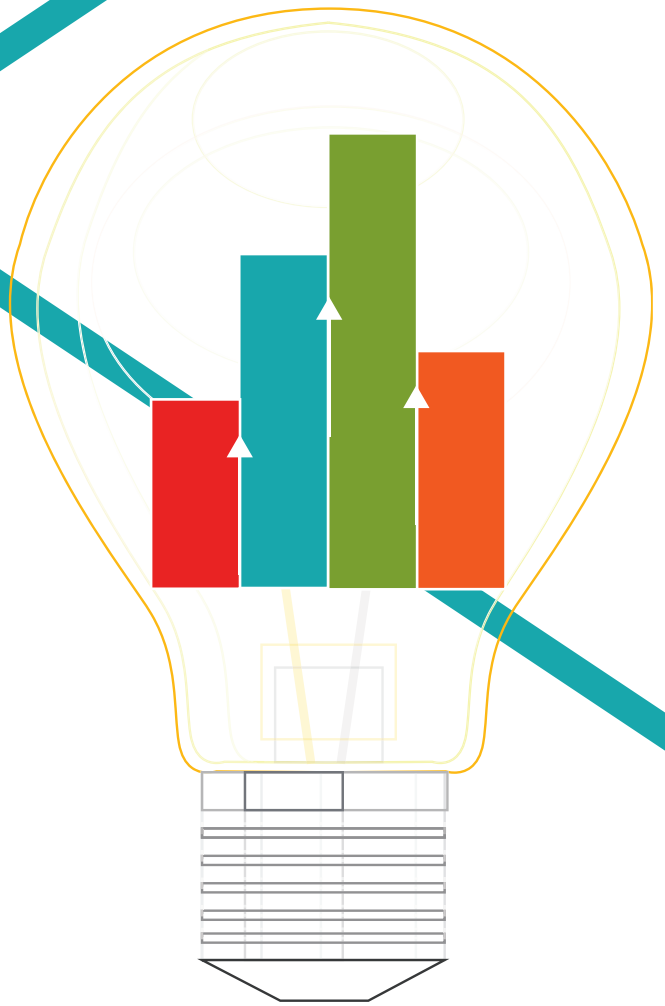


# Conclusion

The consumerization of IT doesn't only apply to the technology the workforce uses; it applies to the support model, too. Employees have support expectations which mimic those they receive in their consumer life, like knowing they can use powerful search engines to get answers they need almost instantly. They can easily self-serve with videos showing them step-by-step guidance or conversational bots leading them to relevant information. Good technologies—including AI—can bring these kinds of experiences—which are becoming table stakes—into businesses and organizations, but the fundamental business cases must be made. Your users are waiting.

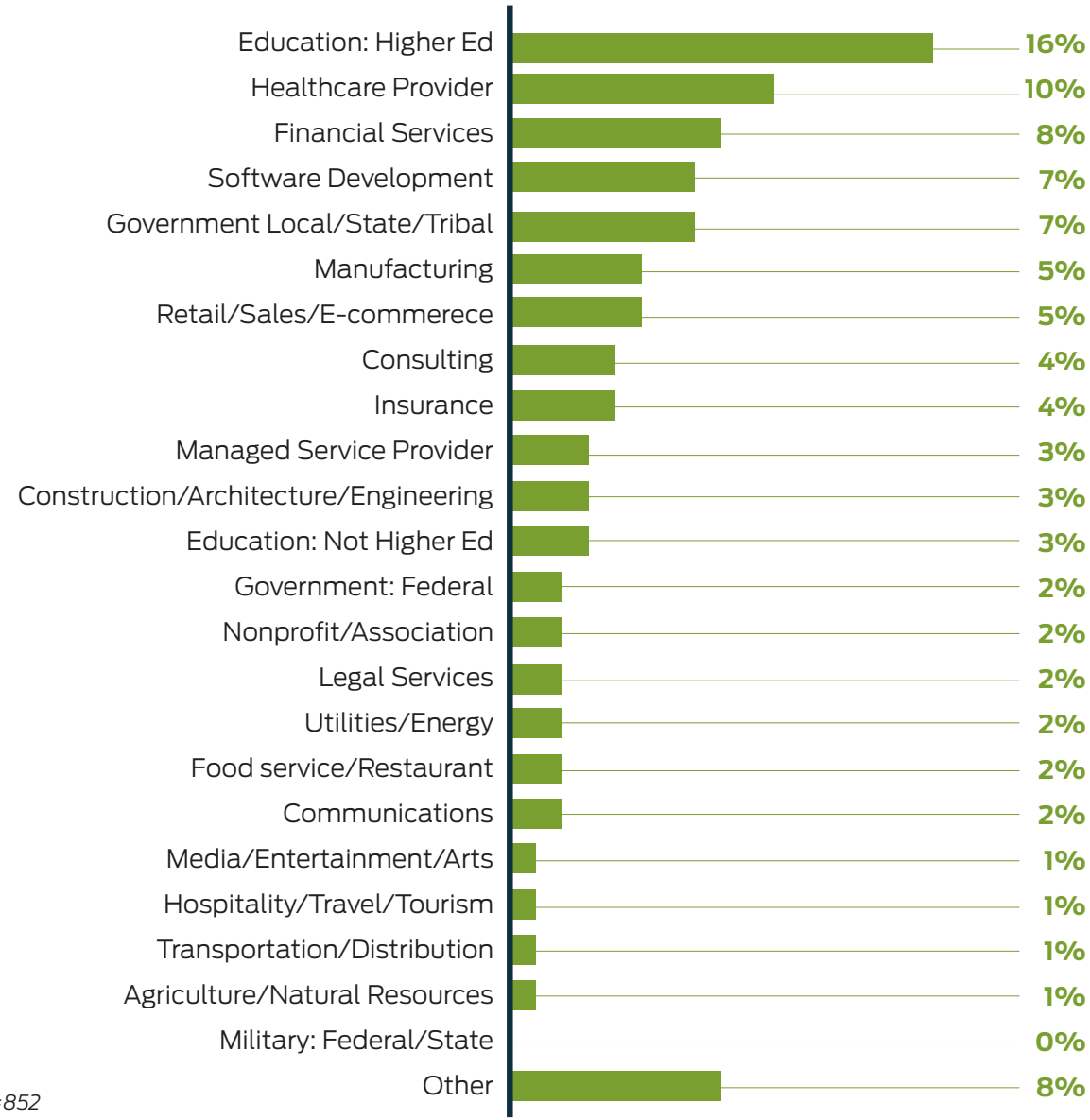
# About the Study

The 852 respondents to this survey represented a range of industries, with the largest representative group being higher education (16%), followed by healthcare (10%), financial services (8%), and software development (7%). The study participants represented all roles within service and support, including executive/senior management (21%), specialist or midlevel management (46%), and supervisors/team leads (12%).

With regard to the size of their operations, almost one-third of the respondents (31%) represent organizations with fewer than 1,000 full-time employees (FTEs), while nearly one-third represent very large organizations of 10,000 FTEs or more. In terms of support organization size, nearly two-fifths (39%) of respondents have fewer than 100 FTEs across all support organizations in their companies; 13% have more than 10,000 FTEs in their support organizations. One-fifth of support organization have total annual budgets exceeding $10M; one-third operate on less than $1M per year.

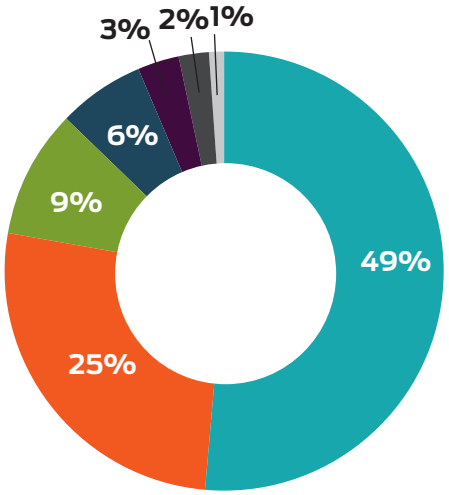
Nearly half of the respondents provide internal service/support exclusively (49%), with 25% providing blended support (internal/external) and 9% providing external (customer-facing) support only. The majority of respondents are involved with the support center/service desk/help desk (80%), with half involved in service management (30%) and nearly half (47%) working with desktop support/field services. A further 29% are involved with development, human resources, facilities, and finance. Geographically, this study is representative of organizations that are predominantly based in North America, specifically the United States (90%) and Canada (4%).

## Industry




*N=852*

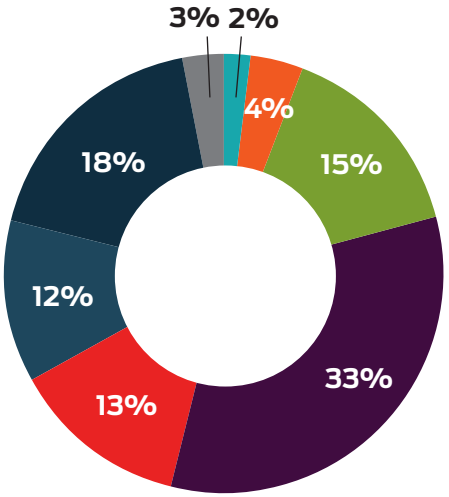
## Role




- Practitioner - internal service/support
- Practitioner - internal and external service/support (blended)
- Practitioner - external service/support (customer facing)
- Consultant
- Outsourced or managed service provider
- Vendor/solution provider
- Not currently affiliated with any organization

*N=852*

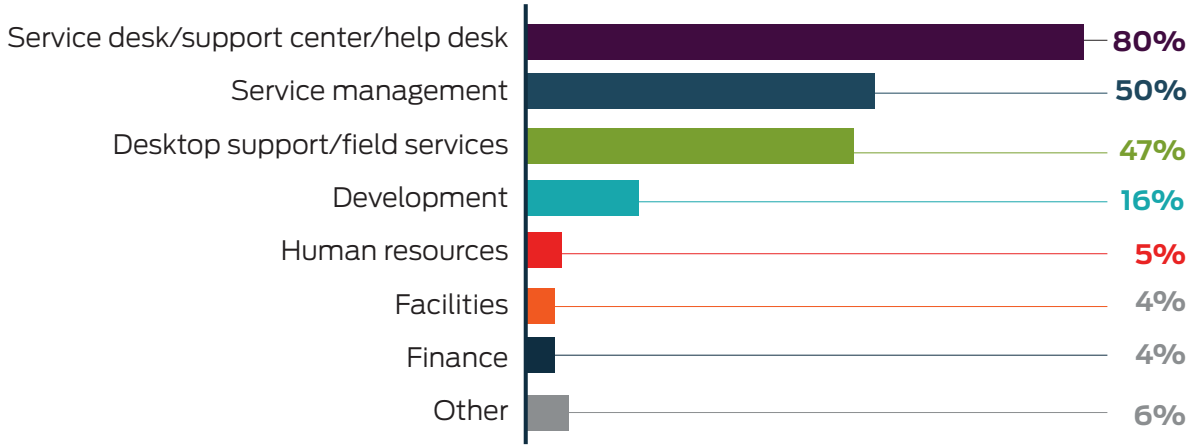
## Job Function




- Executive management (CEO, owner, president)
- IT/technical executive (CIO, CTO, CSO, CISO)
- Senior management (VP, director)
- Mid-level management (manager)
- Specialist management (knowledge manager, project manager, workforce manager, trainer, etc.)
- Supervisor/team lead
- Customer support (analyst, technician, representative)
- Other

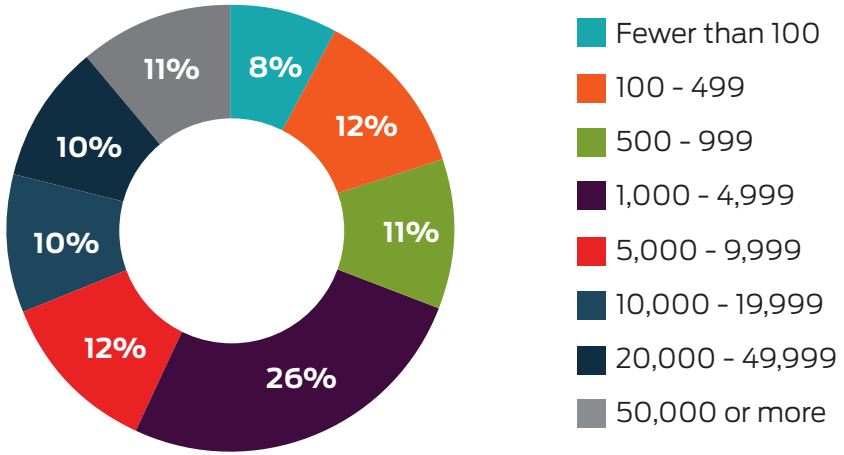
*N=852*

## Business Area



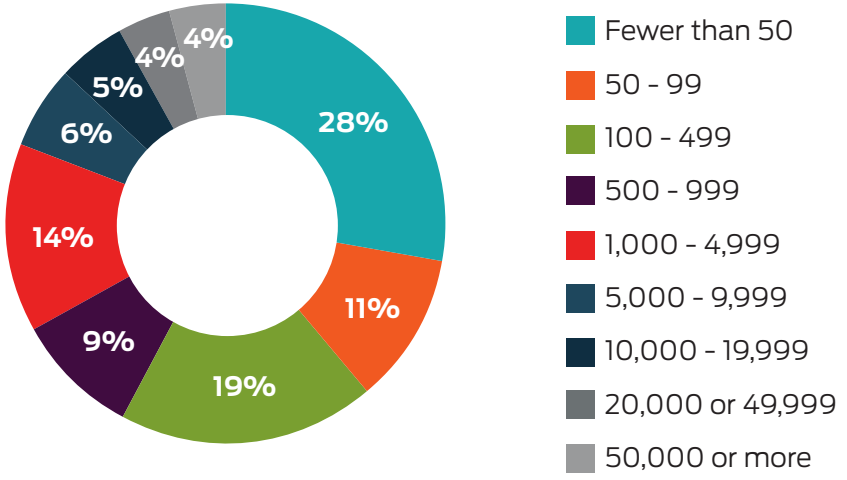

*N=852*

## Company Size (FTEs)



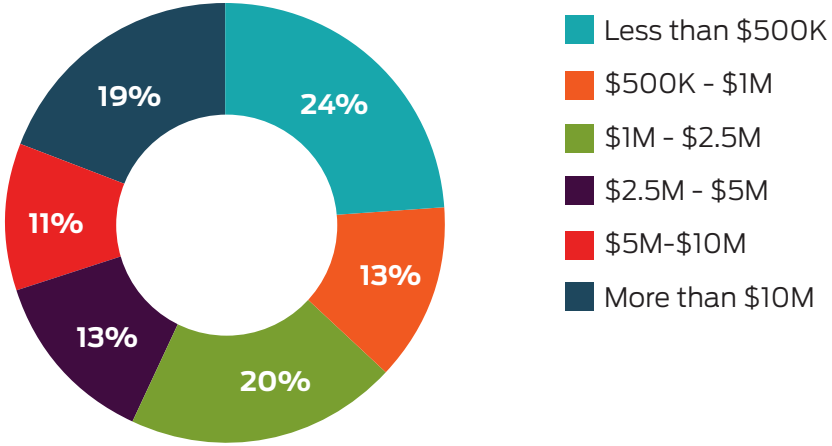

*N=810*

## Support Organization Size (FTEs)




*N=713*

## Support Organization Annual Budget




*N=371*

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