productboard

2022
Product Excellence Report

1400+ product managers and leaders reveal their biggest challenges and where they are finding opportunity in uncertainty.

In partnership with

PRODUCT COLLECTIVE

Contents

Pursuing Product Excellence amidst uncertainty

Product professionals are no strangers to uncertainty. Watching the product landscape grow more uncertain alongside everything else in the past year ups the stakes for everyone, but it also reveals something – opportunity. We partnered with Product Collective to uncover that opportunity amidst uncertainty.

For product leaders, this report will show you where the opportunities are to lead your team to success and how to navigate the heightened challenges you face across the product lifecycle.

For individual contributors, this report will help you identify gaps in processes and communication across not only your team, but among your internal and external stakeholders.

Our latest report also aims to serve an even greater purpose — to help organizations build the foundations of Product Excellence that can weather any environment.

Uncertainty is nothing new for product people. Our job has always had uncertainty. We thrive in uncertainty.

– Productboard CEO Hubert Palan

At the heart of Product Excellence is its three tenets — vision, strategy and execution — each of which draw lines to an important piece of the product innovation puzzle: customer-centricity.

Guides your Vision with deep user and market insights

Informs your Strategy with clear objectives and priorities

Aligns everyone around Execution of the product roadmap

While we found rising uncertainty in this year's Product Excellence survey, we want to focus on the opportunities provided in those findings. Let this report be your guide to seizing them.

PRODUCT EXCELLENCE

Vision

Strategy

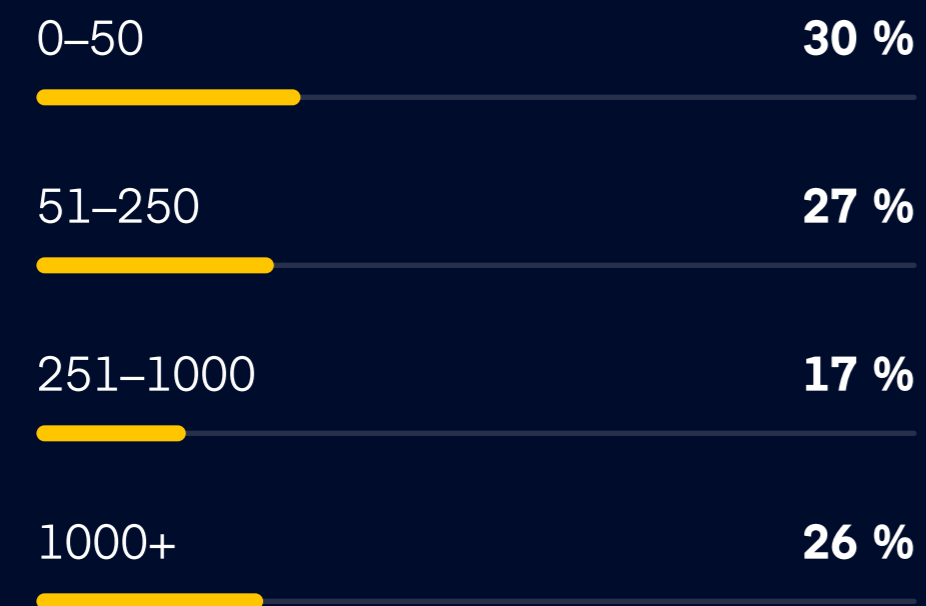**Execution**
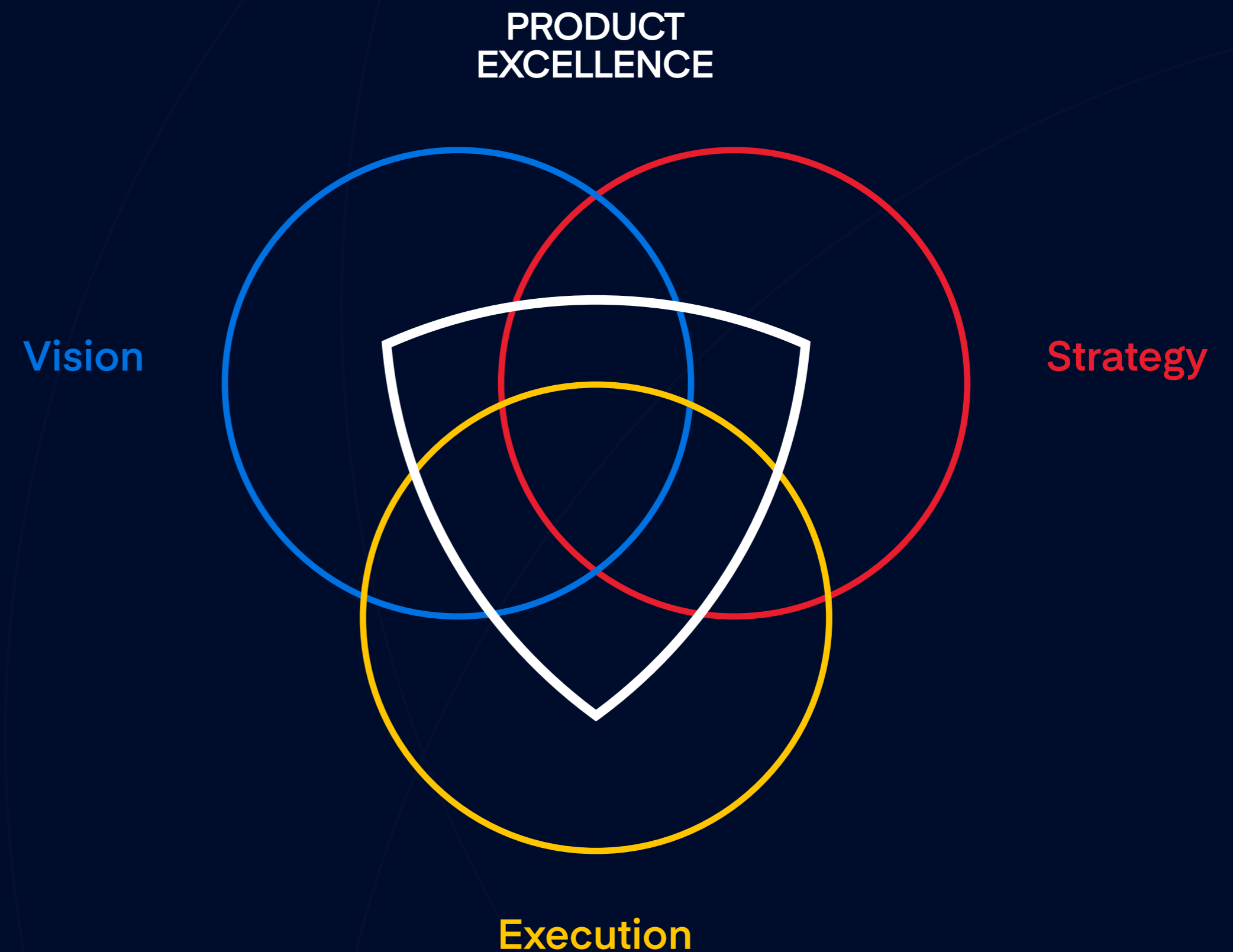
2022
Product Excellence Report

A sneak preview of our findings

1   **Nearly half (48%)** of respondents said that **setting a clear product vision and strategy** is the area where they experience the **most challenges.**

2   **Confidence in product roadmaps has waned year over year,** with only 41% of product professionals reporting they're able to successfully keep them up-to-date compared to 57% a year ago.

3   **Only 31%** of survey respondents said **roadmaps can be easily shared and accessed** by cross-functional partners.

4   Respondents — to the tune of 54% — **do not believe that they have an effective system in place** for communicating feature updates to customers.

5   Product organizations still **lack purpose-built toolkits** to ply their trade, resulting in **fragmented workflows** and **greater difficulty aligning** across multiple stakeholders.
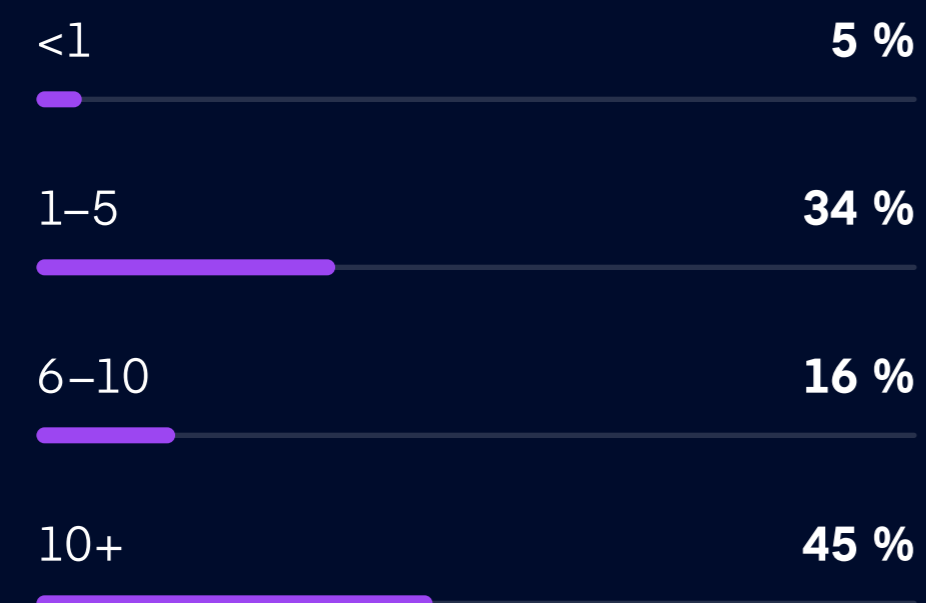
Who we surveyed

This year's survey of more than 1,400 product professionals helped us weigh in on the challenges and opportunities they face in pursuit of Product Excellence. Approximately one quarter of respondents are product leaders, lending their years of experience to our annual report on the key issues facing their field.
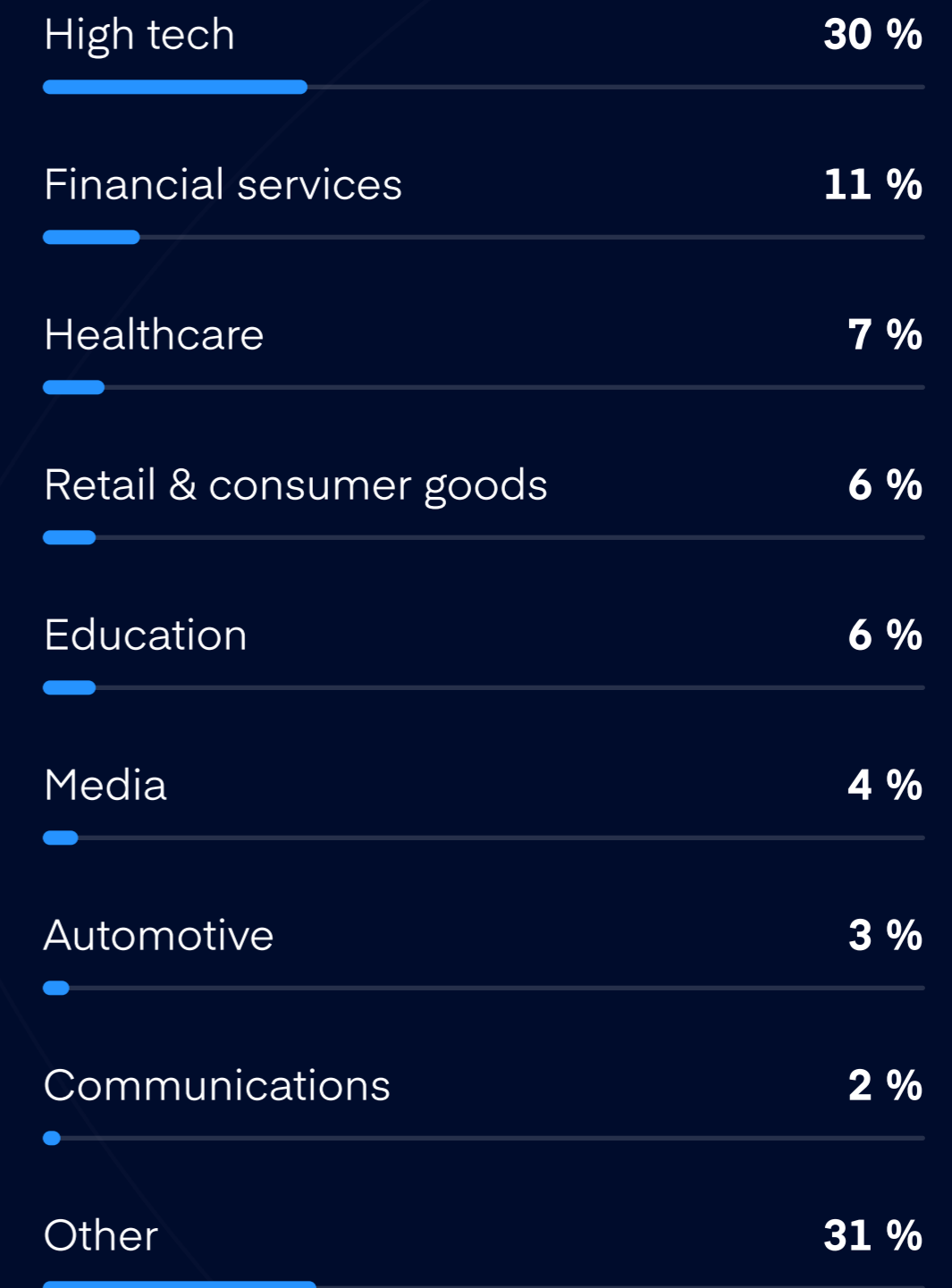
Company Size

0–50	30 %
51–250	27 %
251–1000	17 %
1000+	26 %

Years of Experience

<1	5 %
1–5	34 %
6–10	16 %
10+	45 %

Job title

Product Manager	28 %
Senior Product Manager	15 %
VP / Head of Product	10 %
Director of Product Management	9 %
Lead Product Manager	5 %
Associate Product Manager	4 %
Chief Product Officer	3 %
Junior Product Manager	2 %
Other	24 %

Industry

High tech	30 %
Financial services	11 %
Healthcare	7 %
Retail & consumer goods	6 %
Education	6 %
Media	4 %
Automotive	3 %
Communications	2 %
Other	31 %

New for 2022: Where in the world is product?

Globally distributed hybrid, remote, and in-person teams are part of the new normal for companies, the product team being no exception.

In 2022, our data showed that remote and hybrid workers were evenly split – 45% each – while less than 10% of product professionals responded that they work completely in-person.

90%
of product professionals
are both **hybrid and remote**

Less than 10%
of product professionals
responded that they work
completely in-person

Key Finding #1

Working smarter, not harder

In times of uncertainty, product organizations are refocusing efforts on initiatives that drive impact.

Processes were at the forefront for teams, as more than half (54%) of respondents reported they are more focused on driving innovation, while 47% say that they're increasing their focus on driving efficiencies across the product organization.

Interestingly, only 21% reported reduced product-related budgets. In terms of staffing, 19% had their team downsized and 9% were laid off, numbers that indicate relative stability compared to larger layoff trends. This is bolstered by findings that product professionals across the board increasingly left for new and better jobs, as our data shows.

"

It's a year of significant transition for our company and I believe our leadership team is on board to become product-led. It will not be easy but we are committed!

– 2022 Survey Respondent

Product at a glance:
Events of the past 18-24 months

Increased focus on driving innovation and building the right products **57 %**

Increased focus on driving efficiencies across the product organization **49 %**

Left for new and/or better job **35 %**

Reduced budget for product team tools or other resources **22 %**

Team downsized **21 %**

Additional challenges finding a job in product management **12 %**

Laid off from job **9 %**

None of the above **8 %**

Started your own company **5 %**

Key Finding #2

Insights unseen

Alignment on product vision and strategy, delivering features faster, and measuring success are among the top challenges in 2022.

The biggest challenges for product teams in 2022

Nearly half (48%) of total respondents – leaders included – said that setting a clear product vision and strategy was the area where they experienced the most challenges this past year.

Not far behind were delivering features and products to market faster (42%), and tracking progress and measuring success (40%).

48%
Setting a clear product vision and strategy

40%
Tracking progress and measuring success

42%
Delivering products and features to market faster

	2020	2021	**2022**

2022

Setting a clear product vision and strategy   47%   44 %   **49 %**

2021

Delivering features and
products to market faster   **43 %**

2020

Tracking progress and measuring success   **41 %**

Prioritizing the right products and features   **39 %**

Defining objectives and outcomes   **34 %**

Defining effective team processes   **34 %**

Engaging with customers
and other stakeholders   **33 %**

Gathering and synthetizing
product feedback   **31 %**

Earning organization-wide
buy-in for the roadmap   **29 %**

For the third consecutive year, product professionals continue to struggle with the same challenges. Multiple factors may be contributing to this form of inertia across product, including persistent employee turnover and a challenge to maintain organizational alignment around the product vision and strategy.

"

My biggest challenge is seeking alignment across the company as we don't have specific goals from executives for products. Trying to build this from the bottom up is challenging.

– 2022 Survey Respondent

This year, we also surveyed product leaders to understand their biggest challenges, and in turn, gauge alignment between leadership and their teams.

Aligning stakeholders around prioritization decisions was the biggest product management challenge, particularly for those in leadership, in 2021 — this continues that trend. Chief Product Officers ranked the same top 3 as all respondents but ranked "identifying bottlenecks" highest.

This does suggest that last year's finding – that 3 out of 5 teams lacked a clear vision of where their product was headed, but leadership was in the dark about it – has shifted for the better.

48%

of product leaders named setting expectations with cross-functional stakeholders their biggest challenge

48%

named identifying bottlenecks, clearing blockers & helping teams ship faster
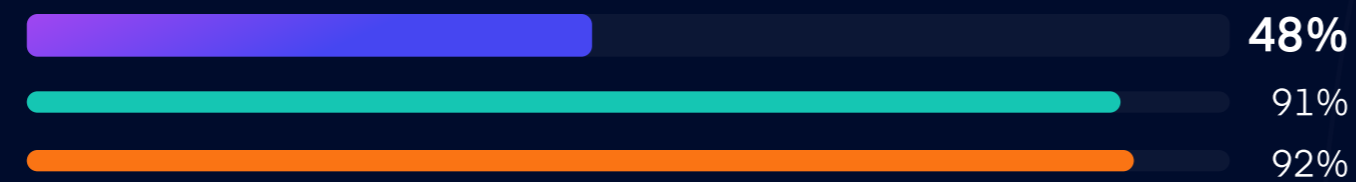
44%

said ensuring product teams' work aligns with product vision & strategy
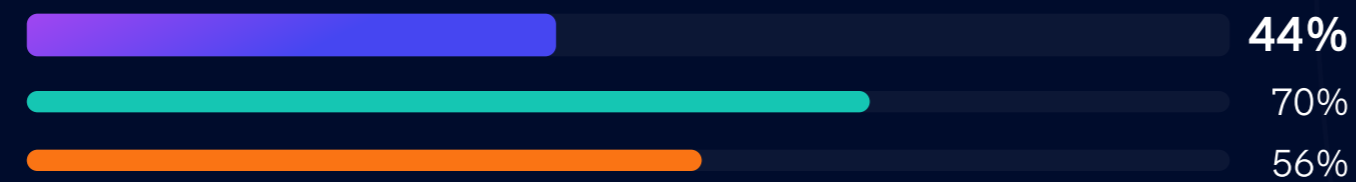
Major challenges for product leaders
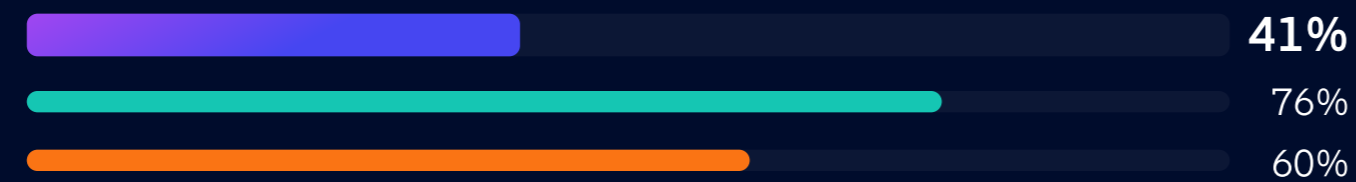
Setting expectations with crossfunctional stakeholders

48%
97%
68%
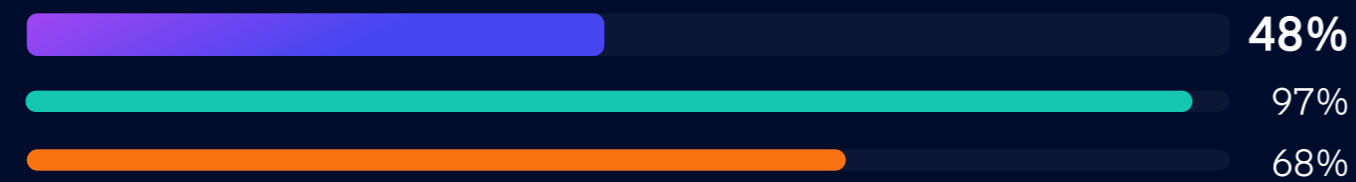
Identifying bottlenecks, clearing blockers, and helping teams ship faster

48%
91%
92%

Ensuring product teams' work aligns with product vision and strategy

44%
70%
56%

Resource planning and capacity

41%
76%
60%

Reporting and analytics

39%
89%
60%

Tracking teams' progress towards completing major initiatives, objectives, and releases

39%
76%
68%

Driving product team efficiencies and saving PMs time

38%
67%
68%

Helping product managers develop professionally

31%
61%
60%

All respondents   **Director**   **CPO**

"

As an experienced product leader who advises early stage startups, one of the greatest challenges I face is coaching CEOs, founders, and functional leads on the difference between output roadmaps/ feature checklists and outcome-based roadmaps. This includes upskilling their knowledge on strategic planning, level-setting on terminology (e.g., outputs vs. outcomes), and developing processes to support learning loops (vs. simply shipping features)."

2022 Survey Respondent

Key Finding #3

Signal lost

Most teams do not have good systems in place for capturing feedback from customers – or from customer-facing colleagues – to help fill in that gap.

Product professionals still struggle with all aspects of customer feedback, from creating a process for capturing it, finding ways to fill inevitable gaps in that process (like capturing feedback from customer-facing colleagues about customer wins and losses) and using that feedback to inform prioritization.

To that last point, **only 14% effectively categorize feedback to inform prioritization.** Even less – 12% – successfully capture feedback from all available sources.

12%

successfully capture insights and feedback from all available sources

<50%

of product teams have a process for capturing customer insights and feedback

14%

effectively categorize feedback to inform prioritization

26%

have no current systematic approach to capturing feedback

Year over year, product professionals are struggling more at capturing feedback

2022   2021

42%   **44%**

of product teams said they have a process for capturing customer insights and feedback

12%   **17%**

successfully capture insights and feedback from all available sources

"

The challenge is to get and process data, so we can make decisions (i.e. we have data, but not information) and when we ship new features to define the impact.

– 2022 Survey Respondent

Feedback is a gift

Collecting feedback is just step one — effectively consolidating, analyzing and sharing it with internal stakeholders helps identify trends in feedback and nail down problems you want to solve. This does not include the importance of maintaining strong lines of communication with external stakeholders such as customers for reassurance that product outcomes are being delivered as promised.

Our customers get regular status updates on past product requests

23%	31%	28%	13%	4%
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
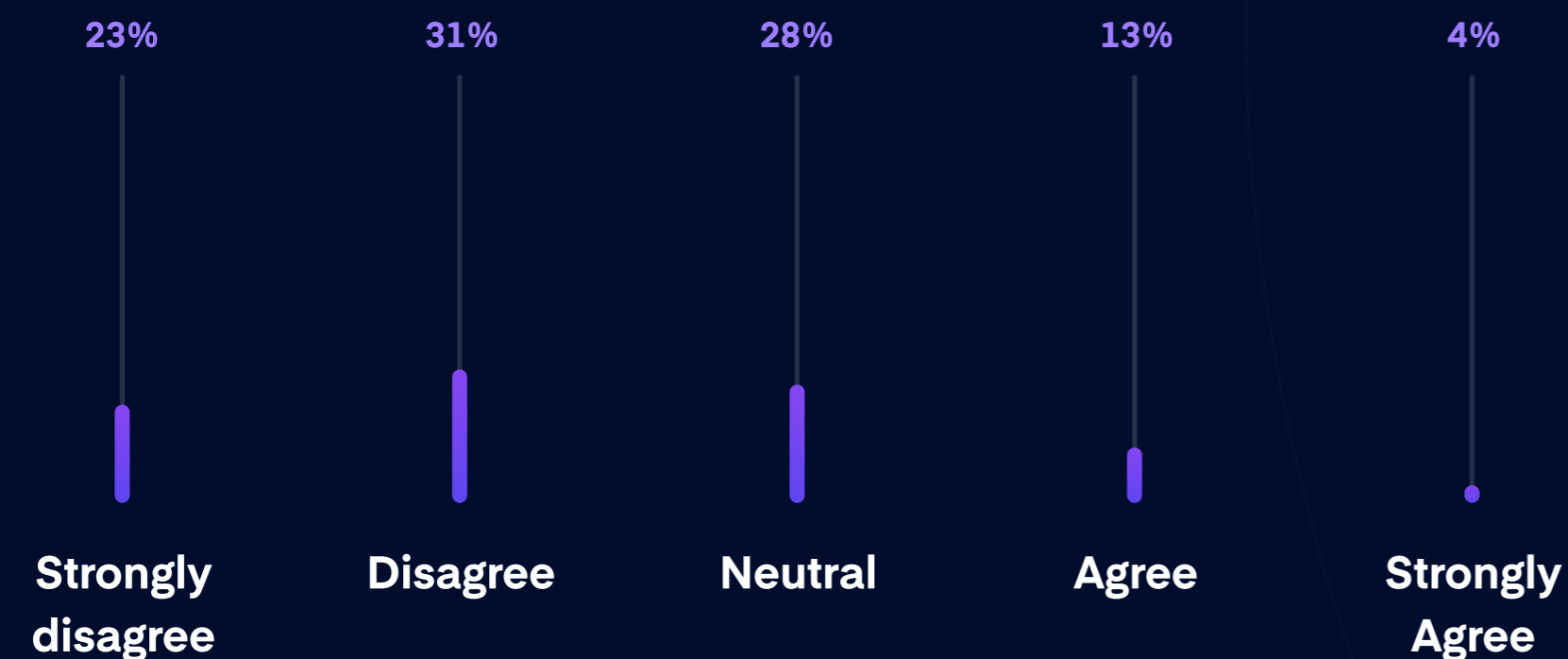
Many organizations are still struggling to close the feedback loop with customers, with **54% of respondents noting that they do not have an effective system in place** for providing customers with status updates about product requests they've made in the past. This isn't a customer-centric approach and puts retention efforts at risk, too.
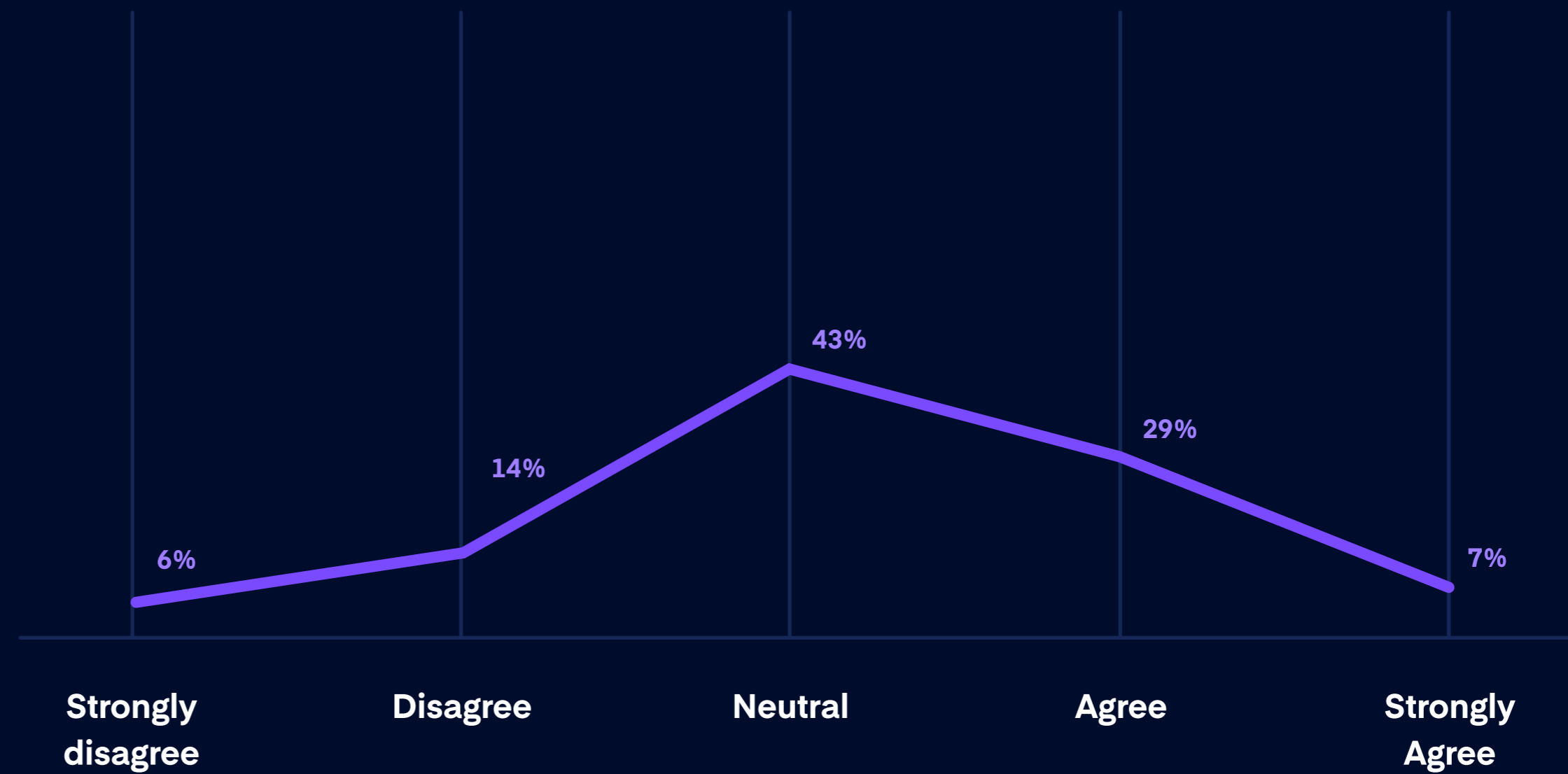
Key Finding #4

Lost in translation

What is the potential long-term impact of suboptimal
communications with customers?

What customer engagement data tells us

The overall story is, unfortunately, one of failing to deliver products and features that customers love. Our data shows that a combined 20% disagree on that point based on product usage metrics, Net Promoter Scores, or other unidentified measures of customer engagement.
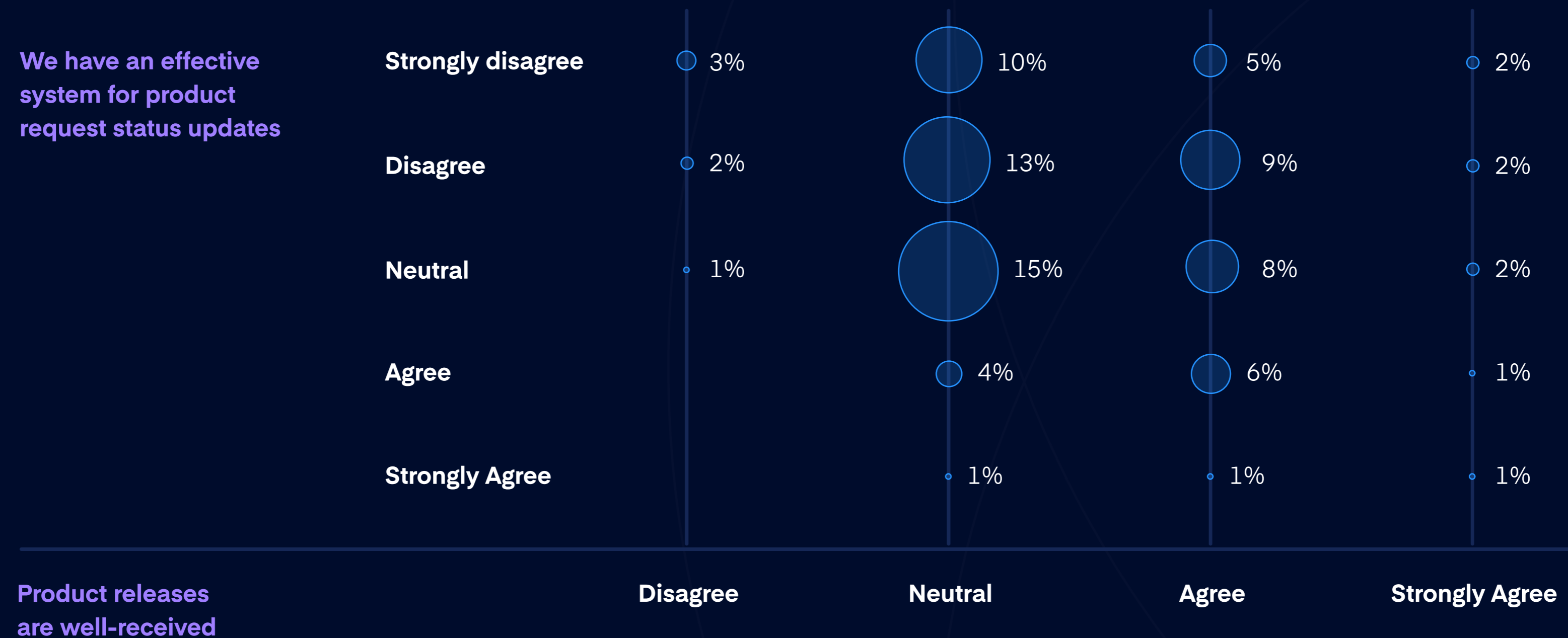
The high rate of neutral responses could indicate room for improvement on collecting and distilling customer feedback, or that this data is collected but not analyzed well, leading to an endless cycle of putting out the latest fire.

The products and features we release are consistently well-received by our customers*

43%

29%

14%

6%

7%

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

*as indicated by product usage metrics, Net Promoter Scores (NPS), or another measure of customer engagement.

What impact does customer communication have on customer satisfaction?

We have an effective system for product request status updates

	Strongly disagree			
Strongly disagree	3%	10%	5%	2%
Disagree	2%	13%	9%	2%
Neutral	1%	15%	8%	2%
Agree		4%	6%	1%
Strongly Agree		1%	1%	1%
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Product releases are well-received

Key Finding #5

A crisis of roadmap confidence

Year-over-year data shows product teams are struggling more than ever to create and communicate meaningful roadmaps.

Roadmaps are essential in communicating direction and intention from a product team to the rest of the organization and to customers. To see confidence in roadmaps falling further from last year's numbers — from barely above half to just below — could have multiple implications when viewed alongside our other data.

I am confident that the products and features on our roadmap:

2022 **2021** **2020**

Align with our long-term business strategy   49 %

Are up-to-date and reflect the current state of our work   42 %

Reflect the needs of our users   47 %

Will deliver the desired business outcomes   32 %

From 2020 to 2021, we saw a slight bump in roadmap confidence that has since declined. With the current environment in mind, product leaders should take this as an even more urgent call to action to equip their teams with the resources they need to create roadmaps that inspire and align.

Roadmap visibility still a major issue for product teams

Visibility is one part of the equation – **only 33% of respondents said roadmaps could be easily shared and accessed** by cross-functional partners along with only 31% finding they provide adequate context, ensuring the negative perception of a "product black box" will continue to be pervasive throughout companies.

Black boxes potentially generate more questions than answers, causing a barrage of messages in different formats, draining even more time and energy than necessary from everyone involved. That's a huge blow to efficiency and productivity.

"

The gap between planning and execution of the roadmap is a gap that needs to be filled.

– 2022 Survey Respondent

Key Finding #6

Tool time

Product organizations tend to rely on disjointed, fragmented toolkits, pointing to a greater need for centralized resources that streamline workflows.

The tools used by product managers

The majority of product teams continue to use a mix of different tools rather than a dedicated product management system.

An issue tracker or delivery planning tool like Jira -10% **70%**

Documents or Google Docs -20% **44%**

Wikis like Confluence, Notion, or Coda -6% **55%**

A dedicated product management tool, like Productboard, Aha!, ProdPad, etc. -16% **28%**

Spreadsheets, Google sheets, Airtable, etc. -8% **52%**
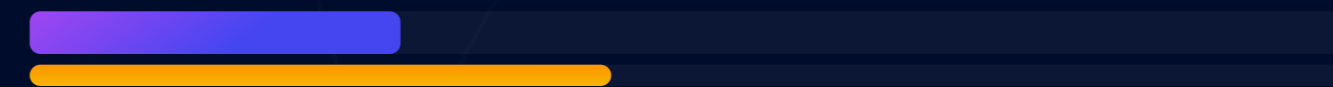
A project management tool like Asana, Trello, or Monday.com **27%**
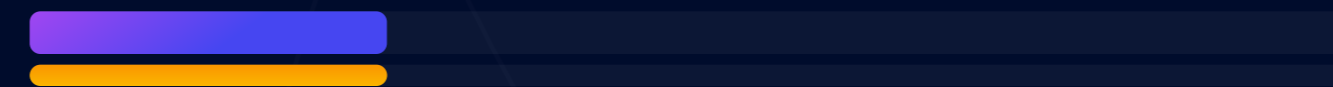
■ 2022   ■ 2021

Establishing a single source of truth for workflows appears to be another enduring challenge for product teams, with the noted exception of cross-functional work with engineering in Jira, our data suggests.

For those who did report using a dedicated product management system, we wanted to see if that had a positive impact on roadmap confidence, particularly on roadmap visibility across teams.

We found that it does.

Respondents using a dedicated product management system said they were **much less likely to cite issues in product roadmap accessibility, sharing, and providing stakeholder context,** among other critical parts of their roles.

Product professionals lack visibility

63% of respondents

reported lacking visibility into whether planned product work really aligns with product objectives and strategy.

Nearly 1/3

of those respondents were product managers, something leadership should note.

Less than 1/3

said roadmaps could be easily shared and accessed by cross-functional partners.

What we learned

Here's how any product organization can unlock opportunity in the face of uncertainty moving forward.

(1) **Alignment, communication challenges are persistent.**

There is still a visibility gap that product managers alone cannot fill. A systematic approach to alignment is needed, which can be implemented with structures or tools that facilitate greater collaboration between product and its cross-functional counterparts.

Product professionals also do not have to go it alone.

[Find a community](#) that can understand the challenges and opportunities you face on a daily basis and help you navigate your career.

2   **Listen up (and down, and across).**

The other side of communication is listening —
to internal stakeholders throughout your company
and most importantly, your customers. Our data
shows that there's still room for improvement on
the ways teams gather and distill feedback to help
build the right products and features for the
benefit of their organization and customers.

A systematic approach to capturing and
synthesizing customer feedback is critical
to making the most informed product
prioritization decisions.

See what experts had to say at our
2022 Product Excellence Summit.

(3) **Dedicated tools can help ease friction.**

Product teams require purpose-built tools to draw a clear line of sight across multiple stakeholders. A dedicated product management system works alongside existing tools and acts as a hub for all of your product management processes. It can help align teams around the product vision and roadmap, improve cross-functional communication, and keep progress across the entire product lifecycle visible and accessible.

See what Productboard can do for you

Schedule a demo to learn more

productboard

About Productboard

Productboard is the customer-centric product management platform that helps teams get the right products to market faster. Over 6,000 companies, including Microsoft, 1-800-Contacts, and UiPath, use Productboard to understand what users need, prioritize what to build next, and rally everyone around their roadmap. With offices in San Francisco, Prague, and Vancouver, Productboard is backed by leading investors like Tiger Global Management, Index Ventures, Kleiner Perkins, Sequoia Capital, and Bessemer Venture Partners.

Learn more at productboard.com

PRODUCT COLLECTIVE

About Product Collective

Product Collective is a community serving 40,000+ technology product management professionals. Through its various resources, products and events, Product Collective aims to help product people answer the question, "Am I doing this right?"

Members of Product Collective have access to a host of resources, including a weekly newsletter, a semi-monthly live video Q&A chat series, and an active Slack community. Product Collective also organizes INDUSTRY: The Product Conference and the New York Product Conference each year.

For more information, visit ProductCollective.com and INDUSTRYconference.com