

TALK

Engineering Leadership in 2024 and Beyond Skating Where the Puck Is Going, While the Ice Is Melting





Scott Carey (he/him)
Editor in Chief
LeadDev



How it started


THE CUT

STYLE | SELF | CULTURE | POWER 

TRENDSPOTTING | FEB. 16, 2022

A Vibe Shift Is Coming Will any of us survive it?



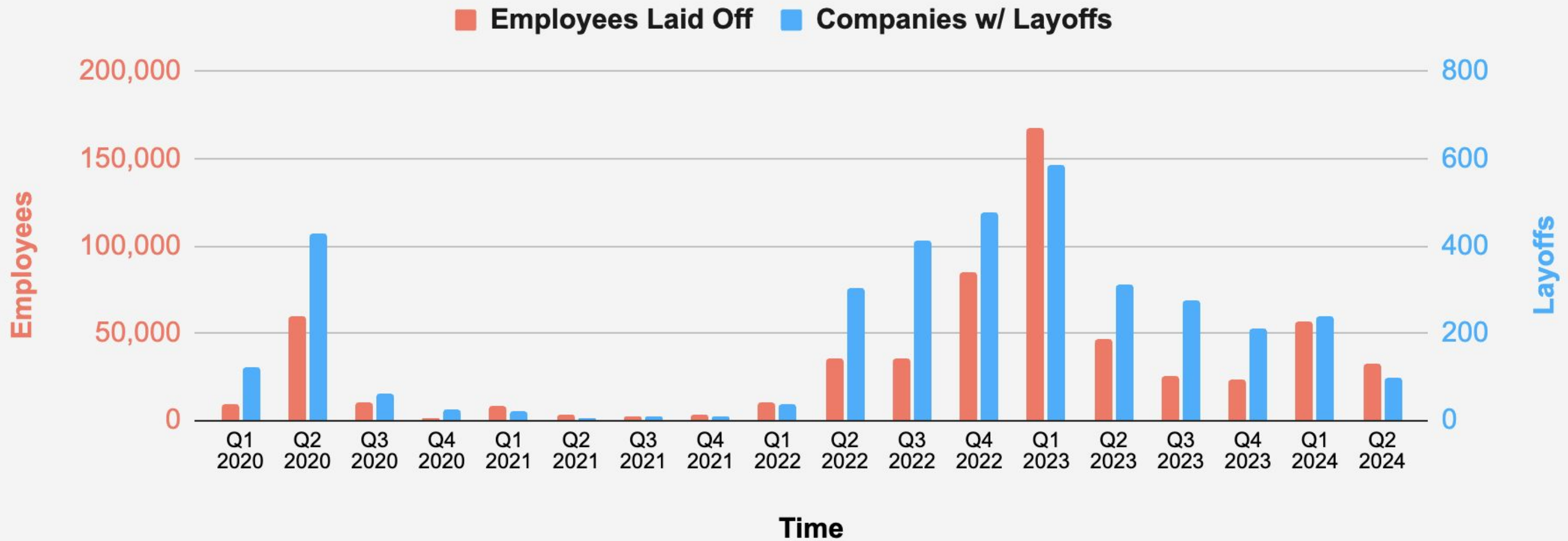
By Allison P. Davis, features writer for New York Magazine and the Cut. 



The vibe shift

Tech layoffs since COVID-19

Source: <https://layoffs.fyi>



The vibe shift



EN English ▾

Economics



The End of Zero Interest Rates

Aug 13, 2023 | JEFFREY FRANKEL

The vibe shift



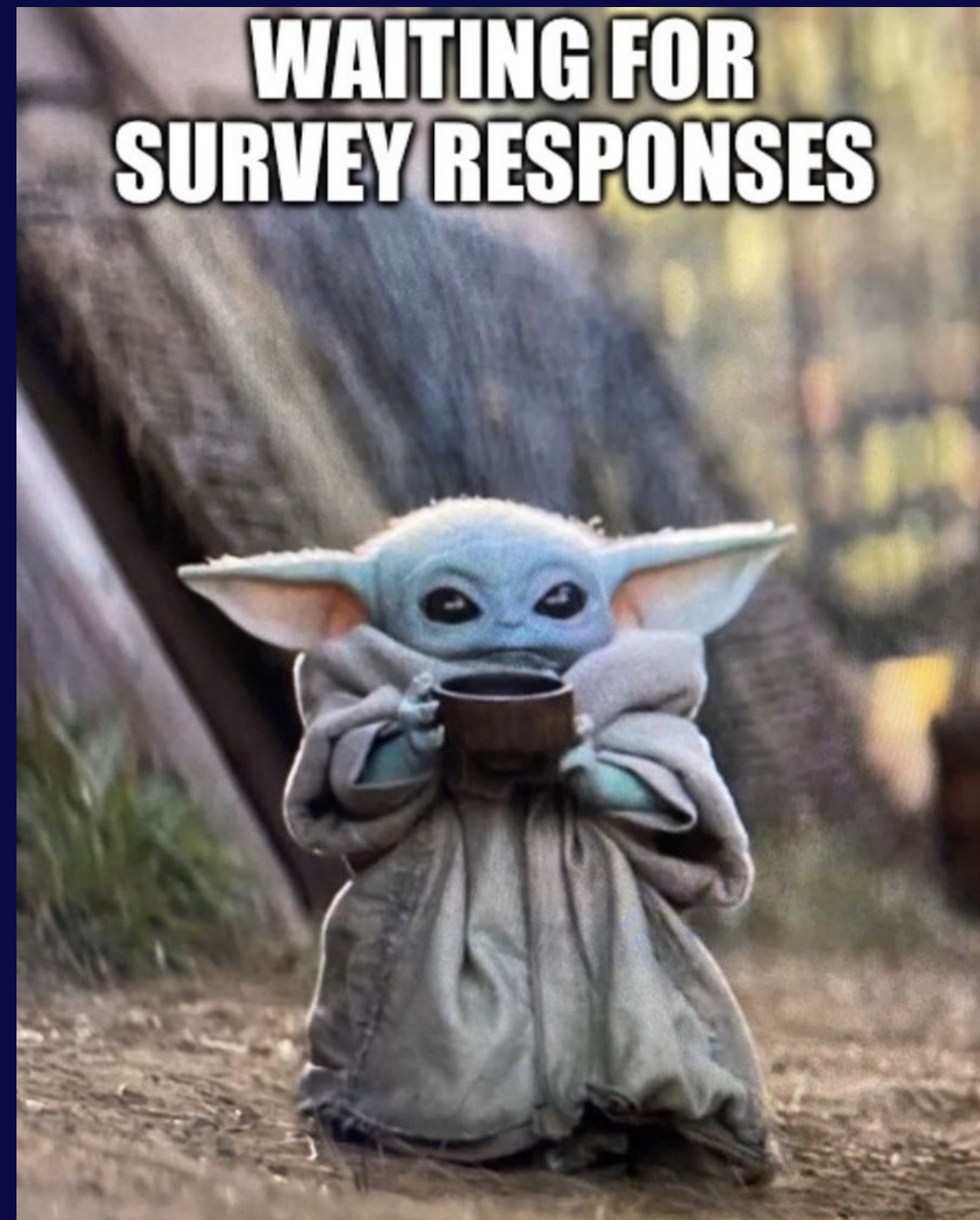
Have We Reached Peak AI?

EDWARD ZITRON / MAR 18, 2024 / 13 MIN READ

What we wanted to find out

- How have organizations been changing?
- What's it like to be and become an engineering leader in 2024?
- How do you grow your career now?
- What's your outlook on the industry?

So... we did some research



The data

Who we heard from

- 1,107 responses
- From engineers to CTOs
- Primarily people managers
- Primarily from Europe, UK, US
- 602 qualitative data points



The past years, present, and future of engineering leadership

The past & present

- How organisations have changed
- The shifts in leadership roles

The future: What it means for us as leaders

The past & present of engineering leadership a.k.a. what we've all been feeling, chartified



How companies have changed in the last 24 months



Budget cuts & layoffs

More decreases than increases (budgets, workforce), and more decreases in larger organisations

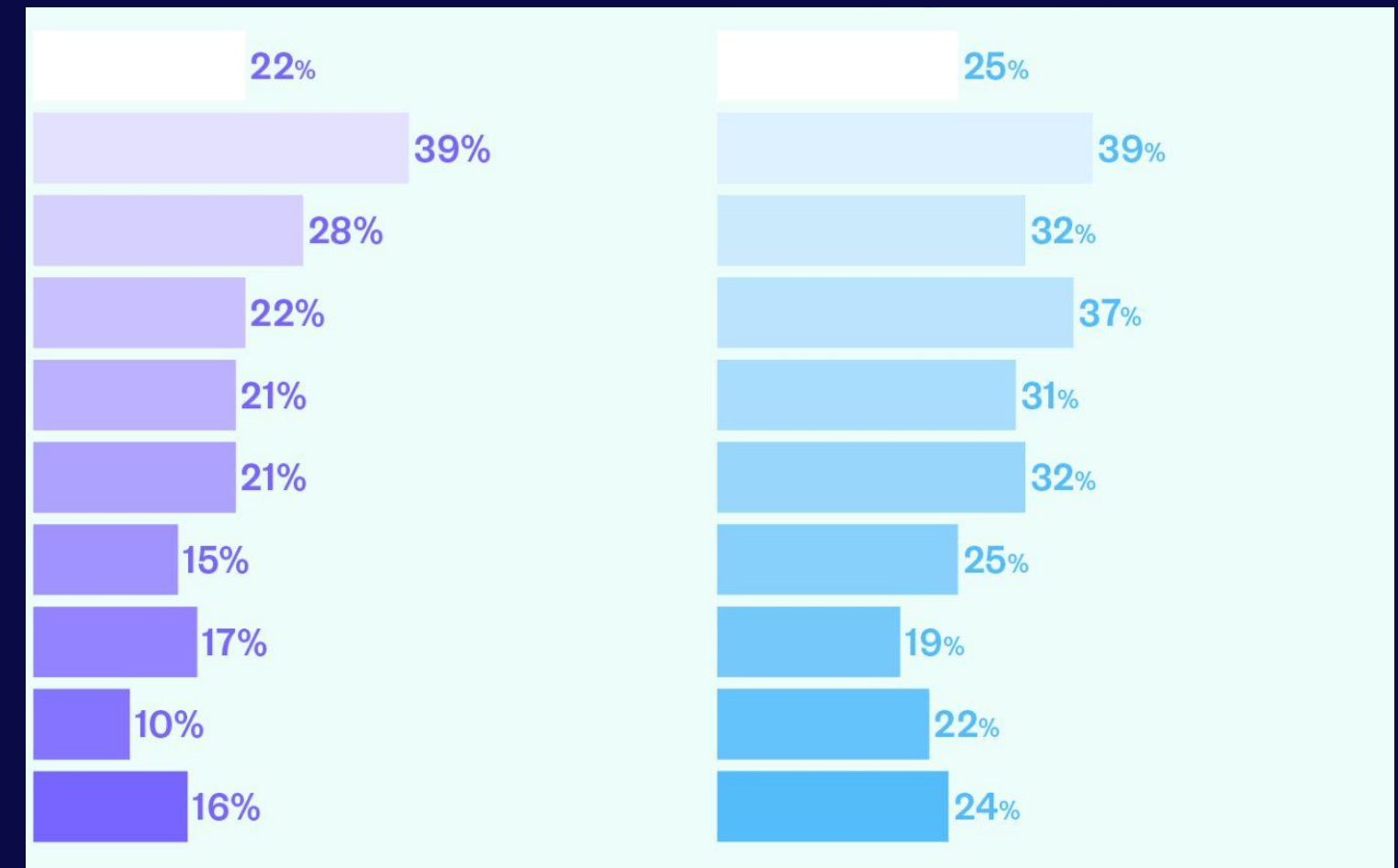
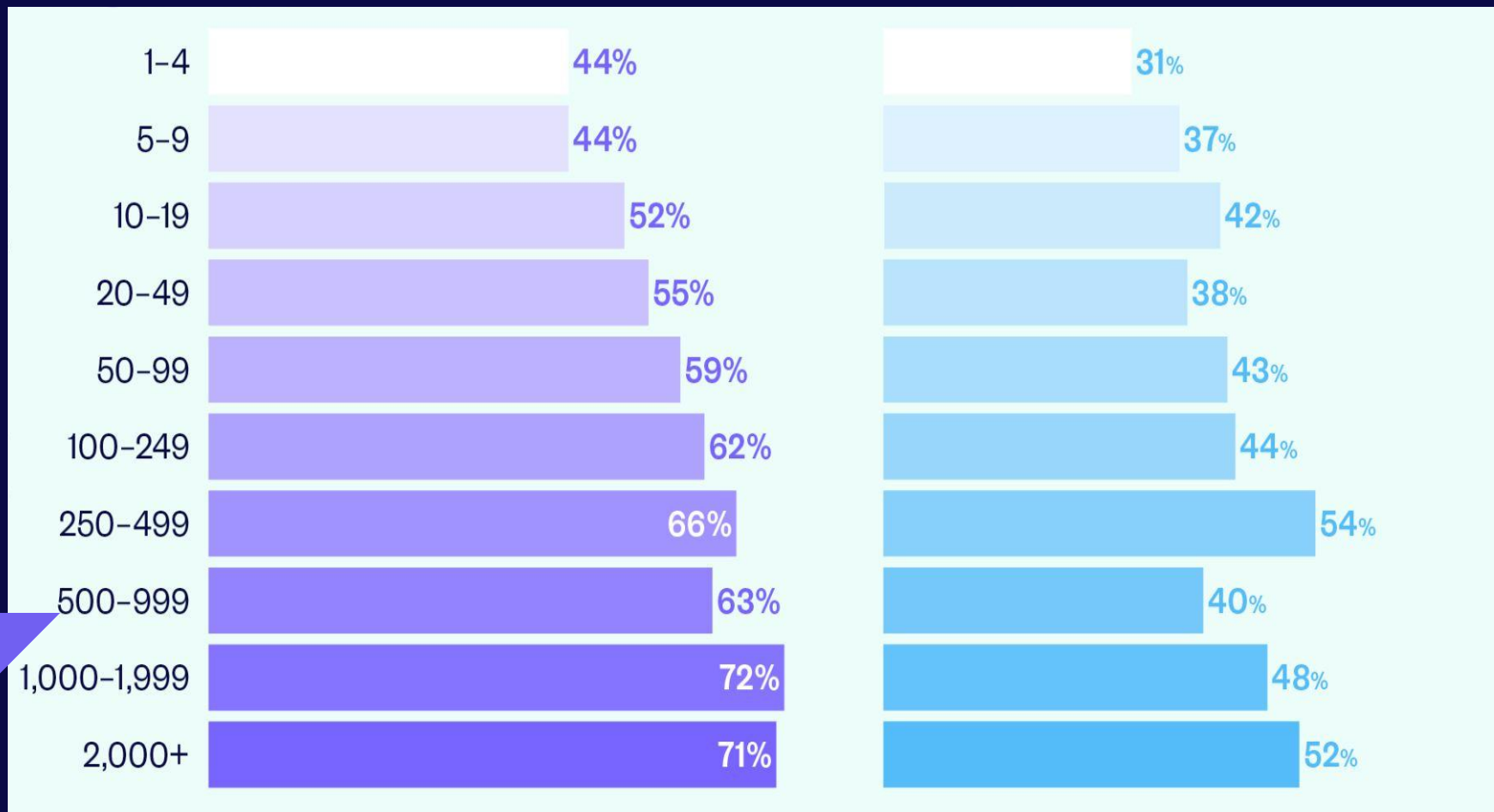
Budget cuts

Layoffs

Budget increase

Hiring increase

Company size



7%

made layoffs *and* hiring increases ↑↓

[SEARCH](#)

[SIGN IN](#)
[Subscribe Now](#)

[Home](#)
[News](#)
[Tech](#)
[Finance](#)
[Leadership](#)
[Well](#)
[Recommends](#)
[Fortune 500](#)

TECH LAYOFFS

Middle managers, beware: You're the prime layoff target in tech's new quest for 'efficiency'

▼ DJIA 38868.04 0.18% ↑ S&P 500 5360.79 0.26% ↑ Nasdaq 17192.53 0.35% ↑ Russell 2000 2031.61 0.25%

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

[English Edition](#) | [Print Edition](#) | [Video](#) | [Audio](#) | [Latest Headlines](#) | [More](#)

[Latest](#)
[World](#)
[Business](#)
[U.S.](#)
[Politics](#)
[Economy](#)
[Tech](#)
[Finance](#)
[Opinion](#)
[Arts & Culture](#)
[Lifestyle](#)
[Real Estate](#)
[Personal Finance](#)

TECHNOLOGY

Tech's Middle Managers Feel the Squeeze as Easy Days End

[SEARCH](#)
BUSINESS INSIDER

US MARKETS CLOSED
▼ DOW JONES +0.18%
▼ NASDAQ +0.39%
▼ S&P 500 +0.26%
▼ META +1.14%

TECH

Amazon, Meta, and other tech giants are cutting middle management to be more efficient. It's a risky move that could backfire.

How management levels changed

[SEARCH](#)
FINANCIAL TIMES

[HOME](#)
[WORLD](#)
[US](#)
[COMPANIES](#)
[TECH](#)
[MARKETS](#)
[CLIMATE](#)
[OPINION](#)
[LEX](#)
[WORK & CAREERS](#)
[LIFE & ARTS](#)
[HTSI](#)

Work & Careers [+ Add to myFT](#)

'The flattening': tech sector calls time on middle managers

Moves to carve out a layer of staff aim to speed up decisions but could leave a talent gap

Disappearing Middle Management In The Tech Industry: Evolution Or Extinction?

February 2, 2024 By Alex Kolterer Max Zhang 8 min read

All Industries

Digital Business Consultancy

Generative AI For Business

Bloomberg

Subscri

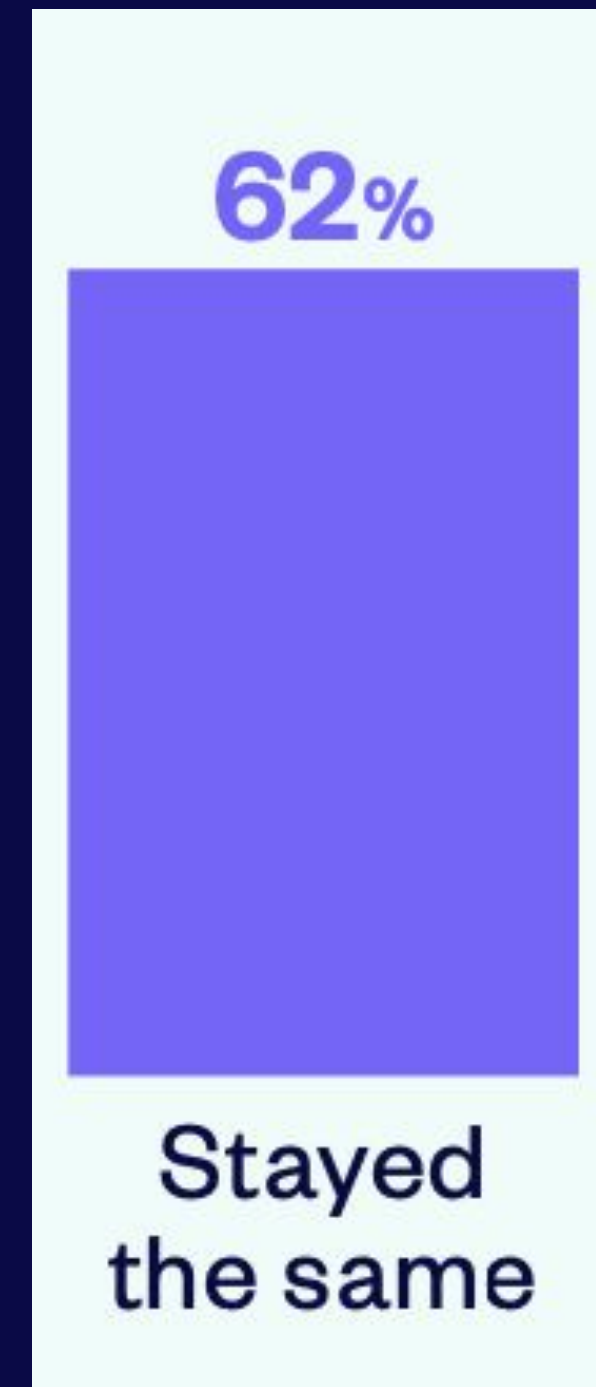
[Global Layoffs: Brutal Tech Cuts](#) |
 [Laid Off? Next Steps](#) |
 [Anxious US Workers](#) |
 [Share Your Story](#)

Work Shift | Modern Management

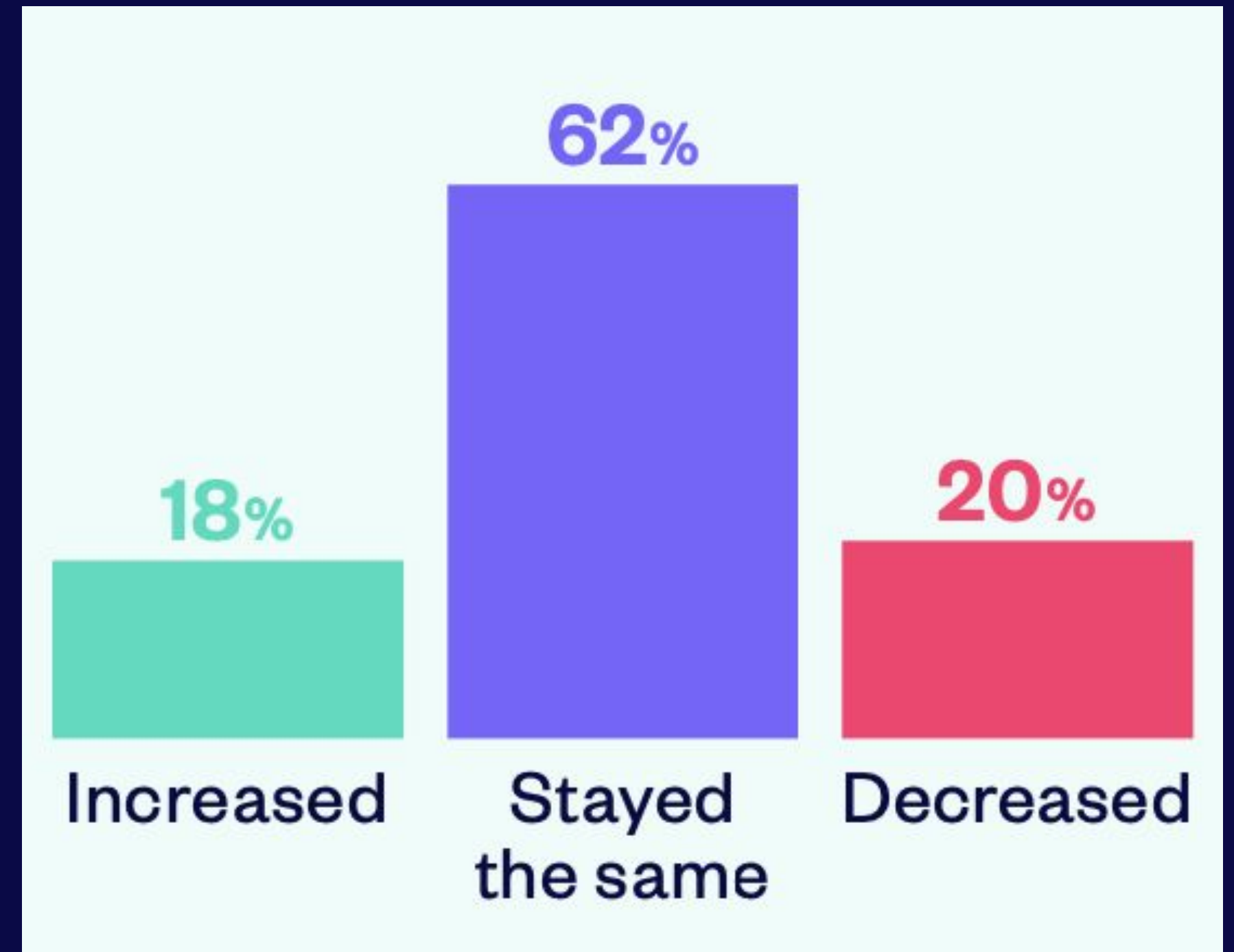
More Middle Managers Are Being Laid Off

Among white-collar workers, middle manager job cuts rise to more than 30% of laid-off employees as companies such as Meta preach a culture of efficiency.

**Manager roles
and levels
stayed the same
in 62% of
respondents'
companies**

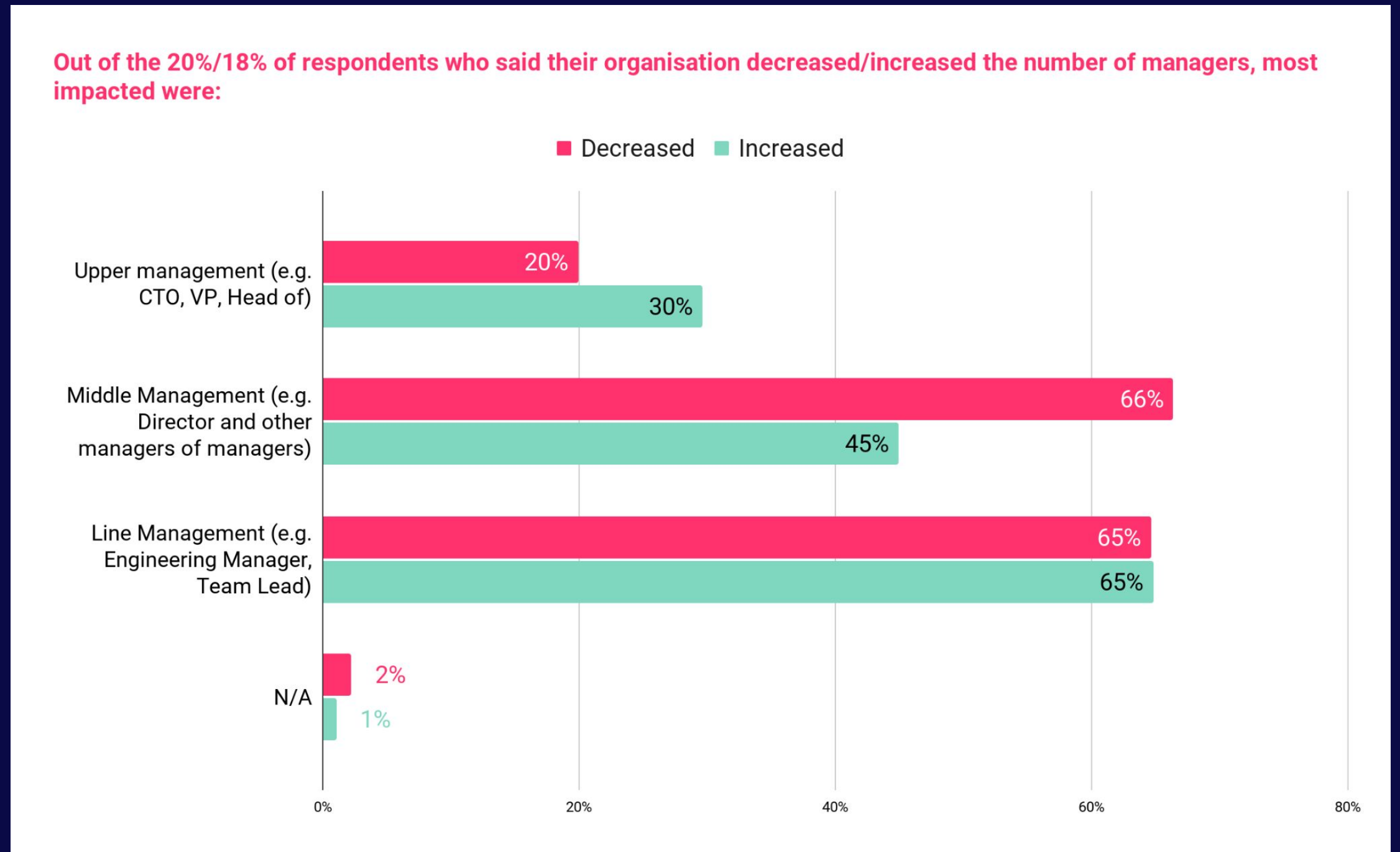


**Manager roles
and levels
changed in 38%
of companies**



Impact of increases & decreases by level

Biggest delta in middle management at larger companies



**In the last 2 years,
companies shifted
how they work**



I ❤️ Re-Org

Tech Re-Orgs

66% of companies did at least one

48%

of companies changed leadership

“What tech industry trends are you excited about?”

**“AI for the C-Suite. Let's replace
'em with an LLM. Those can explain
their decisions.”**

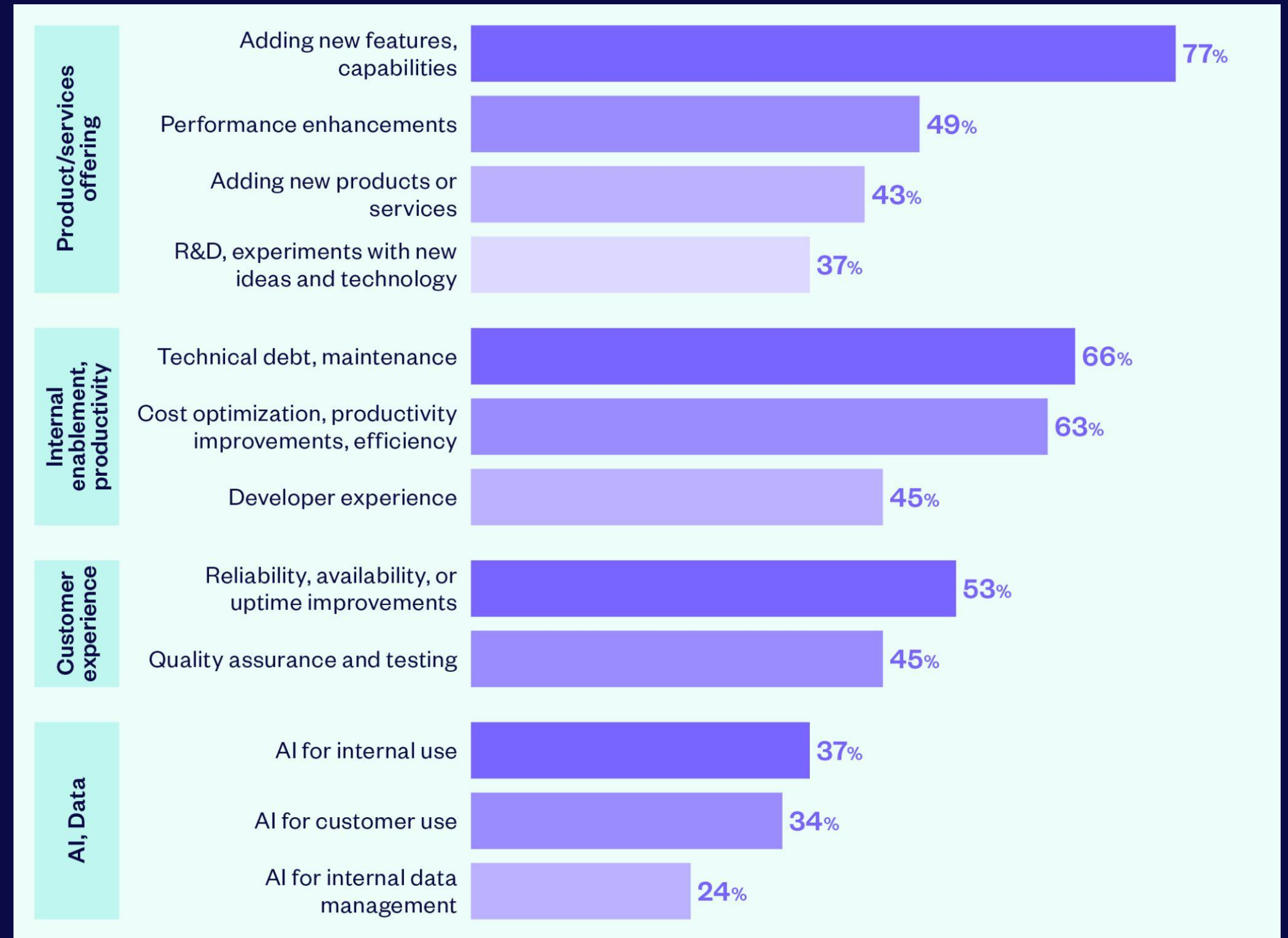
— Software engineer

4+ large changes

at more than half of companies

Organisational priorities

tl;dr: Everything, and AI



“What type of work are you and your team(s) prioritising in the next 12 months?”

“Sheer stupidity.”

— Advanced engineer

**That's *a lot* of change.
All of this change needed to be
handled by someone™**

“How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?”

**“Filling in
for more positions at once.”**

— Advanced engineer

71%

of engineering leaders' scope increased
in the last 12 months

41%

of managers have more direct reports

“How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?”

“I was laid off.”

— Manager of managers

“How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?”

“I have a slightly wider scope, but it is because I am pushing for a Staff Engineering role.”

— Tech Lead

How leaders spend their time hasn't changed in aggregate

Despite shifts in roles and scope

How leadership roles changed

	Mean amount of time being spent on each task		
	Breakdown of time 12 months ago	Current breakdown of time	Change
People management incl. 1:1s, feedback, career development	15.7%	15.4%	-0.3%
Delivery management incl. planning, backlog grooming, stand-up and retrospectives	13.2%	13.7%	+0.5%
Customer and stakeholder management	8.3%	9.6%	+1.3%
Cascading information to your team	7.4%	7.3%	-0.1%
Hands-on coding	14.9%	12.7%	-2.2%
Technical strategy	9.1%	10.4%	+1.3%
Code reviews	6.6%	5.5%	-1.1%
Guiding or making technical and architecture decisions	8.3%	8.7%	+0.5%
Managing up, e.g. 1:1s with and reporting to your boss	6.6%	6.4%	-0.2%

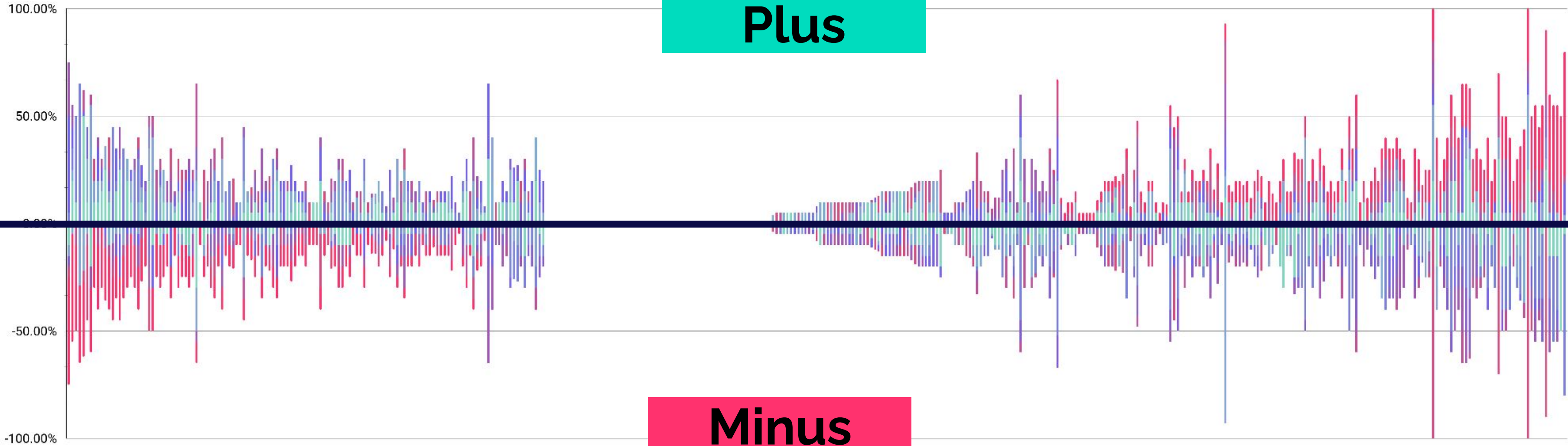
Q: What % of your time each week do you currently typically spend on the following tasks? 12 months ago, what % of your time would you typically spend on the following tasks?

LeadDev & Lena Reinhard
bit.ly/engleadershipreport

But many leaders' individual roles have changed: For Line Managers

"What % of your time would you typically spend on the following tasks?" - Line Managers, now vs. 12 months ago

- People management incl. One-to-Ones
- Other
- Managing up
- Guiding or making technical and architecture decisions
- Code reviews
- Technical strategy
- Hands-on coding
- Cascading information to your team
- Customer and stakeholder management
- Delivery management incl. planning, backlog grooming, stand-up and retrospectives



Plus

Minus

35%

of leaders are working more hours compared to last year,
especially people managers at all levels

What we did *not* hear

Even though we asked

- More hands-on technical work (0.5% total, average -3% to +1.5% of line managers)
- More technical strategy (0.2%)

**A lot of this probably wasn't news to you
because you've lived it.
This is the data to show:
You're not the only one.**



Get the full report: bit.ly/engleadershipreport

- **Changes in organisations:** Their shape, size, how they work & their priorities
- **Being and becoming a leader in 2024:** Roles, time spend, and interviewing
- **Industry trends and outlooks:** What engineering leaders are excited & concerned about, and the influence of AI
- + **Practical recommendations**

The Engineering Leadership Report 2024

We asked 1,100+ engineering leaders how their roles are evolving in response to a rapidly changing economic landscape in 2024. [Here's what we found.](#)



In collaboration with
Lena Reinhard

The future of engineering leadership:

How to skate where the puck is going when the ice is melting



**“I skate to where the puck is going,
not where it has been.”**

— Wayne Gretzky, former professional ice hockey player

Disclaimer: These are my skates

But I do know a thing or
two about business clichés



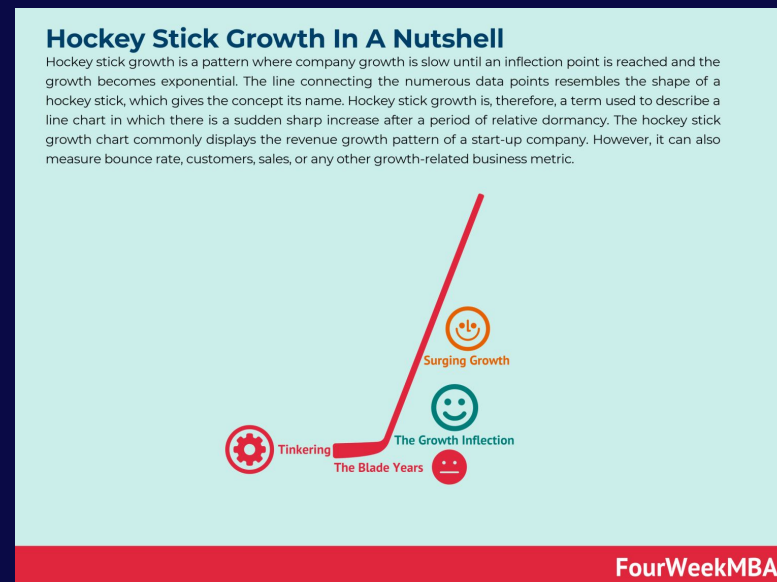
The ice has been melting.*

*

- 1) Metaphor for changes in the tech industry
- 2) Nod to climate change

**Maybe it's time
to put the hockey sticks away**

Leadership For The Post-Hockey-Stick Years



What this means for leaders

LeadDev & Lena Reinhard
bit.ly/engleadershipreport

Eierlegende Wollmilchsau, *noun*

Ei·er·le·gen·de woll·milch·sau [ˈaɪ̯əˌleːɡ̊də ˈvɔlˌmɪlçˌzaʊ]

Egg-laying wool milk pig: A person, thing, or a solution to a problem that's supposed to only have advantages, satisfy all needs and requirements - but exactly because of that, it's not real

Many leaders work in even more challenging setups now:

In broader, even-unclearer-than-before roles, with high expectations, reporting to hyper-busy managers, without much training or support.

“What tech industry trends are you concerned about?”

“Reduced focus on diversity and culture now that ‘times are tough.’”

— Manager of engineers

“What tech industry trends are you concerned about?”

“Reduced focus on diversity and culture now that ‘times are tough.’”

— Manager of engineers

**“I skate to where the puck is going,
not where it has been.”**

— Wayne Gretzky, former professional ice hockey player

— Steve Jobs on leading at Apple, *undated*

— Warren Buffet, on stock market pessimists, *2008*

— John Roth, *2001*

— Norman R. Augustine, *1997*

Everyone is trying to skate where the puck is going, and when they move, they move in packs.

Product Roadmap: “Something with AI”

Product Roadmap: “Something with Y”

1. It's the next big thing, says your boss
2. And TechCrunch
3. You hear it's where all VC is going now
4. Your customers are asking for it, or will ask for it any day now
5. And your investors
6. And your board
7. Your competition is probably already on it
8. Your employees are asking about it
9. You will need to do have it if you want to raise more money
10. Every conference has sessions about it
11. While you ~~wasted~~ spent thinking about it, your competitor posted on LinkedIn that they're working on it
12. Your boss is asking when you'll ship it

**“Everyone is doing Z,
maybe I should too”**

“What tech industry trends are you concerned about?”

**“Organizations prioritising shortcuts
as quick-win revenue generation
(Boeing, on a smaller scale).”**

— Manager of engineers

The tech industry has a long history of terrible impact on humanity at large: From poor user representation, to [insert a very long list of more examples here, to] literal genocides, to data centers alone consuming the equivalent of a top-10-energy-consuming-countries.

**Our technology is not neutral.
With every button design, with every line
of code, with every deployment:
We take a stand.**

Many of us engineering leaders have felt quite reactive among all these shifts in the industry.

At the same time, many of us are in positions of power.

Software development is an act of representation.

As leaders, we shape what that representation looks like.

“The tech industry” isn’t just happening to us: Everyone in this room is “the tech industry.”

Software development is an act of representation.

As leaders, we shape what that representation looks like.

“The tech industry” isn’t just happening to us: Everyone in this room is “the tech industry.”

**When everyone is racing after the puck,
where will you skate?**