



communicopia

Non-profit Digital Teams

Benchmark Research Results

October, 2011

Overview & Details

Why we are passionate about digital teams

Intention

We undertook this research to better understand how non-profit leaders manage digital & online initiatives in their organizations. In our experience it's well led, well structured, & well resourced teams that are the fundamental building blocks for success online.

We've gathered data from leaders in the community & *combined it with our own insights & analysis (identified by italics)* to help start a conversation in our sector about building better teams.

Fine Print

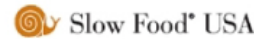
Some important things to know about this benchmark:

- Research was performed online from July to September of 2011
- 67 non-profit organizations participated
- Respondents were senior level staff who lead digital in their organization
- The majority were from mid- to large-sized organizations (50,000+ members)

Contributing organizations

Responses from 67 non-profits were used in the benchmark, including:

GREENPEACE



About Communicopia

Who we are



About Communicopia

We are a boutique digital consultancy working globally for change. Our strategy services help institutions who see digital as pivotal for their future focus their **vision**, develop **roadmaps** for complex web projects, & create team **structures** that enable innovation & collaboration.

Our purpose

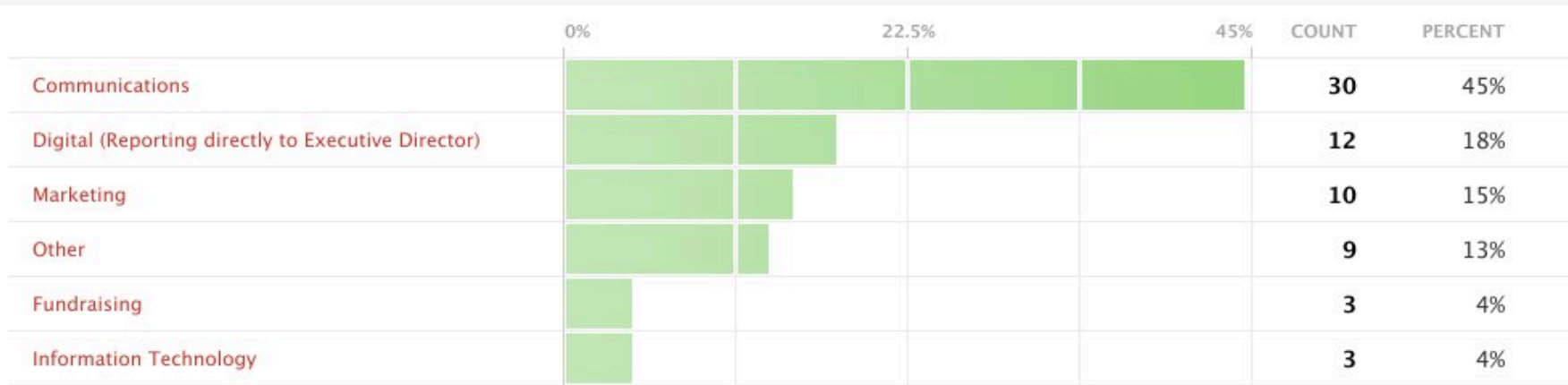
We lead transformational digital projects that help social mission organizations increase their impact & effectiveness in a networked world.

Part I: The Basics

Digital teams live in communications.

Question: What department are you a member of?

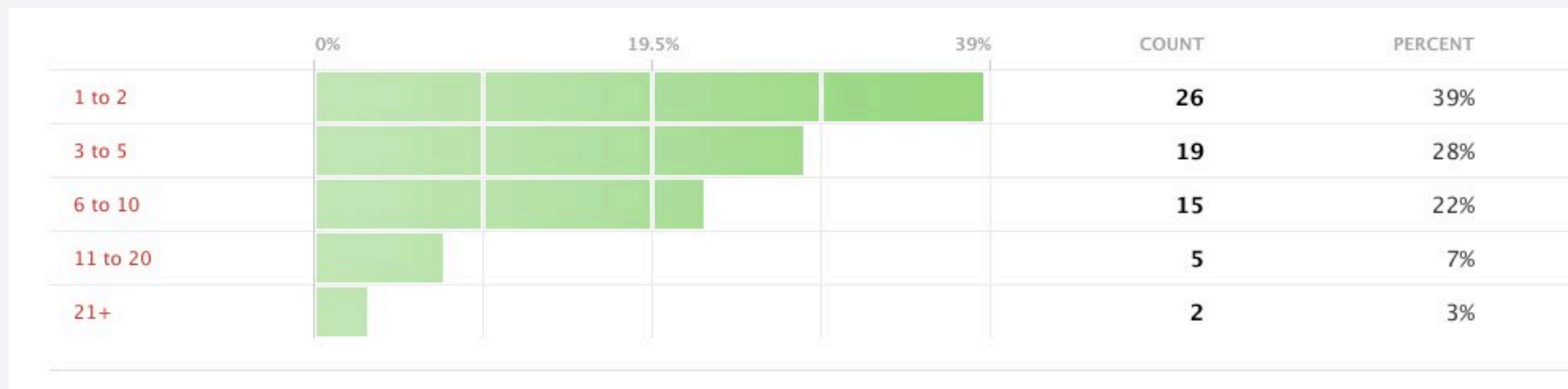
Nearly 45% of digital teams report to communications. *This is not surprising since most digital work is communications driven.* Teams within IT departments are increasingly rare. Interestingly we found 18% in the relatively new category of “digital super-groups”, reporting directly to the ED. We expect to see this figure increase over time as this can often be a more ideal location to lead new engagement functions, manage multi-channel communications, & drive innovation across campaigns.



Most teams are small.

Question: How many full-time staff are officially part of the team responsible for your primary digital channels?

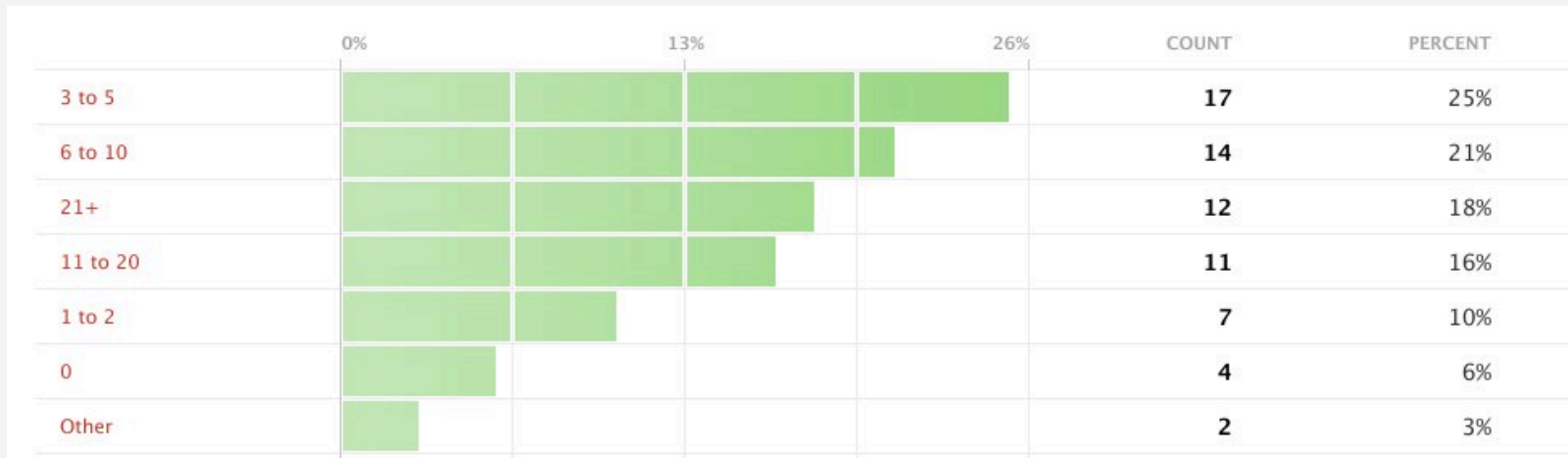
Nearly 40% of respondent teams working full time on digital are 1-2 people. Unsurprisingly, these numbers correlate with the size of the organization. Organizations with over 500 staff had digital teams of an average 16 people, those with 100 to 500 staff had an average of 8 people. Smaller organizations with less than 100 staff had digital teams with an average of 4 people. *Most teams are small & need to grow given increasing performance expectations.*



We share the responsibility for digital.

Question: How many other staff outside the core digital team contribute to digital/online throughout the organization?

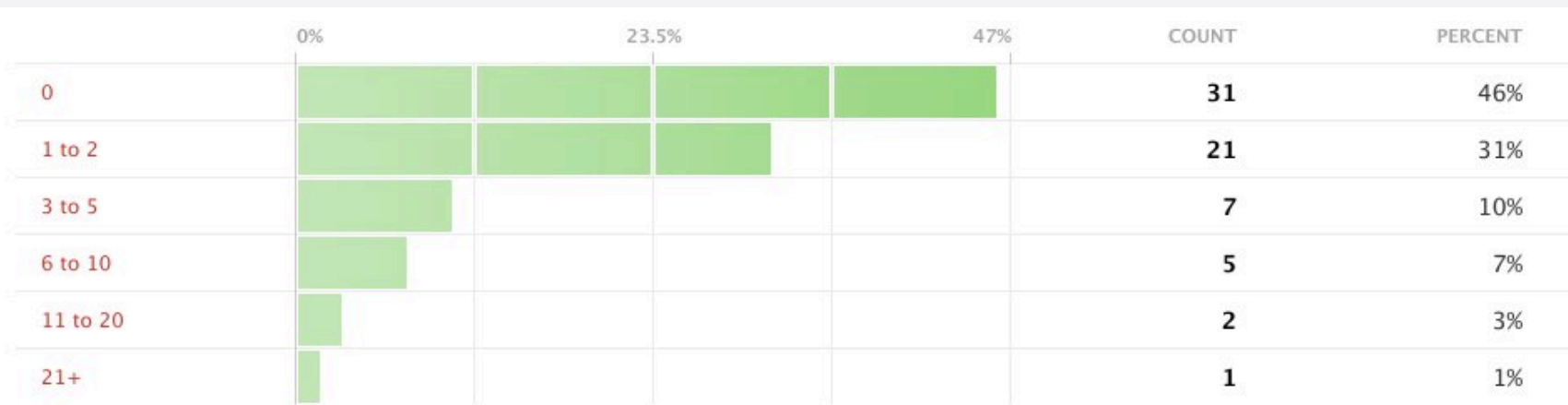
In 94% of respondents some part of the digital function is shared with other departments, & a majority (55%) work with more than 6 people outside the core team to deliver digital content or services. *Most organizations appear to be taking a distributed approach to managing digital by empowering or collaborating with other departments. We consider this healthy.*



We use a lot of contractors.

Question: How many full-time equivalent contractors consistently contribute to the team responsible for digital?

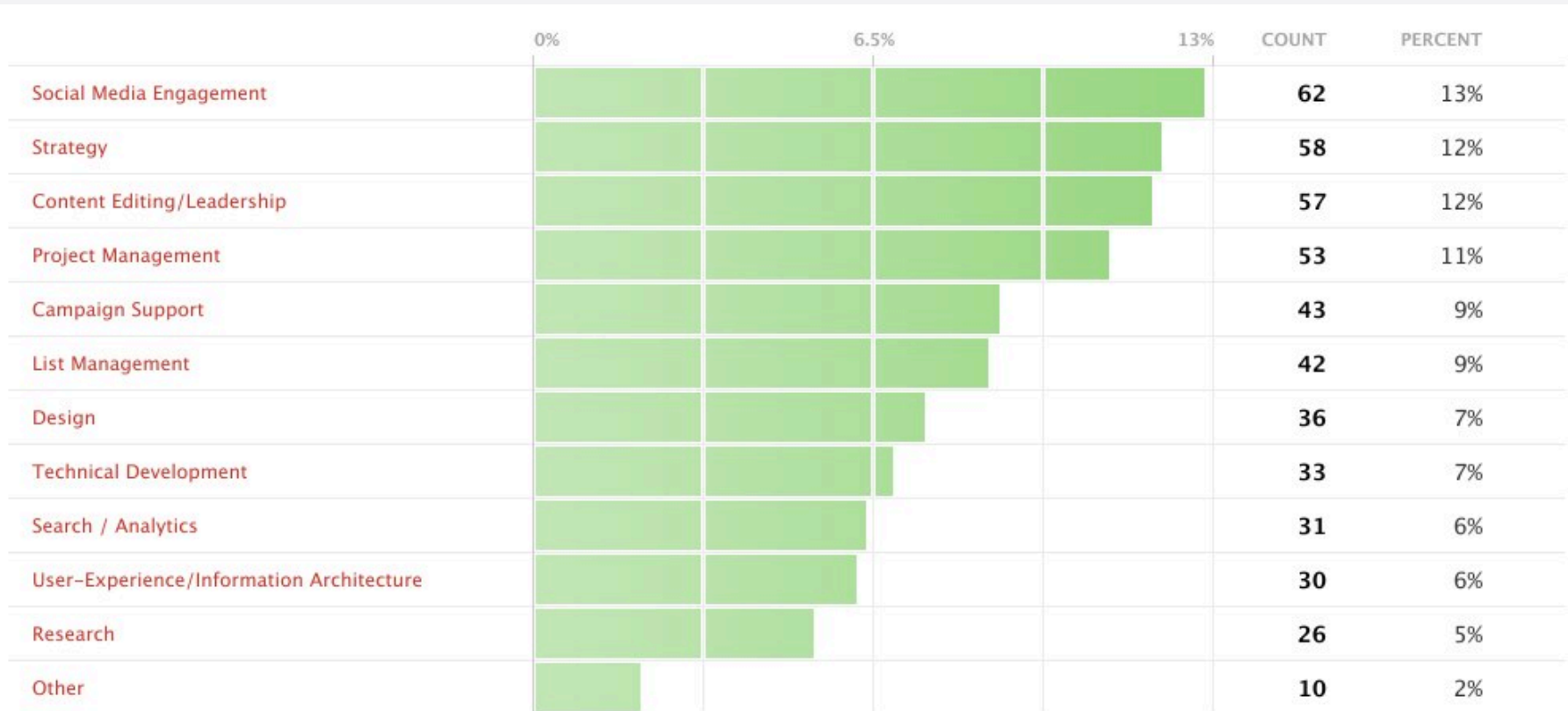
Mid-sized teams (6 to 10 people) utilized an average of 8 outside contractors, while larger teams (11 to 21+) used far less with an average of 3. *This suggests most mid-sized organizations are highly reliant on external resources to deliver core services. While this offers flexibility, we have concerns the ratio is both financially inefficient & may reflect a lack of success in team leaders advocating for appropriately skilled full time staff.*



Top roles are social, strategy, content, PM

Question: On your digital team, what services/roles are currently represented?

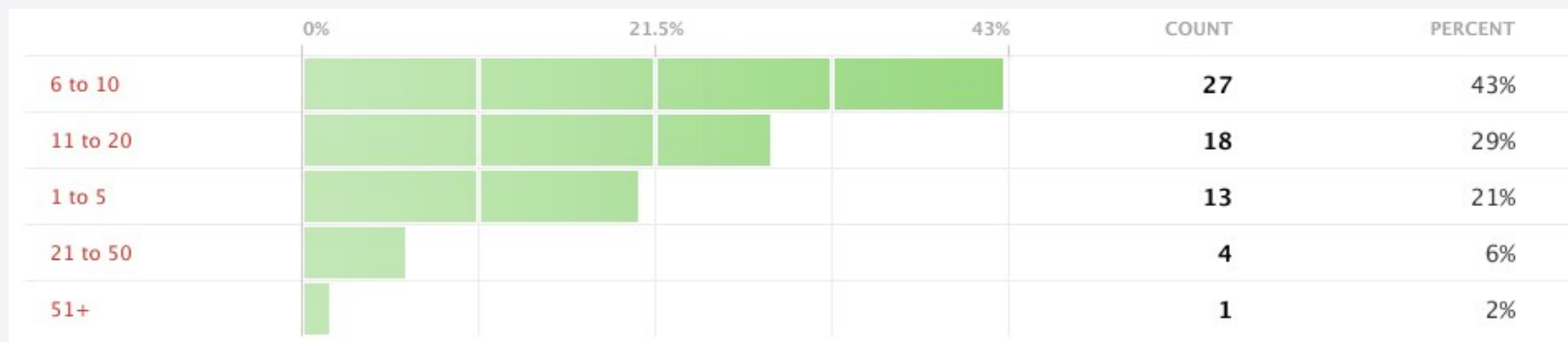
The most common roles found on teams are social media, strategy, content, & project management. Very few teams have research, user-experience (UX), technical, or design skills on-staff, *which is a notable contrast from best in class corporate digital teams who invest heavily in research & UX.*



We manage high volumes of properties.

Question: How many digital properties is your team currently responsible for leading or maintaining?

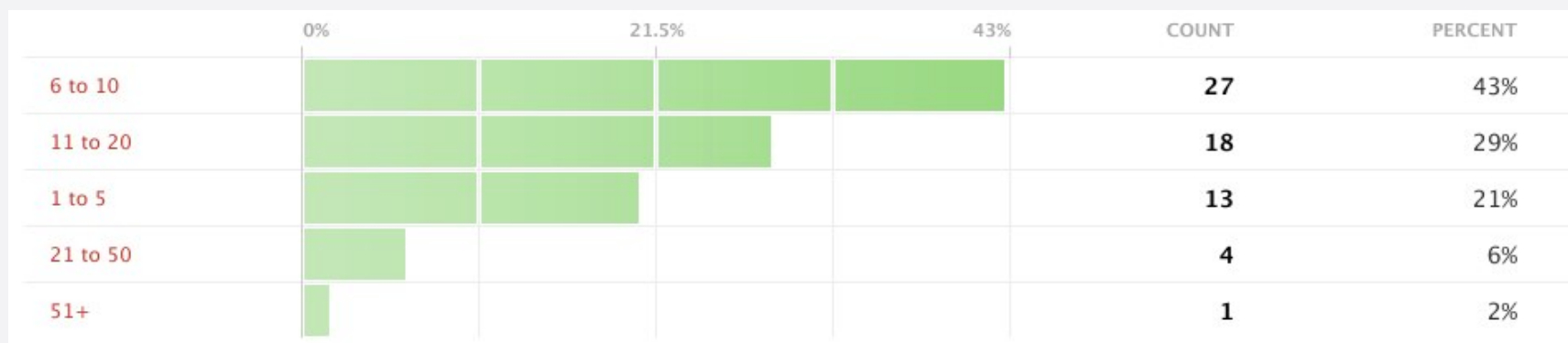
79% of all teams manage more than 5 digital properties (websites, social media channels, mobile apps, etc.) Of the larger groups surveyed, the average number was 24 properties, smaller groups averaged 12. Five groups manage over 21 & one more than 50 properties! *It is difficult enough to maintain, optimize and grow only a few core assets, & when compared to the small sizes of teams this means resources & attention are often spread very thin.*



We manage lots of social media.

Question: How many social media channels does your institution manage in total across the organization?

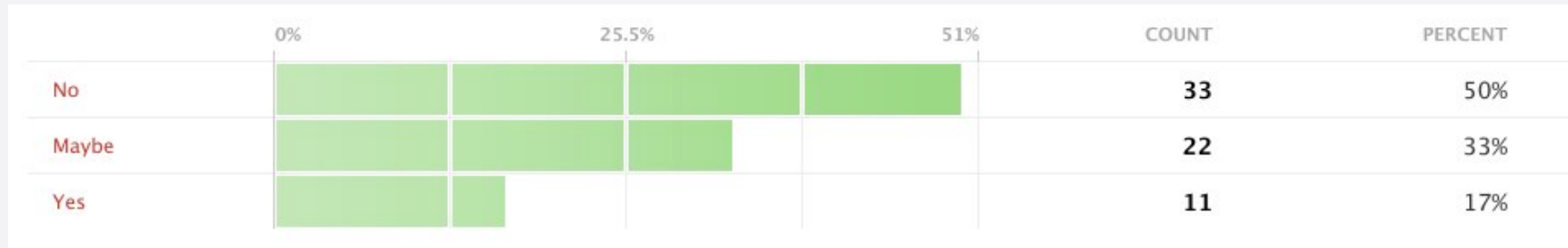
40% of respondents report having to manage 6-10 social media channels. An additional 37% manage more than 11, with 8% managing more than 21. This points to most organizations taking a distributed model for social media & creating multiple accounts for internal departments & campaigns. *However too many channels often leads to difficulties with alignment, creating extraneous noise that drowns out key messages & actions at major moments.*



Yet desperately lack people & skills.

Question: Does your team have the right people to do its best work?

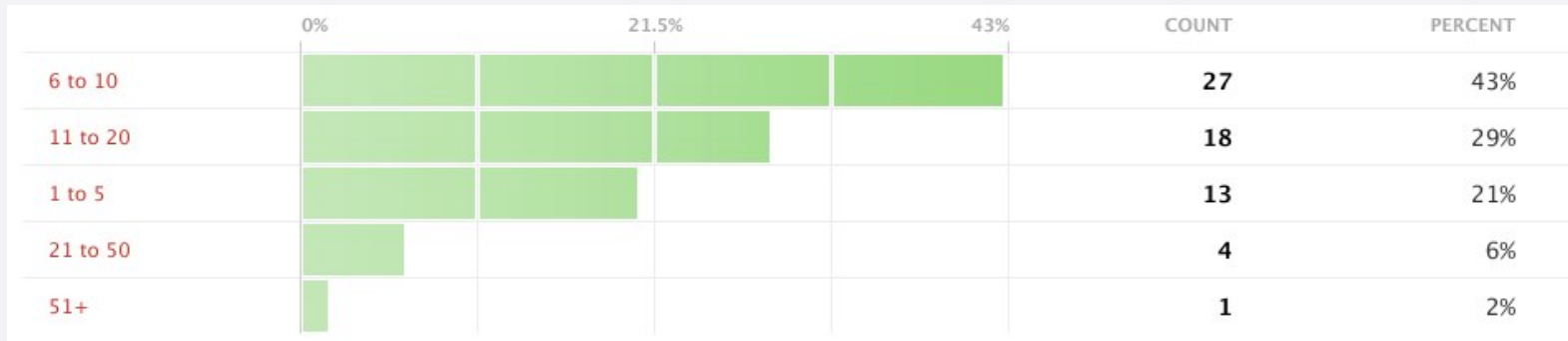
88% of respondents reported their teams probably or completely lack the people required to do their best work. This means only 17% of teams are appropriately staffed. In a separate question 74% report their teams lack the right skills to do their best work. *This points to a painful resource, people, & skill gap holding back higher performance across our sector.*



Social media is a rare bright spot.

Question: How effective do you think your organization is at managing your social media channels?

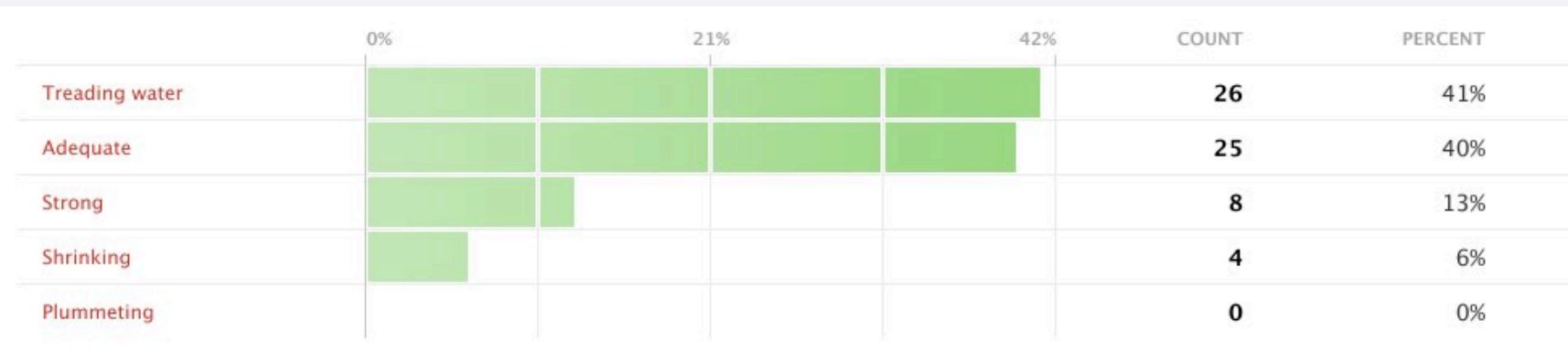
Fully 92% of respondents believe they manage social media somewhat or highly effectively. *For a sector that is often self-critical of its own performance, this is rare & nearly universal good news. It is perhaps not surprising as social media was reported as the #1 job role in digital teams, no doubt due to the cultural & media focus on the space over the last 5 years.*



Email lists continue to grow.

Question: How would you describe the growth of your email supporter lists?

External research continues to show that email remains by far the largest, most engaged, most lucrative, & most active tool in the digital strategy toolkit. So it is heartening to hear most respondents reported continued growth in their email lists. We recommend the popular M&R e-Benchmarks report that goes into much greater depth on email metrics.

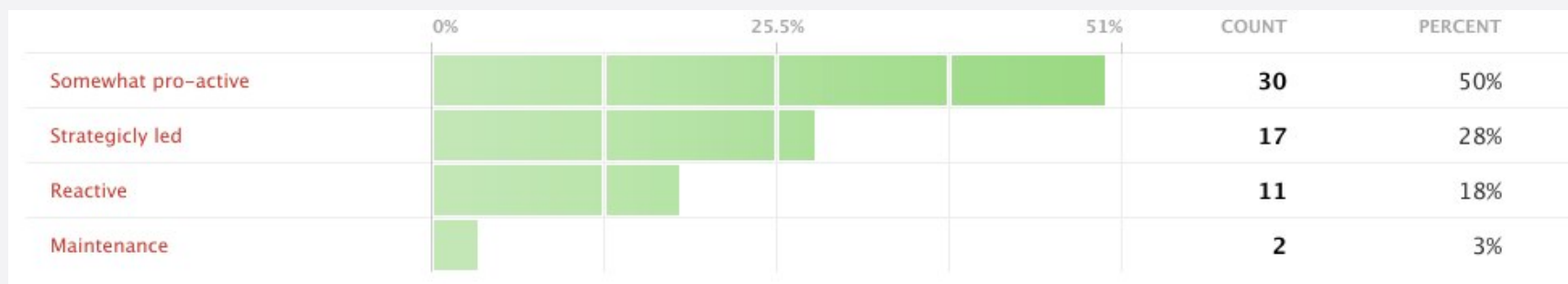


Part II: Culture, Structure, & \$\$\$

Teams are increasingly leading change.

Question: How would you describe the digital/online team's culture?

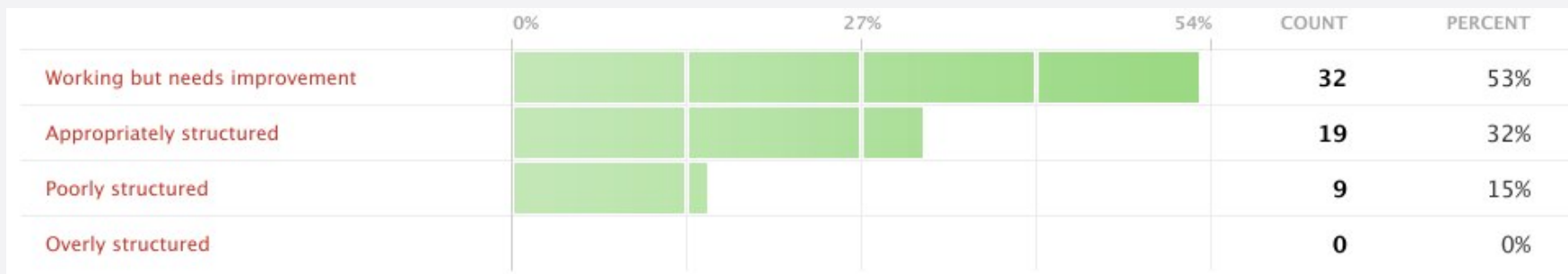
28% of teams report their culture as strategically-led, with another 50% reporting a somewhat pro-active culture. This is important as in a separate question fully 60% of teams are expected by their superiors to always drive new initiatives, not merely act as a service desk. *This reflects an important cross-industry trend where digital functions have evolved from a reactive "service shop" to more of an innovation & leadership role.*



Most suffer from poor structure.

Question: How would you describe the structure of your team?

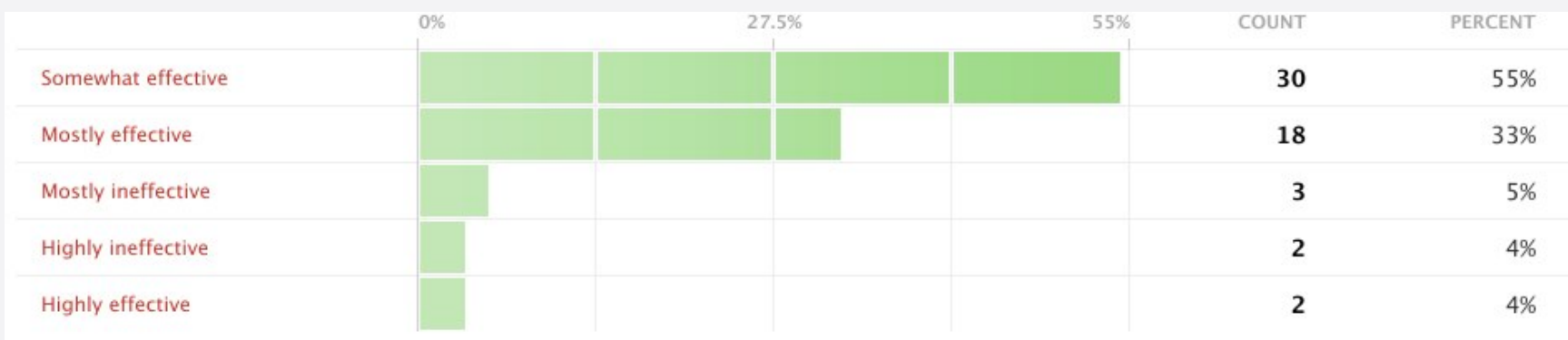
Over half (53%) of respondents report their team structures are working but need improvement, with another 15% reporting a poor structure holding performance back. Only 32% report their structures are appropriate for the demands on their teams. *We expect this last number to increase as more institutions re-structure their digital departments in the coming years.*



Digital programs are “somewhat effective”.

Question: How effective do you think your digital program is at serving the needs of your constituents and organization?

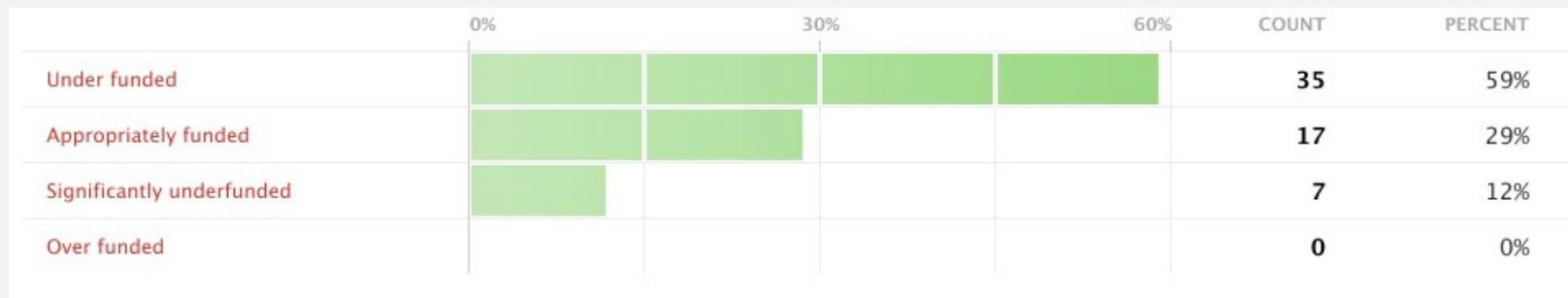
55% of respondents report their digital programs are only somewhat effective at serving the needs of their constituents & organization, with a further 9% reporting they are mostly or even highly ineffective. *For a sector that prides itself on innovation & impact, & where the successes of others are so easy to see, having a majority of peers report such lukewarm results is disheartening.*



Most programs are underfunded.

Question: Is your budget sufficient for your plans for this year?

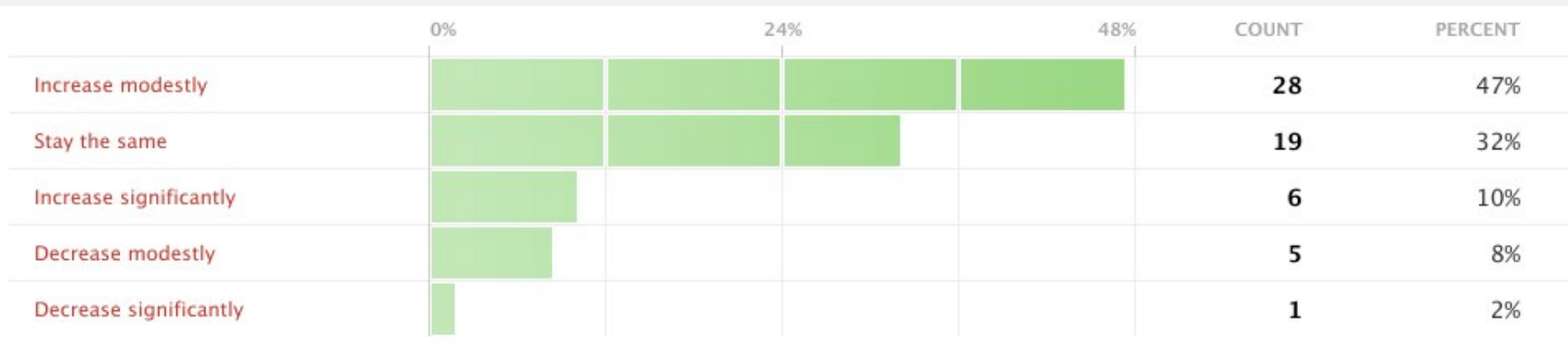
71% of respondents report their programs are either under-funded or significantly underfunded. Only a lucky minority of 29% report appropriate funding. *While not surprising for non-profit sector employees to report under-funding, what is striking is the contrast with private-sector digital budget growth (reference: <http://ow.ly/6VkuR>). This is also counter-productive to the increasing responsibilities being given to digital programs.*



But the future is looking brighter.

Question: What is the plan for digital spending next year?

And we end with some good news. 57% of respondents report plans to increase their digital spending next year. A further 32% will stay the same and only 10% will see their budgets shrink. *This is significant given that overall non-profit budgets have flat-lined, and shows the increasing importance – and expectations – that senior managers are placing on digital.*



A few final words...

Where we see the field evolving

This research points to the fact that institutions are in transition. Some are still structured and resourced in ways that reflect the organic evolution of the web or its legacy functions (ie publishing). Others struggle with how to balance the needs of multiple internal customers with driving new forms of technical & engagement innovation – all with teams that have not kept pace with the demands placed on them. In most cases, digital is increasingly important, yet the resources & leadership haven't yet emerged to fully support it.

Patterns we're seeing & expect to change in the coming years:

- Digital teams will continue to mature & shift from reactive service to proactive leadership & innovation hubs that drive fundamental changes in how institutions operate
- Many organizations will restructure & reposition the digital group to meet increasing internal & external expectations on the digital experience
- Team leaders will need to better make the business case for more appropriate funding & staff in a resource constrained environment

Meet the team

The people behind the numbers



Jason Mogus

Principal Strategist

Jason has led transformational digital projects for some of the world's most respected institutions for over 15 years.



Christopher Roy

Lead Researcher

Christopher has managed complex digital projects & teams for many of the world's leading brands for over 12 years.



Ekaterina Dovjenko

Research Intern

Ekat is a UBC Commerce undergrad & student leader with a passion for business & for social change.

Our services

What we do

Vision

Focus your vision

We identify opportunities & make choices on a compelling yet achievable digital vision for your entire organization.

Roadmap

Plan experiences

Guided by user insights we help you plan high stakes digital projects, then identify & manage best in class vendors to execute them.

Structure

Optimize teams

We create more responsive teams, leaders, & systems to help institutions more effectively manage digital innovation across silos.

Let's start a conversation

How to get in touch with us

Online

communicopia.com

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Further Reading

This research was published as a [three part series](#) in the Stanford Social Innovation Review.

Special Thanks

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Thank you!