

Executive Outlook on the Metaverse, 2033 and Beyond

Oxford–Protiviti Survey: Key Findings

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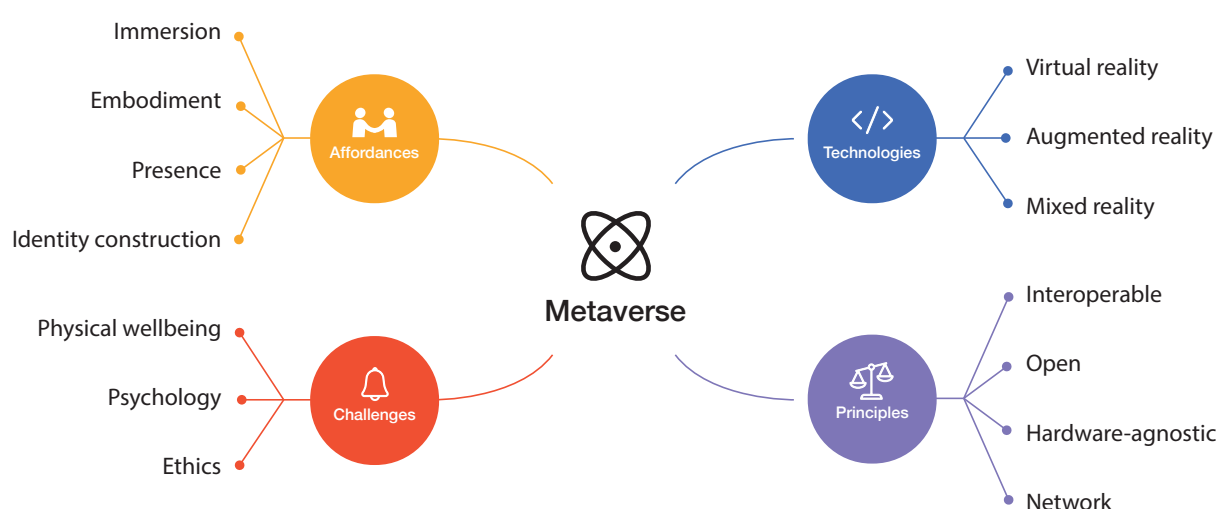
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Introduction

Changing the name of Facebook to Meta in 2021 marked a semantic, popular, and widely encompassing shift in how businesses and consumers became absorbed with the metaverse. In recent years, the concept has been increasingly discussed at organisational strategy meetings, and became the most topical, if sometimes fuzzy, focus for entrepreneurial flair and the drive toward more efficient, flexible forms of corporate, commercial, and consumer engagement. The metaverse is a collective of virtual-reality shared spaces where users interact with a computer-generated environment as well as with other users, typically represented as avatars, in a network of 3D virtual worlds. The metaverse is already estimated to be worth \$8 to \$13 trillion by 2030. This report looks at where we and the metaverse may be heading over the next decade according to business leaders across the world.



Source: Mystakidis, S. (2022). Metaverse. Encyclopedia, 2(1), 486–497. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia2010031>

Our definition

Given the emergence of the metaverse from science-fiction novels in the early 1990s to new technologies, tangible profits, and investment pathways today, this three-dimensional version of the internet promises more activity avenues and business opportunities than even many of those working in the technology industries may have foreseen at the start of the decade. It's early 2023; where may we be a decade hence? For the purpose of initiating conversation in our report's survey of 250 global business leaders, we have defined the metaverse as a collective of virtual-reality shared spaces, where users interact with a computer-generated environment as well as other users, typically represented as avatars, in an interconnected network of 3D virtual worlds. As a working definition, it aimed to provide a starting point for business leaders' perceptions of the future metaverse, which have proved to embrace the possibilities of the imminent future, as the following analysis reveals.

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The Oxford-Protiviti Survey: Unpacking the methodology and survey

To assess the present situation and to forecast the upcoming developments in this field over the next decade and beyond, this Executive Outlook on the Metaverse has captured insights from 250 company board members, C-suite executives, and business leaders across North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific regions. The survey participants represent a broad range of industries, and include both publicly and privately held organisations and asset management companies.

Data, which were collected between December 2022 and February 2023, were obtained via one-on-one computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). Participants were asked a series of questions about the future of the metaverse, compared to current practice, concerning their own organisations. Additional questions were asked about the size and location of their organisation, as well as their gender, age, and job title.

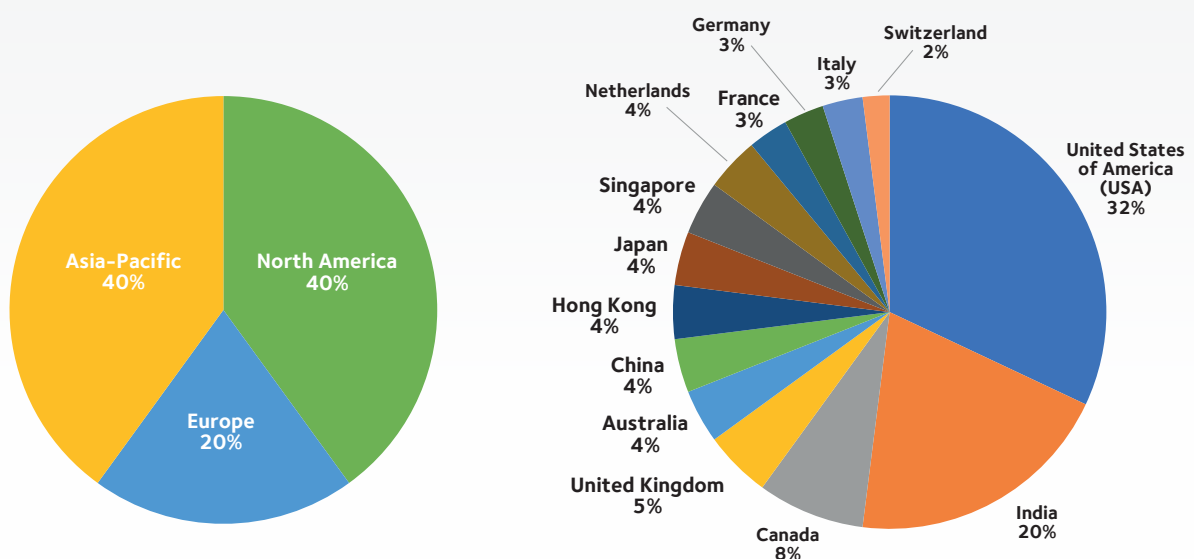
Following a series of introductory screening and demographic questions, the survey posed nineteen key questions about the impact of the metaverse. All data were collected confidentially, and the names of organisations and individuals are not disclosed.

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The Oxford-Protiviti Survey: Demographics

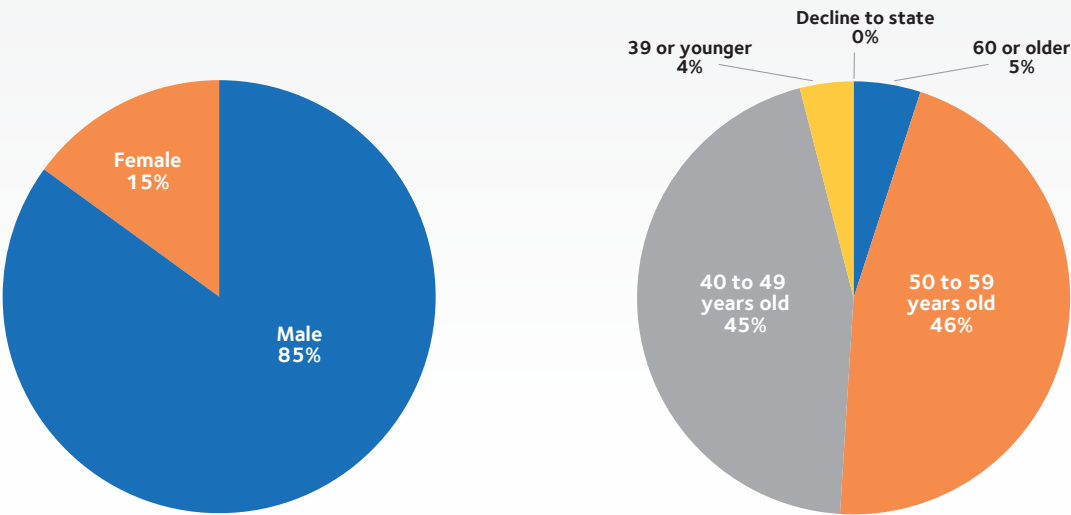
The total number of board members, C-suite executives, and business leaders surveyed was 250, of whom 40% were located in North America, 40% in the Asia-Pacific region, and 20% in Europe. Country-wise, the largest representation of company headquarters covered the United States (32%), India (20%), and Canada (8%), with the remaining countries each being distributed evenly at 2% to 5%. Overall, this research covers organisations headquartered in 14 territories, with the aggregate population of 2.2 billion people, thus, comprising almost 30% of the world's total. The survey demographic results are summarised below.

In which part of the world and in which country is your company headquartered?

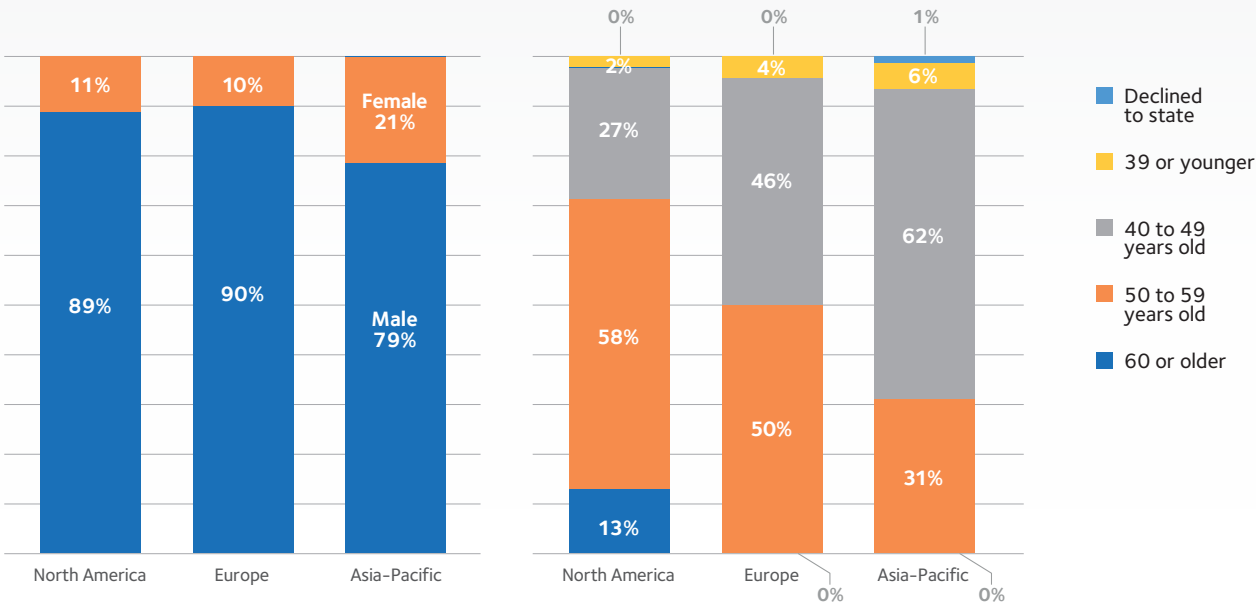


Survey participants’ self-identified gender and age

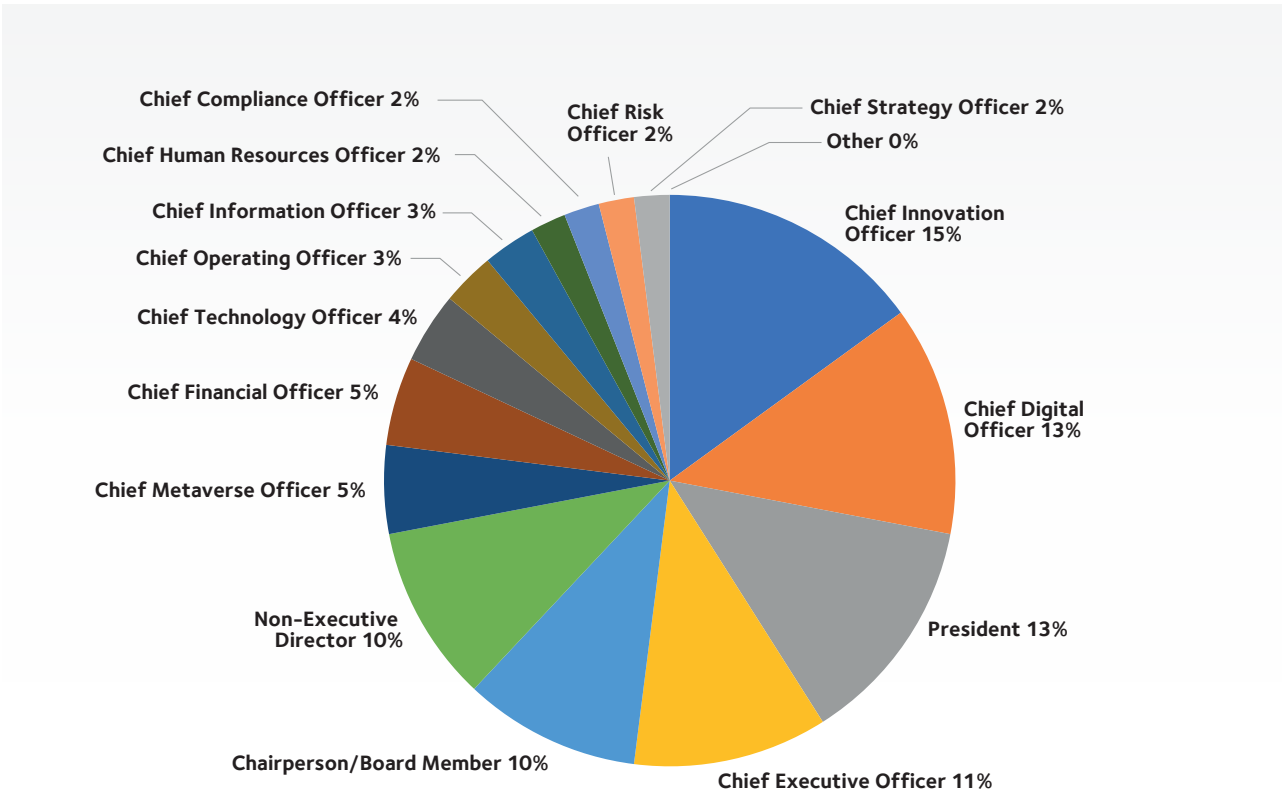
Eighty-five per cent of the business leaders surveyed were male and 15% were female, with just over one-half being over the age of 50 years old. The gender composition of the business leaders is almost identical in North America and Europe, although one-fifth of executives interviewed in the Asia-Pacific region were women. Whilst around two-thirds of the C-suite executives in Asia-Pacific were under 50 years old, this younger cohort represents under half of the C-suite executives in Europe, and a quarter in North America. More than one-tenth of the latter regional cohort were aged over 60 years.



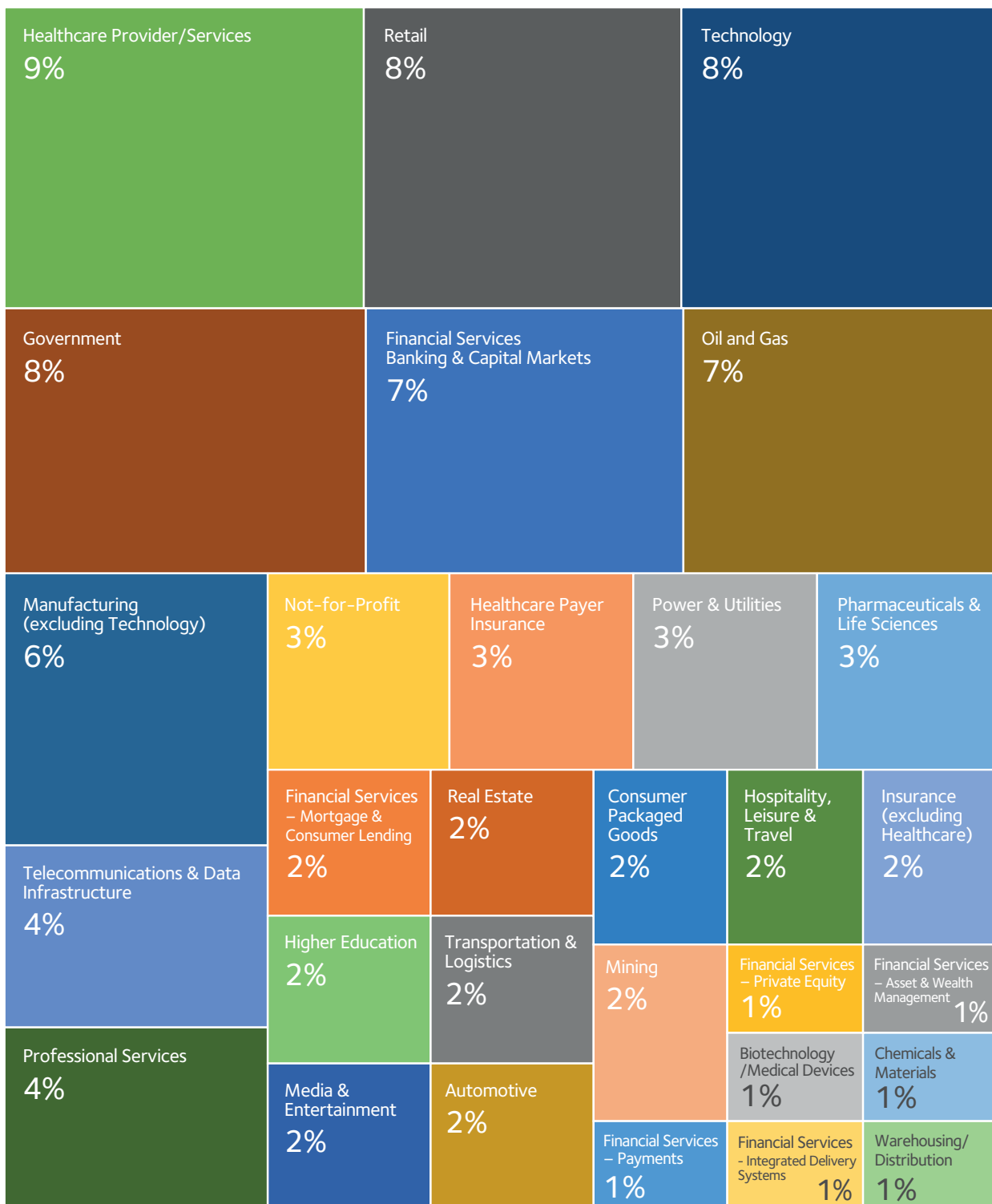
Gender and age, by region



What is the title of the most significant, or most senior, position you hold within your organisation?



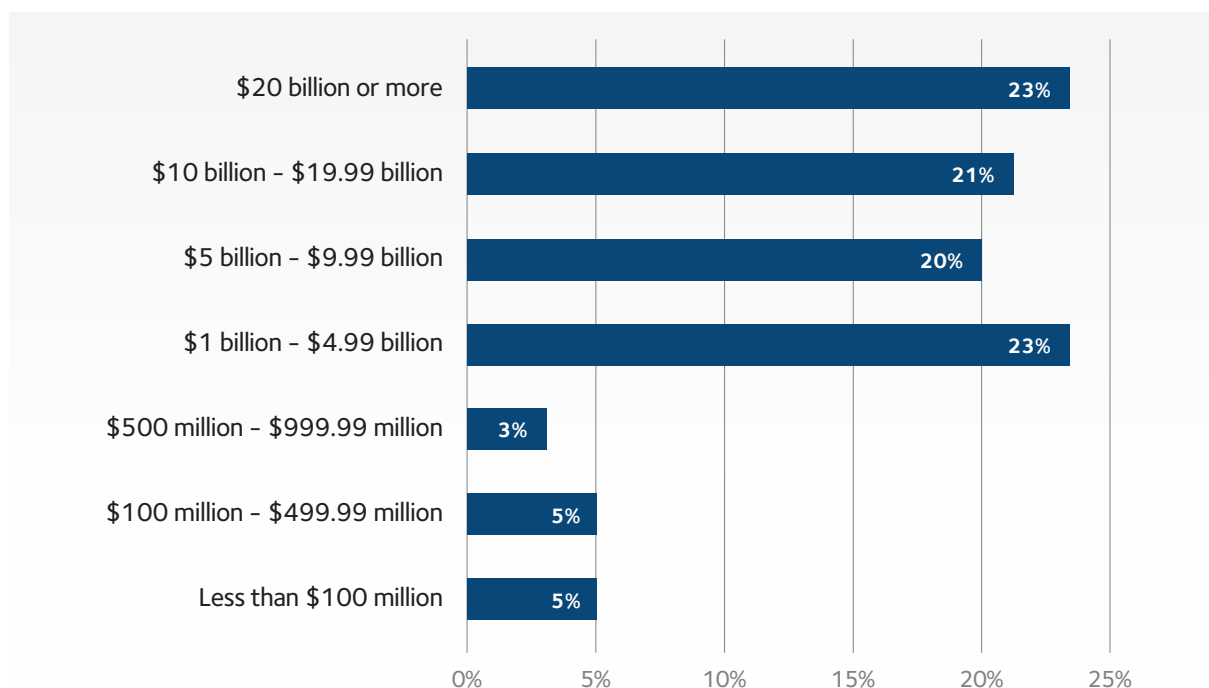
What is your organisation's primary industry?



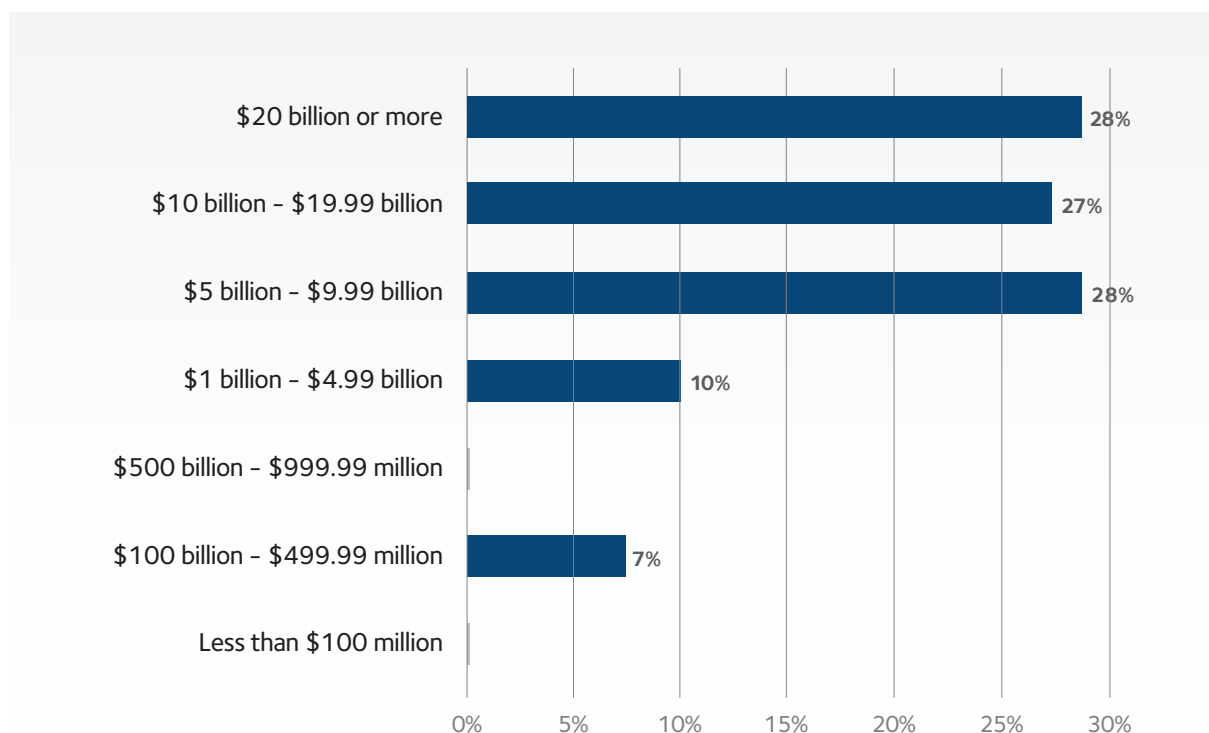
The survey covered a broad range of company positions, with the roles of Chief Innovation Officer, Chief Digital Officer, President, Chief Executive Officer, Chairperson or Board Member, and Non-Executive Director each representing at least one-tenth of the overall survey responses. In terms of the primary economic activity of the companies surveyed, the most numerous representation comes from the following four sectors, each having at least an 8% share: Healthcare Provider or Services, Retail, Technology, and Government. Financial Services, Oil and Gas, and Manufacturing follow closely. The wide range and scope of organisations testifies to the increasing awareness about the metaverse in the context of today's economies.

What is your organisation's size by gross revenue in US dollars? (Total sample size n=221)

Almost 65% of the companies surveyed (excluding asset management firms) had annual gross revenues ranging from US\$1 billion to US\$20 billion; 23% of the companies generated a gross revenue above US\$20 billion, whilst just over one-tenth of the firms surveyed grossed below US\$1 billion annually. For asset management companies (constituting 12% of the overall survey sample), over a half managed US\$10 billion or more per year.



What is your organisation's size by assets under management in US dollars? (Asset management companies only; total sample size n=29)



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Findings in brief: The global business perspective on the future of the metaverse

The survey reveals the recognised importance of the metaverse among company board members, C-suite executives, and business leaders today, and their perceived possibilities for its future uses. Perhaps most striking is the consistently high uptake and engagement with the metaverse in North America. The strong regional drive to explore this emerging opportunity refreshes findings from a previous Oxford-Protiviti survey, [*Executive Outlook on the Future of Work, 2030 and Beyond*](#), in which 88% of global business executives pointed to artificial intelligence as the key for a “radical transformation” of their company over the next decade, but those in North America were slightly less enthused than leaders in Europe and Asia-Pacific. No such hesitance is apparent now, as North America heads to the metaverse frontier and appears to be embracing all it has to offer, as the analysis shows below.

Key points of evidence from the survey show:

- There is a notable difference between North American business leaders and their European and Asia-Pacific counterparts. The straightforward summary is that global executive leaders in North America are ahead of the game in metaverse matters: the survey showed that enthusiasm and current engagement in the region is considerably and consistently higher than elsewhere. This may have been because the Facebook-to-Meta transition had more media presence, or was perceived to have more direct “home turf” relevance than in other regions. In North America, 82% of leaders surveyed are already using the metaverse in business, compared with just a third in Europe and Asia-Pacific.
- Use of the metaverse is being decided by groups set up for the task within organisations. Over two-thirds of respondents were collectively engaged in determining their organisation’s current steps toward or within the metaverse, and only 13% were the sole decision-maker. This reflects the scope, and perhaps uncertainty, of what the metaverse offers as an emerging, but relatively untested new dawn for business and governance.
- Two-thirds of business leaders recognised the metaverse’s potential importance for global economic development, but this awareness again appears to be far higher in North America than other regions. It would seem that organisations in North America have grasped the future, and are looking to seize the advantage ahead of global counterparts. North American leaders are twice as likely as those in Europe and Asia-Pacific to have already taken this leap into what they see as the new operational era for business and organisations.
- Organisations are developing and redeveloping applications for the metaverse era, with almost twice as much commitment shown, once again, in North America where 78% of global executive leaders are already engaging with meta-apps. Over a half of their counterparts in Europe and Asia-Pacific have no immediate or short-term plans to develop any apps, products, or services for the metaverse.

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Analysis: The overall importance of the ESG approach to business

As organisations move increasingly toward considering the role of the metaverse in their day-to-day activities, leadership is overwhelmingly concentrated in collective or group-led decision-making. Over two-thirds of respondents were engaged in determining their organisation's current steps toward or within the metaverse, but only 13% were the sole decision-maker (Figure 1). In-depth knowledge and confidence in metaversal opportunities is perhaps a rarity in many organisations, and deliberation seems to be the key compass for charting this form of the future. With regard to decision-making, those under 50 were almost twice as likely not to be involved than those over 50, across the survey as a whole. Over three-quarters of business leaders over 50 years old were actively engaged in deciding their organisation's integration into the metaverse, perhaps indicating the importance placed on this emerging new era within organisational hierarchies.

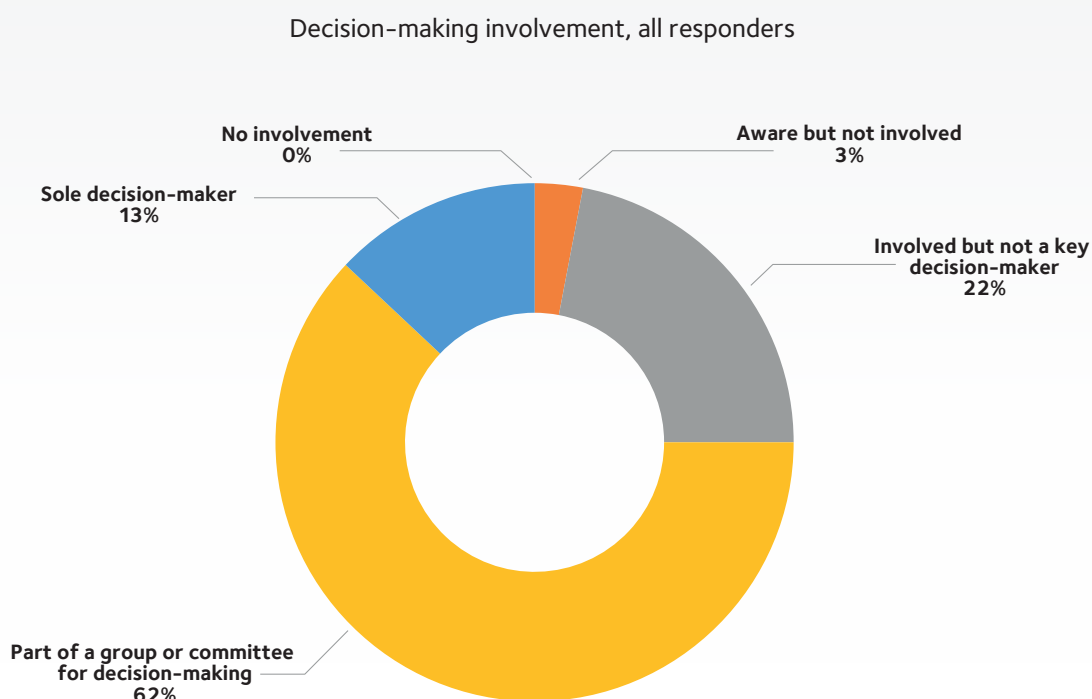


Figure 1. How involved are you, personally, in decisions your organization makes about the metaverse?

Decision-making involvement by age

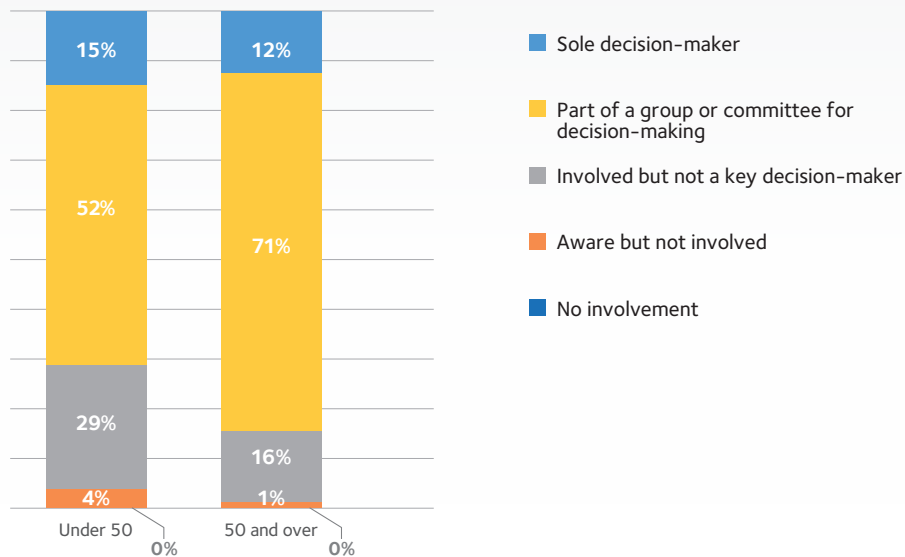
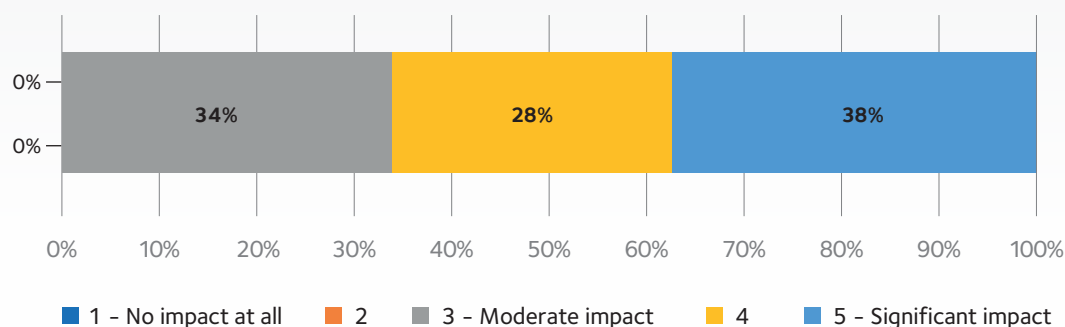


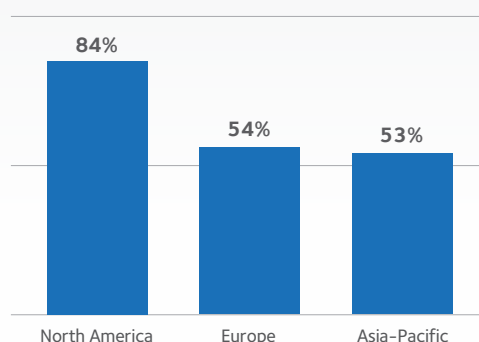
Figure 2. How involved are you, personally, in decisions your organisation makes about the metaverse?

While age plays a role in decision-making about the level of engagement in the metaverse, this factor combines with geographical variation to provide a notable insight into its anticipated global impact, and perhaps likely organisational uptake in the immediate future. Two-thirds of business leaders recognised the metaverse’s potential importance for global economic development over the next decade, but this awareness appears to be far higher in North America than across other regions (84% of business leaders, compared to just over half in Europe and Asia-Pacific), and also among those aged over 50 years (Figure 2). It would seem that organisations in North America have grasped the future, and that those with longer experience in their business are looking to seize metaverse opportunities a step ahead of younger colleagues. It should be noted that a relatively higher number of executive leaders over 50 years old were surveyed in North America than in other regions. Nevertheless, age and geography still prove to be important factors when looking at metaverse uptake.

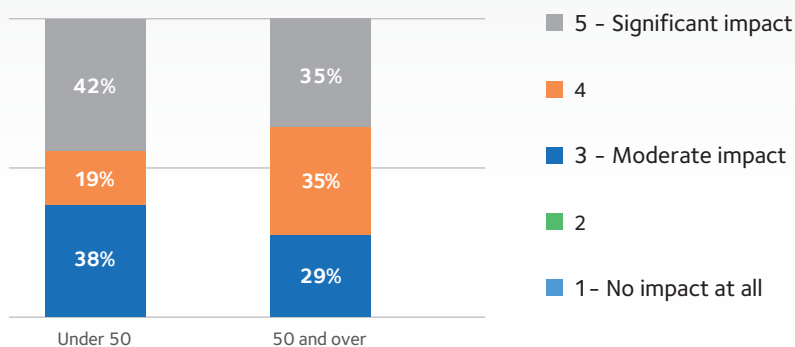
Anticipated global economic impact, all responders



Anticipated global economic impact rated as important or significant, by region



Anticipated global economic impact, by age



Note: Less than 1% of respondents chose 1 or 2

Figure 3. How would you characterise the anticipated global economic impact of the metaverse a decade from now?

While definitions and understanding of what the metaverse is may vary, over two-thirds of business leaders across the globe recognise that something “new” is occurring: that a technological and societal shift, akin to the internet age, is upon us, and it is something which needs to be addressed (Figure 3, previous page). Once again, North America leads the way in grasping this baton for the next leg of global economic competition. Business leaders may not all know about the technical intricacies, or even agree as to what the metaverse might actually offer, but it has arrived and needs to be explored, understood, and harnessed to drive development into the decades ahead.

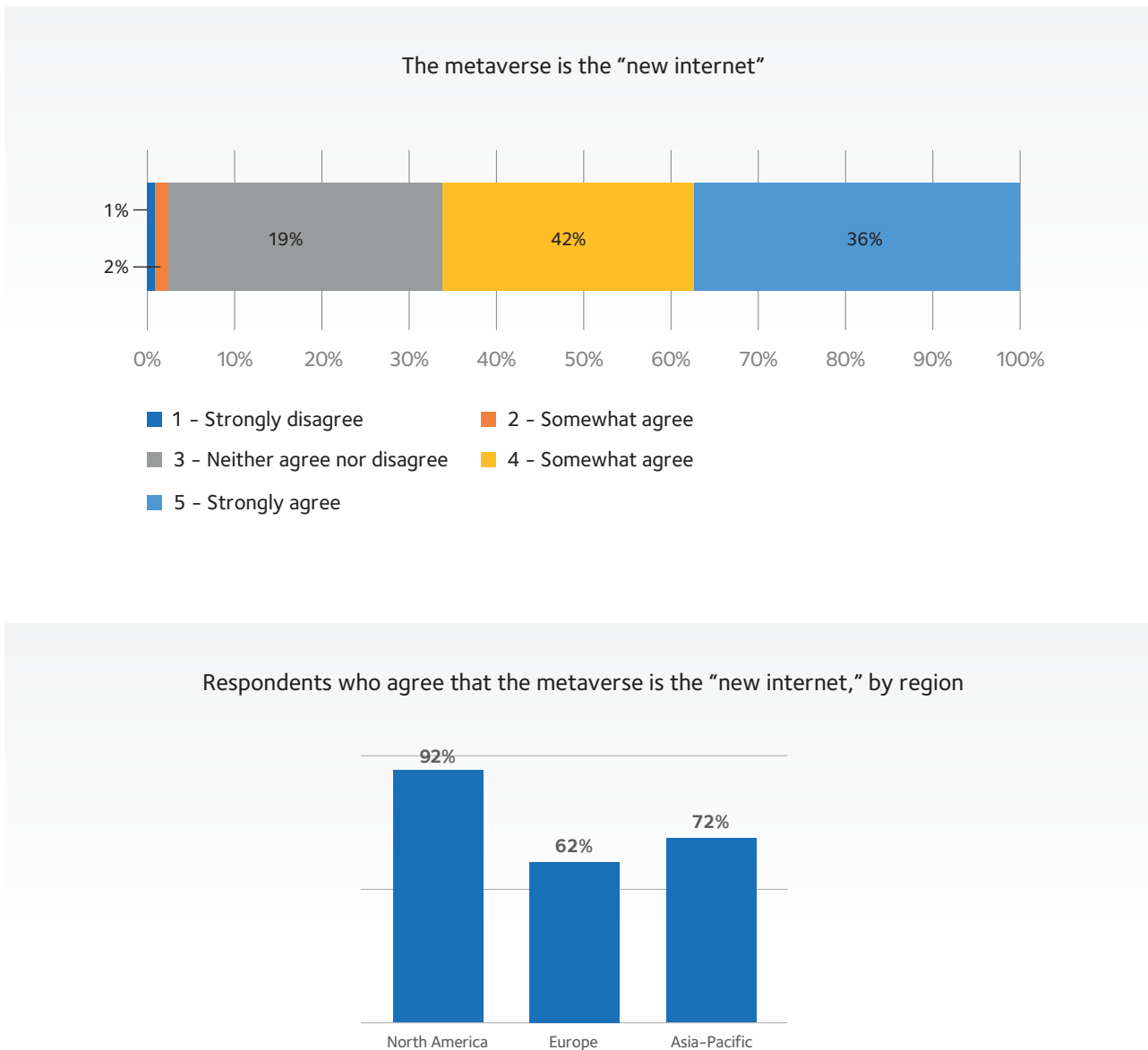


Figure 4. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The metaverse is the “new internet.”

Our report shows that global business leaders are switched on to, and are likely to be already engaging with the potential global economic and societal impact of the metaverse. North American leaders are twice as likely than those in Europe and Asia-Pacific to have already taken this leap into what they see as the new operational era for business and organisations (Figure 5). Over two-thirds of business leaders in Europe and Asia-Pacific are still standing outside the metaverse, perhaps glimpsing in, but not immersing.

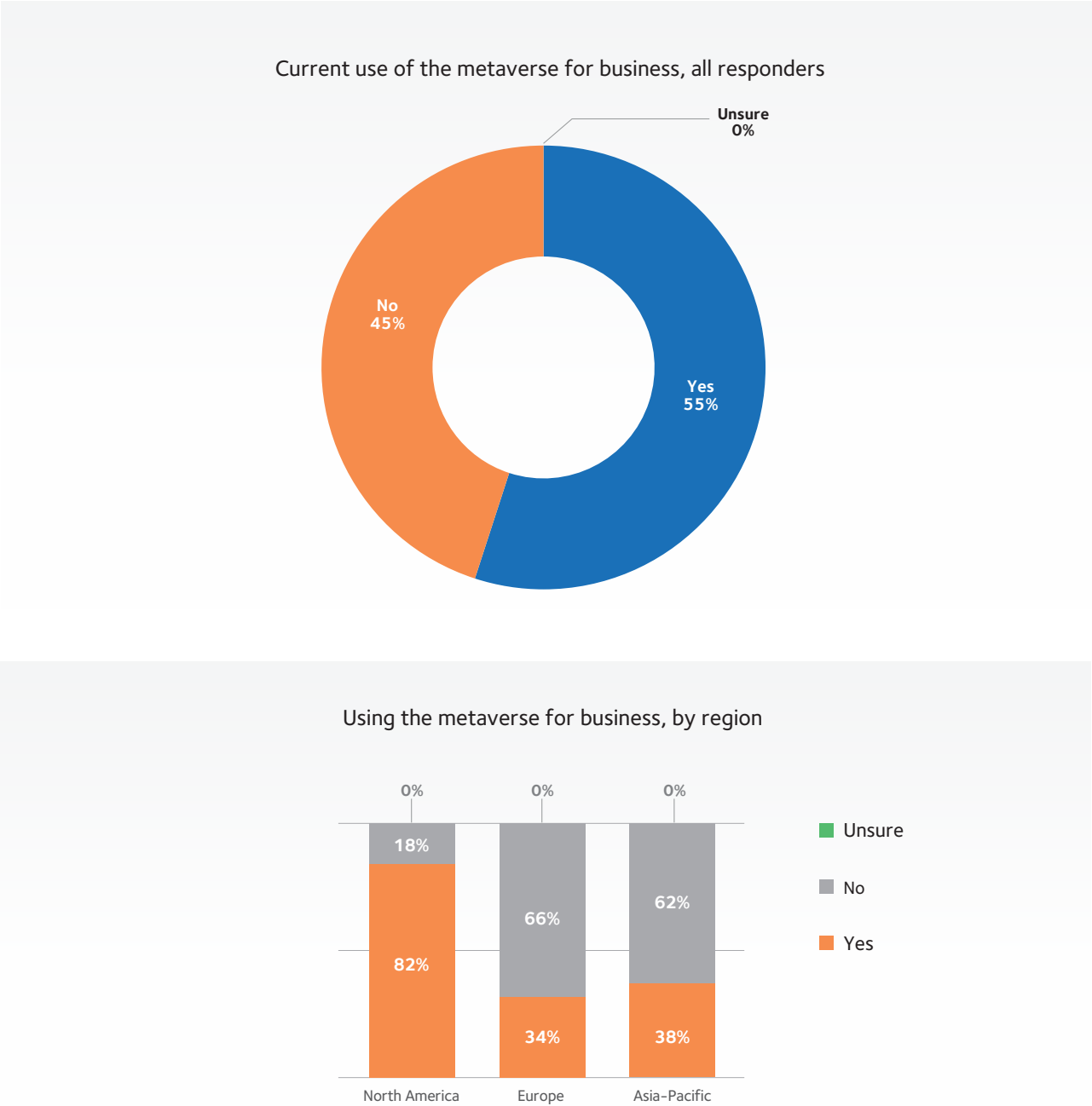


Figure 5. Is your company currently using the metaverse for business purposes?

Marketing, advertising, and related events dominate the current use of the metaverse for business purposes (Figure 6). These uses appear to be the latest avant-garde of the metaverse march into the wider world of commerce, stepping past the initial emphasis on gamification amongst consumers and many commercial technologies during the last decade. Awareness now has been embedded in business and governance circles, and while forms of engagement vary across regions, the rollout is global.

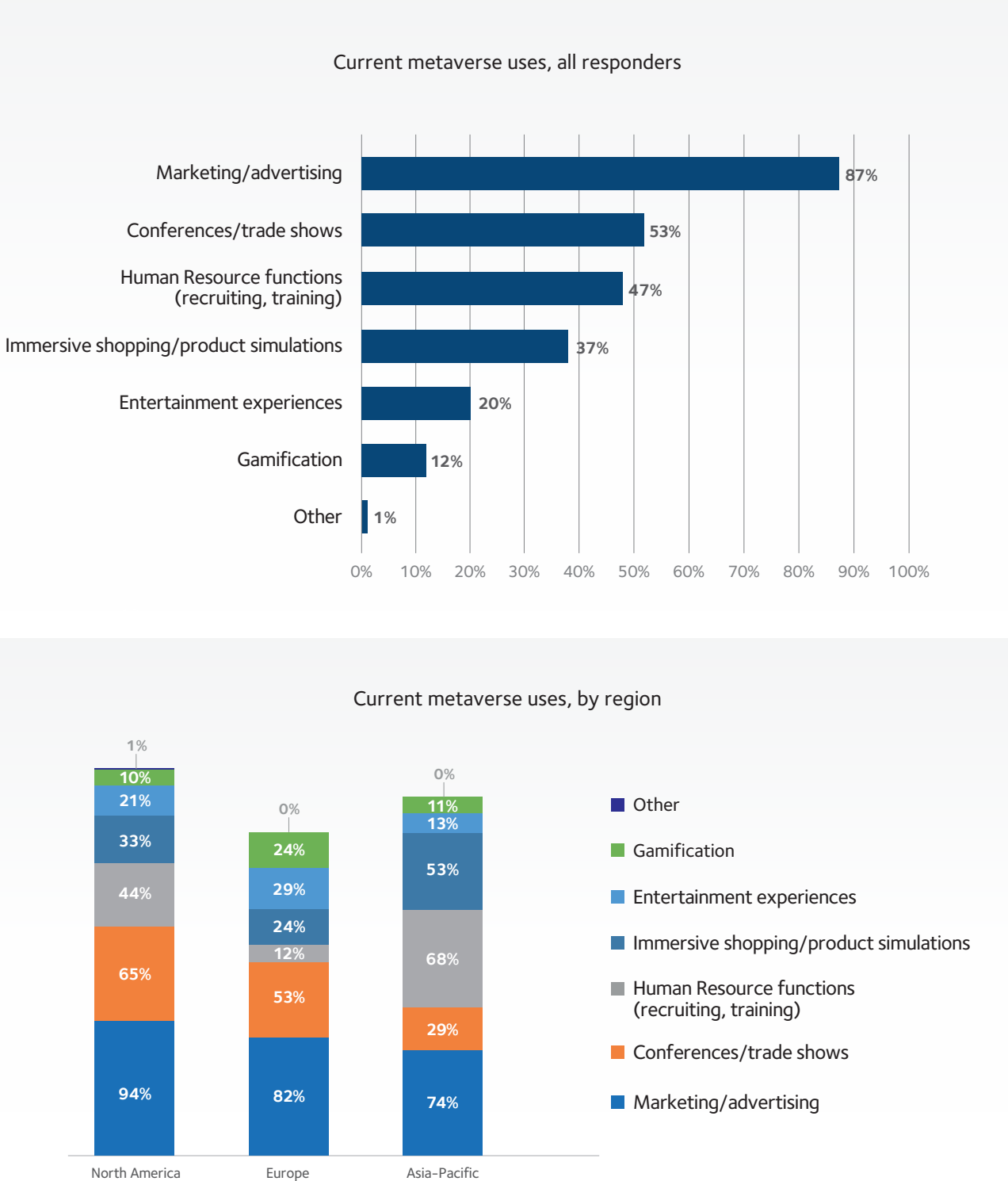


Figure 6. If yes, how so? Respondents who answered “yes” to “Is your company currently using the metaverse for business purposes?”

Organisations are developing, and redeveloping, applications for the metaverse era, with almost twice as much commitment shown, once again, by leaders in North America (Figure 7). Delivering metaverse development strategies in a tangible format is the formative moment of organisational engagement. Over two-thirds of North American organisations already have this in place, compared to just under a third in Europe and Asia-Pacific (Figure 8, next page). European and Asia-Pacific global executive leaders do, however, appear to have recognised the risk of lagging behind. Almost two-thirds surveyed in these regions now believe that their organisation will have a tangible metaverse strategy within five years, with Asia-Pacific twice as likely to be ready within 2 years.

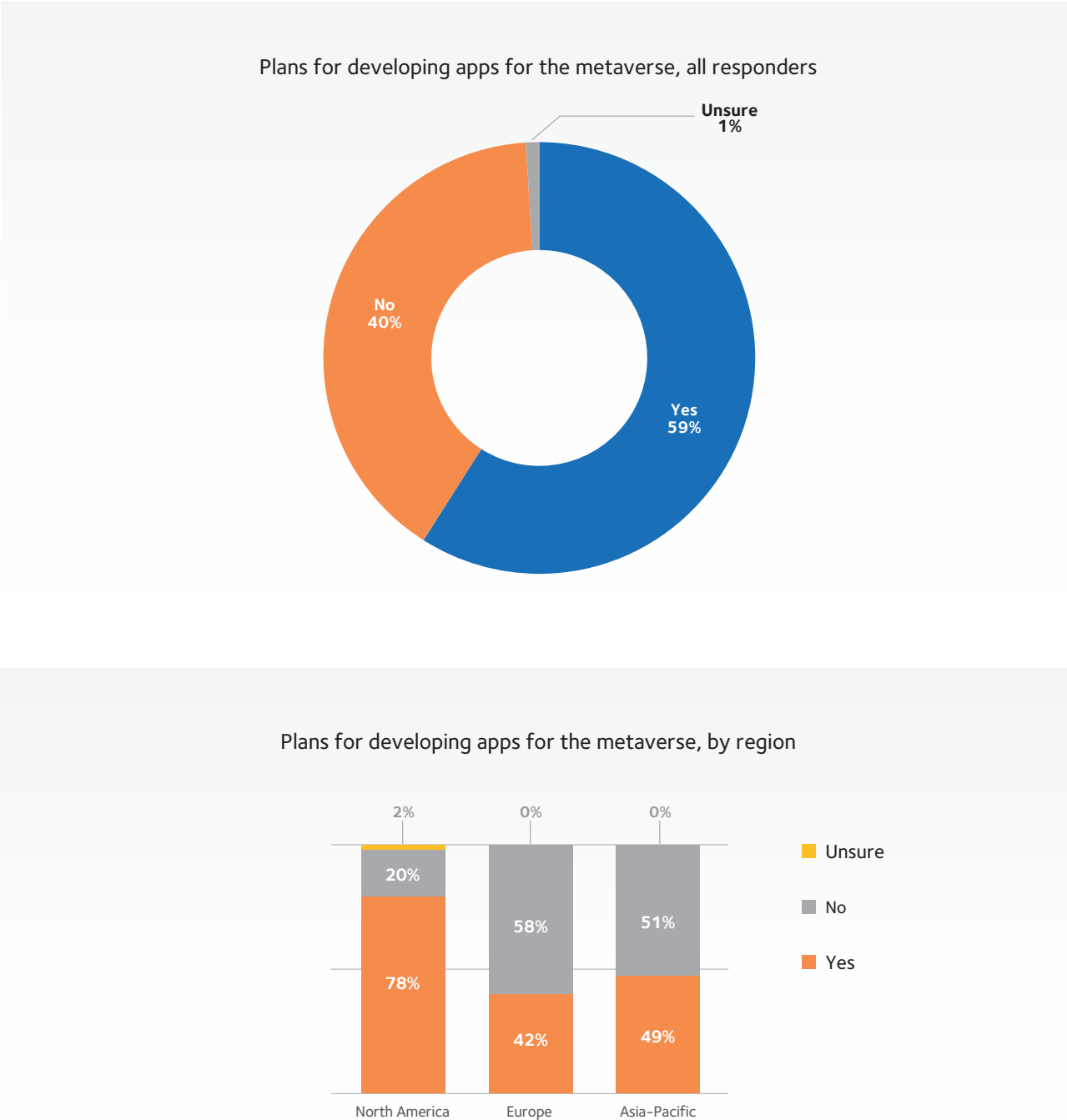
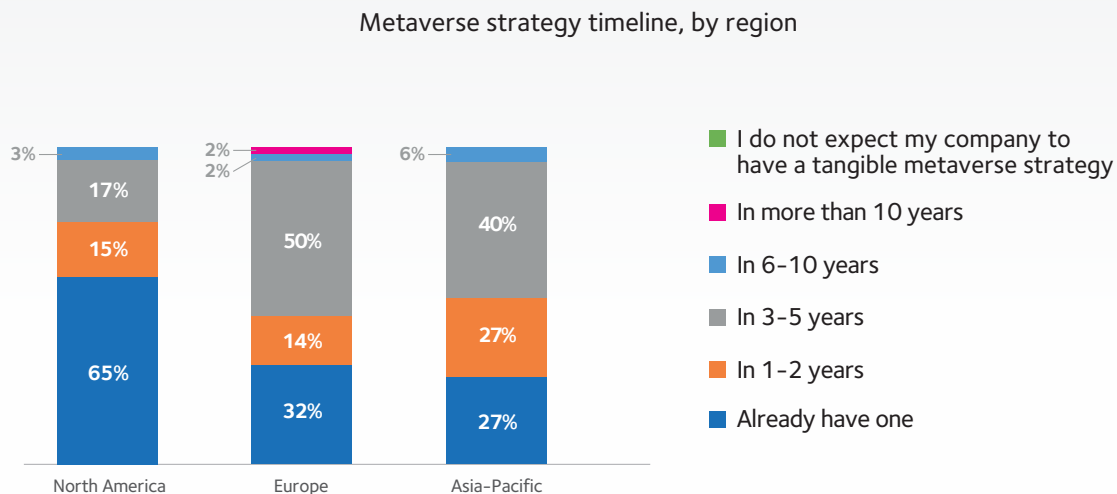
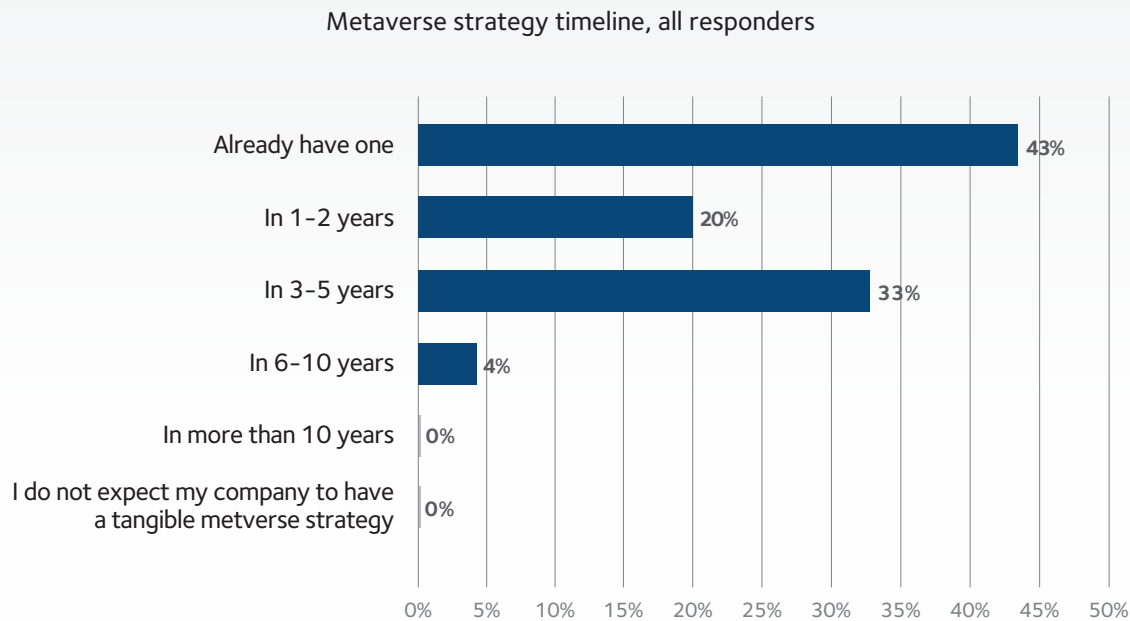


Figure 7. Do you have any immediate or short-term plans to develop any apps, products, or services for the metaverse?



Note: No respondents chose ■ I do not expect my company to have a tangible metaverse strategy

Figure 8. When, if at all, would you expect your company to have a tangible metaverse strategy?

While the survey so far has concentrated on the internal dynamics of organisational integration with metaverse matters, customer experience and loyalty form the bedrock for the success of many businesses. The risk of providing technological access or opportunity ahead of market response or consumer reality generates the risk of commercial or organisational failure. Despite the focus on the new and the next, the cart-before-horse scenario is critical to consider when integrating the metaverse into organisational operations. While positive soundings for sustaining customer loyalty were voiced in Asia-Pacific, and overwhelmingly so across North American leadership, caution remained amongst leaders in Europe (Figures 9, next page). The picture is similar with regard to anticipated changes to products and services because of the metaverse (Figure 10, next page). Just under a half of all leaders surveyed, however, indicated that their organisation had already started to connect with their customer base via the metaverse, with North America leading the way (Figure 11, page 19). No evidence for consumer uptake was incorporated into the survey of leaders' reflections on the metaverse, but all leaders indicated that within 10 years the metaverse would be a component of customer engagement.

Respondents who rated customer experience and sustaining customer loyalty as important or significant, by region

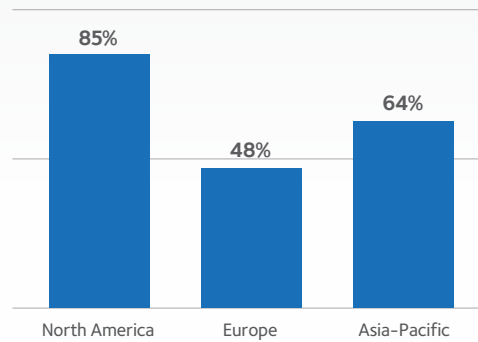
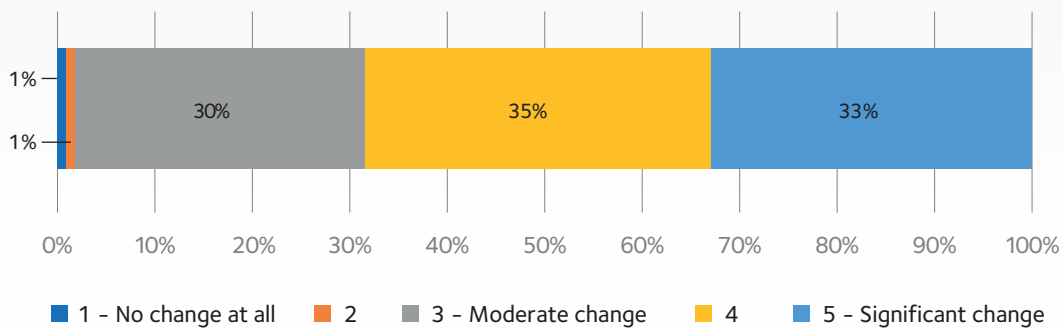


Figure 9. How would you classify the metaverse in terms of its overall importance to the customer experience and sustaining customer loyalty over the next ten years?

Anticipated change to products and services, all responders



Respondents who rated change to products and services as important or significant, by region

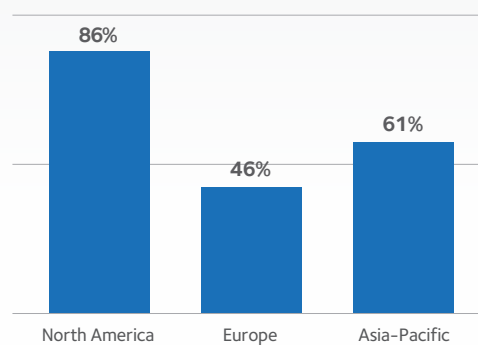
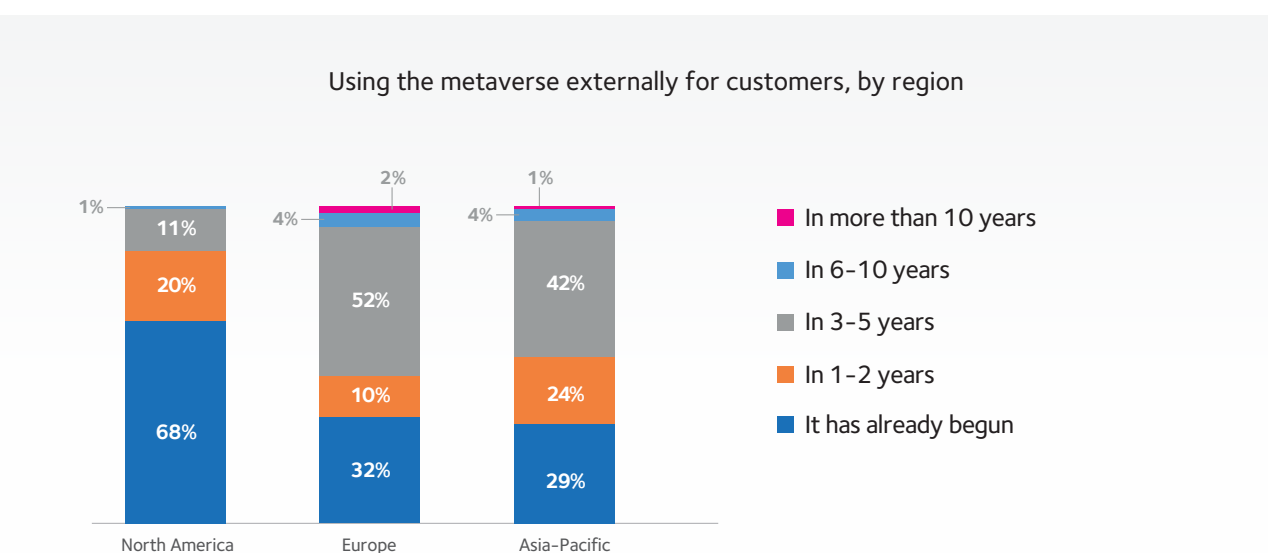
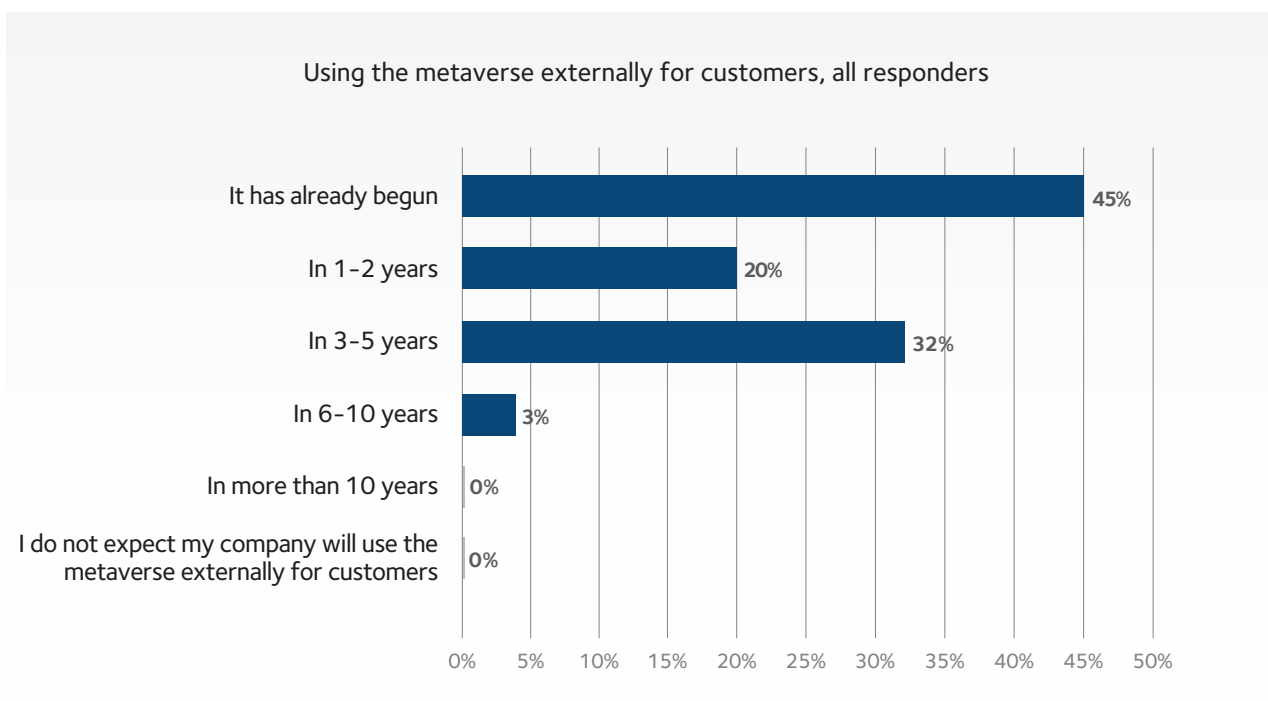


Figure 10. Do you think your products and service offerings will change because of the metaverse over the next decade?



Note: No respondents chose "I do not expect my company will use the metaverse externally for customers"

Figure 11. When, if at all, do you expect your company will be using the metaverse externally for customers?

While all leaders in the survey confirmed that the metaverse would be integral to, or at least integrated into their external and internal organisational operations by 2033, the format of this immersion reflected the broad range, and perhaps uncertainty, of what that might actually constitute. Two-thirds signalled augmented, virtual, or extended reality as the most exciting component, closely followed by the role of artificial intelligence: the latter receiving the most enthusiasm in North America and Europe (Figure 12).

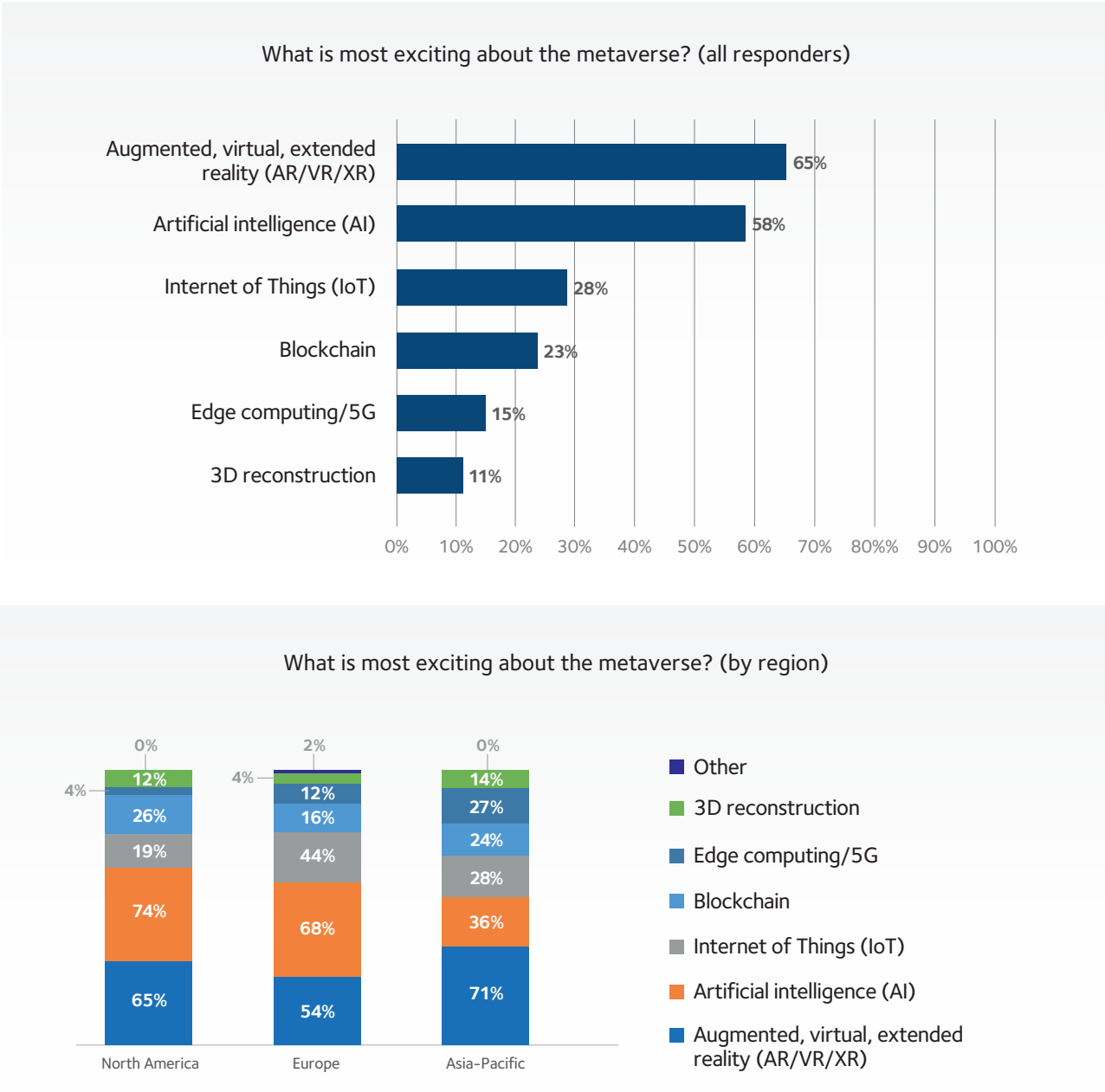


Figure 12. What metaverse technologies are you most excited about?

North American leaders led the way by a significant majority in recognising the transformative impact for employees and human resource operations within their organisations, with nine out of ten predicting important or significant changes in employment relations and practices (Figures 13 and 14). Such uptake was deemed less important by Asia-Pacific leaders, and only by a minority in European organisations. Two-thirds of Asia-Pacific leaders emphasised the critical impact of immersive training and learning, while a similar proportion in North America focused on new forms of collaboration as the key to their metaversal focus for employees (Figure 15, next page).

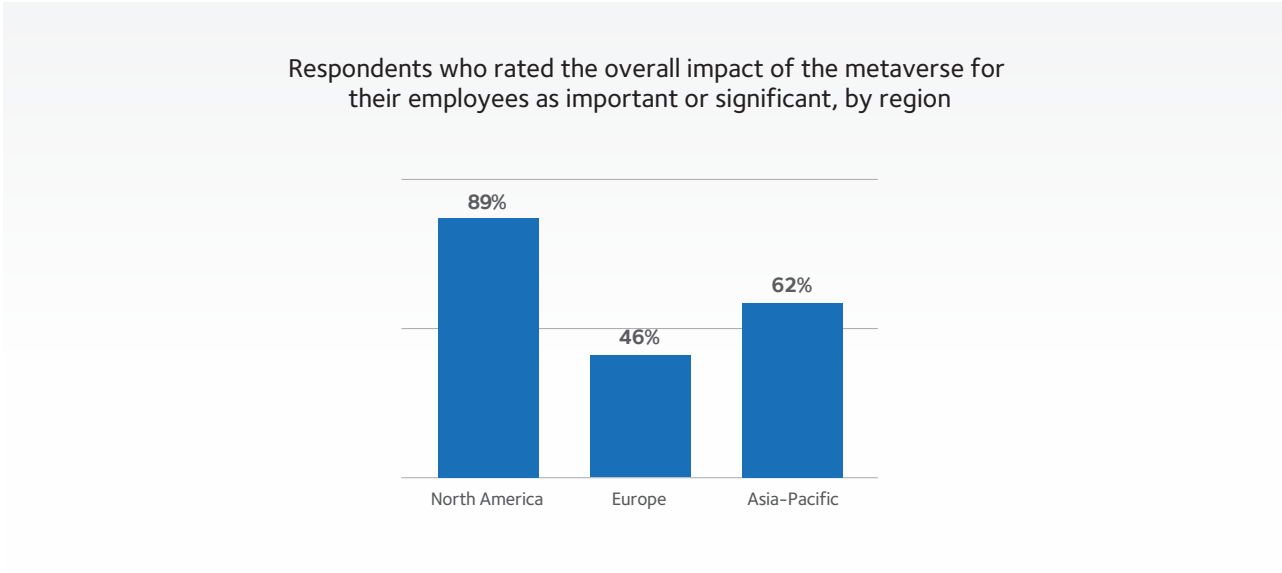


Figure 13. How would you classify the metaverse in terms of its overall importance to your employees over the next decade?

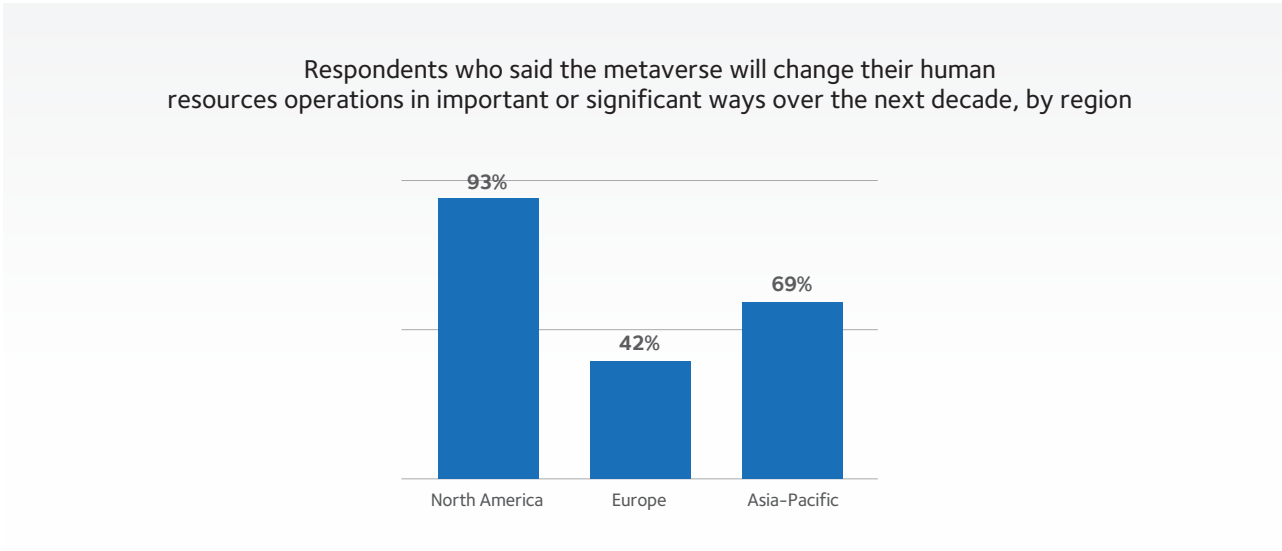


Figure 14. How much, if at all, do you think your human resources operations, including recruitment, training, and development, will change because of the metaverse over the next decade?

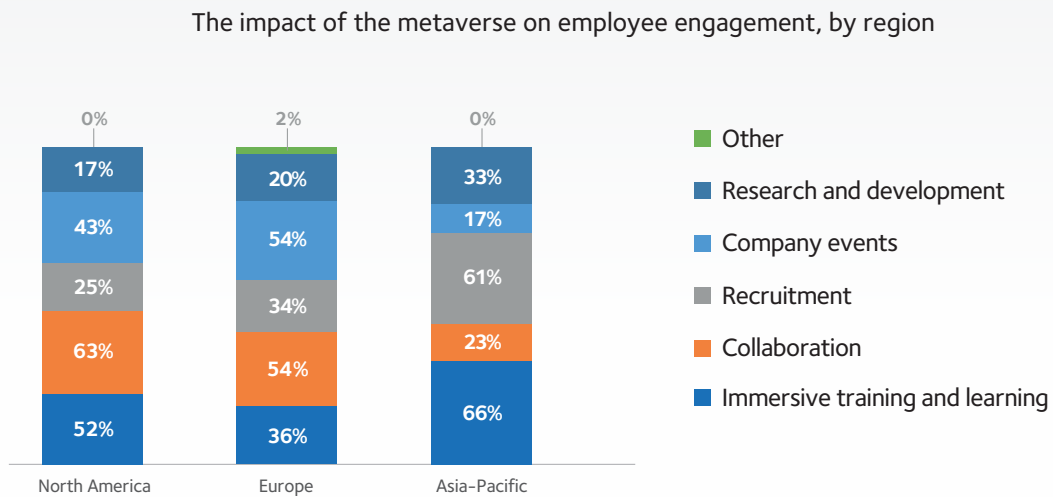
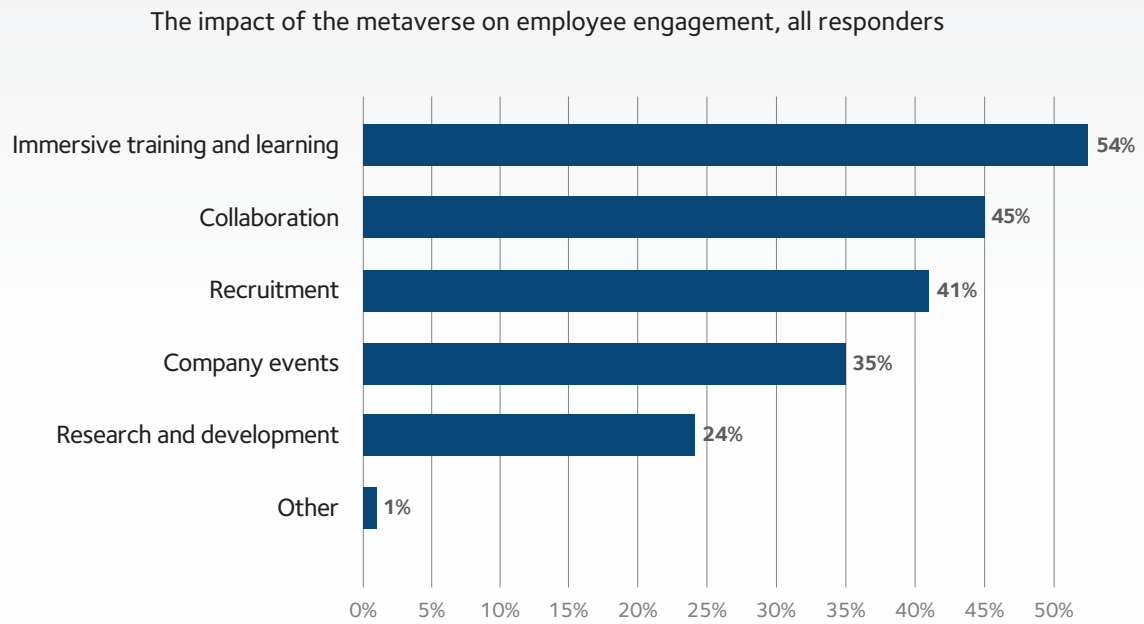


Figure 15. In which of the following ways is your company most likely to use the metaverse for internal employee engagement?

The survey overall reflected the positive opportunities for organisations to chart a course into the emerging metaverse era, but sanguine reflections pointed to key roadblocks en route. Cost and risks around issues of privacy and security were rated highly, followed by technological shortcomings in operativity and functional infrastructure (Figure 16). Regional differences were once again significant. Two-thirds of European leaders highlighted cost as a significant stumbling block, compared to only a third in Asia-Pacific. Regional differences once more highlight the tricky terrain offered by the metaverse, with some companies poised to seize the opportunity, but grounded in contemporary economic and societal realities of the present and the near future.

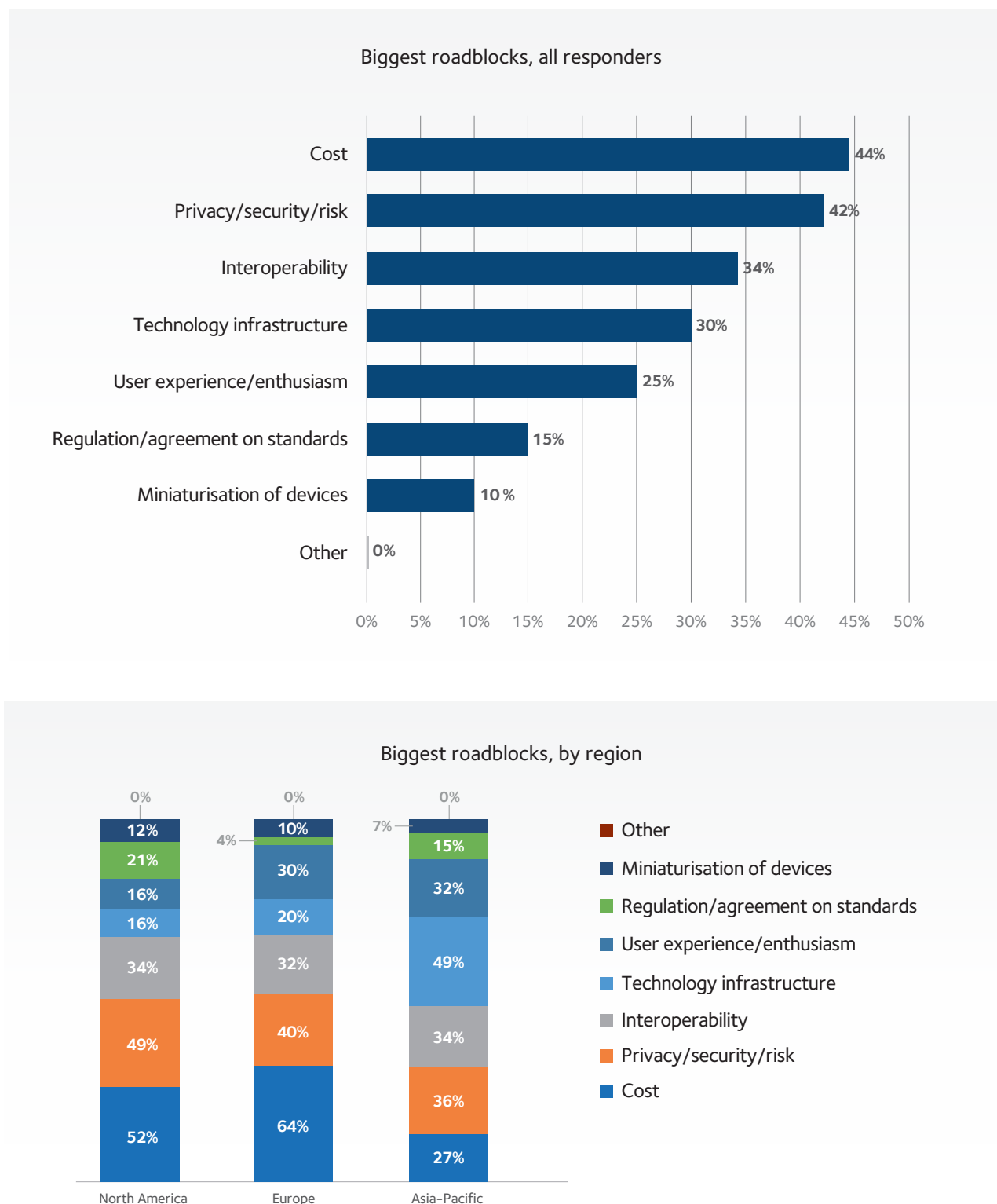


Figure 16. What do you view as the biggest roadblocks to the metaverse's maturation, adoption, and use?

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Looking ahead

One of the main takeaways of the survey is a recognition that the metaverse could be an essential driver and component of profitability and effective operations by 2033. Strategies to manage this are falling into place, at different rates, across the global economy. The survey consistently points to a wider, more enthusiastic approach to what the metaverse might offer amongst North American leaders, compared with those in Europe and Asia-Pacific. The coming decade may determine whether caution is a virtue, or an opportunity lost.

While North American leaders have already immersed themselves more fully, counterparts in Europe, and especially in Asia-Pacific, indicate that although uncertainties partly obscure the benefits of engaging with the metaverse today, the risks of lagging behind are far greater. And the current regional gap is significant. Over half of the leaders surveyed in Europe and Asia-Pacific have no immediate or short-term plans to develop any apps, products, or services for the metaverse. Over three-quarters of the executive leadership in North America already have plans.

Roadblocks exist even in the metaverse. Costs and risks around issues of privacy and security will be matched by technological shortcomings in operativity and functional infrastructure for those who do not plan ahead. North American leadership is in the forefront in recognising the transformative impact of the metaverse for employment relations and practices with new forms of collaboration at the heart of a new metaversal focus for employees. The next decade always promises more change than the last, and those leading organisations today are aware that the metaverse will be pivotal.



V 1.6



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