



Hudson Valley Community College

Workforce Development Survey Research

February 2026



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Introduction & Executive Summary

Hudson Valley Community College engaged CCA, in partnership with ADV Market Research, to better understand how employers across the Capital Region perceive workforce challenges, skill gaps, and training providers, including HVCC itself. In a regional economy defined by technological change, evolving labor demands, and persistent hiring pressures, understanding employer needs is essential to ensuring that workforce programming remains relevant, responsive, and forward-looking.

Employers are a critical constituency for community colleges. Their experiences and perceptions influence hiring pipelines, internship opportunities, customized training partnerships, and broader assessments of institutional value. In an increasingly outcomes-driven environment, the strength of employer relationships is closely tied to how effectively an institution aligns programming with labor market realities.

This study was designed to provide HVCC with a clearer view of:

- The workforce challenges employers are currently facing.
- The skills that are most important—and most difficult to find—in today's labor market.
- Employers' preferences regarding training formats and provider characteristics.
- Perceptions of HVCC's performance as a workforce development partner.
- Opportunities to strengthen engagement and impact moving forward.

The purpose of this report is not simply to document employer opinions, but to interpret what those opinions suggest about the current workforce landscape and HVCC's role within it. The findings that follow are intended to support strategic discussion and informed decision-making, helping HVCC build on existing strengths while identifying areas where targeted action could meaningfully expand its impact.

Introduction & Executive Summary

This research reveals a Capital Region workforce environment characterized by sustained pressure and moderate preparedness. Employers report ongoing difficulty filling key roles, anticipate increased need for upskilling over the next several years, and describe the regional talent pool as adequate but not exceptional.

Across skill categories, employers consistently emphasize a dual expectation: employees must possess job-specific technical competence and demonstrate strong professional readiness. Communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and accountability are often as important as technical precision, and just as difficult to find.

In evaluating training providers, employers most frequently rely on internal solutions. Internal training is perceived as convenient and aligned with organizational needs. Among external providers, however, HVCC compares favorably, particularly in expertise and relevance of training offerings. Where opportunities for improvement exist, they relate to flexibility, response speed, and awareness.

Encouragingly, there is little evidence of negative perception toward HVCC. Employers who have engaged with the College report positive experiences, and the majority express openness to deeper partnership. The primary barriers to engagement appear to be reliance on internal training and limited awareness of HVCC's workforce offerings rather than dissatisfaction.

Taken together, the findings suggest that HVCC's opportunity is activation rather than reinvention. By strengthening visibility, simplifying engagement pathways, and continuing to align programming with high-priority skill areas—particularly where importance and scarcity intersect—HVCC can deepen its role as a trusted workforce partner.

The data point toward focused, intentional action: enhancing communication, reinforcing dual-competency preparation, and leveraging employer goodwill to expand engagement. In doing so, HVCC is well-positioned to contribute meaningfully to regional workforce strength and economic vitality.

Discovery & Interview Insights

Before fielding the survey, we conducted a series of discovery interviews with HVCC stakeholders as well as eight in-depth conversations with regional employers. These discussions were designed to surface early hypotheses, clarify employer expectations, and inform the structure and content of the survey instrument.

While qualitative in nature and not intended to be statistically representative, these conversations provided important context for understanding how HVCC is perceived and how employers are thinking about workforce challenges today. Many of the patterns that emerged in interviews were later reinforced in the broader survey results.

Several key insights surfaced consistently across conversations.

Theme #1: Workforce Pressure is Persistent & Operational. Employers described ongoing difficulty finding and retaining qualified employees. While not framed as crisis-level disruption, workforce challenges were characterized as steady and structural rather than temporary.

- *“It’s not that we can’t hire anyone — it’s that it takes longer, and we’re not always getting exactly what we need.”*
- *“The roles are evolving. Even when we fill them, the skill expectations are higher than they were a few years ago.”*

These early discussions suggested that hiring pressure was not episodic but embedded in day-to-day operations. The survey later confirmed this broader pattern across the region.

Discovery & Interview Insights

Theme #2: Technical Skill Alone is Not Enough. A consistent theme across employer interviews was that while technical competence is essential, it is rarely sufficient on its own. Employers repeatedly emphasized communication, reliability, adaptability, and work ethic as differentiators between adequate and exceptional employees.

- *“We can train the technical side. What’s harder to train is showing up on time, communicating clearly, and thinking through problems.”*
- *“It’s the follow-through. We need people who can solve problems without constant supervision.”*

These insights informed the survey’s emphasis on both technical skill areas and foundational professional competencies. The quantitative results would later demonstrate how widespread this dual expectation is across employers.

Theme #3: Customization & Responsiveness Shape Training Decisions. Employers who discussed workforce training needs frequently framed their preferences in terms of practicality. Flexibility, on-site delivery, and training tailored to specific organizational needs were viewed as especially valuable.

- *“The best training is the training that fits our schedule and our environment.”*
- *“We don’t want a generic class. We want something that speaks to our equipment and our processes.”*

These conversations suggested that operational ease and customization may weigh as heavily as instructional quality in employer decision-making. The survey subsequently tested the relative importance of provider characteristics such as expertise, flexibility, and speed of response.

Discovery & Interview Insights

Theme #4: Awareness & Clarity Influence

Engagement. Several employers expressed general familiarity with HVCC but were less certain about the scope of its workforce development offerings or how to initiate engagement.

- *“We know HVCC is there, but sometimes it’s not clear who to call.”*
- *“If we knew more about what was available, we’d probably use it more.”*

These perspectives shaped survey questions around awareness, communication clarity, and partnership interest. They also highlighted the potential difference between positive perception and active engagement.

From Discovery to Quantitative Validation

The themes surfaced in these early conversations—persistent workforce pressure, the importance of dual competency, the value of customization, and the role of communication clarity—directly informed the design of the survey that follows.

The quantitative findings provide an opportunity to assess how broadly these insights are shared across employers in the Capital Region, where perceptions are consistent, and where nuance emerges. Together, the qualitative and quantitative components of this research provide a more complete understanding of employer needs and HVCC’s role within the regional workforce ecosystem.

Methods & Respondent Profile

Methods & Report Format

In partnership with Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC), CCA and ADV Market Research conducted online surveys of employers and workforce partners in the greater Capital Region.

The survey was developed based on project goals, prior experience with related research, and input from the HVCC team. ADV programmed and tested the surveys using a leading, mobile-friendly survey platform.

Participants were sourced in two ways. Most (210/228) were sources from an independent market research panel, which provided access to the target population through its database of survey participants by:

- Recruiting from online communities such as social media platforms, online forums, or online marketplaces,
- Utilizing email lists of individuals who have opted-in to receive emails about market research studies,
- Partnering with third-party providers who have access to large pools of potential survey participants, and
- Using referrals from current panel members to refer friends, family members, or colleagues to join the panel and participate in surveys.

Additionally, some respondents (18/228) were recruited through HVCC's network and database of employer partners from throughout the region. This included members of the Workforce Development Advisory Council, programmatic advisory boards, startups affiliated with HVCC, and others.

Responses were collected from 228 employers and hiring managers from the Capital Region from January 29 to February 12, 2026.

Following data collection, ADV analyzed all responses and tabulated results. Responses to open-ended questions were coded via manifest content analysis; results in this report include top themes of open-ended responses as well as verbatim comments.

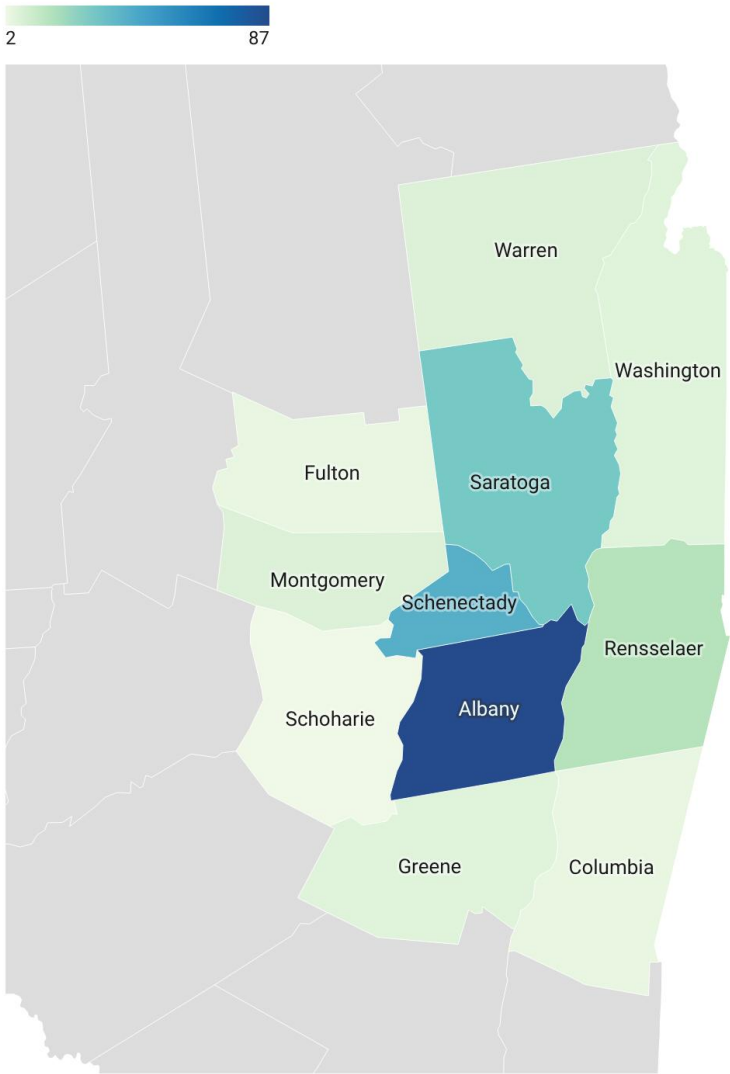
Whenever helpful in extending the understanding of the results, findings were segmented between sub-groups. Statistically significant differences are noted throughout, with statistical testing done at the 95% confidence level.

Respondent Profile

Industry	%
Information technology, software, or data services	24%
Construction, building trades, or skilled trades	11%
Retail, hospitality, or customer service	9%
Healthcare and health services	8%
Public Sector or government	8%
Education or training	8%
Manufacturing (including advanced manufacturing)	7%
Finance, banking, or insurance	6%
Professional services (e.g., accounting, consulting, etc.)	4%
Transportation, logistics, or warehousing	4%
Non-profit or community-based organization	4%
Energy, utilities, or environmental services	2%
Agriculture, food production, or natural resources	0%
Other	4%

Company Size (employees)	%
Fewer than 25	14%
25-99	15%
100-249	20%
250-999	29%
1,000+	22%

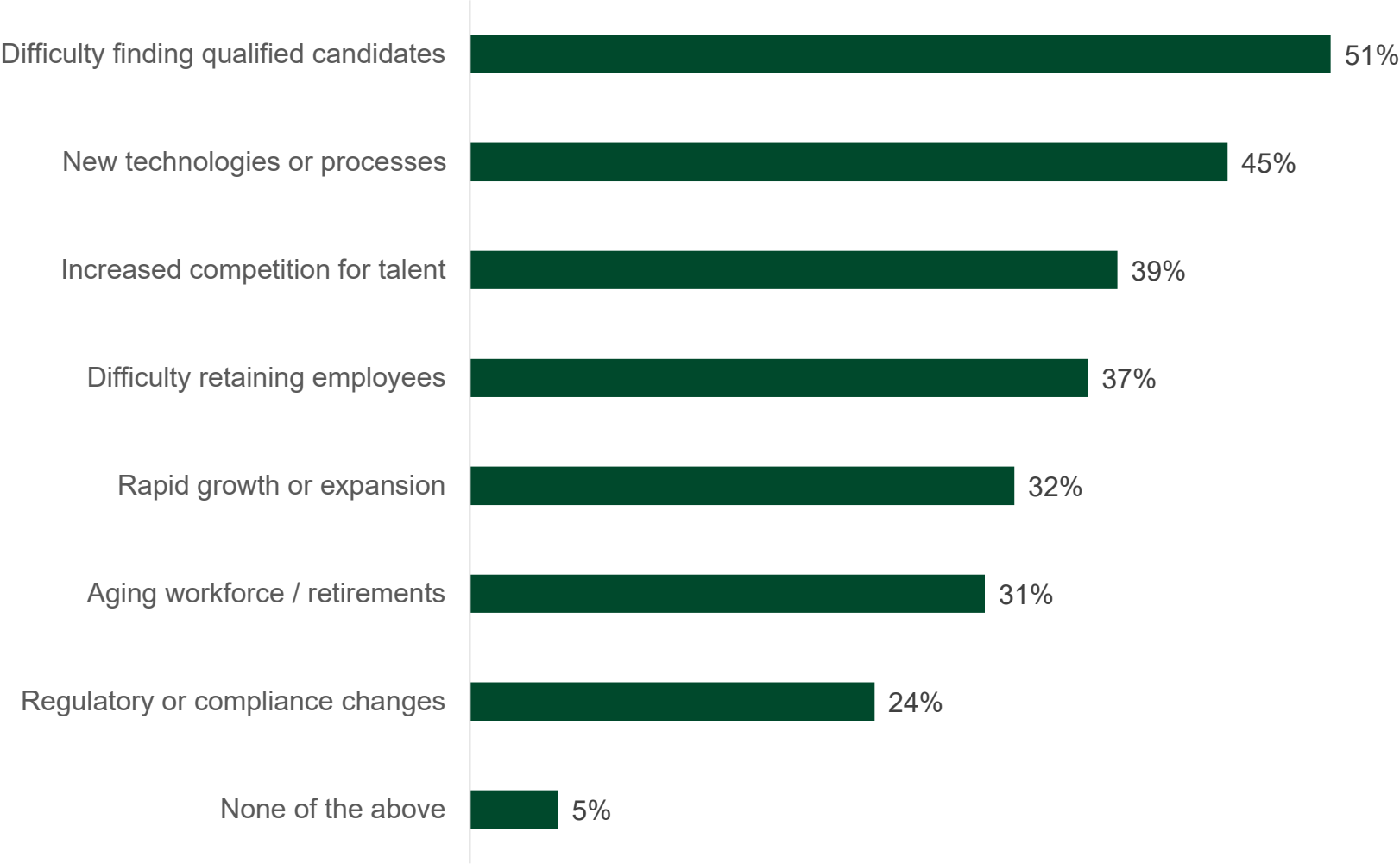
County	%
Albany	41%
Columbia	2%
Fulton	2%
Greene	3%
Montgomery	3%
Rensselaer	8%
Saratoga	14%
Schenectady	20%
Schoharie	1%
Warren	3%
Washington	3%



Workforce Pressures & Hiring Reality

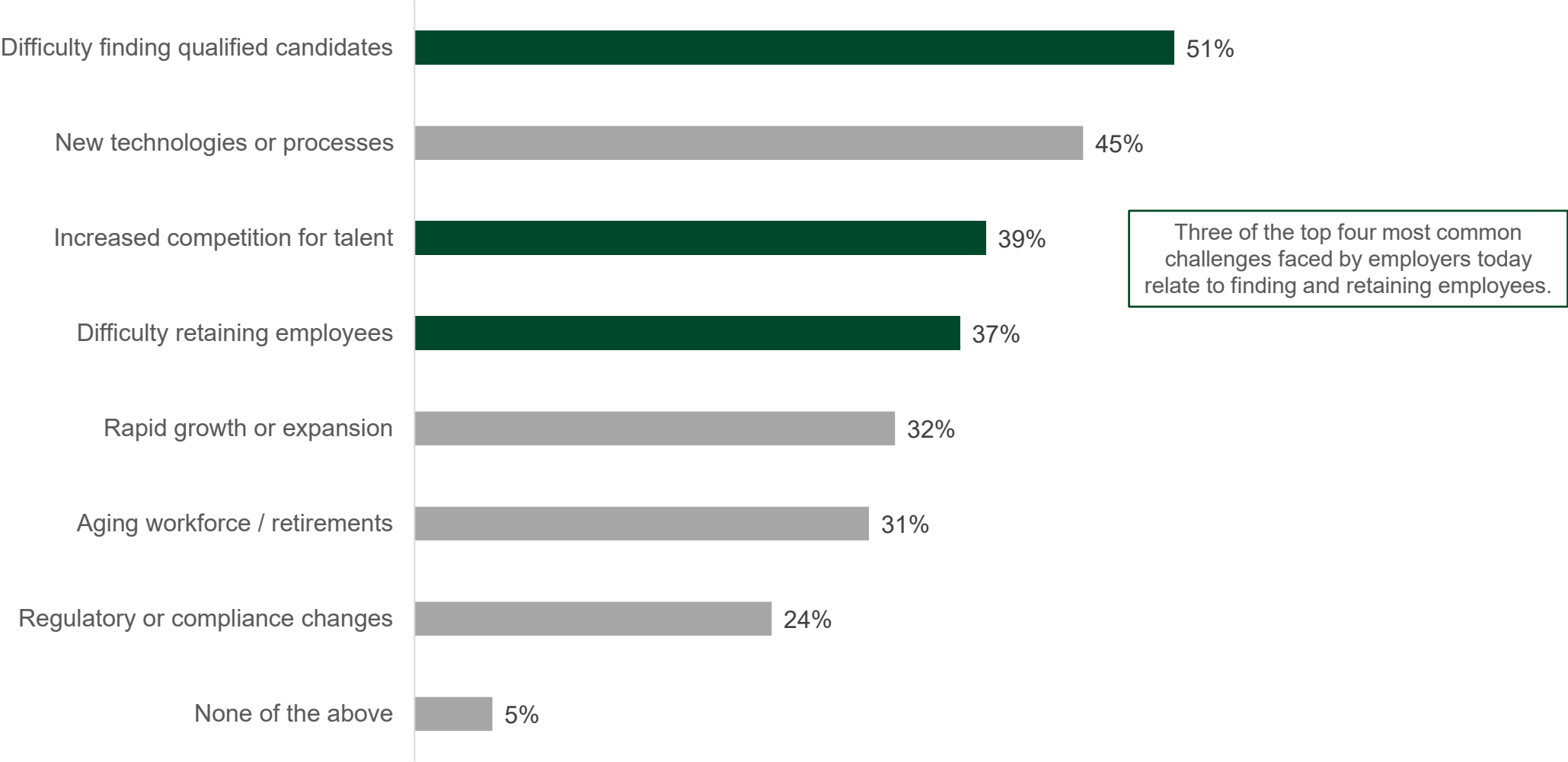
About half of employers in the region have difficulty finding qualified candidates and navigating new technologies or processes

Q. Which of the following workforce challenges is your organization currently experiencing?



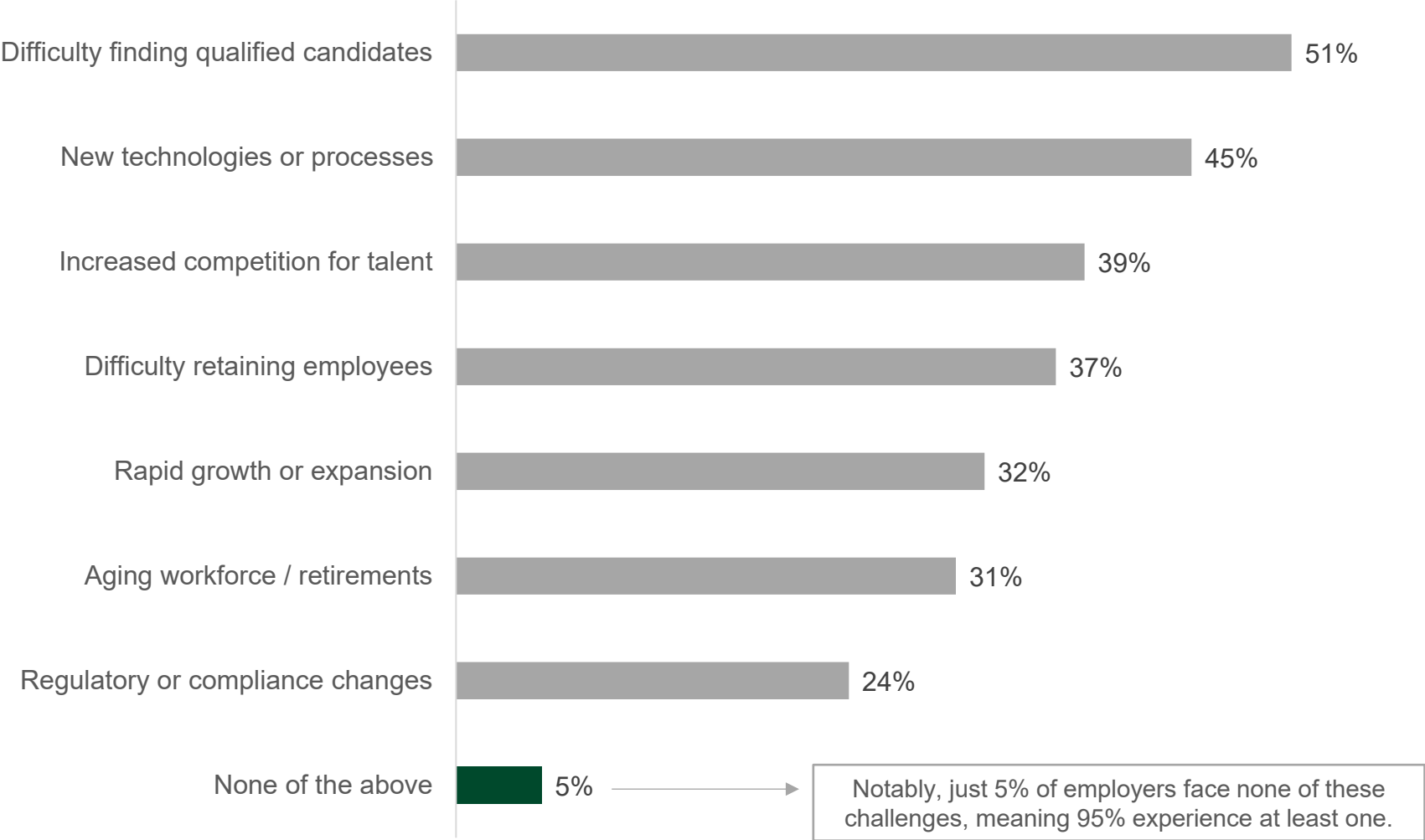
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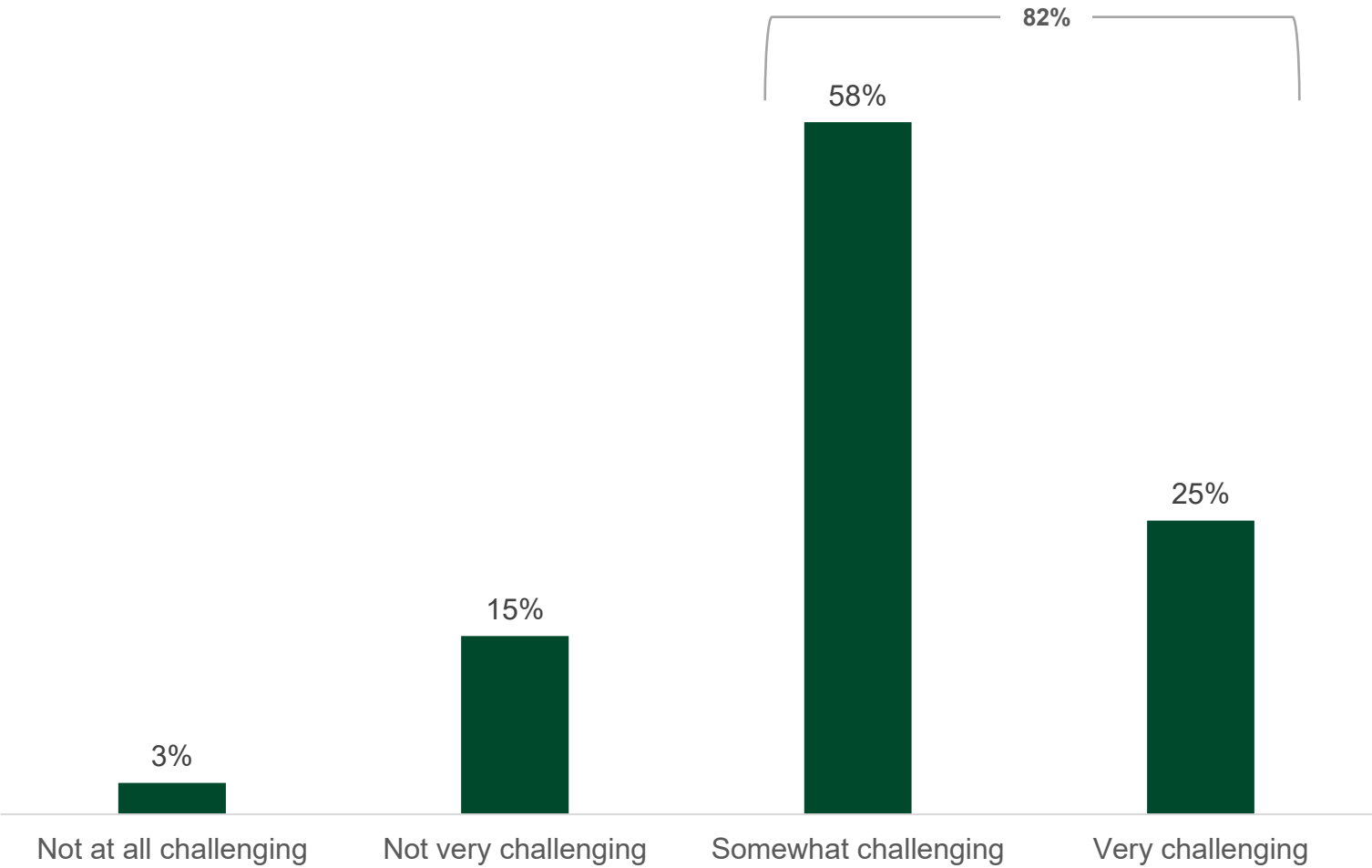
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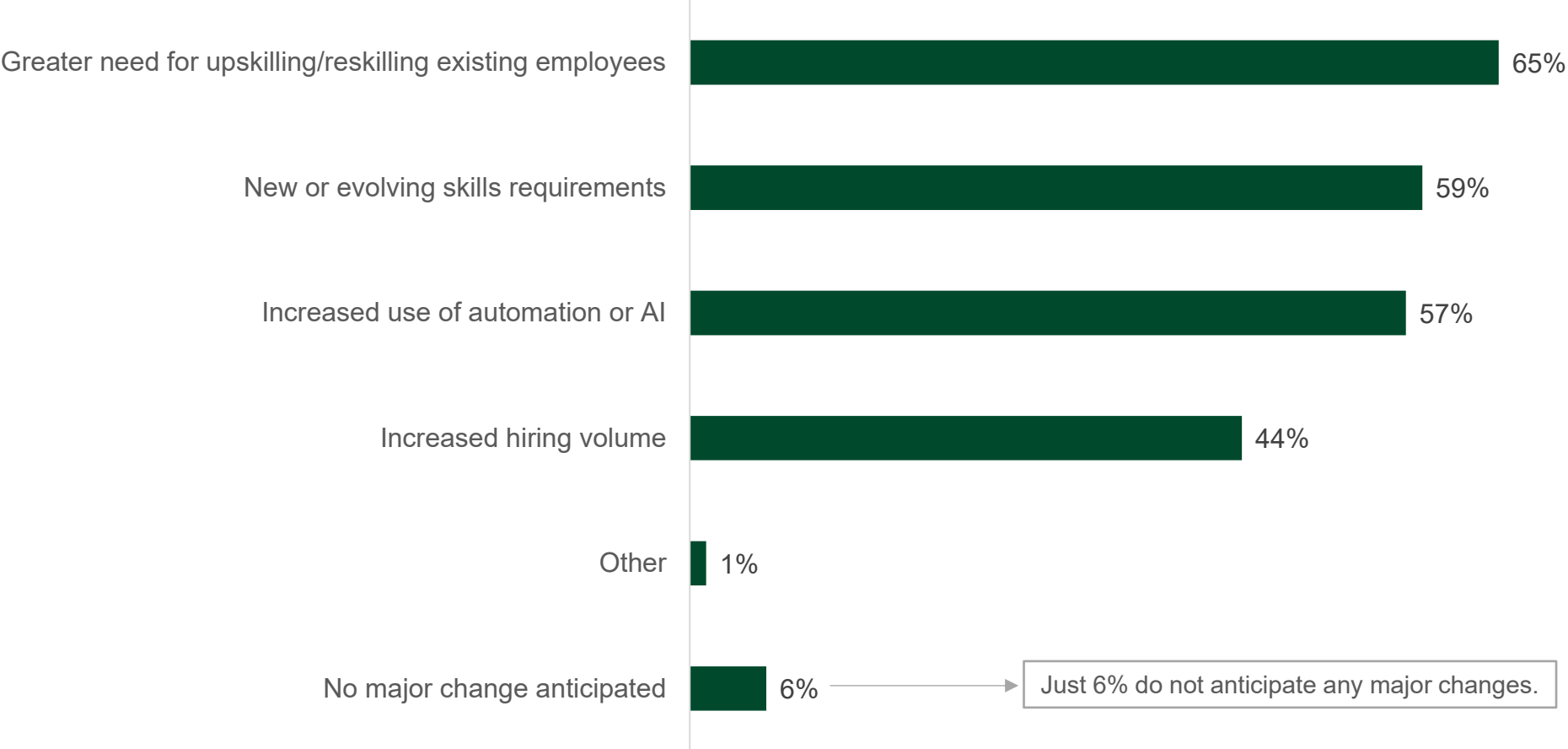
82% of employers say it is somewhat or very challenging to fill key roles today

Q. Overall, how challenging is it for your organization to fill key roles today?



2 out of 3 employers anticipate a greater need for upskilling/reskilling their employees

Q. Looking ahead 3-5 years, how do you expect your organization's workforce needs to change?



Analysis & Observations: Workforce Pressures & Hiring Reality

Collectively, these findings reinforce that workforce development is not a peripheral function in the Capital Region – it is central to employer competitiveness.

Nearly all employers report at least one workforce challenge, and most anticipate increased need for upskilling in the coming years.

This environment creates sustained demand for training partners who can respond proactively and flexibly.

For HVCC, this suggests that workforce development is not episodic work, it is a long-term strategic opportunity.

Desired Skills in Employees

Introduction: Desired Skills in Employees

One of the primary objectives of this study was to uncover the skills employers desire, and struggle to find, in employees today. This question is important to consider through the dual lenses of what is desired in new hires and what is desired, or what needs upskills, among people already employed within respondents' organizations today.

To explore these questions, we first approached this topic at a higher level to determine which *skills areas* are most important and difficult to find in the labor market today. These skills areas represent categories of competencies rather than individual skills or traits themselves.

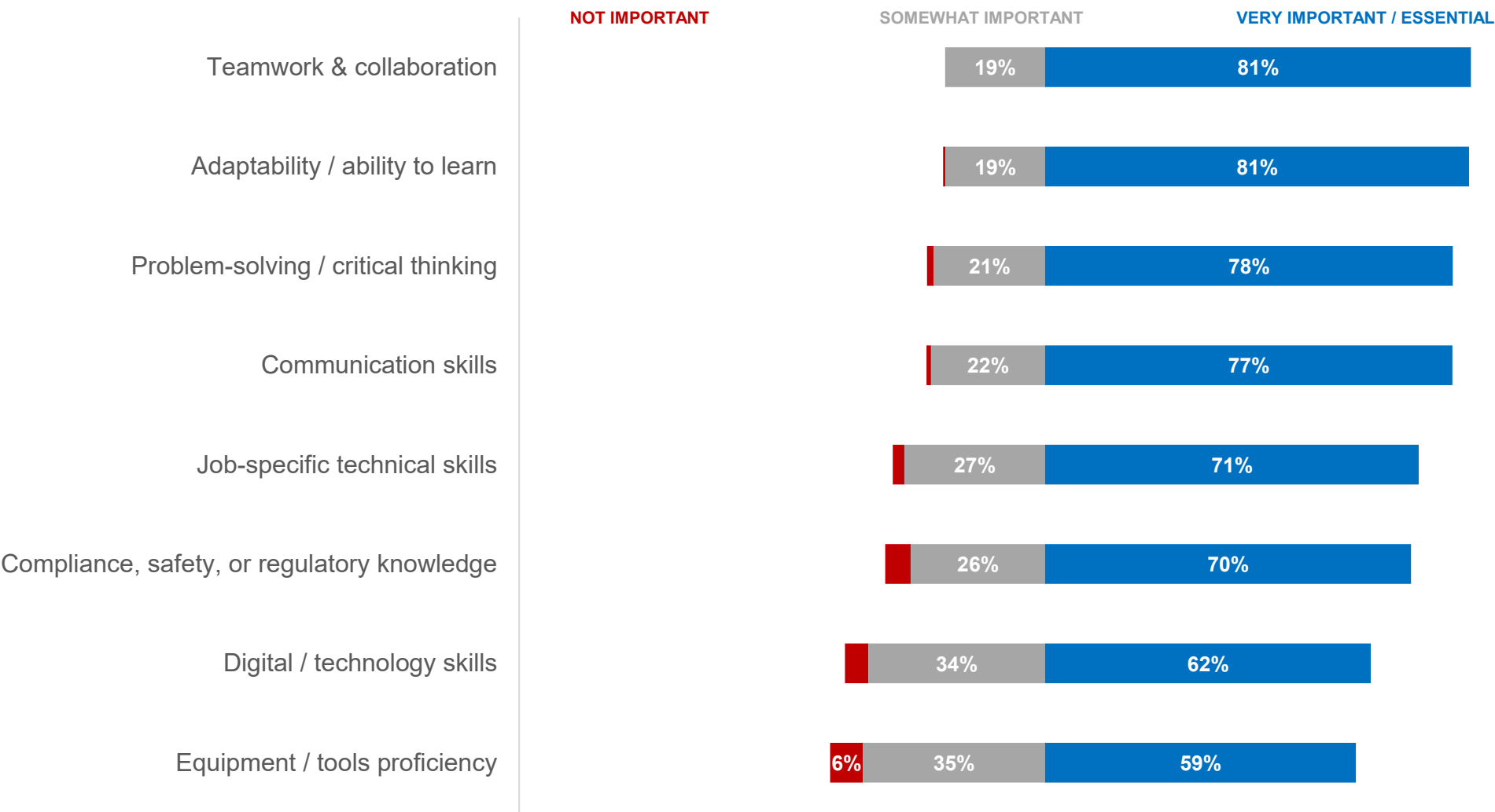
In subsequent questions we ask employers to drill down on the specific skills within each areas that are most important for their organizations.

These findings provide direct insight into the qualities that are most important to employers today, as well as which traits are hardest to find among current or new employees.

Results can inform HVCC's workforce development initiatives regarding the types of skills training / upskilling offered to regional employers as well as the skills that are most critical to develop among HVCC's credit-earning students. As shown in the following pages, while many of the skills that employers need and struggle to find are technical and job-specific in nature, many are also more foundational or "soft skills" that relate to *how* employees go about the work as much as what they know or can perform. These are critical development opportunities for current or future employees, and they represent areas in which HVCC can serve the needs of employers throughout the Capital Region.

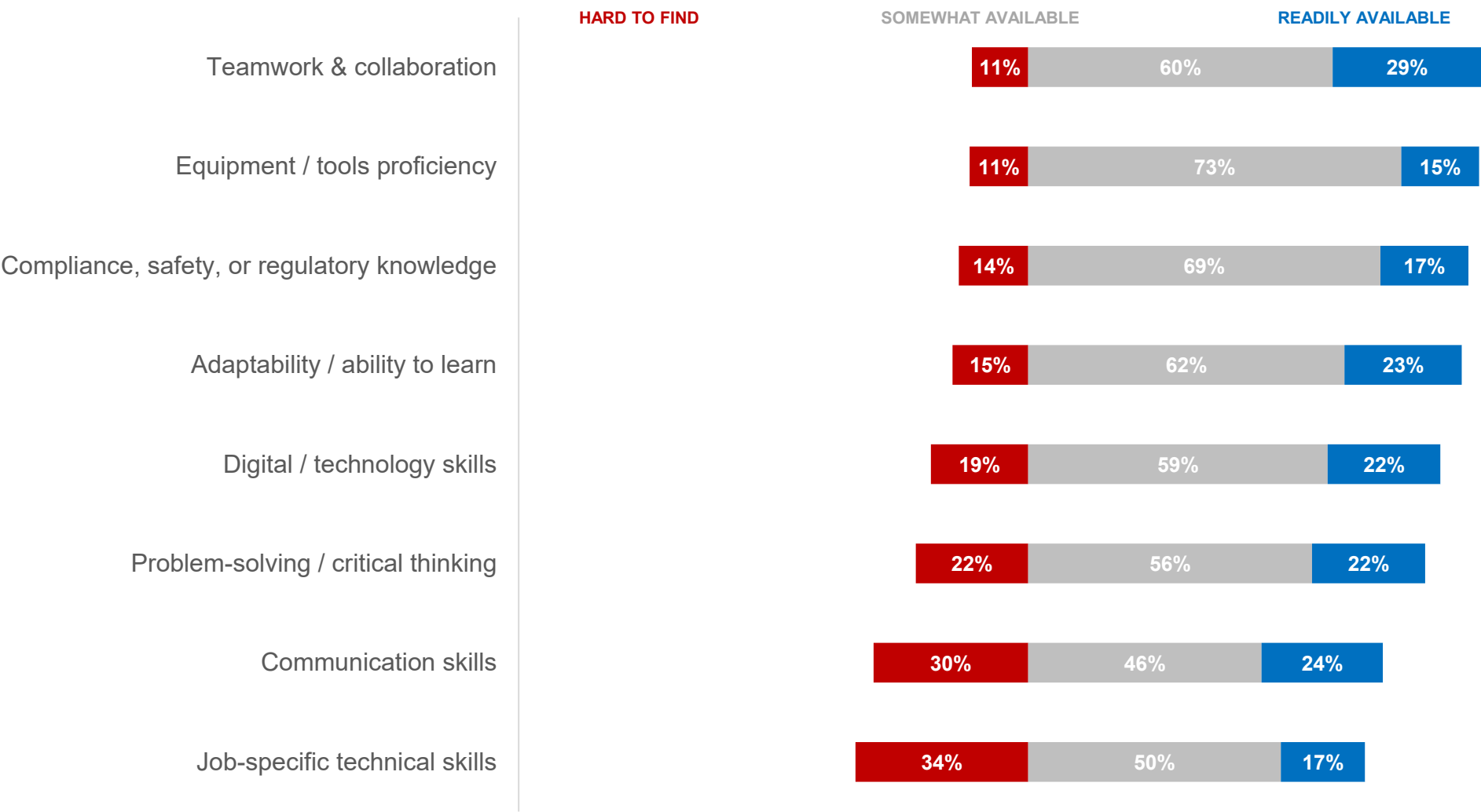
Most employers say each of these skill areas is very important, but most important are the “soft skills” of effective professionals

Q. How important are the following skill areas for your organization’s workforce today?



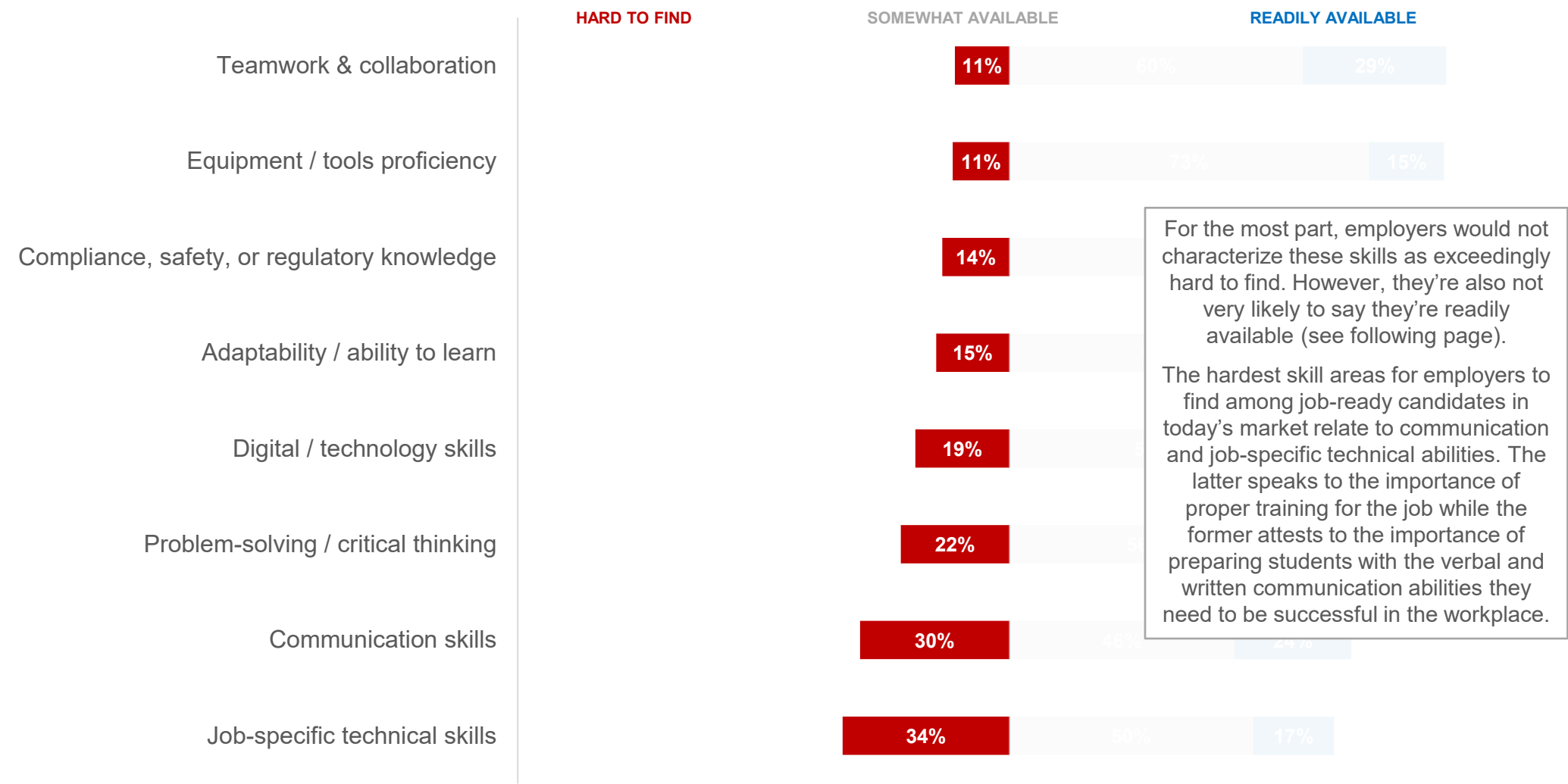
The hardest skills for employers to find are job-specific technical skills and communication skills

Q. How available are job-ready candidates with the following skills in the current labor market?



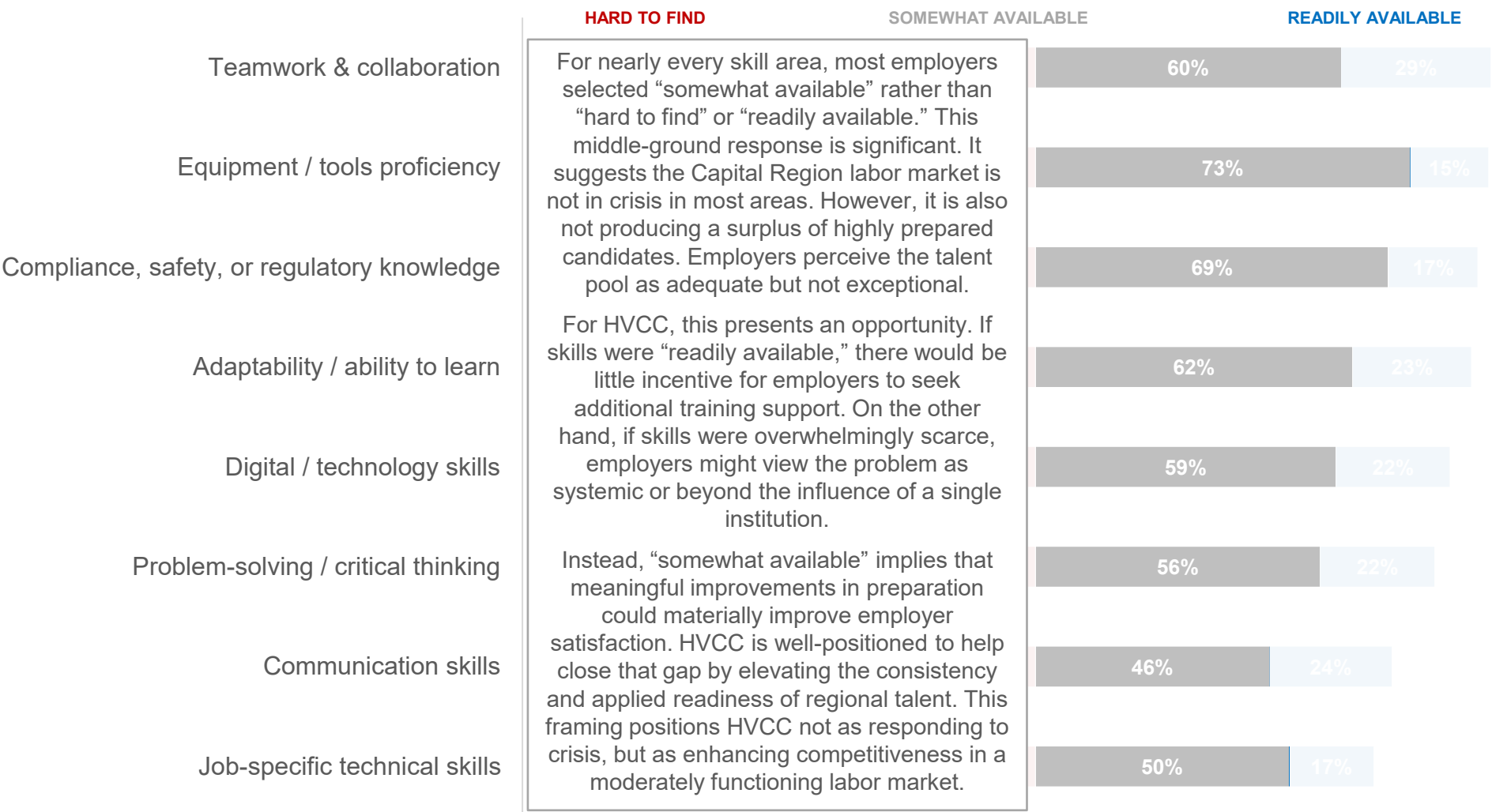
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Comparing Importance & Availability

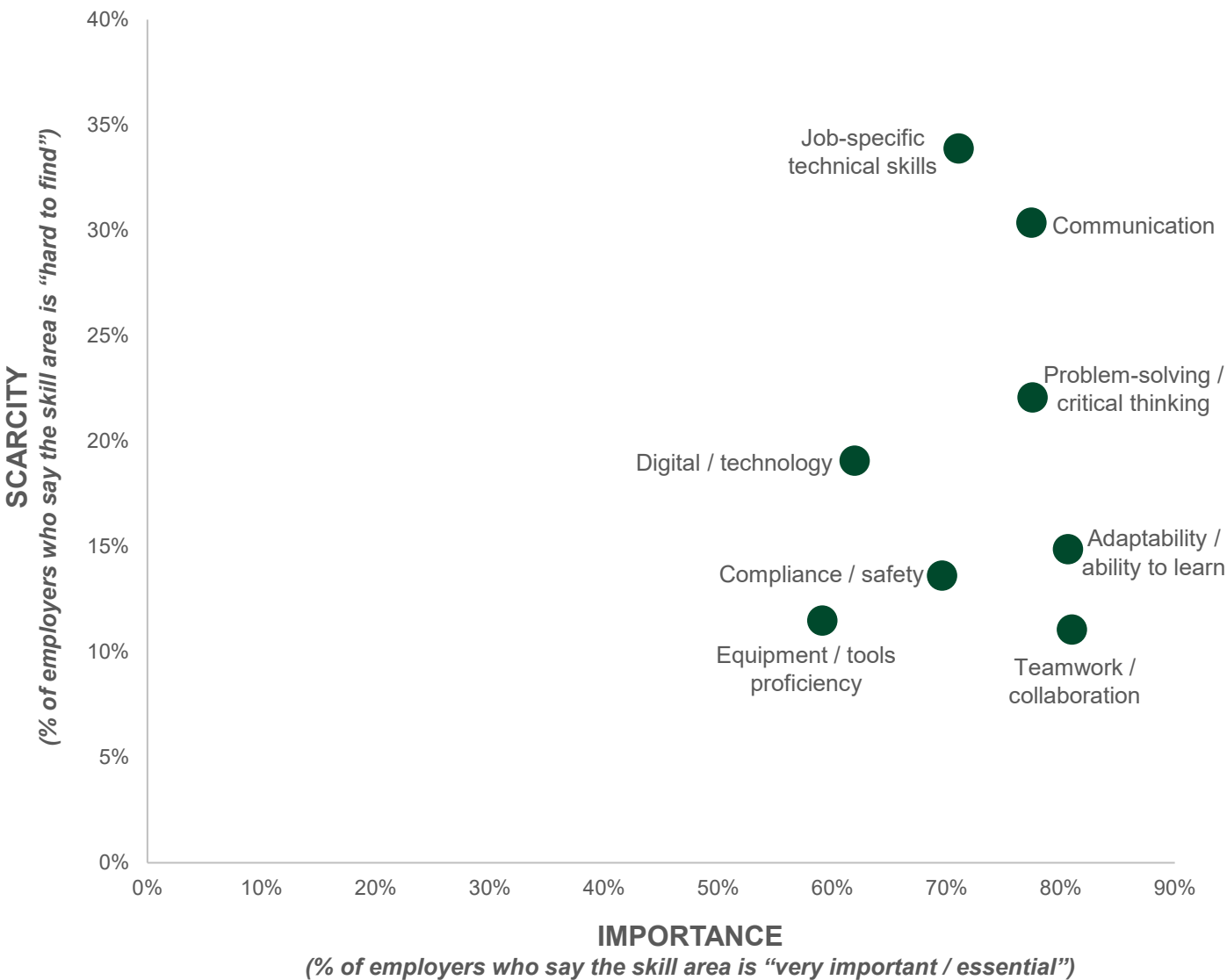
When comparing importance and scarcity, two skill areas rise to the top: **job-specific technical skills** and **communication skills**. These sit at the intersection of being both highly valued and relatively difficult to find. This intersection matters. It represents the areas where employer pain is most acute and where workforce providers can deliver the greatest return on investment.

For HVCC, this insight suggests three strategic implications. First, technical precision is a differentiator. Employers are not simply seeking baseline competency. They emphasize *advanced* technical ability, quality control, and attention to detail. HVCC has an opportunity to position its programs not just as job-aligned, but as producing technically confident graduates who can perform with minimal ramp-up time.

Second, communication skills are workforce currency. Communication challenges emerged repeatedly, both in structured questions and open-ended responses. This reinforces that verbal clarity, written effectiveness, and the ability to act on feedback are not secondary skills; they are core employability criteria. HVCC could differentiate by explicitly integrating communication benchmarks into technical programs and articulating those standards to employers.

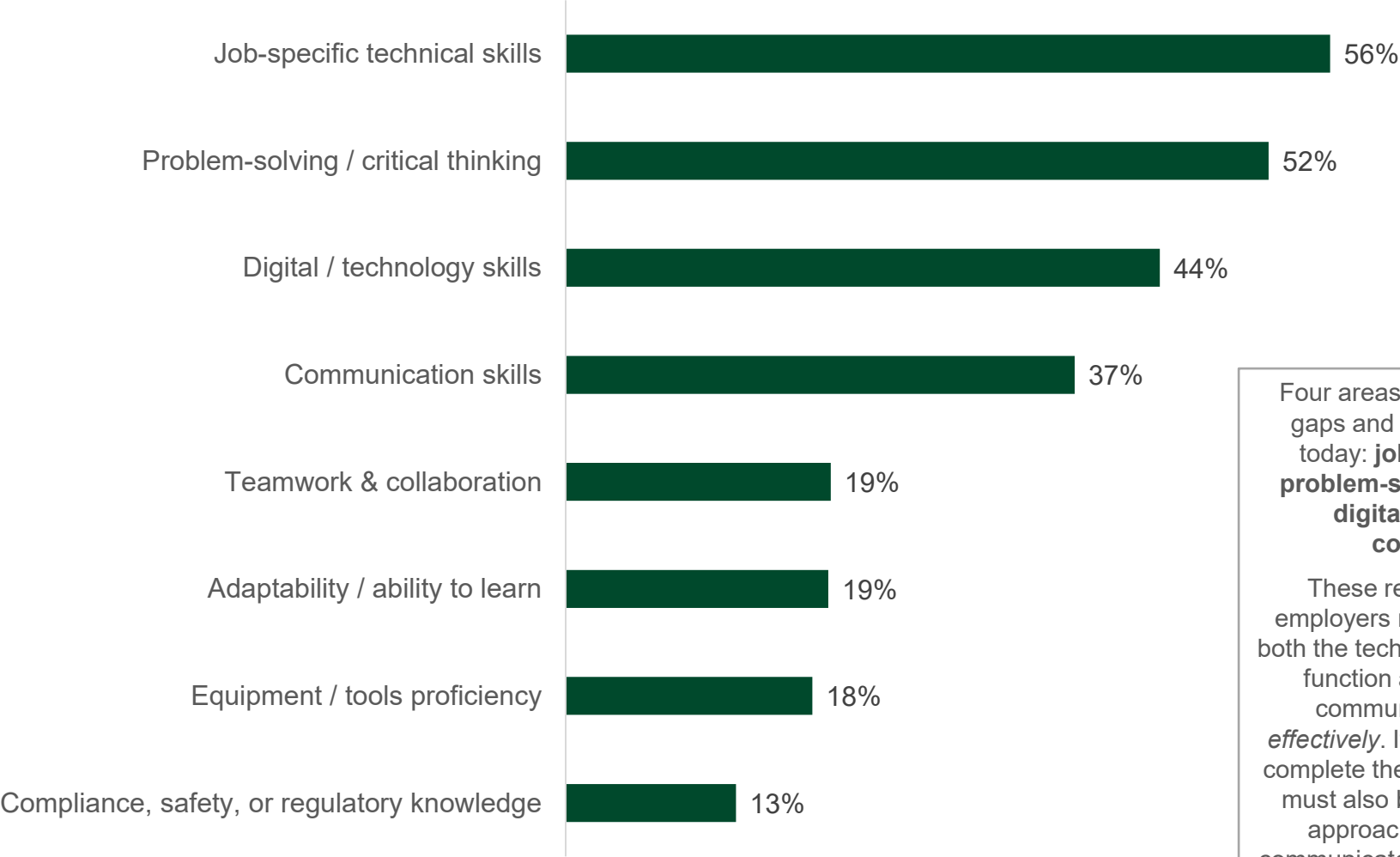
Third, dual-competency framing is an asset. Employers' responses reflect a consistent dual expectation: employees must know how to do the job and know how to function effectively within a team and organization. HVCC's workforce messaging can lean into this dual-competency model—technical expertise + professional readiness—as a defining value proposition.

These findings highlight where HVCC can have disproportionate impact. By strengthening programs in areas that are both highly valued and relatively scarce, HVCC positions itself as directly responsive to the region's most meaningful workforce pressures.



Most common gaps in organizations today are job-specific technical skills, problem-solving abilities, technological skills, and communication

Q. Which three skill areas represent the greatest gaps or pain points for your organization today?

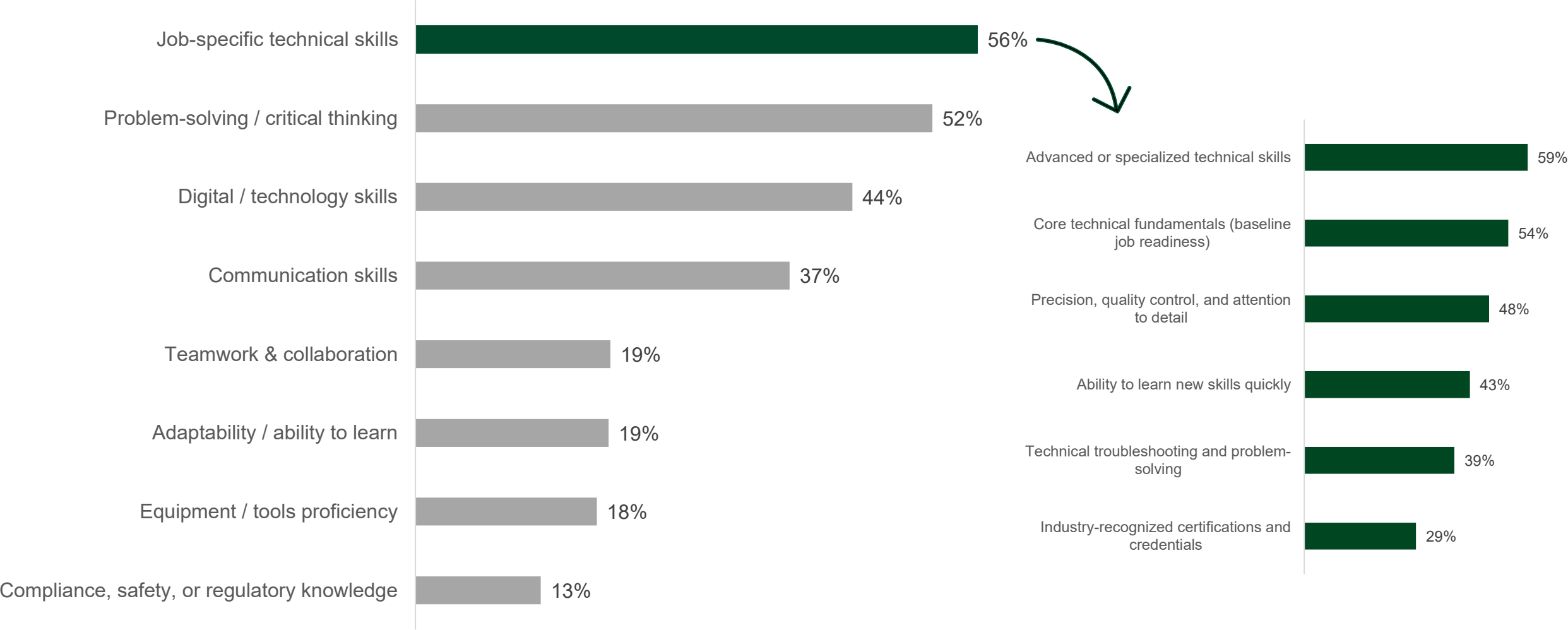


Four areas emerge as the greatest skills gaps and pain points for organizations today: **job-specific technical skills, problem-solving and critical thinking, digital/technology skills, and communication skills.**

These represent the duality of what employers need within their teams today: both the technical abilities to perform the job function and the critical thinking and communication skills to do the job *effectively*. It is not enough to know how to complete the basic job function; employees must also be mentally nimble enough to approach the work thoughtfully and communicate the needs of the job to others.

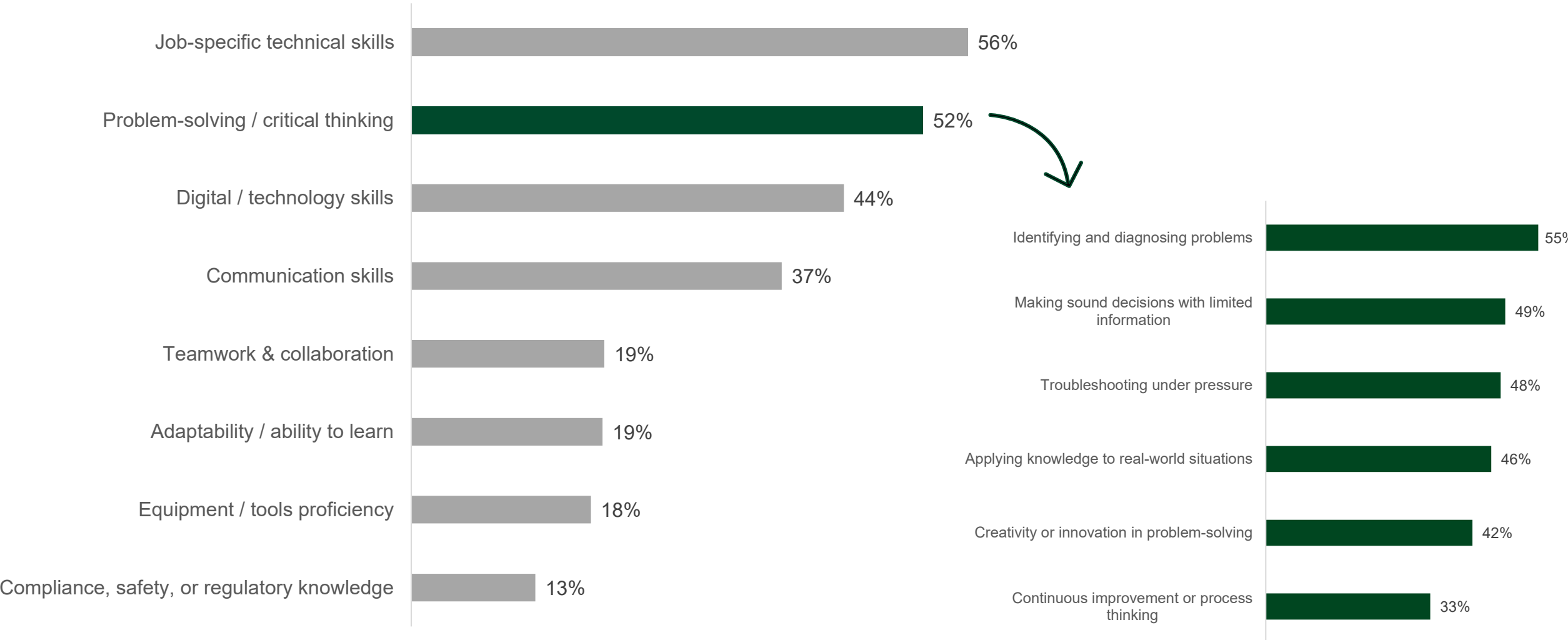
Job-Specific Technical Skills: employers need teams with core and advanced technical abilities as well as precision, quality control, and attention to detail

Q. Which of the following types of job-specific technical skills are most critical for your organization?



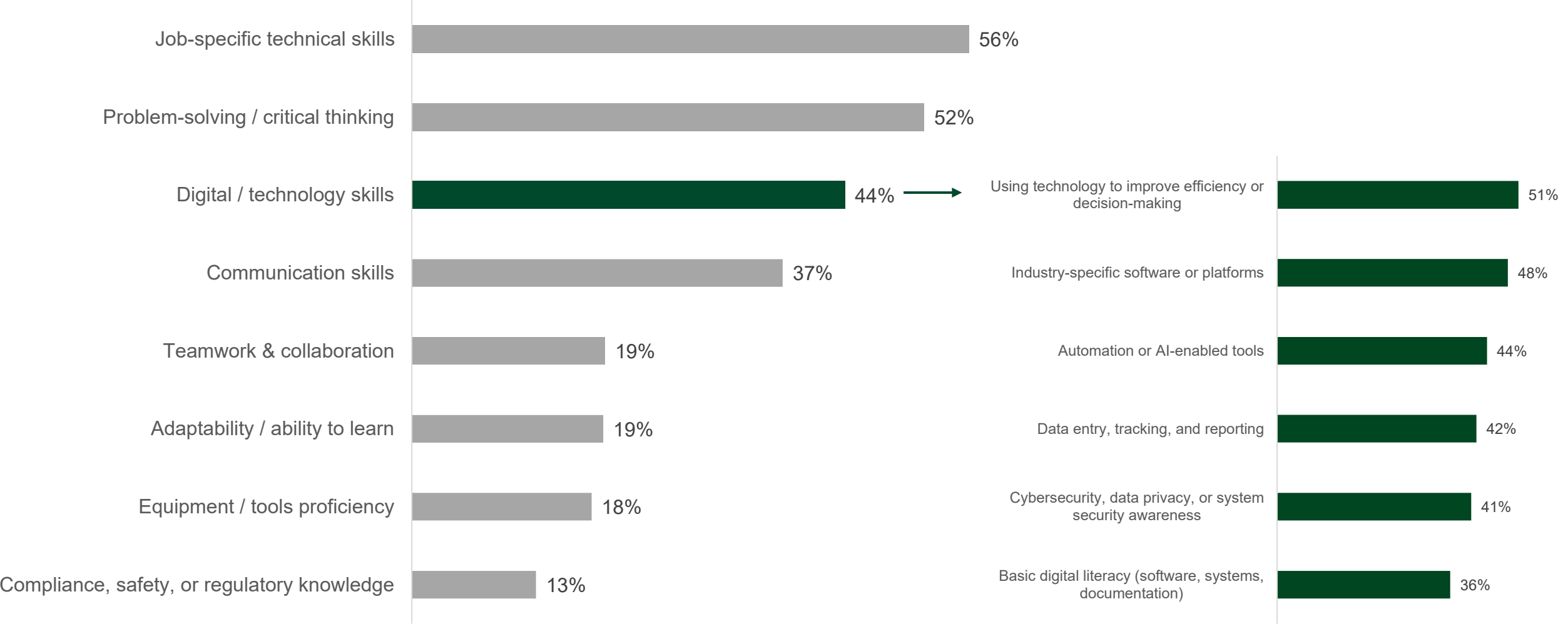
Problem-Solving / Critical Thinking: most essential is identifying & diagnosing problems and then finding solutions with limited information or under pressure

Q. Which of the following types of problem-solving / critical thinking skills are most critical for your organization?



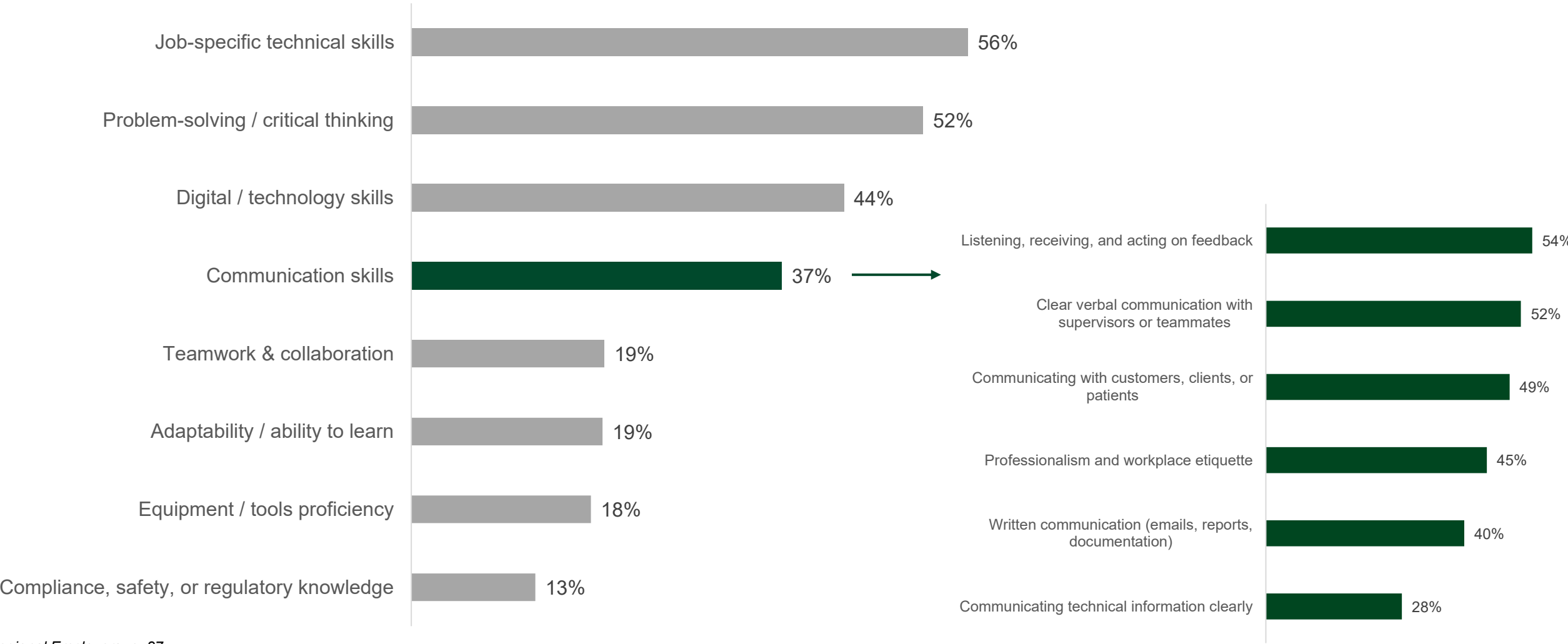
Digital / Technology Skills: employees must know industry-specific software and use technology to work more efficiently

Q. Which of the following types of digital / technology skills are most critical for your organization?



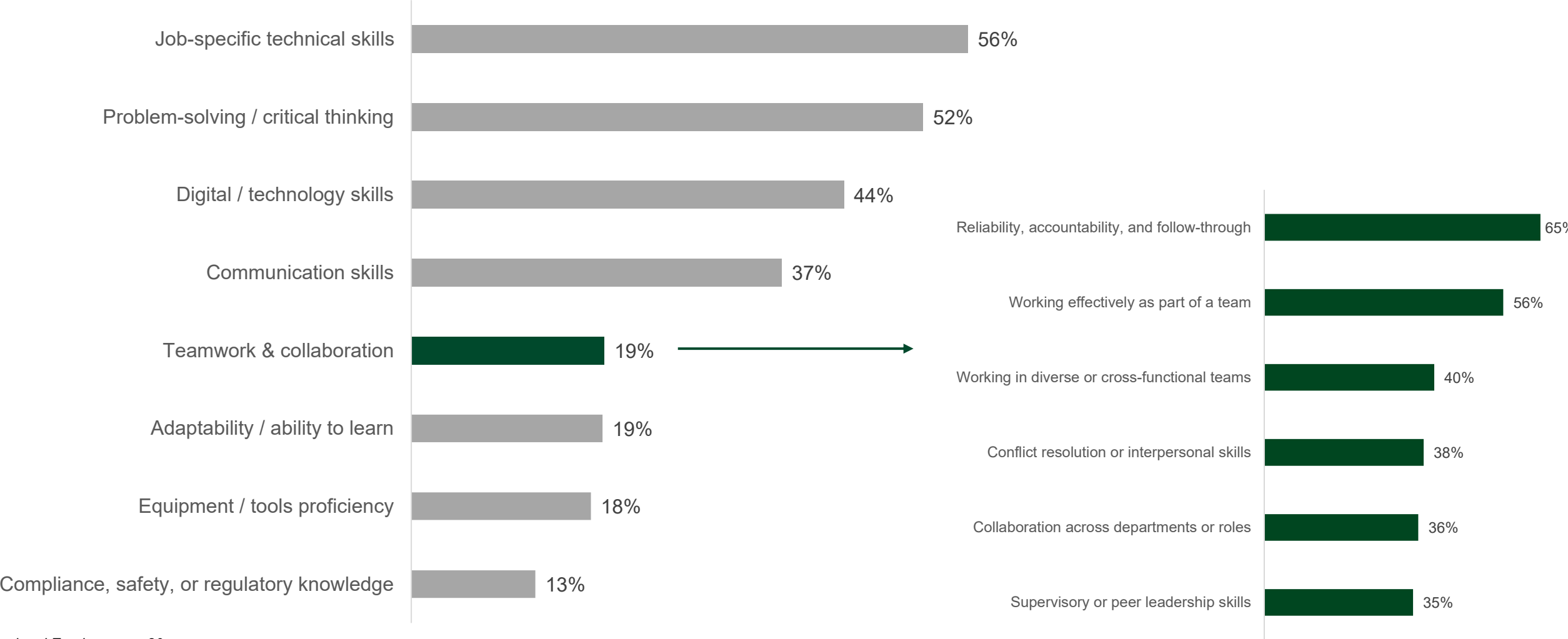
Communication Skills: employers need workers who can take and act on feedback as well as speak effectively with superiors, peers, and customers

Q. Which of the following types of communication skills are most critical for your organization?



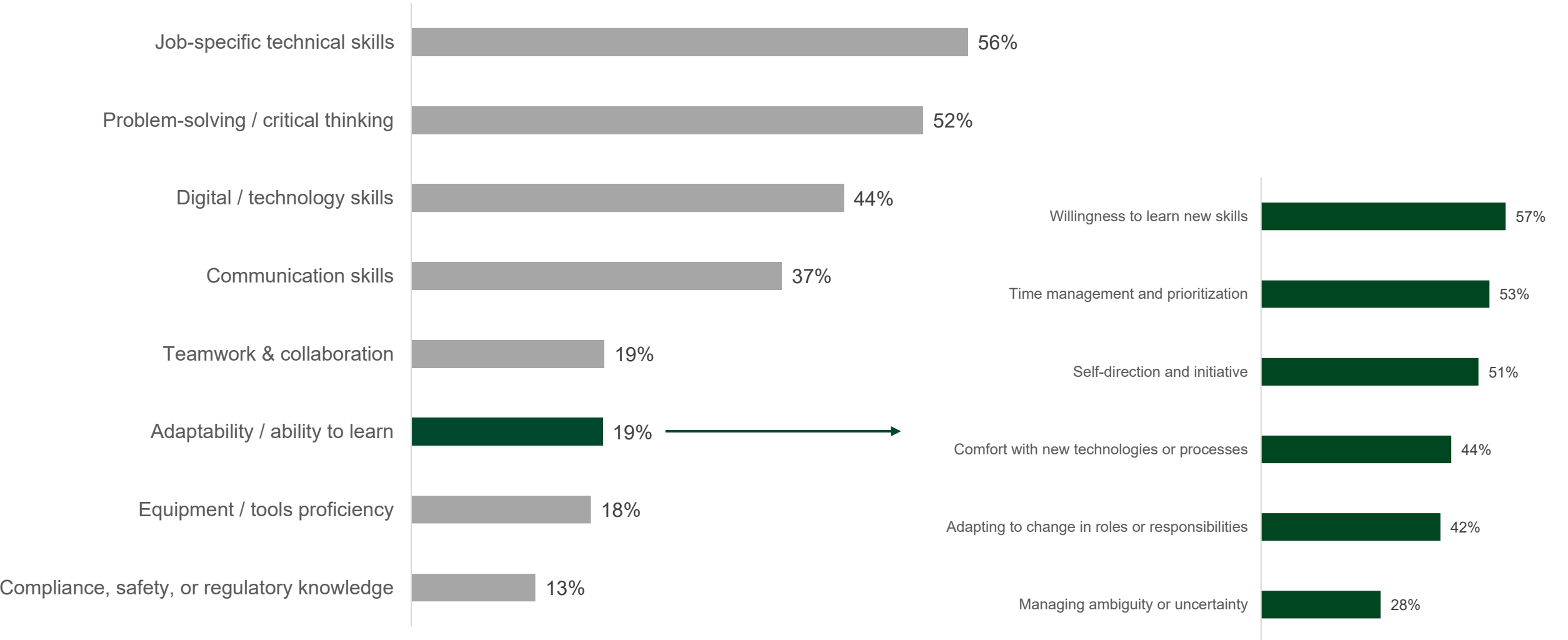
Teamwork & Collaboration: dependability is key – employers want people who are accountable and will follow-through as professionals

Q. Which of the following types of teamwork & collaboration skills are most critical for your organization?



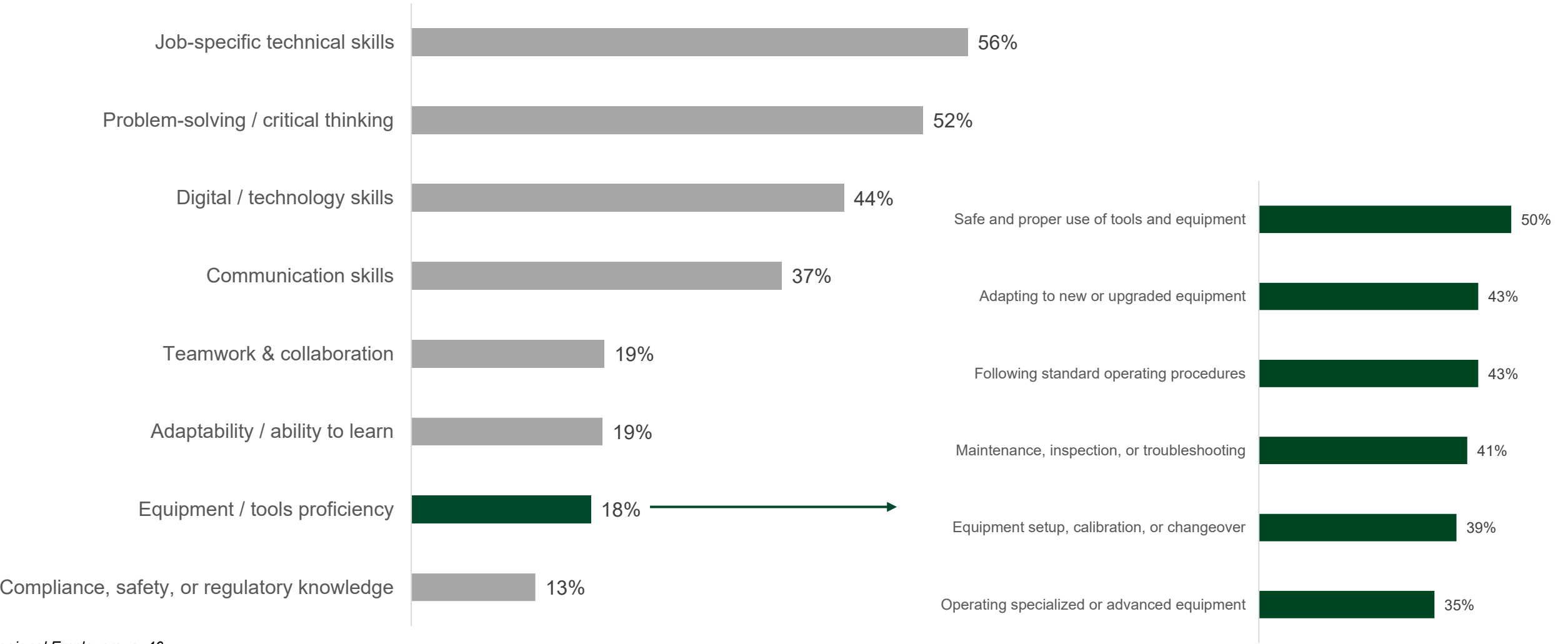
Adaptability / Ability to Learn: employers are seeking sound work ethic, including a willingness to learn, good time management, and self-direction

Q. Which of the following types of adaptability / ability to learn skills are most critical for your organization?



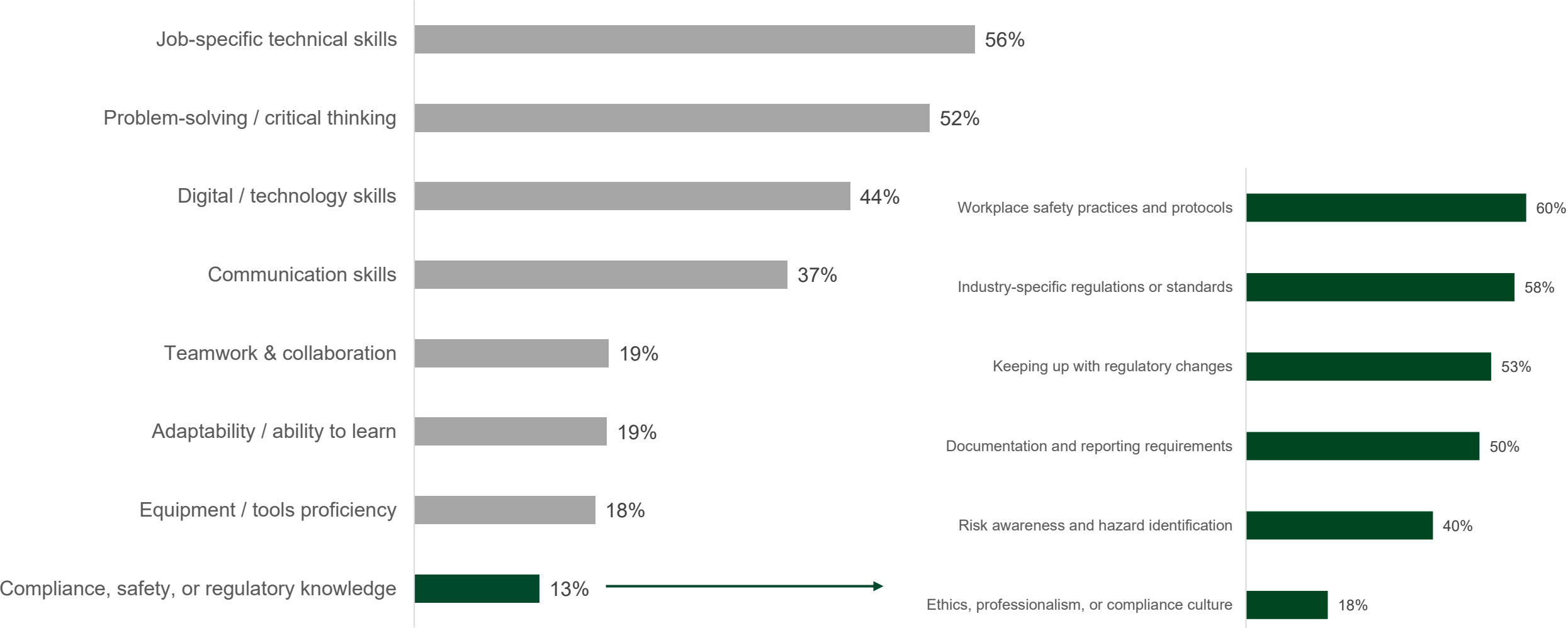
Equipment / Tools Proficiency: safe and proper use of equipment is a must

Q. Which of the following types of equipment / tools proficiency skills are most critical for your organization?



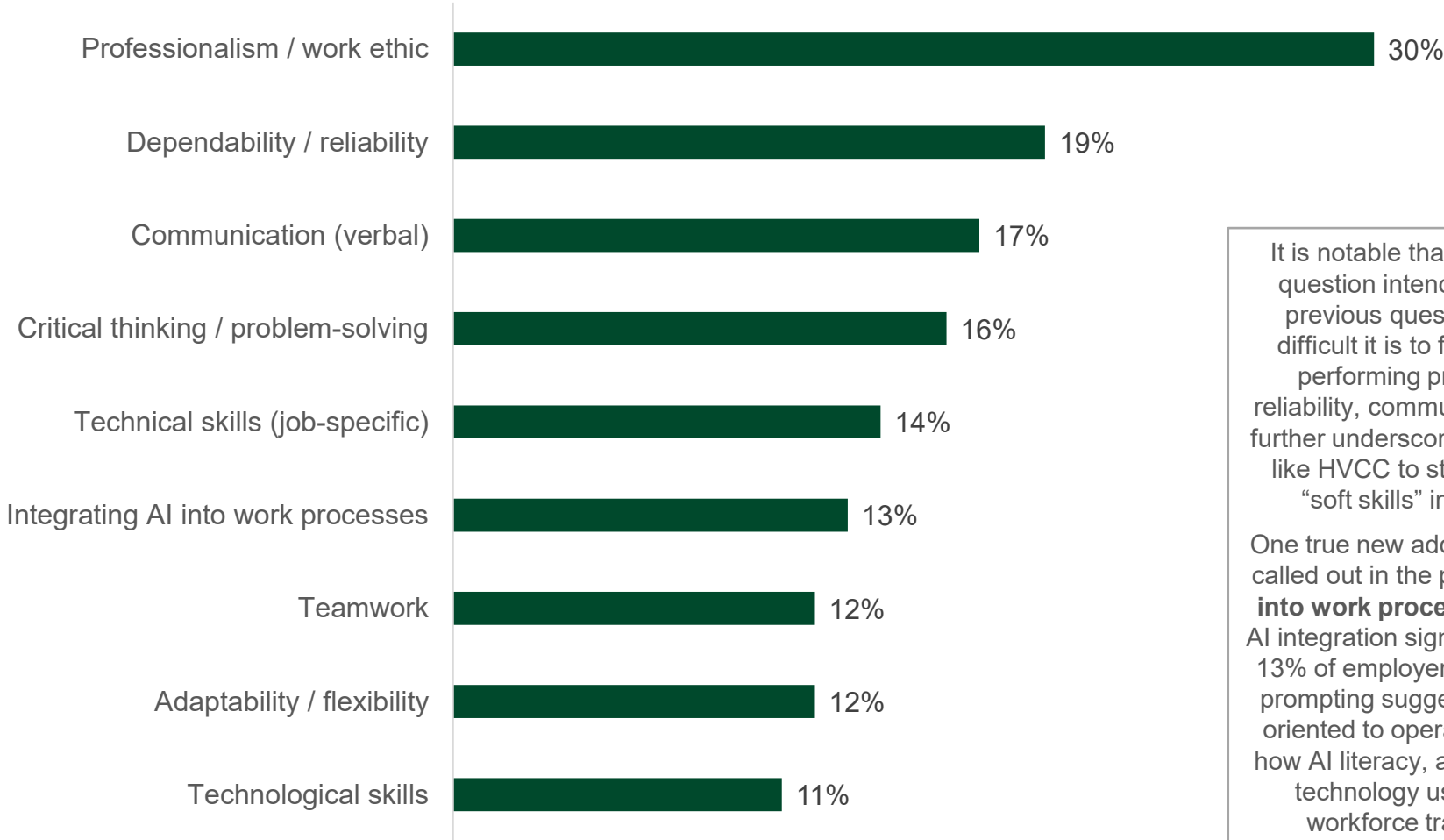
Compliance, Safety or Regulatory Knowledge: abiding by laws and regulations is most important in this area

Q. Which of the following areas of compliance, safety, or regulatory knowledge are most critical for your organization?



Additionally, employers underscored how difficult it is to find strong work ethic, dependability, communication, and critical thinking skills in today’s labor market

Q. Are there any other specific skills or competencies not listed in the previous questions that you struggle to find in the labor market?
[open-ended]



It is notable that in responding to this open-ended question intended to get at skills *not* listed in the previous questions, employers returned to how difficult it is to find the foundational skills of high-performing professionals such as work ethic, reliability, communication, and problem solving. This further underscores how important it is for institutions like HVCC to strive to develop these foundational “soft skills” in students as much as possible.

One true new addition to this list of skills not explicitly called out in the previous questions is **integrating AI into work processes**. The spontaneous mention of AI integration signals emerging demand. The fact that 13% of employers volunteered this skill area without prompting suggests it is rapidly moving from future-oriented to operational. HVCC may wish to explore how AI literacy, applied automation, and responsible technology use can be incorporated into both workforce training and credit programming.

Verbatim Responses: Additional Skills Difficult to Find in the Labor Market

Q. Are there any other specific skills or competencies not listed in the previous questions that you struggle to find in the labor market?

[open-ended]

It is hard to find people who communicate clearly, take real ownership and stay adaptable and reliable when things get tough.

Strong communication paired with real accountability is surprisingly rare — people who follow through, think clearly, and can work without constant hand-holding are the hardest to find.

Emotional intelligence, accountability, resilience, strong work ethic, ownership mindset.

Strategic tech-business acumen, remote cross-functional collaboration, ethical AI/data governance, and change management agility.

Critical thinking under pressure, project management, and adaptability to changing work environments are also skills we often struggle to find in candidates.

I often find it difficult to hire candidates with strong communication skills, critical thinking, adaptability, real-world problem-solving experience and strong work ethic.

People that are wanting to work full time. I find it interesting that most new people entering the work force want part time. Maybe because they carry multiple jobs to survive in NY.

We have a huge issue with punctuality and attendance in the hospitality field.

Reliability and follow-through finding candidates who consistently show up on time and stay engaged is still a big challenge.

I struggle to find candidates with strong practical AI skills combined with domain expertise and professionals skilled in ethical AI implementation.

Integrity and responsibility showing up for the work when you're supposed to be there.

Finding professionals with a deep understanding of AI-driven automation combined with cloud architecture security is increasingly difficult

Analysis & Observations: Desired Skills in Employees

These findings provide HVCC with more than a list of desired competencies – they offer a roadmap for how workforce programming and credit programs can evolve to meet employer expectations.

First, results underscore that workforce development cannot be framed solely around technical skill acquisition. While job-specific technical skills are critical—and in short supply—employers are equally clear that communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and professionalism are essential. This dual demand suggests that HVCC’s programming should integrate technical and foundational skill development rather than treating them as separate domains. In practice, this could mean:

- Embedding structured communication and problem-solving components into technical training programs (e.g., scenario-based learning, team-based simulations, client presentations).
- Making “soft skills” development visible and intentional within curriculum design.
- Highlighting these competencies in employer-facing marketing so that businesses understand HVCC’s holistic approach to workforce preparation.

Second, the anticipated need for upskilling and reskilling over the next 3–5 years signals that HVCC’s role is not limited to preparing new entrants to the workforce. There is a significant opportunity to position HVCC as a long-term learning partner, particularly in areas like digital literacy, emerging technologies, and AI integration, which employers flagged in open-ended responses.

This may suggest:

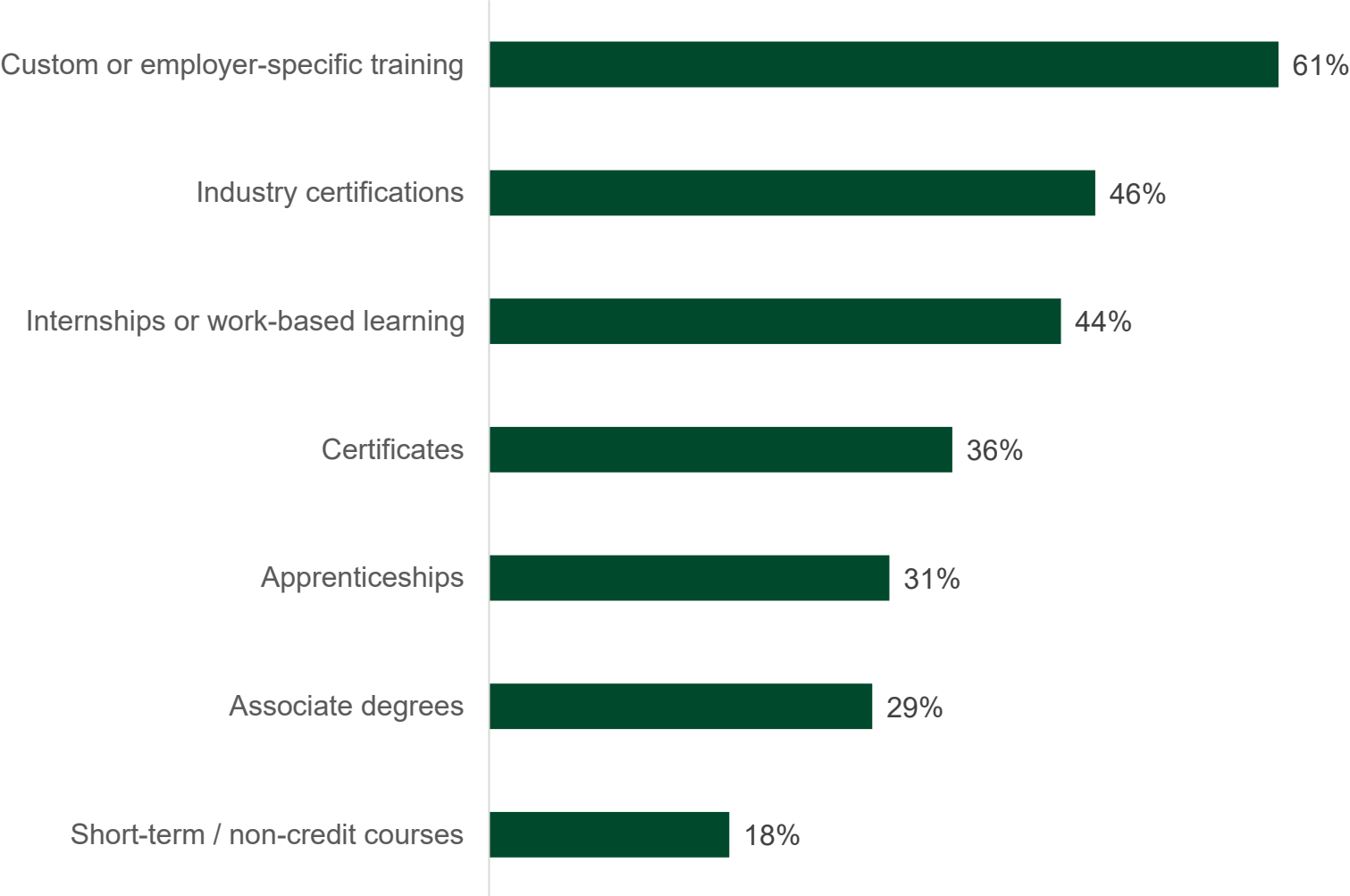
- Expanding modular or short-term credentials led by experienced instructors.
- Developing targeted AI literacy or applied AI workshops tailored by industry.
- Offering consultative conversations with employers about future skill needs rather than responding only to immediate training requests.

Taken together, these findings suggest that HVCC’s competitive advantage lies not simply in offering training, but in offering integrated skill development that combines technical precision with professional readiness – and in doing so in a way that is forward-looking rather than reactive.

Workforce Training Preferences & Perceptions of Providers

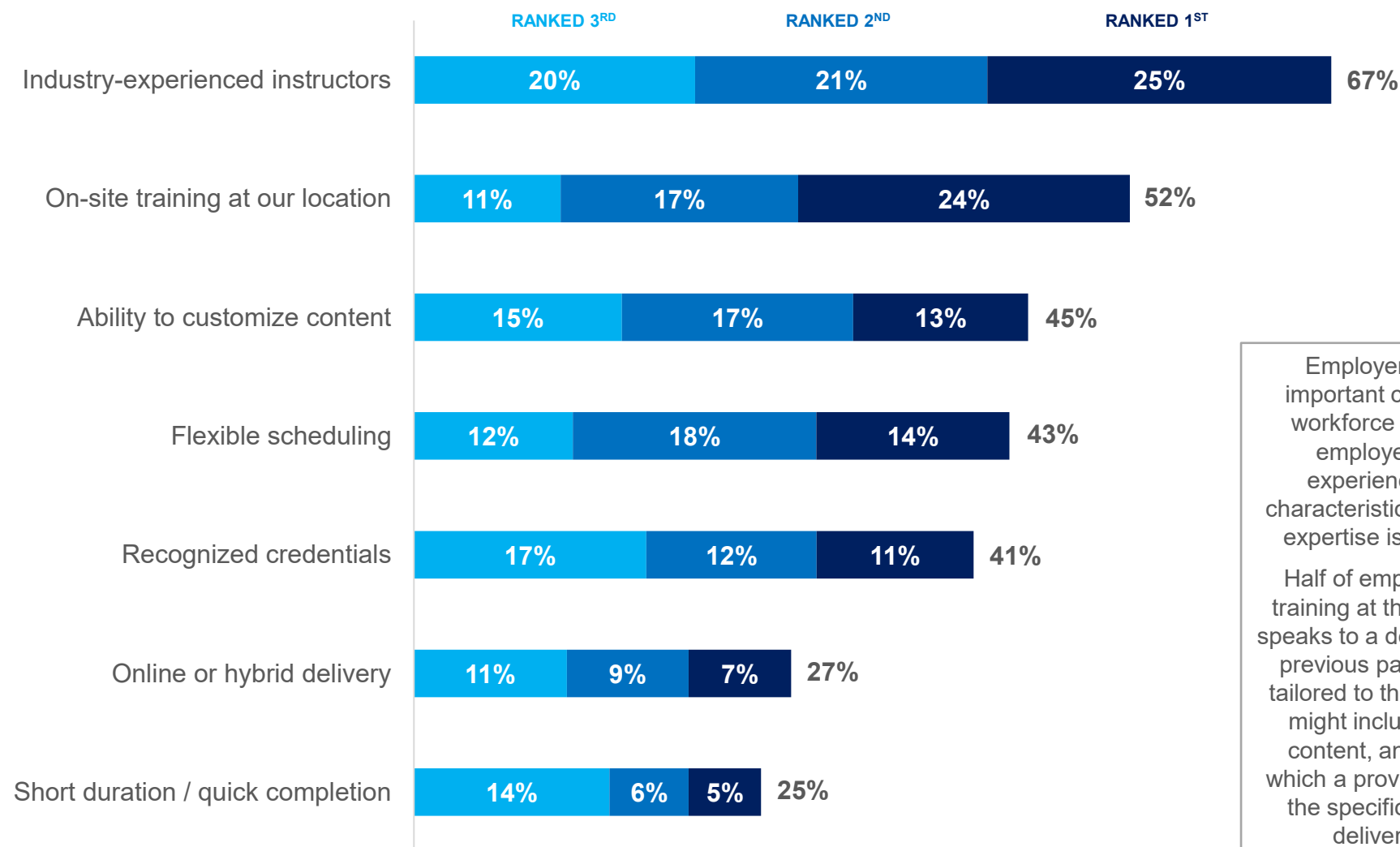
Employers see the most value in customized training specific to their employees, industry, and organizational needs

Q. Which types of education or training are most valuable to your organization?



When choosing a provider for workforce training, employers prioritize industry-experienced instructors and on-site training

Q. How important are the following characteristics when choosing a provider for workforce training?

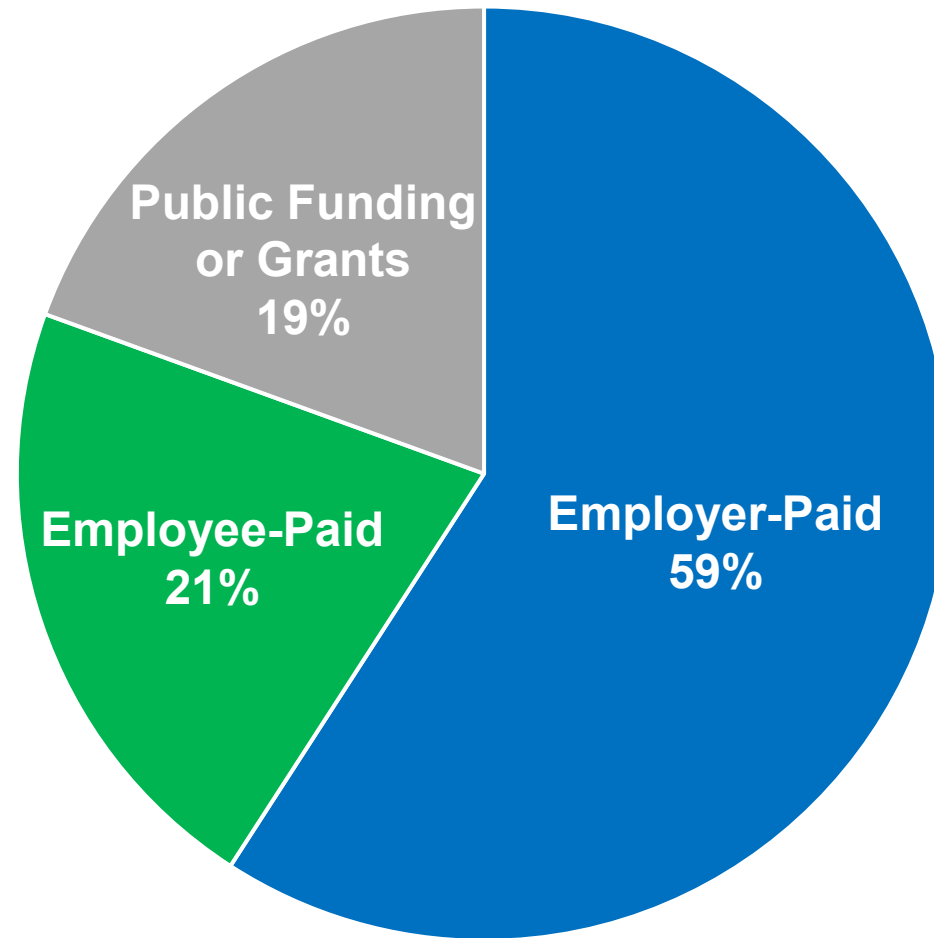


Employers ranked their top three most important characteristics when choosing a workforce training provider. Two-thirds of employers, or 67%, ranked industry-experienced instructors as a top-three characteristic, indicating that industry-relevant expertise is critical in an effective provider.

Half of employers also highly value on-site training at their organizations' locations. This speaks to a desire—shown in the results on the previous page—for workforce training to be tailored to the needs of the organization. This might include on-site training, customized content, and flexible scheduling – ways in which a provider can wrap the training around the specific needs of the organization and deliver tailored customer service.

Most of the cost of workforce training is borne by employers; employees and public funding each cover about one-fifth of the cost

Q. Thinking about workforce training and upskilling in your organization, how is the cost typically covered?



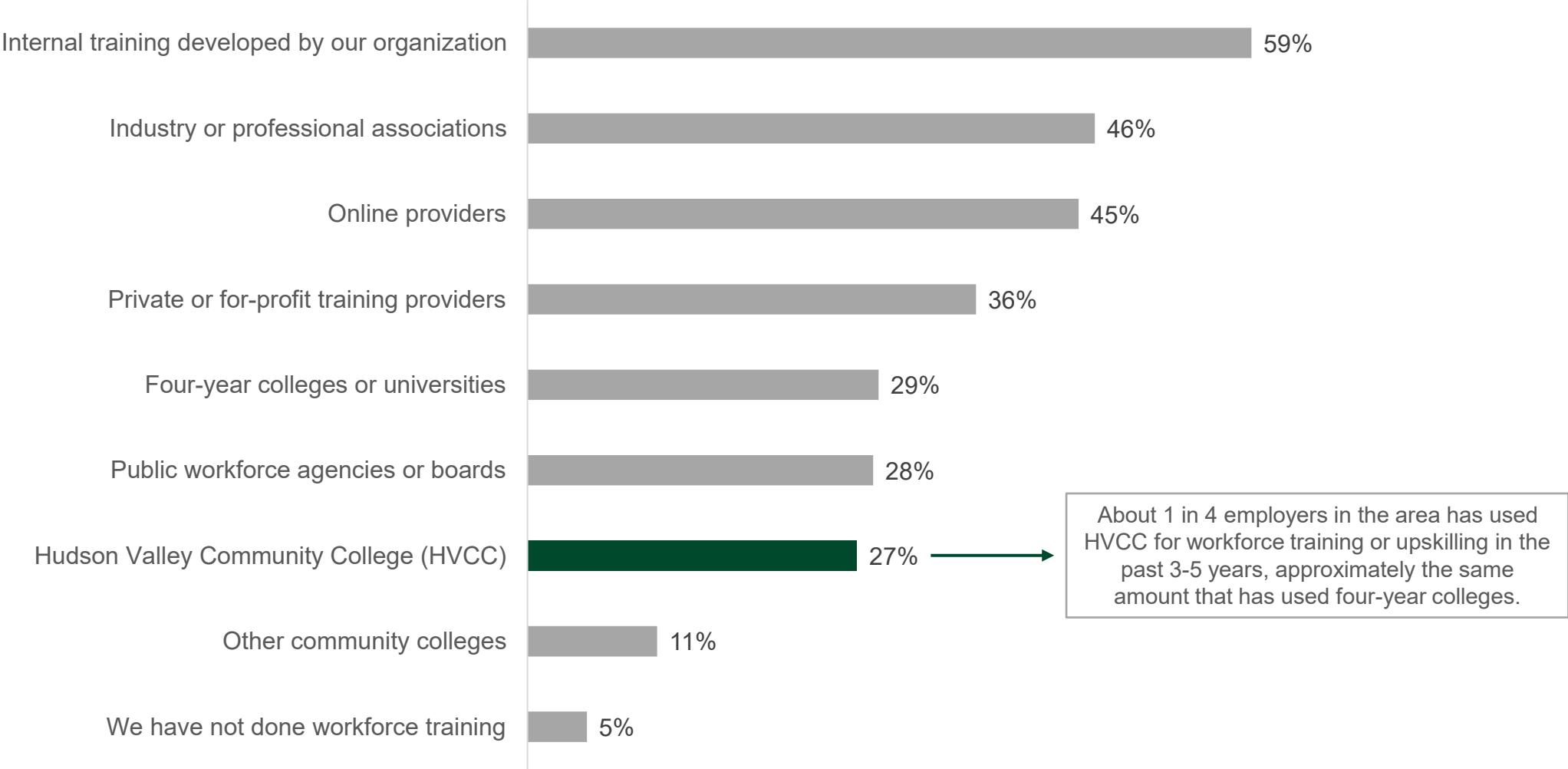
Employers in the Capital Region are most likely to have looked internally or to professional associations or online providers for workforce training

Q. Which of the following have you used in the past 3–5 years to meet workforce training or upskilling needs?



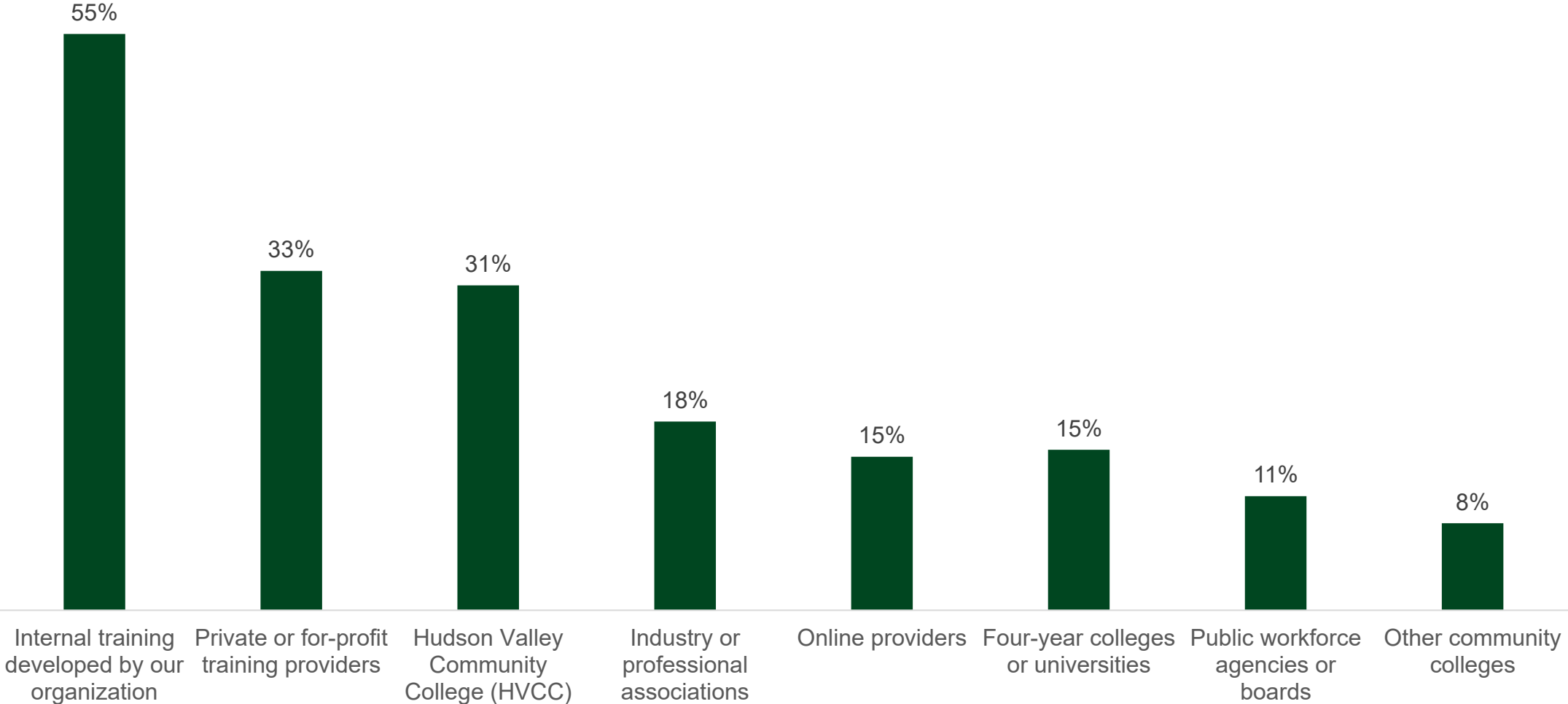
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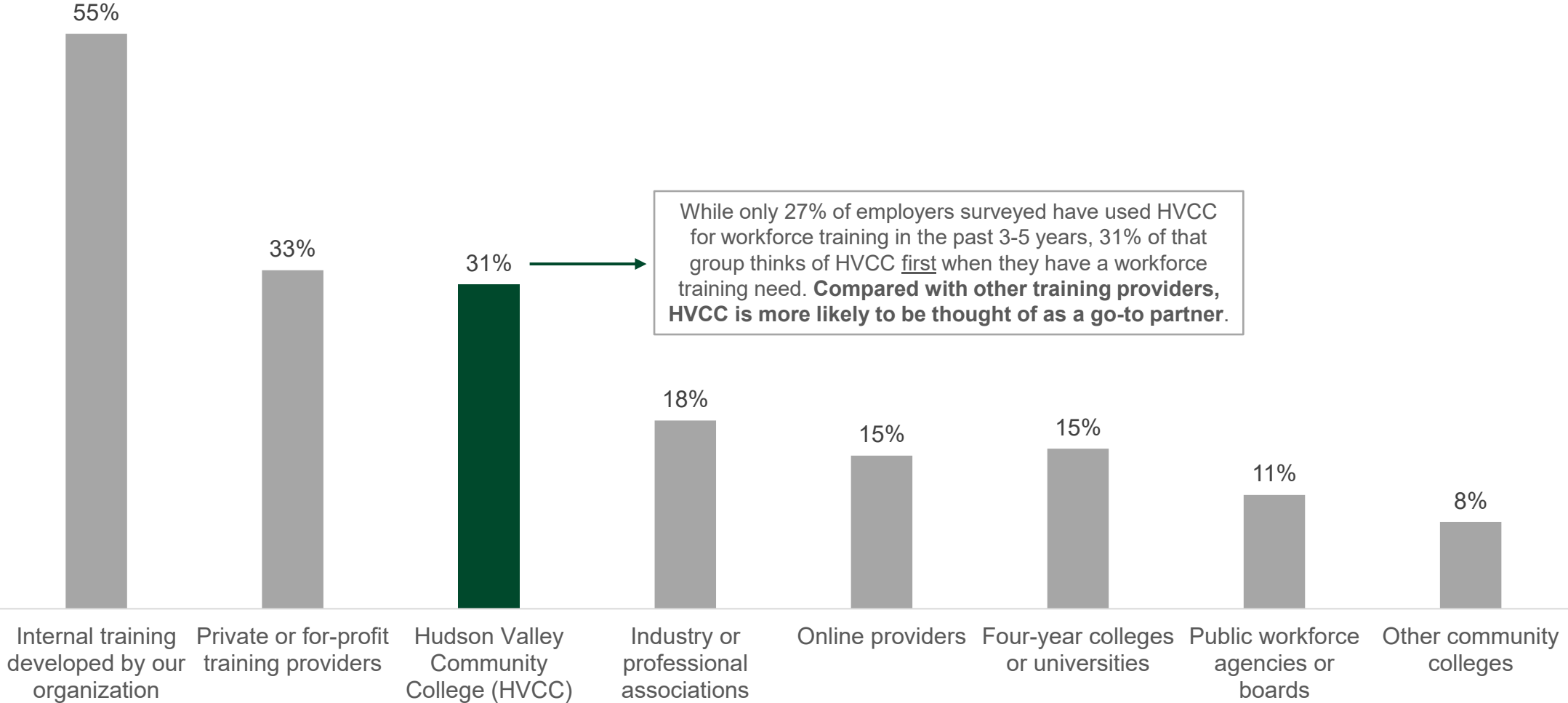
Employers tend to look inward first when training needs arise

Q. When your organization needs workforce training, which type of provider do you typically turn to first?
[% of those who have used the provider at all in the past 3-5 years]



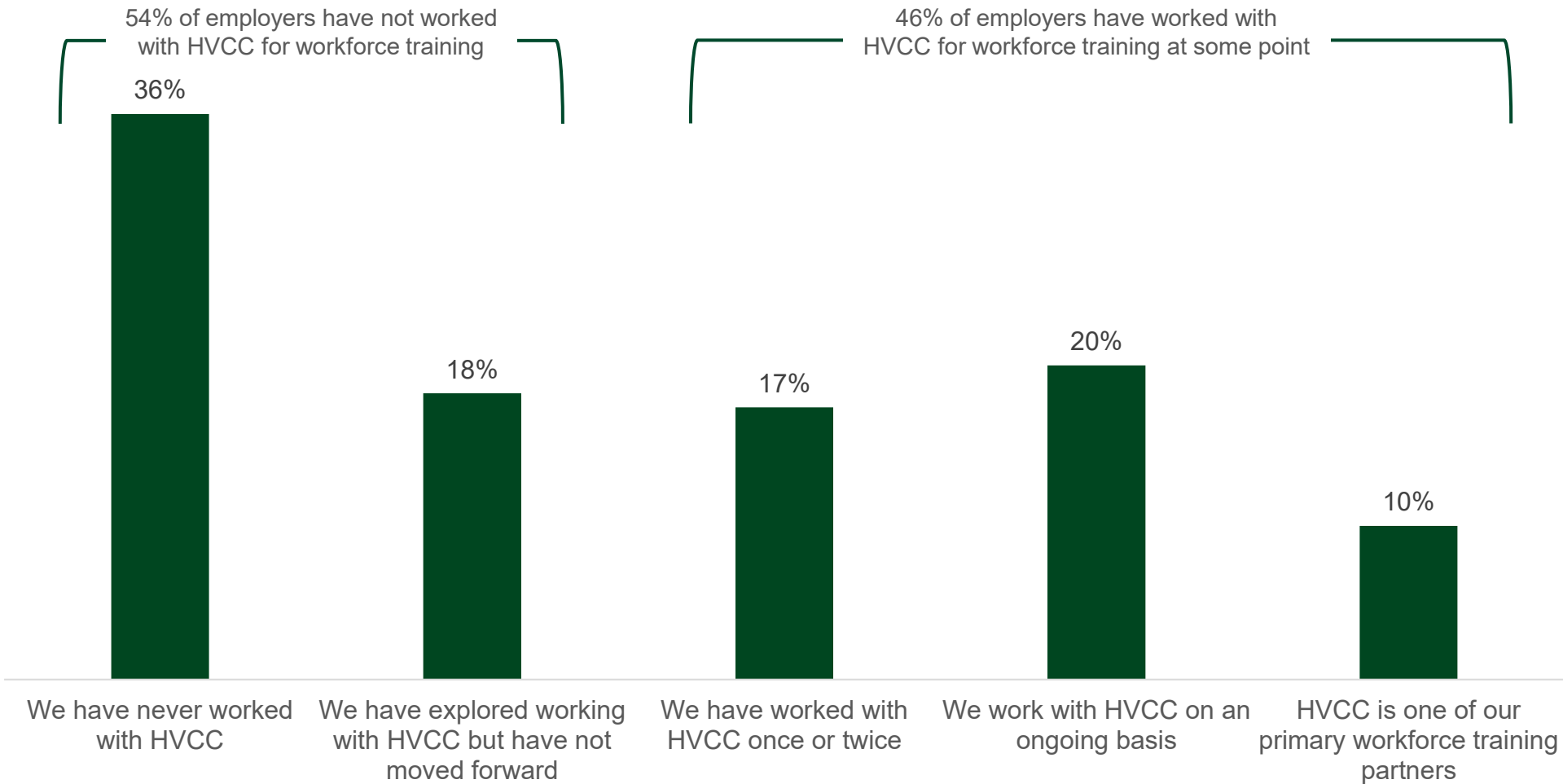
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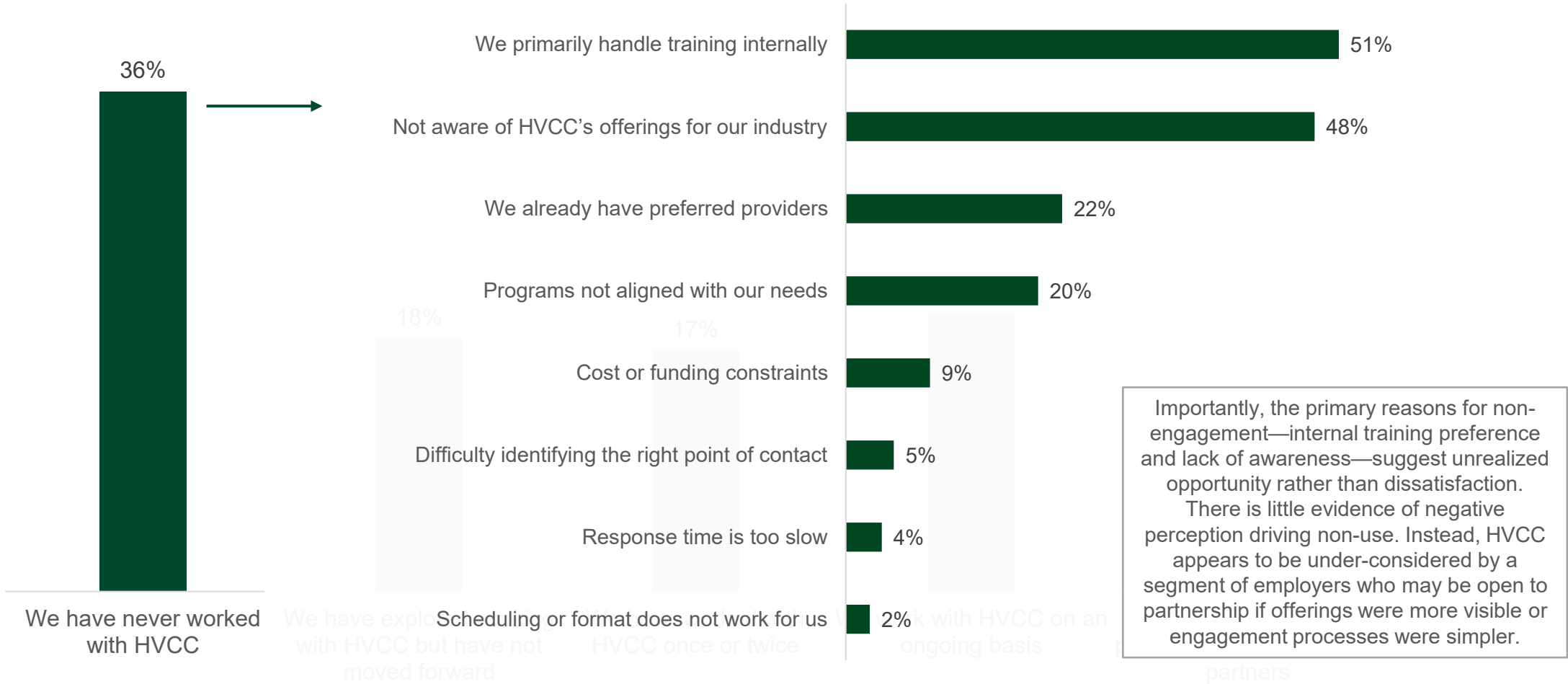
54% of regional employers have not worked with HVCC for workforce training

Q. Which of the following describes your organization's experience working with Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC) on workforce training or talent development?



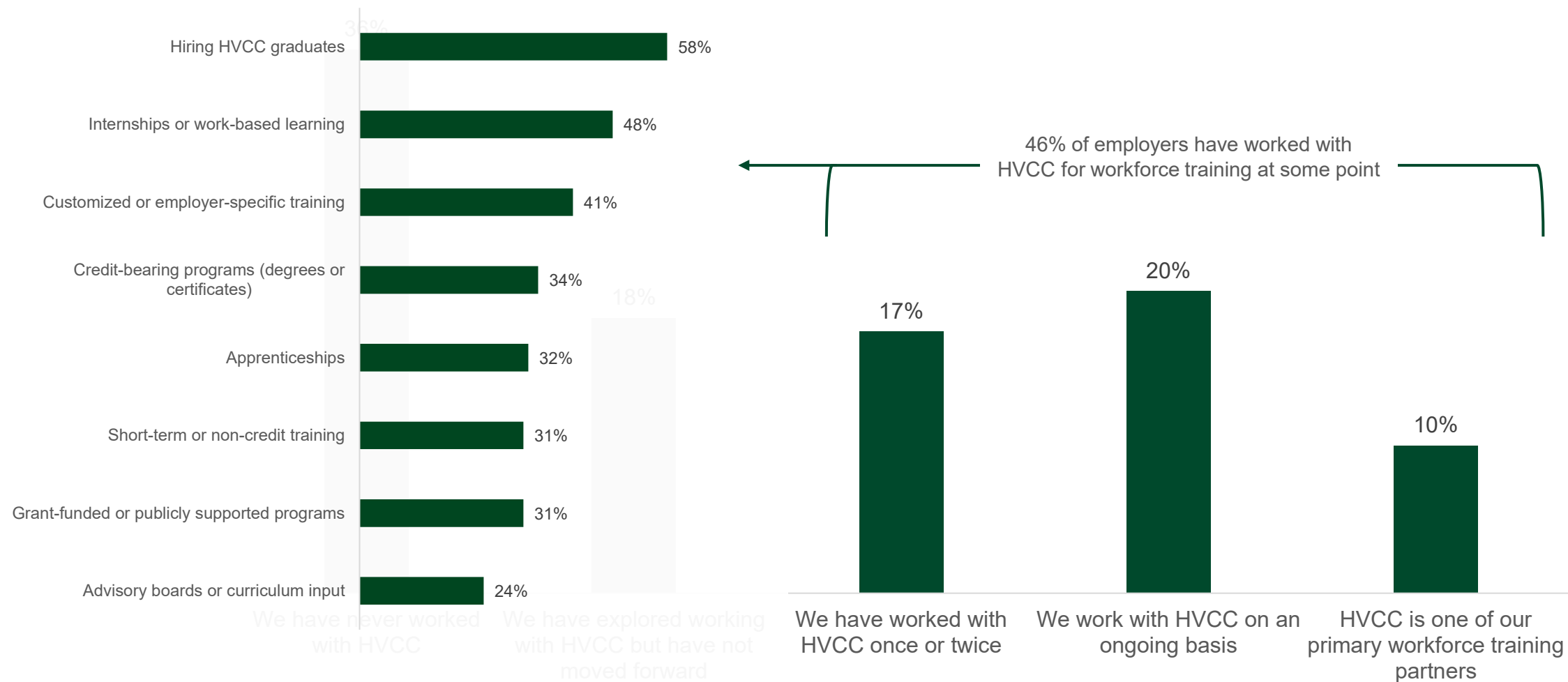
Tendency to handle training internally and lack of awareness of HVCC's offerings are the primary reasons why employers have not used HVCC

Q. Why has your organization not worked with HVCC for workforce training?



Employers who have engaged with HVCC are most likely to have hired graduates, hosted interns, or engaged in custom employee training

Q. In what ways has your organization worked with HVCC?



Overview: Attribute Association

The following pages show results to this question asked in the survey:

“Which providers do you think perform well on the following dimensions?”

Respondents were shown a list of six characteristics (listed below) and asked to select which workforce training providers they believe perform well on each characteristic. Characteristics tested:

- Speed of response
- Flexibility
- Relevance of training
- Ease of working with
- Cost effectiveness
- Expertise

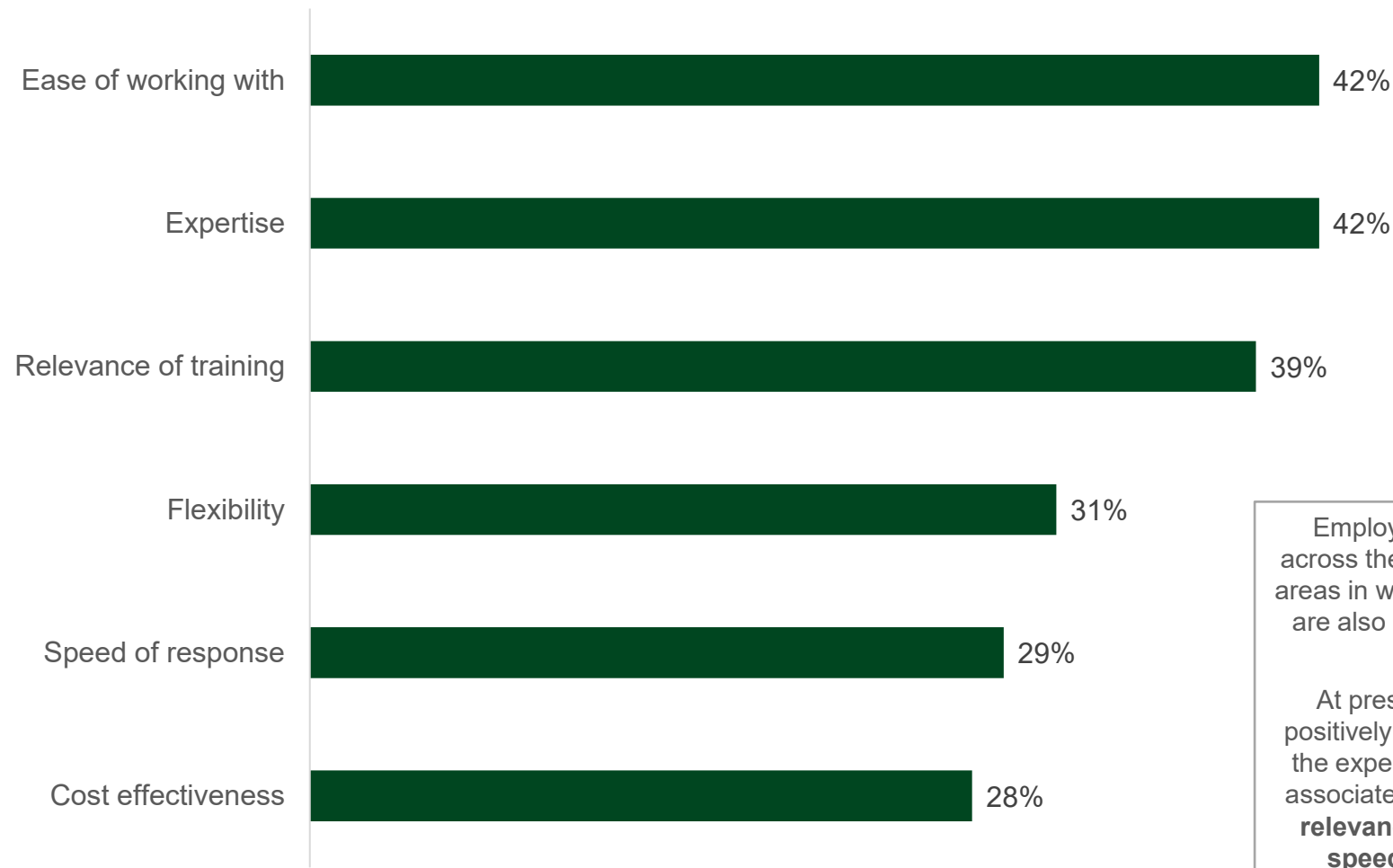
Results provide insight into not only how HVCC is perceived to perform on these dimensions, but also how HVCC is perceived *in relation to other workforce training providers*.

We begin by looking at how many employers believe HVCC performs well on each dimension. We then explore how employers perceive all workforce training providers.

Findings show how HVCC is perceived today as well as the areas in which perception can improve so that more employers view HVCC as an effective and dynamic workforce training provider.

Approximately 4 out of 10 employers believe HVCC performs well on being easy to work with, instructional expertise, and the relevance of training offerings

Q. Which providers do you think perform well on the following dimensions?
[HVCC results only]



Employers have moderate perceptions of HVCC across these characteristics today. While there are no areas in which HVCC drastically under-performs, there are also no areas in which HVCC is perceived to be exceptionally strong.

At present, employers view HVCC slightly more positively on the quality of the workforce training than the experience of procuring it – a higher percentage associates HVCC with **expertise** (42%) and **training relevance** (39%) than **flexibility** (31%), **response speed** (29%), and **cost effectiveness** (28%).

While most employers prefer internal training and think of highly of it, HVCC outperforms other outside training providers in several categories

Q. Which providers do you think perform well on the following dimensions?

The category leader in every dimension is internal training, which, by nature of being *internal*, employers see as being convenient, relevant, and cost-effective. Where internal training can be lacking is in expertise – internal training’s lowest category. This opens the door for outside providers like HVCC to offer something both meaningful and distinct. For HVCC, this suggests that competing head-to-head on generic training offerings is less effective than positioning as an extension of internal capability – bringing specialized expertise, advanced technical depth, or emerging skill areas that internal teams cannot easily replicate.

While internal training is the highest-performing provider on these dimensions, looking beyond internal training shows that HVCC is perceived to perform quite well in comparison with other outside training providers. In fact, after internal training, HVCC received the second-highest marks on **ease of working with**, **expertise**, and **relevance of training**. This signals that HVCC is seen as a trusted provider of workforce training by employers in the Capital Region – trusted for expertise and relevance even more than private companies, online providers, and four-year institutions.

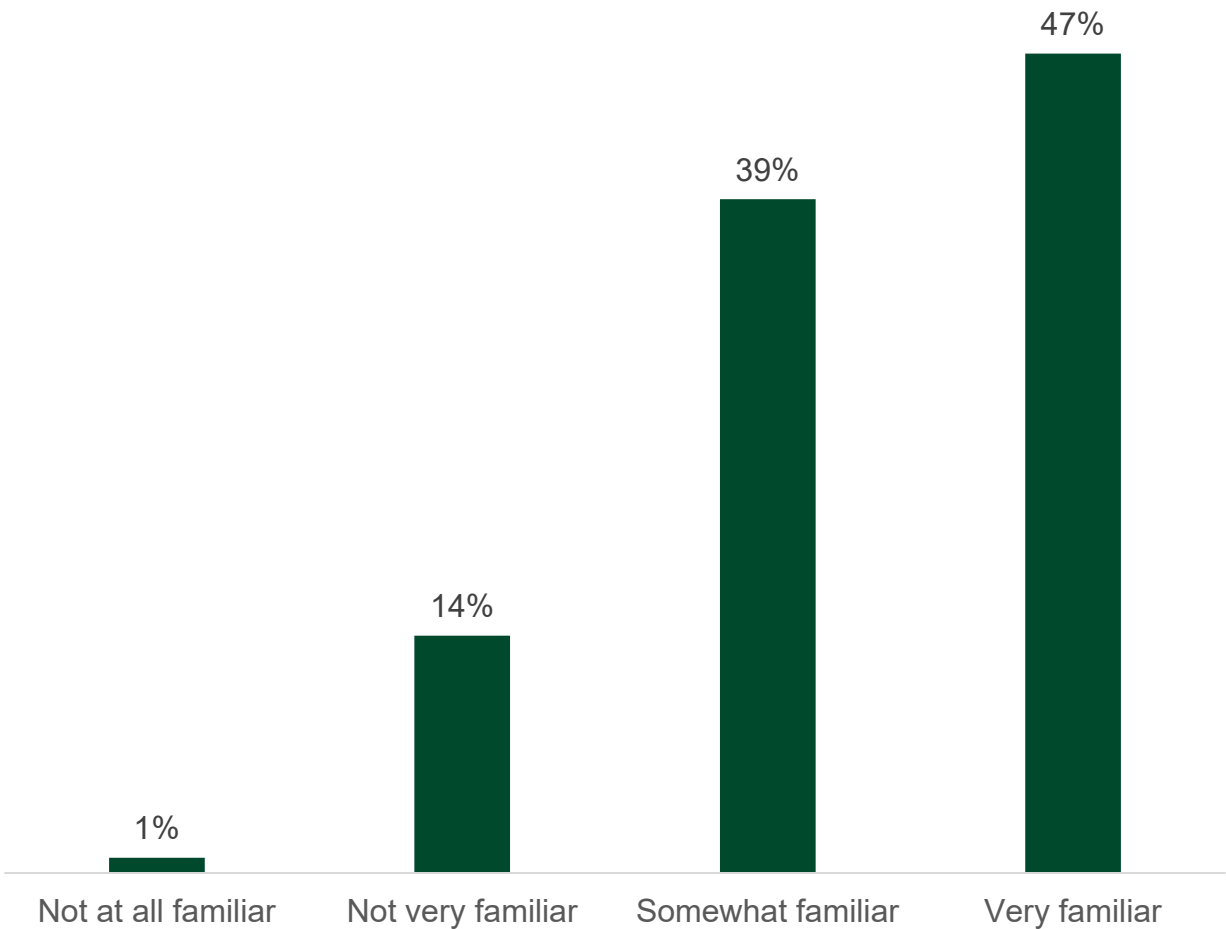
The areas in which HVCC stands to improve in employers’ eyes are in what it looks like to work with HVCC for workforce training. While HVCC receives high marks on overall ease of working with the College, HVCC is seen as under-performing online providers or private companies on flexibility, speed of response, and cost. While cost will vary by provider and need, these results suggest HVCC can improve workflows so that employers can expect quick responses to inquiries and feel that HVCC will work with them flexibly on creating workforce training plans suited to their needs.

	HVCC	Internal training	Private or for-profit entities	Online providers	4-year colleges or universities	Other community colleges
Ease of working with	42%	68%	37%	26%	24%	17%
Expertise	42%	48%	39%	30%	29%	15%
Relevance of training	39%	63%	32%	25%	20%	14%
Flexibility	31%	52%	23%	38%	23%	16%
Speed of response	29%	55%	43%	34%	18%	13%
Cost effectiveness	28%	57%	12%	34%	20%	17%

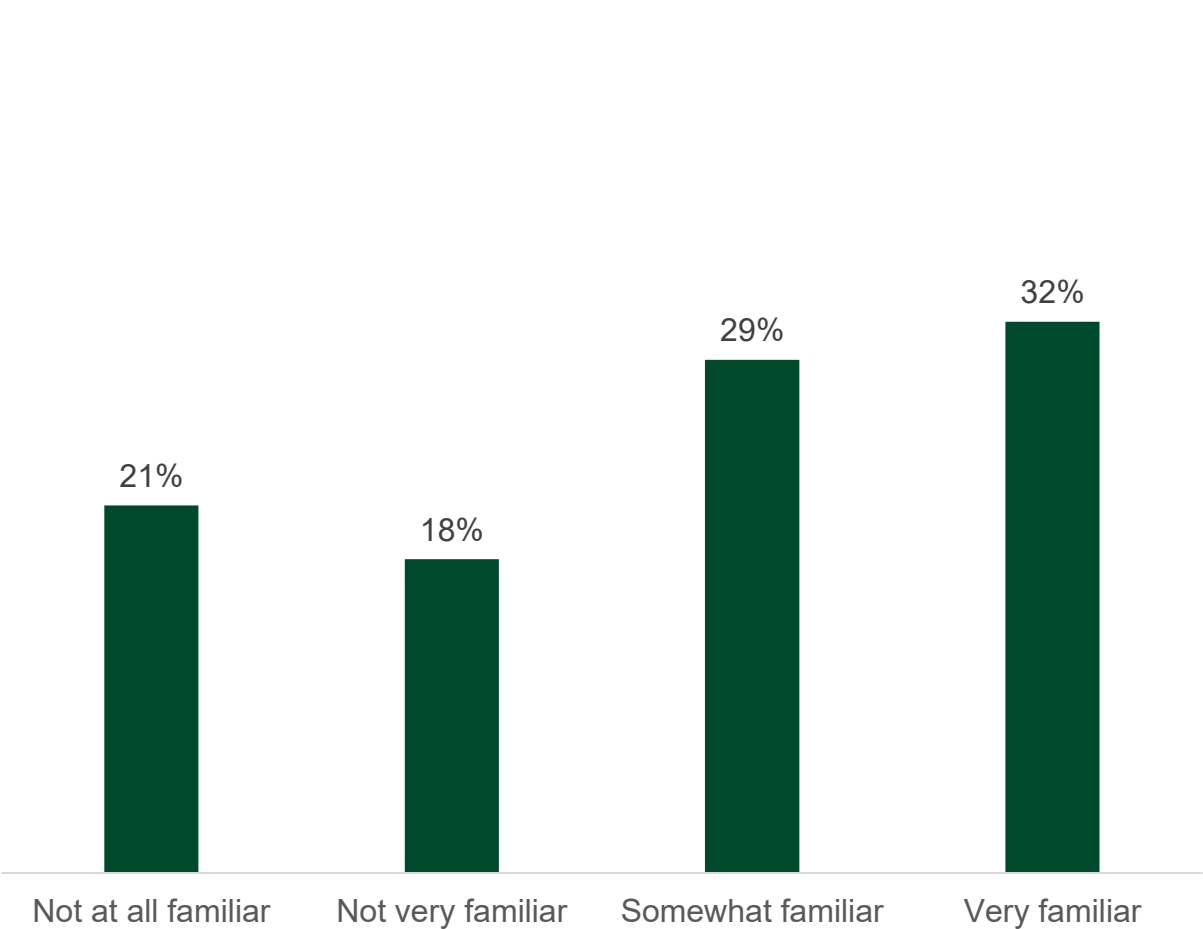
Perceptions of HVCC as a Workforce Partner

HVCC enjoys broad familiarity among employers in the Capital Region, though familiarity with HVCC’s workforce development offerings is lower

Q. Overall, how familiar are you with Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC)?

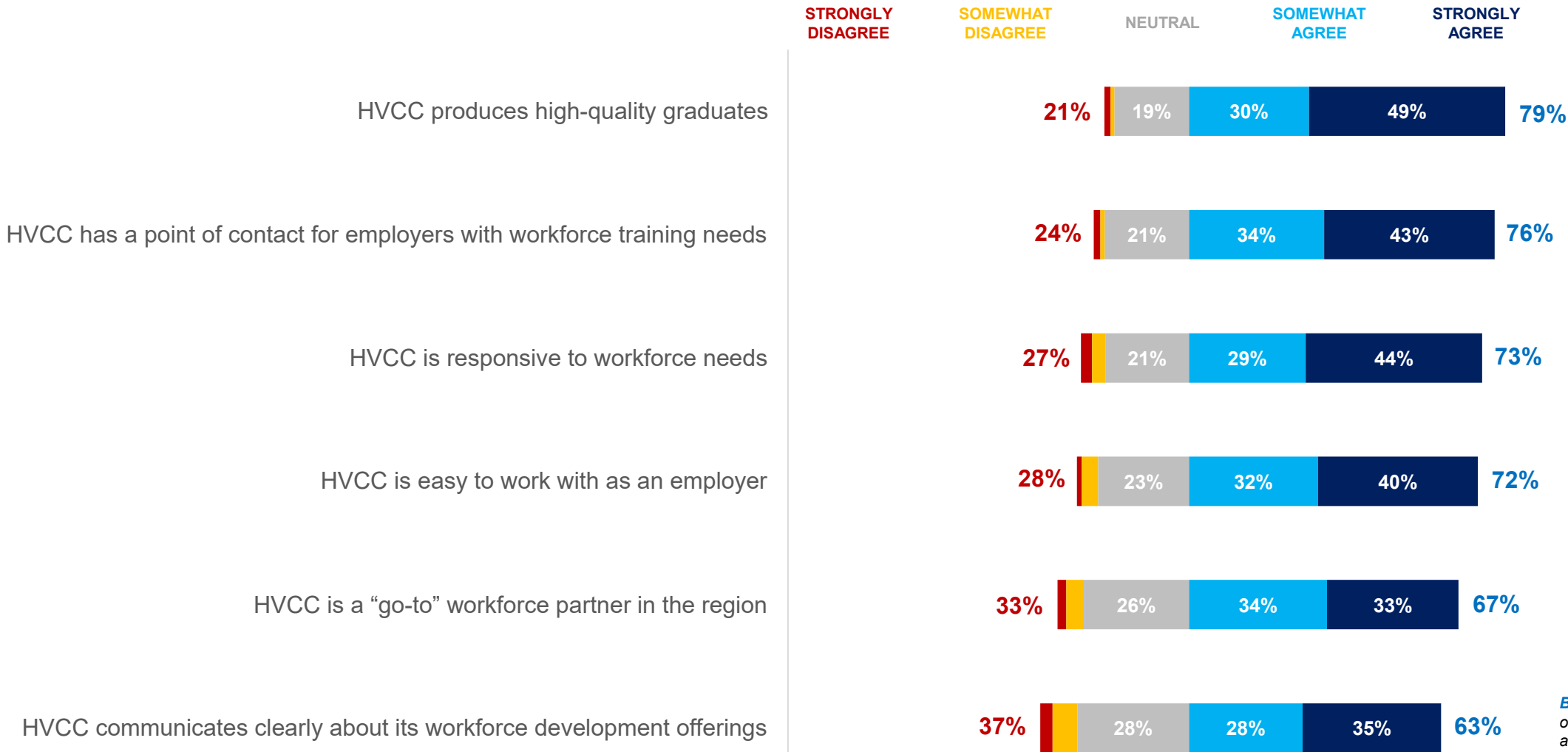


Q. How familiar are you with HVCC’s workforce development offerings?



Most employers agree with these positive statements about how HVCC serves the workforce needs of the region

Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about HVCC?



Blue data points represent the sum of “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree.” Red data points represent the sum of “strongly disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” and “neutral.”

Most employers agree with these positive statements about how HVCC serves the workforce needs of the region

Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about HVCC?

STRONGLY DISAGREE SOMEWHAT DISAGREE NEUTRAL SOMEWHAT AGREE STRONGLY AGREE

Only two statements garnered less than 70% agreement.

The first relates to the extent to which HVCC is seen as a go-to workforce partner in the region. Two-thirds of employers agree with this statement, leaving one in three who, while not outright disagreeing, would not say they agree with the idea that HVCC is a go-to partner. This does not indicate dissatisfaction; rather, it suggests that HVCC occupies a positive but not yet default position in employers' decision-making. Moving from "viable option" to "first call" depends on proactive outreach, streamlined engagement processes, and clearer articulation of what differentiates HVCC from other providers.

The second relates to how HVCC communicates its workforce development offerings. Once again, most employers agree HVCC communicates about its offerings clearly, but 37% would not agree

While these results are not worrisome red flags, they signal areas for potential growth in how HVCC functions and is perceived as a workforce partner in the region. Encouragingly, these two attributes are related – as HVCC improves how clearly it communicates about its workforce development offerings, it will simultaneously be more likely to be seen as a go-to workforce partner.

HVCC is a "go-to" workforce partner in the region

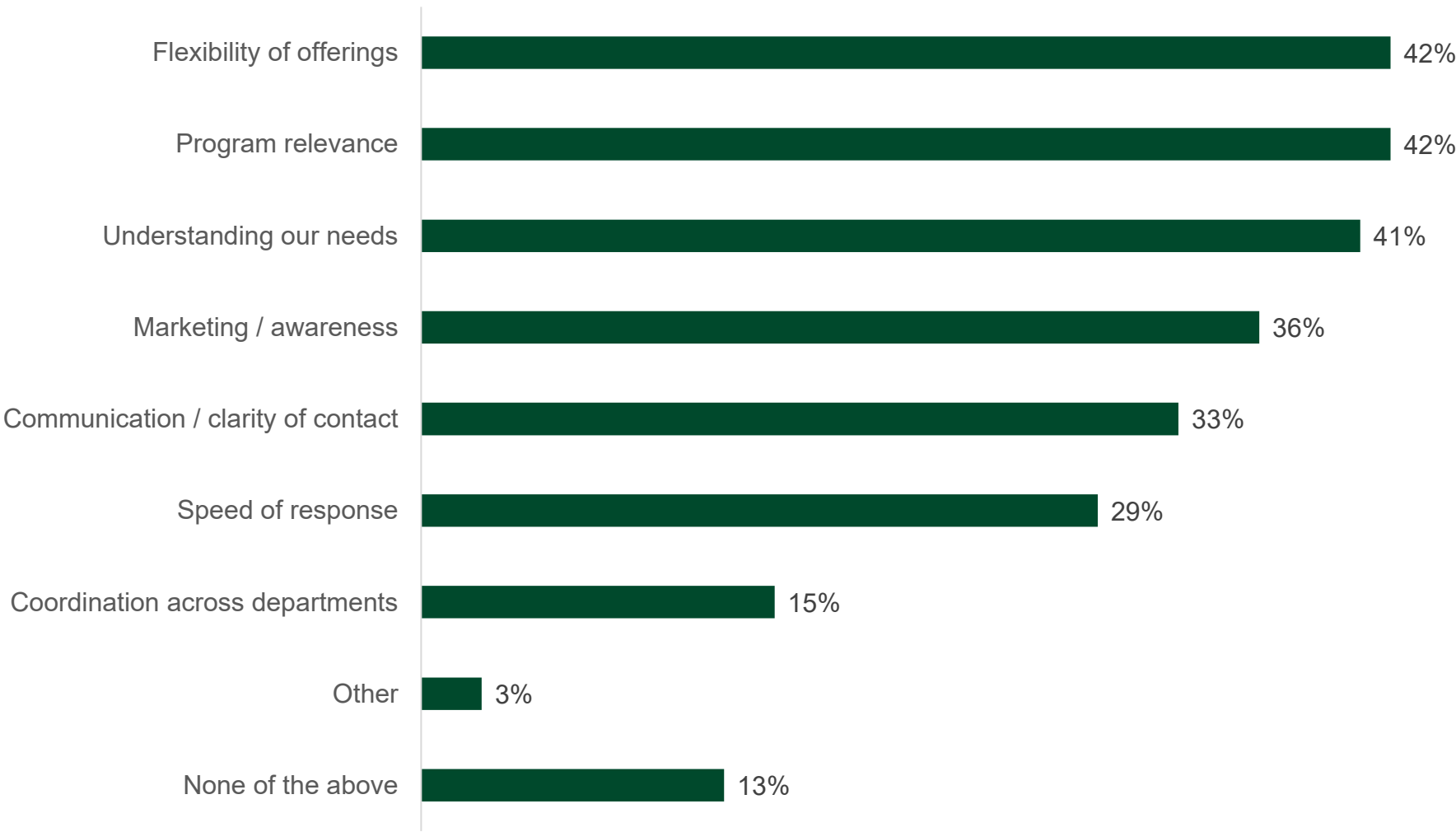


HVCC communicates clearly about its workforce development offerings



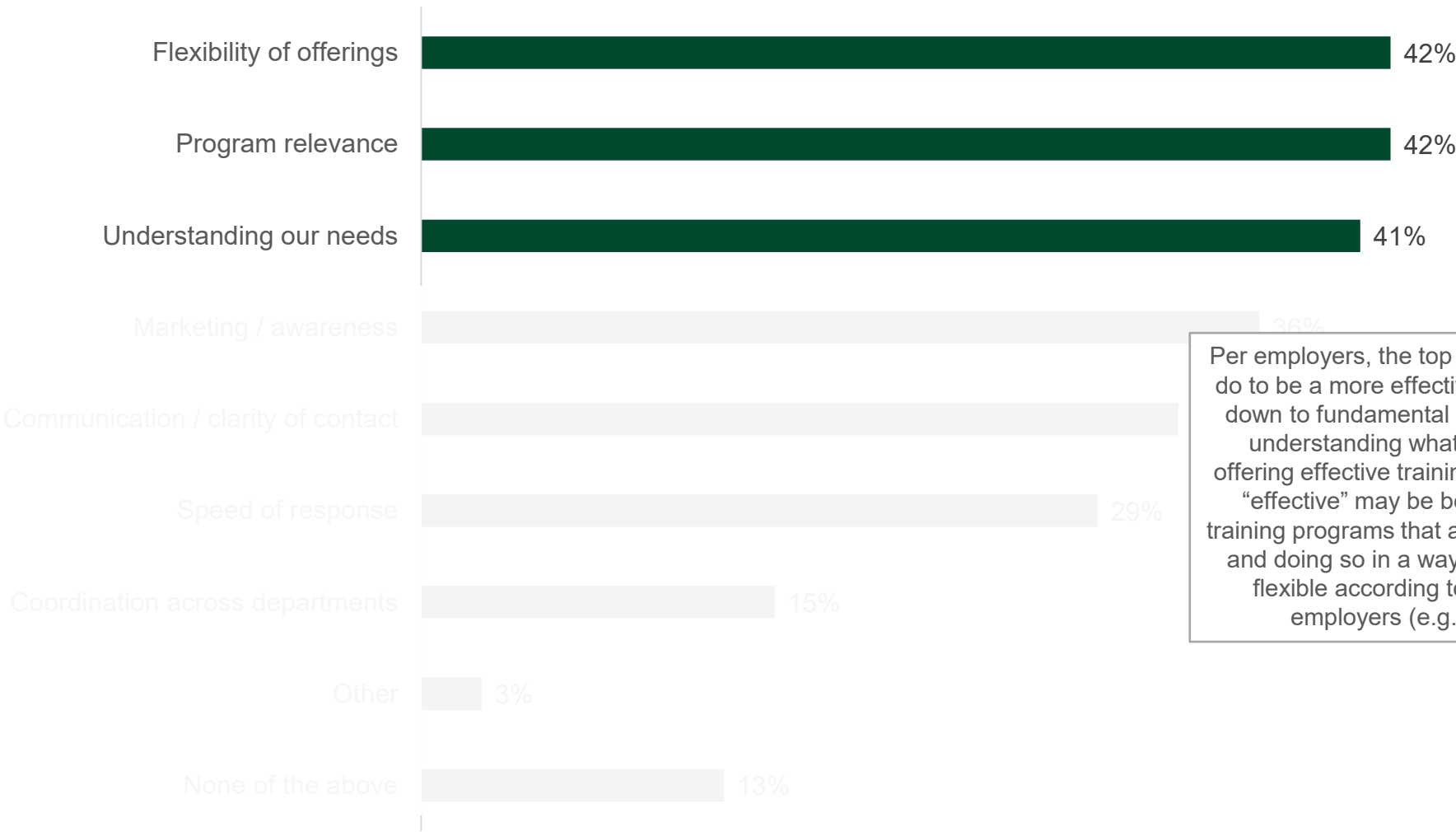
Employers say HVCC could be more effective by better understanding employers' needs and responding with relevant & flexible solutions

Q. How could HVCC be more effective in serving employers like you?



Employers say HVCC could be more effective by better understanding employers' needs and responding with relevant & flexible solutions

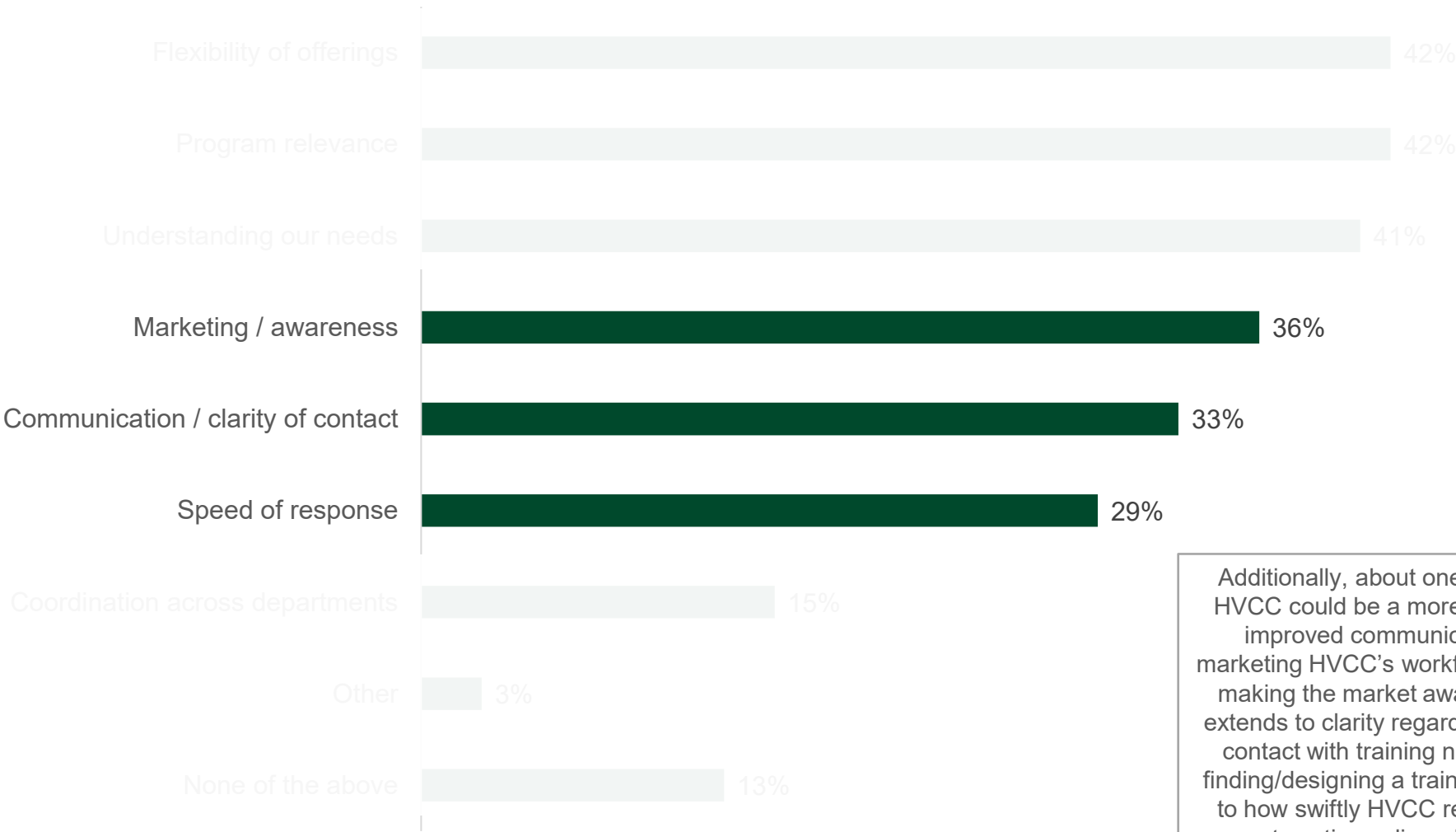
Q. How could HVCC be more effective in serving employers like you?



Per employers, the top three things HVCC could do to be a more effective workforce partner boil down to fundamental product-market fit – i.e., understanding what employers need and offering effective training solutions. In this case, “effective” may be best defined by offering training programs that are relevant to their needs and doing so in a way that is customized and flexible according to what works best for employers (e.g., on-site training).

Employers say HVCC could be more effective by better understanding employers' needs and responding with relevant & flexible solutions

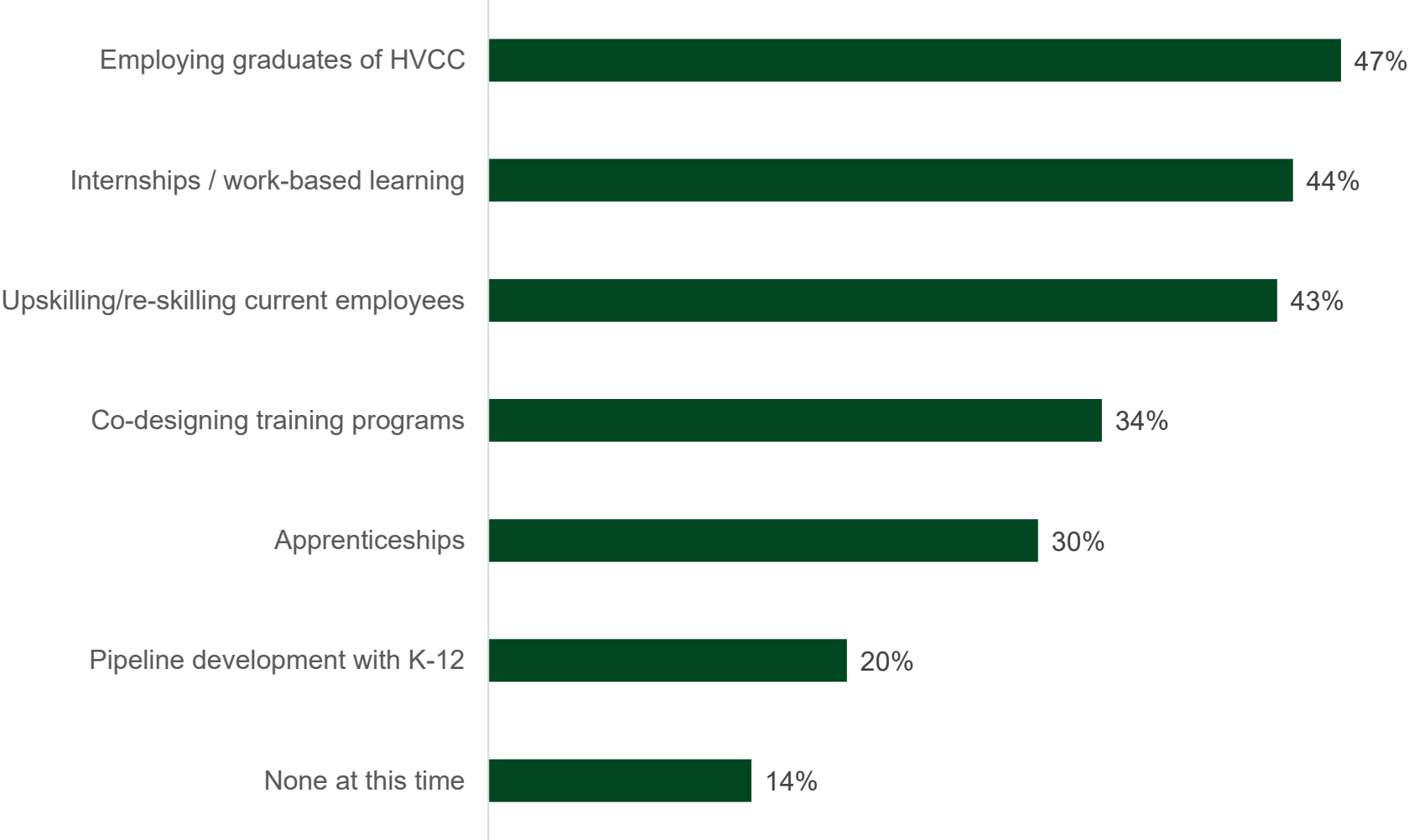
Q. How could HVCC be more effective in serving employers like you?



Additionally, about one in three employers feels HVCC could be a more effective partner through improved communication. This begins with marketing HVCC's workforce training programs and making the market aware of what is available. It extends to clarity regarding who employers should contact with training needs and the process for finding/designing a training solution. It also applies to how swiftly HVCC responds to an inquiry and presents options aligned with an employer's needs.

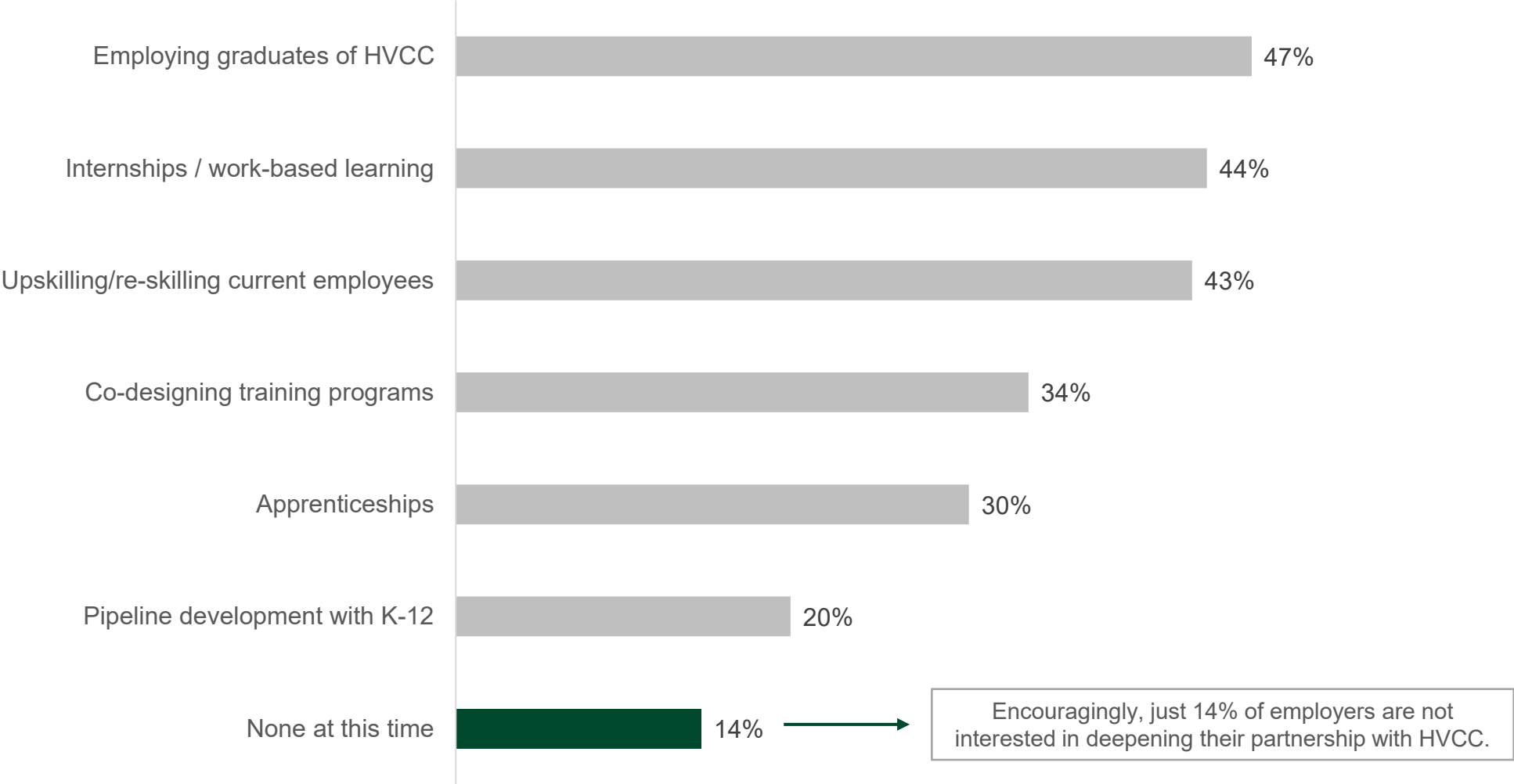
Employers are most eager to further their partnership with HVCC by employing graduates, hosting interns, and training for current employees

Q. In which areas would you be interested in deeper partnership with HVCC?



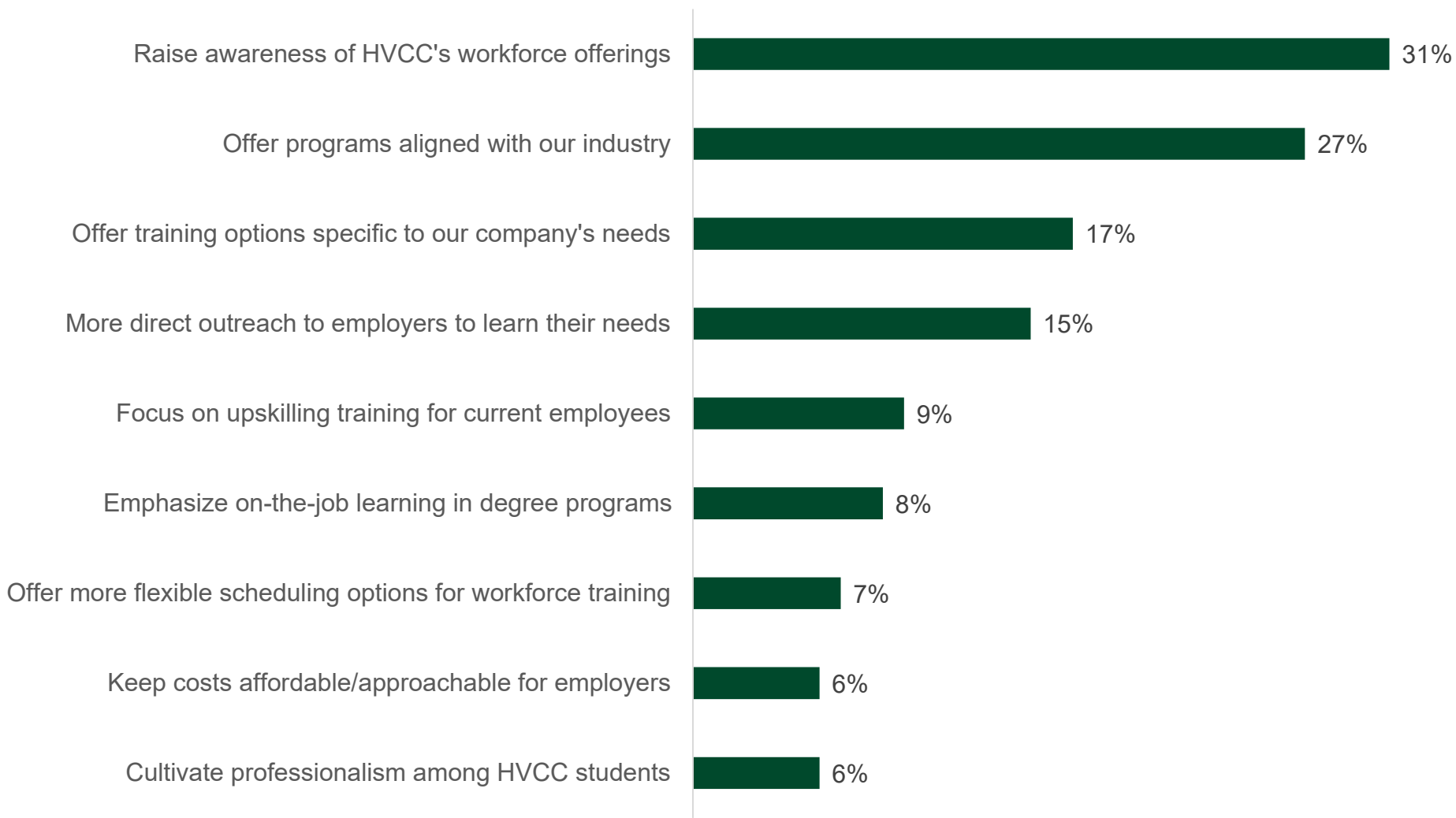
Employers are most eager to further their partnership with HVCC by employing graduates, hosting interns, and training for current employees

Q. In which areas would you be interested in deeper partnership with HVCC?



Raising awareness of HVCC’s workforce development offerings is the most impactful thing the institution could do to better support workforce needs

Q. If HVCC could do ONE thing differently to better support your workforce needs, what should it be?
[open-ended]



Verbatim Responses: What HVCC Could Do to Support Workforce Needs

Q. If HVCC could do ONE thing differently to better support your workforce needs, what should it be?
[open-ended]

HVCC could strengthen partnerships with local employers to offer more hands-on, real-world training and internship opportunities that directly align with workforce needs.

I wish they would work with us to create more customized courses to help us get better trained staff.

Improve proactive outreach and employer engagement to better align programs with industry skill gaps.

We need people that have better on-the-job training, not just in the classroom. There is a big difference on the job site vs. classroom training.

If HVCC could do one thing differently, it should increase hands-on industry-aligned training programs.

Increase proactive outreach and tailored communication to better understand specific industry skill industry skill gaps and co-create flexible, industry-relevant training programs.

Allow undergrads to come and actually see how manufacturing plant is run.

Communicate more effectively and on a more regular basis.

HVCC should expand employer partnerships to ensure programs directly match current workforce's skill demands.

Better response time with training and applicants.

More apprenticeship programs would be better.

Flexible hours for ongoing training.

Increase awareness of available programs. It's hard to use services we don't know about.

Proactively engage employers with dedicated industry liaisons to co-design agile modular training that directly addresses specific skill gaps.

Increase awareness of their programs and offer training specifically aligned with industry need.

Offer more hands-on, job-ready training that matches real employer expectations so graduates can step in with confidence from day one.

HVCC should focus on customizing training programs to align closely with our specific industry needs and skill gaps.

Summary, Themes, & Implications

THEME 1: Sustained Workforce Demand in the Capital Region

Across the survey, one of the clearest patterns to emerge is that workforce pressure is not a temporary or cyclical disruption, it is an ongoing operational reality for employers in the Capital Region.

Nearly all employers report at least one workforce challenge, and more than eight in ten say it is difficult to fill key roles. Looking ahead, most anticipate continued or increasing need for upskilling and reskilling over the next three to five years. Only a small minority expect workforce needs to remain static.

Taken together, these findings suggest that workforce development is not a short-term intervention area; it is a structural feature of the regional economy. Employers are navigating persistent hiring challenges, technological change, and evolving skill expectations. This environment creates sustained demand for skill-building partnerships.

For HVCC, this reinforces the importance of viewing workforce development not as a transactional service line, but as a strategic, long-term relationship opportunity. There is room to move beyond responding to discrete training requests toward deeper engagement around evolving skill needs, emerging technologies, and longer-term workforce planning. The opportunity is not merely to deliver training programs, but to position HVCC as a consistent contributor to regional competitiveness.

POTENTIAL TACTICAL ACTIONS:

- a. Establish recurring employer check-ins focused on anticipated skill needs.
- b. Develop modular credentials aligned with emerging industry trends, led by experienced instructors and customized to the industry/employer.
- c. Explore multi-year training partnerships with key regional employers.
- d. Position workforce development prominently in employer communications.

THEME 2: Employers Seek Dual Competency: Technical Skill and Professional Readiness

The skills findings reveal a consistent dual expectation among employers. On one hand, job-specific technical skills are among the most important and most difficult to find. On the other, communication skills, problem-solving, adaptability, and accountability surface repeatedly as both high-priority and scarce. Open-ended responses reinforce this pattern, with employers emphasizing work ethic, reliability, follow-through, and the ability to operate independently.

What emerges is not a simple technical skills gap. Employers are looking for individuals who can perform their job functions competently and operate effectively within professional environments. The expectation is not only that employees can complete tasks, but that they can communicate clearly, respond to feedback, collaborate with others, and navigate ambiguity.

This carries important implications for HVCC. Technical training alone may not be sufficient to differentiate graduates or trainees in a moderately competitive labor market. There is an opportunity to more intentionally integrate and articulate professional readiness within workforce and credit programming. Making this dual-competency model explicit—both in curriculum design and in employer-facing communication—could strengthen HVCC's value proposition as a workforce partner.

POTENTIAL TACTICAL ACTIONS:

- a. Embed communication and applied problem-solving components within technical programs.
- b. Develop a clearly defined professional readiness framework.
- c. Share competency maps with employers outlining both technical and professional outcomes.
- d. Highlight dual-competency preparation in marketing and outreach materials.

THEME 3: Current Skills Availability Signals a Market that is *Functional*, but Not Optimal

For nearly every skill area tested, most employers selected “somewhat available” when describing the availability of the skill in the regional talent pool. Few skills were characterized as “readily available,” yet most were not described as overwhelmingly difficult to find either. The prevailing perception is one of adequacy rather than excellence.

This middle-ground assessment is meaningful. It suggests that while the labor market is not in crisis, employers are not fully satisfied with the consistency or polish of available candidates. Preparation is sufficient to function but not consistently strong enough to create confidence or competitive advantage.

This represents opportunity for HVCC. In an environment where expectations are moderately met but not exceeded, incremental improvements in preparation and applied readiness can influence employer perception.

Elevating candidate preparedness from “adequate” to “consistently strong” could shift HVCC from being one training option among many to a preferred pipeline for workforce-ready talent.

POTENTIAL TACTICAL ACTIONS:

- a. Introduce capstone projects co-designed with industry partners.
- b. Offer advanced or distinction-level credentials signaling higher proficiency.
- c. Collect and share employer satisfaction data regarding graduate readiness.
- d. Incorporate employer feedback loops into program refinement.

THEME 4: Internal Training is the Default; HVCC Must Offer Differentiated Value and Ease

When workforce needs arise, employers most often turn inward. Internal training is perceived as convenient, culturally aligned, and responsive to organizational priorities. In nearly every evaluated dimension, internal training leads in perceived performance.

At the same time, when employers do consider external providers, HVCC compares favorably, particularly in instructional expertise and training relevance.

Where HVCC appears to lag is in perceived flexibility, speed of response, and cost effectiveness relative to private or online providers.

The strategic insight here is that HVCC's primary competition is not other colleges – it is employers' internal capacity. Employers do not default externally unless they see clear added value or operational ease.

For HVCC, this suggests two parallel priorities. First, lean into differentiated expertise, particularly in technical areas or emerging technologies where internal capacity may be limited. Second, reduce friction in engagement. Clear points of contact, predictable response timelines, and visible customization options may meaningfully increase the likelihood that HVCC becomes a first-call partner rather than a secondary option.

POTENTIAL TACTICAL ACTIONS:

- a. Streamline employer intake and response workflows.
- b. Assign industry-specific liaisons to key sectors.
- c. Publicly articulate response expectations and customization capabilities.
- d. Position HVCC as an extension of internal training capacity rather than a replacement.
- e. Emphasize faculty/instructor professional experience and expertise.

THEME 5: Employer Goodwill is Strong; Activation and Awareness Remain the Opportunity

One of the most encouraging patterns in the research is the absence of strong negative perceptions of HVCC.

Employers who have worked with HVCC tend to evaluate the experience positively, and most agree with favorable statements about HVCC's workforce contributions. Additionally, only a small minority express no interest in deeper partnership.

At the same time, more than half of employers have not engaged with HVCC for workforce training, and a significant portion do not affirm HVCC as a go-to partner. The primary barriers cited are reliance on internal training and lack of awareness of offerings.

This suggests that the gap is not reputational – it is operational and communicative. HVCC appears to enjoy baseline goodwill and openness among employers. The opportunity lies in activation: increasing the visibility of offerings, clarifying how employers can engage with HVCC, and proactively initiating relationships rather than waiting for employers to seek services.

In many respects, this may represent the most immediate opportunity for impact. Unlike systemic labor market challenges, awareness and engagement processes are within HVCC's direct influence.

POTENTIAL TACTICAL ACTIONS:

- a. Advance awareness of HVCC's existing role as a workforce development partner for the Capital Region.
- b. Increase targeted outreach to non-engaged employers.
- c. Clarify and simplify workforce training entry points.
- d. Continue to host—and expand—employer roundtables to surface needs and share offerings.
- e. Develop recurring employer communications highlighting programs and success stories.
- f. Track employer engagement growth as a strategic performance indicator.



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