



# State of Crisis Comms

According to 1,000 in-house and  
agency comms professionals



# Overview

Comms professionals are at the epicenter of the brand(s) they work for, responsible for driving awareness, combating misinformation, and shaping perception.

Examining some of the biggest brand battles of the year (which you can read about in [Memo's 2023 Crisis Index](#)) got us thinking about how comms teams (and their agencies) tackle crisis planning and incident response in today's climate.

So...we asked some questions and got some answers—from 1,000 in-house and agency communicators.

Memo's State of Crisis Comms examines what comms pros are most concerned about in 2023, how they are planning for potential crises ahead, and their approach to incident response.

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# Key Takeaways

- 1 Over 50% of in-house comms pros are not prepared for a restructure or layoffs should they arise.**

Despite it being one of the most common crises of 2023 thus far, restructures and layoffs ranked second lowest with only 44% of comms teams having a plan in place.

- 2 Millennial & Gen Z comms pros are far more worried about leadership issues arising than their older counterparts.**

More than 10% of Millennials and Gen Z comms pros ranked it within their top 2 concerns, compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers.

- 3 Leadership and financial issues are the top concerns keeping PR pros up at night.**

Both were more frequently ranked within the top 3 for in-house comms pros.

- 4 In-house comms pros are most frequently looking at data to inform crisis response.**

While it's a small margin between agencies (82%) and in-house comms (85%), comms pros within insights and analytics departments are more frequently looking at a higher variety of data sources, including readership.

# In-house Comms in a Crisis

The heartbeat of any brand is the in-house comms teams that are tasked with building its image and protecting it when a crisis arises. We asked them about their top concerns, how they evaluate crises, and perhaps most importantly, how they plan for the unknown.

## What types of crises keep comms pros up at night?

We asked in-house comms leaders to rank the types of crises keeping them up at night. Leadership and financial issues both lead the pack with 45% of those surveyed ranking them in their top 3.

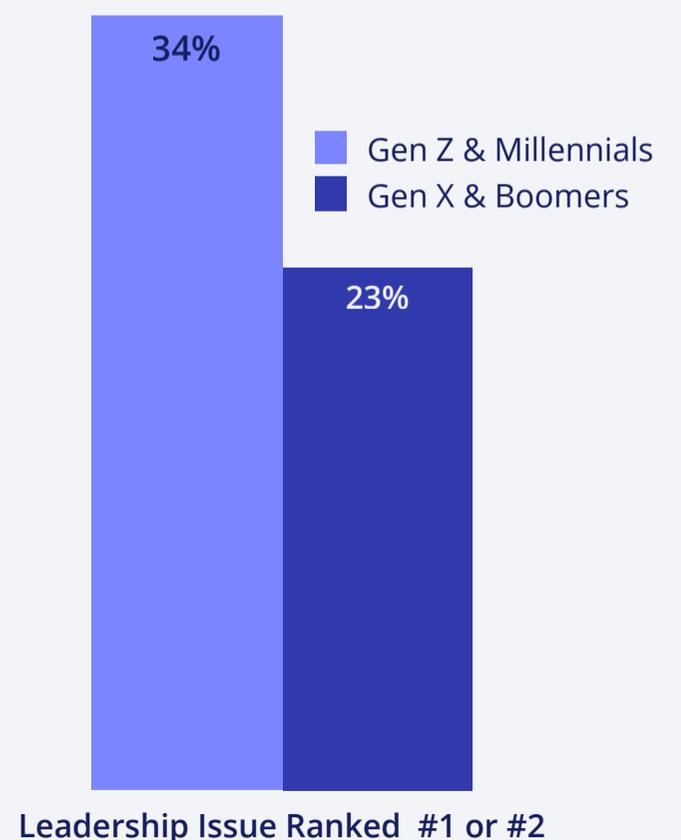
### Top 3 potential crises keeping comms teams up at night



**Millennial & Gen Z comms pros are far more worried about leadership issues arising than their older counterparts.**

Taking a closer look, more than 10% of Millennials and Gen Z comms pros ranked it within their top 2 concerns, compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers.

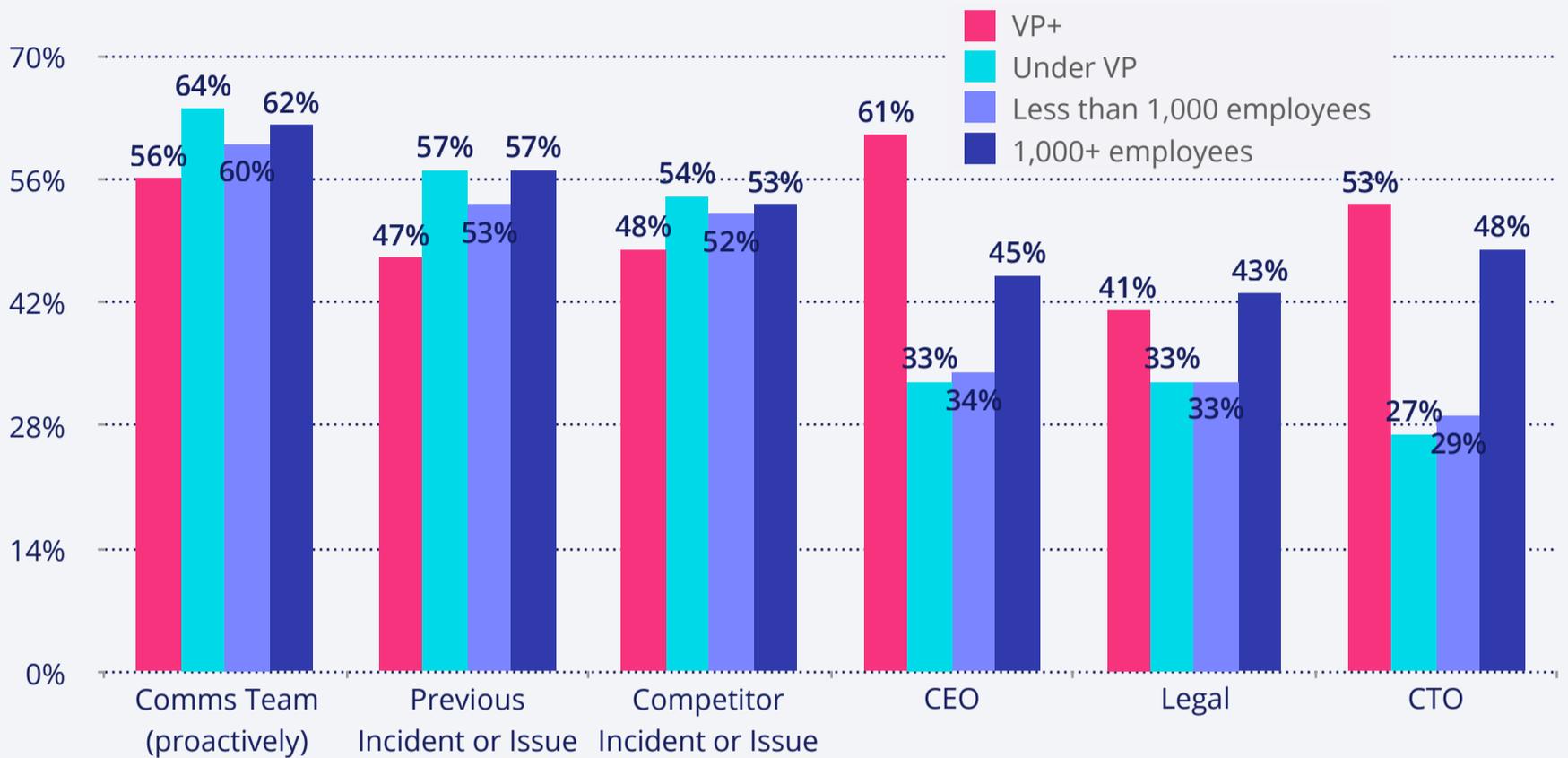
Perhaps not too surprising since these comms heroes spent their formative professional years watching #metoo and several social justice movements unfold.



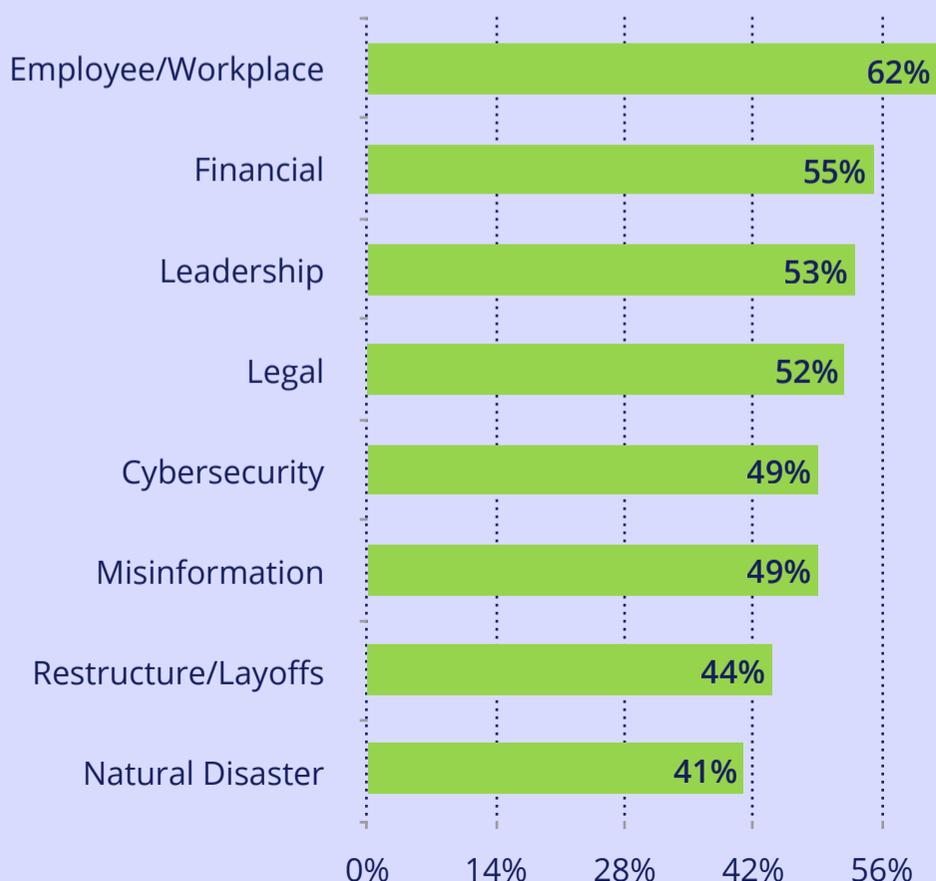
# In-house Crisis Planning

## What (or who) prompts crisis prep?

Anticipating risk is core to any comms pro's responsibilities. If you ask VPs and above, CEOs are prompting crisis planning most, with their own comms team coming in close second. Directors and below say that their comms teams are leading the charge, especially at companies with over 1,000 employees.



## What types of crises comms teams have plans for currently



Comms teams are most prepared for issues relating to employees or workplace, finances, leadership, and legal, with over 50% of comms pros saying they've developed a plan for each.

Despite it being one of the most common crises of 2023 thus far, **less than 50% comms teams say they have a plan in place should restructures or layoffs arise.**

Could it be that just mumbling the word "layoffs" is too scary? Maybe comms pros just assume someone else has it covered?

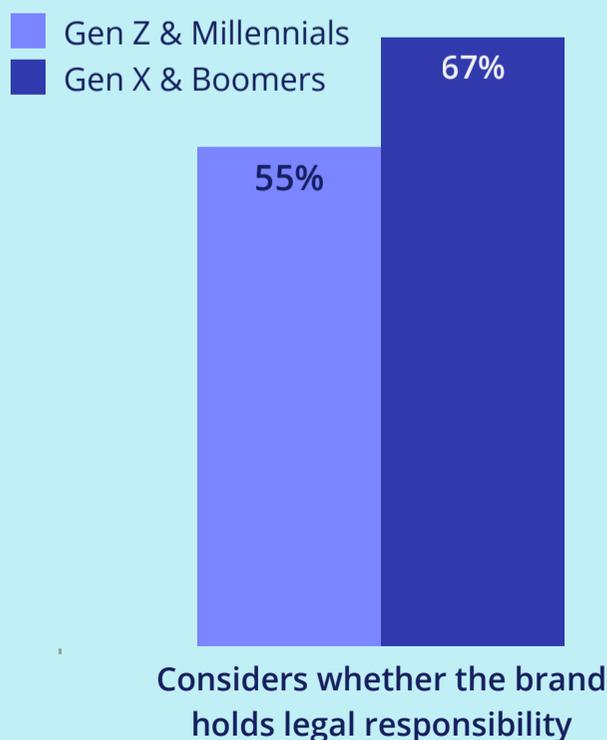
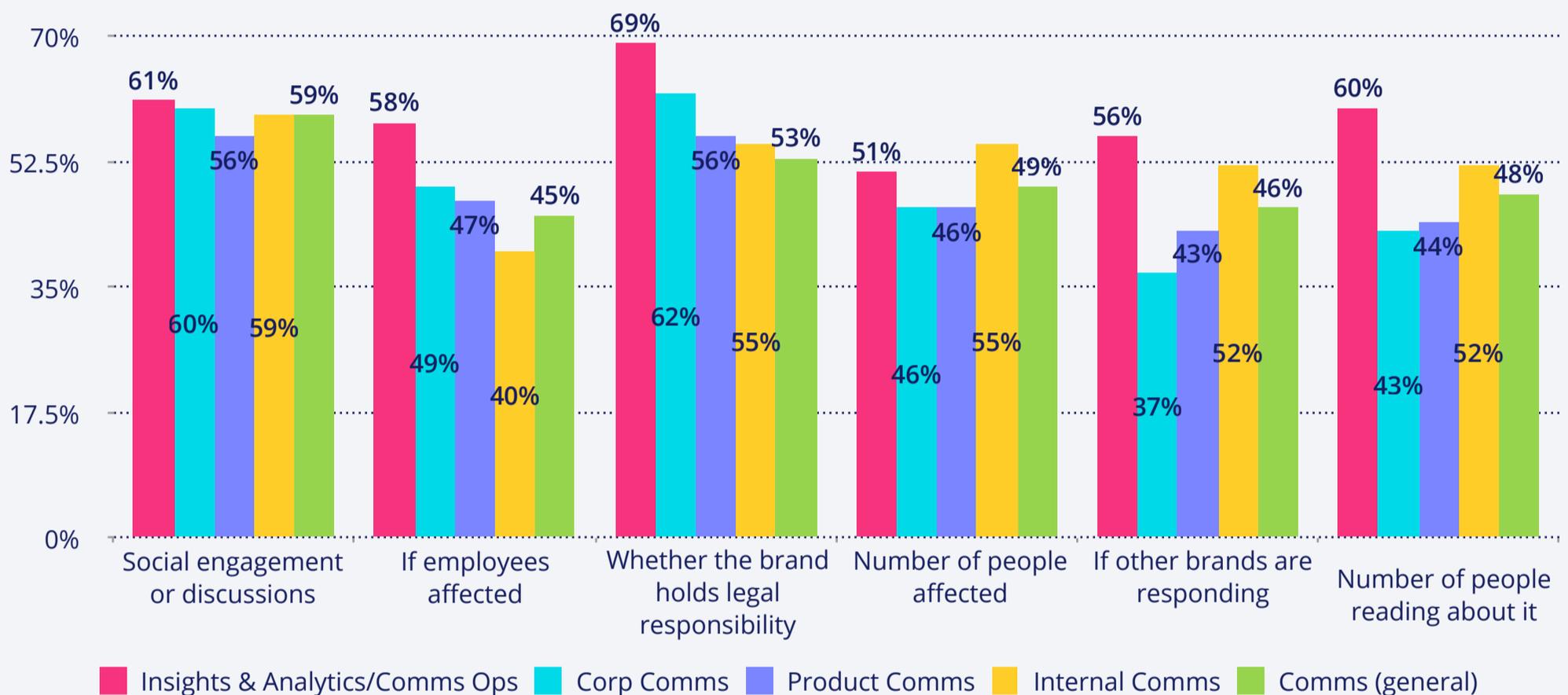
# In-house Considerations in a Crisis

## Comms teams consider social chatter and legal obligations most in a crisis

In-house comms pros consider social engagement and any legal responsibilities most when contemplating a response to a crisis. If you break that down by comms department, we see a more detailed view.

With less than 10% of article traffic coming from social media, not crises surface via social platforms. Read more about crises in [Memo's 2023 Crisis Index](#).

### Crisis Response Considerations by Team



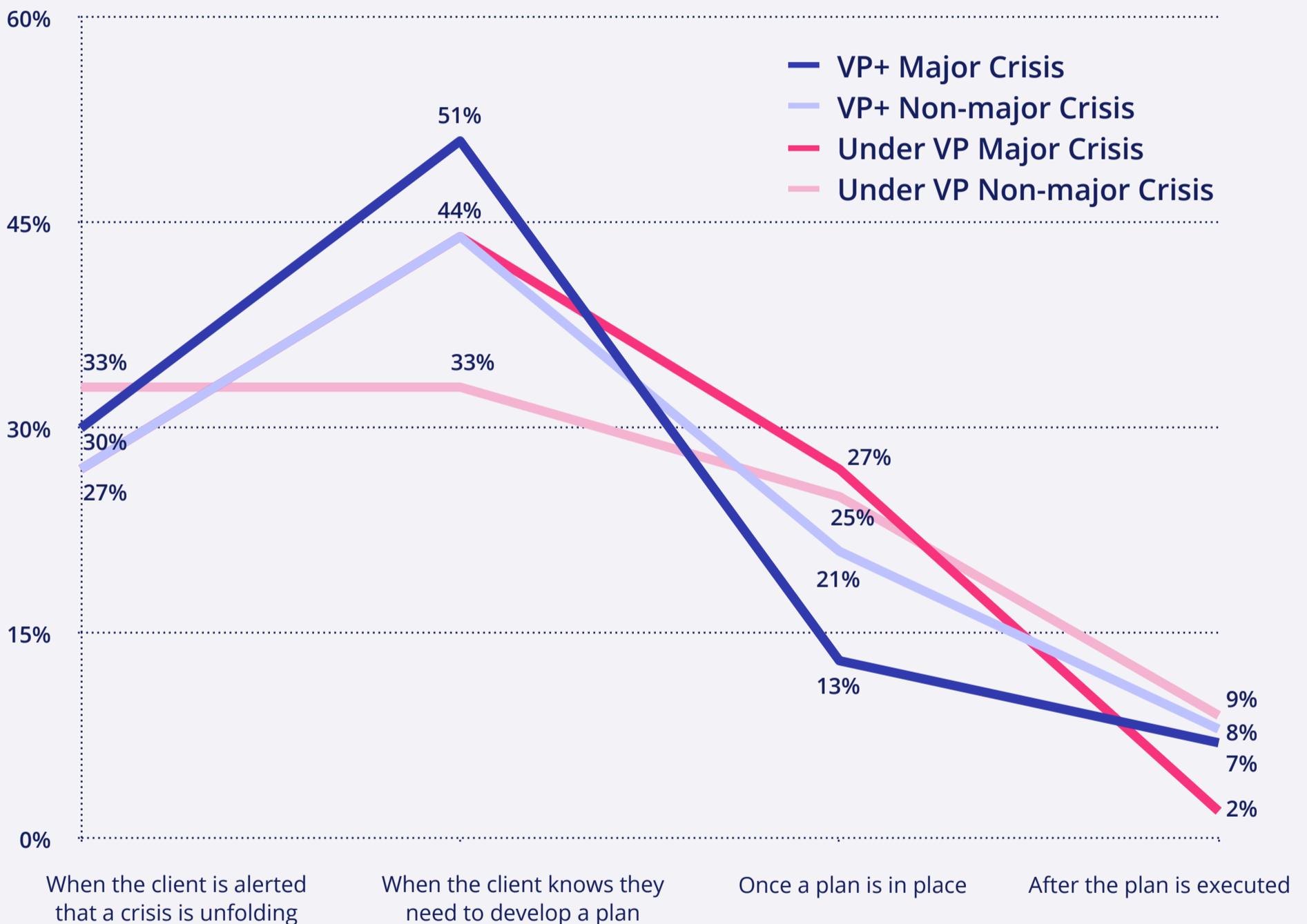
## Gen X & Boomer comms pros consider legal responsibility far more than their younger counterparts.

Of respondents that consider whether or not the brand holds any legal responsibilities when responding to a crisis, there was a 12% delta between Gen X & Boomer comms pros and Millennials and Gen Z comms pros.

# Agency Analysis

PR agencies sit on the frontlines when it comes to media relations. When a crisis starts to unfold, brands lean on their agencies to do everything from creating a media plan to crafting a response and monitoring pickup.

## When agencies get looped into crisis response



In the case of a major crisis (such as layoffs, a security incident, financial issue, executive issue, etc.), most PR agency professionals get looped in when clients know they need to develop a plan.

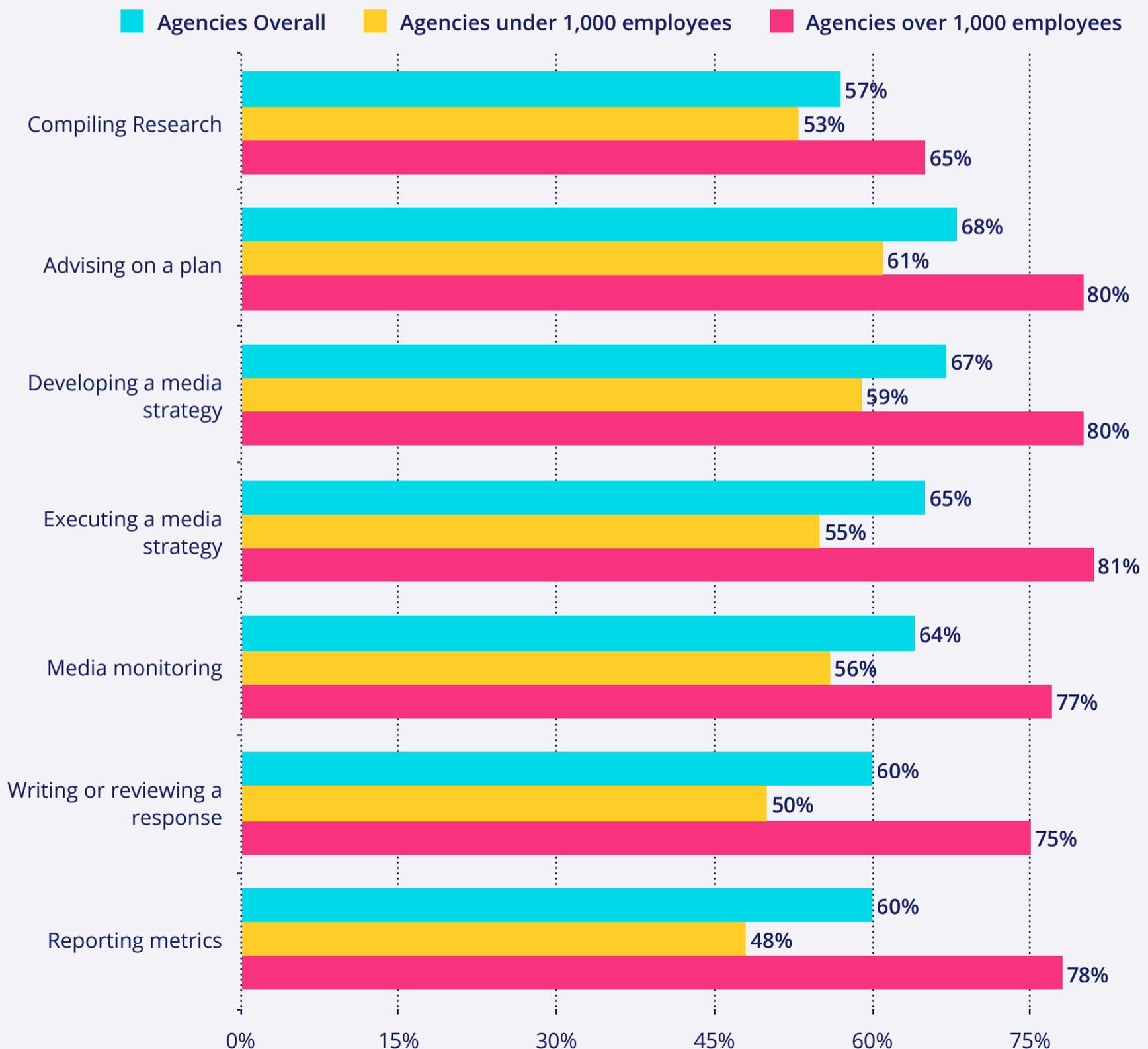
In the case of a non-major crisis (such as uptick in negative Glassdoor reviews, a minor employee incident, etc.), not a lot changes.

# Agency Analysis

## In a crisis, agencies help most with media relations.

Agencies large and small get called upon most relating to media relations when a crisis arises. Mid-sized agencies (100-999 employees) tend to help with media strategy slightly more, while large agencies (1,000+ employees) help with media monitoring and metrics reporting more than their mid-sized counterparts.

### What brands need from agencies in a crisis

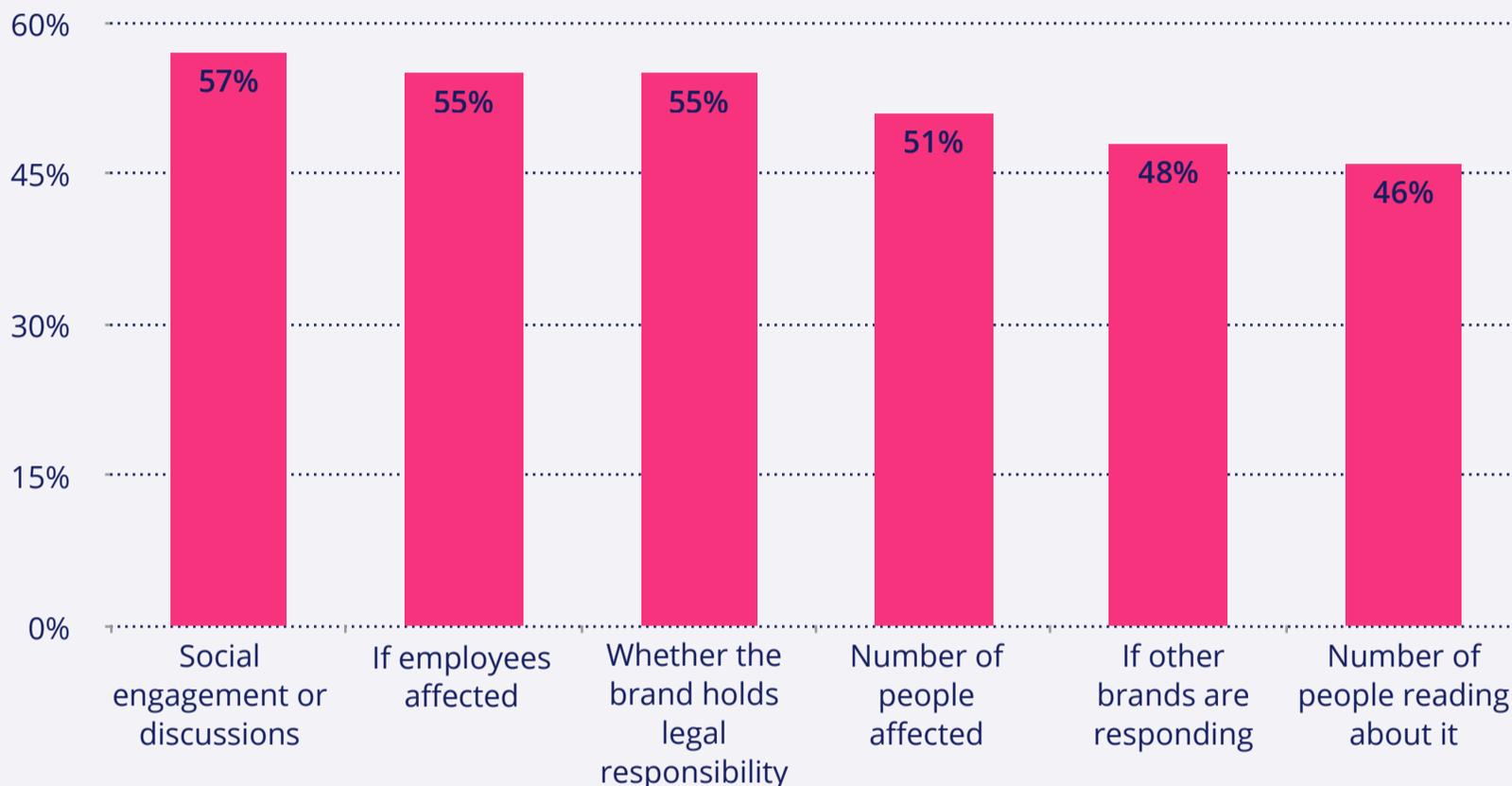


# Agency Analysis

## What considerations are made before responding to a crisis?

Agencies look to social engagement, employee impact, and any legal responsibilities as signals for crisis response.

### Agency Crisis Response Considerations



### Ranking: Types of crises agencies help clients to develop a plan for

1. Financial Issue
2. Employee Issue or Workplace Incident
3. Cybersecurity Incident
4. Combating Misinformation
5. Leadership Issue
6. Legal Issue or Lawsuit
7. **Restructure or Layoffs**
8. Natural Disaster

Despite record layoffs in 2023, creating a plan for a restructure or layoffs ranked 7th among crisis plans agency pros helped develop in the last 3 years.

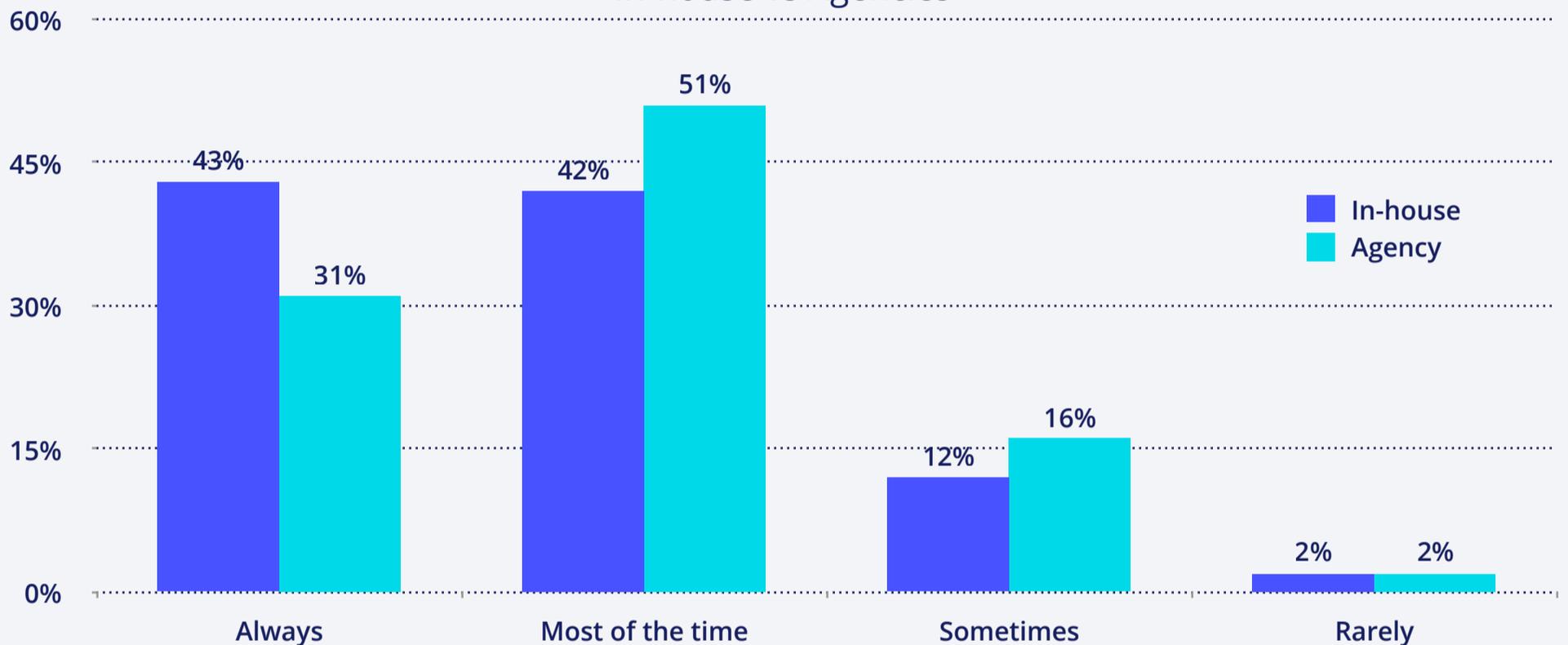
# Data in a Crisis

## How often does data inform crisis response?

For agencies, 82% say that they leverage data to inform crisis response always or most of the time. For in-house comms pros, it's slightly higher — 85% say that they leverage data to inform crisis response always or most of the time.

### Frequency of Data Informing a Crisis Response

In-house vs Agencies



Based on their rankings of considerations, this could be anything from social metrics to readership. Comms pros within insights and analytics departments are more frequently looking at a higher variety of data sources, including readership.

For the 2% of both that say they rarely look at data... we're downright spooked!

## Methodology

These are the results of an online survey conducted by a third party panel company, Sago, from June 15, 2023 to June 21, 2023 of 1,000 respondents over 18 years old working full time in communications at a company (either in-house or at an agency) with over 100 employees.

# Accurate data leads to better decisions.

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