

Project Managers' Competencies Research by actiTIME

The interplay between hard and soft skills.



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Overview

The demand for skilled project management professionals continues to grow across various industries and company sizes. However, the competencies required to excel in this role are not uniform; they may vary significantly depending on the specific context in which a project manager operates.

At actiTIME, we recognized the importance of understanding the skill sets of project managers in today's dynamic business environment.

Our white paper presents the findings from an extensive study involving 1,500+ project managers from diverse sectors and organizational scales.

Through a comprehensive survey (quiz) and a project management simulation based on real-life scenarios, we assessed both hard and soft skills, aiming to uncover the challenges these professionals face in developing their proficiency.

Our research seeks to identify which skills are the most difficult to master and explore how these challenges correlate with the size of the company and the industry in which the project managers work.

We hope to provide valuable insights that can inform training programs, recruitment strategies, and professional development initiatives.

Methodology

We designed a comprehensive and unique research methodology that involved two engaging opportunities for our users: [a project management skills quiz](#) and [a simulation exercise](#).

Project Management Skills Quiz

Objective: Evaluate the soft skills essential for effective project management.

Structure:

- The quiz consisted of a series of carefully crafted questions designed to assess various dimensions of soft skills.
- It provided respondents with five options for each question: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always.
- Each question was formulated to gauge the respondents' self-perception and real-life application of these skills in their work environments.
- Respondents were encouraged to answer honestly to provide a true reflection of their abilities.

Question Block	Goal
Emotional awareness	Explore how well a project manager can identify emotional cues in themselves and their team members.
Optimism	Determine how a project manager maintains motivation and encourages their team during difficult times.
Self-control	Measure how well a project manager can remain calm, make rational decisions, and maintain professionalism in high-pressure situations.
Flexibility	Assess a project manager's adaptability to changing circumstances and their willingness to modify plans as needed.
Empathy	Evaluate how well a project manager can connect with team members, recognize their needs, and respond to their concerns. Empathy fosters trust and collaboration within teams.
Ability to give and receive constructive feedback	Evaluate how well a project manager can connect with team members, recognize their needs, and respond to their concerns. Empathy fosters trust and collaboration within teams.
Ability to build positive team relations	See how well a project manager can create a supportive and inclusive team environment, promote collaboration, and resolve conflicts.
Leadership	Understand how a project manager inspires, motivates, and directs their team, as well as their ability to make decisions, set clear goals, and delegate responsibilities effectively.

Simulation Exercise

Objective: Test hard skills critical to project management.

Structure:

- Participants engaged in a realistic project management simulation that presented them with scenarios requiring strategic decision-making and problem-solving.
- The simulation was designed to mimic real-world challenges faced by project managers, allowing participants to demonstrate their technical skills in a controlled environment.
- It involved a series of multiple-choice questions, each specifically designed to correlate with a particular skill.

Question Block	Goal	Skills Tested
Project Initiation	<p>Evaluate the ability to identify all individuals or groups affected by the project, including sponsors, team members, customers, and other stakeholders.</p> <p>Assess the capability to define the project’s purpose, objectives, and scope in a formal document that serves as a reference throughout the project lifecycle.</p> <p>Determine the ability to assess whether the project is viable in terms of technical, economic, legal, operational, and scheduling factors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder analysis,• Communication and documentation skills,• Risk assessment.

<p>Project Planning</p>	<p>Evaluate how well the project manager can establish clear, measurable, and achievable goals that align with stakeholder expectations and project objectives.</p> <p>Test the ability to outline the boundaries of the project, including deliverables and exclusions, to prevent scope creep.</p> <p>Assess proficiency in creating a timeline for project tasks, milestones, and deliverables to ensure timely completion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-setting, • Scheduling, • Prioritization, • Scope management, • Time management.
<p>Project Execution</p>	<p>Evaluate the ability to effectively allocate and manage resources (human, financial, material) needed for project completion.</p> <p>Assess the ability to create and manage a budget that aligns with project goals while ensuring financial resources are used efficiently.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource allocation, • Budget management, • Proactive planning, • Crisis management.
<p>Monitoring and Control</p>	<p>Evaluate the capacity to lead and motivate a team towards achieving project objectives while fostering collaboration.</p> <p>Assess knowledge of processes for ensuring that project deliverables meet required standards and stakeholder expectations.</p> <p>Determine the ability to assign tasks effectively and track their progress to ensure timely completion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality assurance.

Project Closure	<p>Evaluate the ability to establish metrics for assessing project performance and progress against goals.</p> <p>Assess how well the project manager can handle changes in scope, resources, or timelines while minimizing disruption.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Evaluate critical thinking and decision-making skills when faced with challenges or unexpected issues during the project lifecycle.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performance measurement,• Data analysis,• Change management.
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Data Collection

Performance metrics from the quiz and simulation were recorded, providing quantitative data on how effectively participants navigated various project management tasks.

Additionally, we analyzed voluntarily provided information regarding the participants' backgrounds using public and proprietary company registers like Crunchbase and Tracxn to facilitate a comprehensive analysis.

We also used traffic analytics tools to retrieve the traffic data from the quiz and simulation exit forms and determine the geographics of our respondents.

Data Processing and Calculations

In this research, we employed a mixed-method approach to assess various skills of participants.

In the quiz we analyzed the responses by calculating the percentage of answers for each option across all participants.

Based on the distribution of responses, we categorized users into three levels of skill proficiency:

- Strong Level: A high percentage of responses indicating “always” and "often."
- Medium Level: A balanced mix of responses between "often" and "sometimes."
- Weak Level: A high percentage of responses indicating "rarely" or "never."

In the quiz, for each question, we recorded the number of correct and incorrect answers given by participants.

Then we calculated the percentage of correct answers for each question to determine the proportion of users who demonstrated proficiency in that specific skill.

For participants who passed the simulation multiple times, we only calculated the results from their first attempt. Subsequent attempts were not included in the final analysis.

We also tried to establish the correlation between demographic factors (country and company type and size) and skill levels to identify unique challenges faced by project managers in different regions and industries.

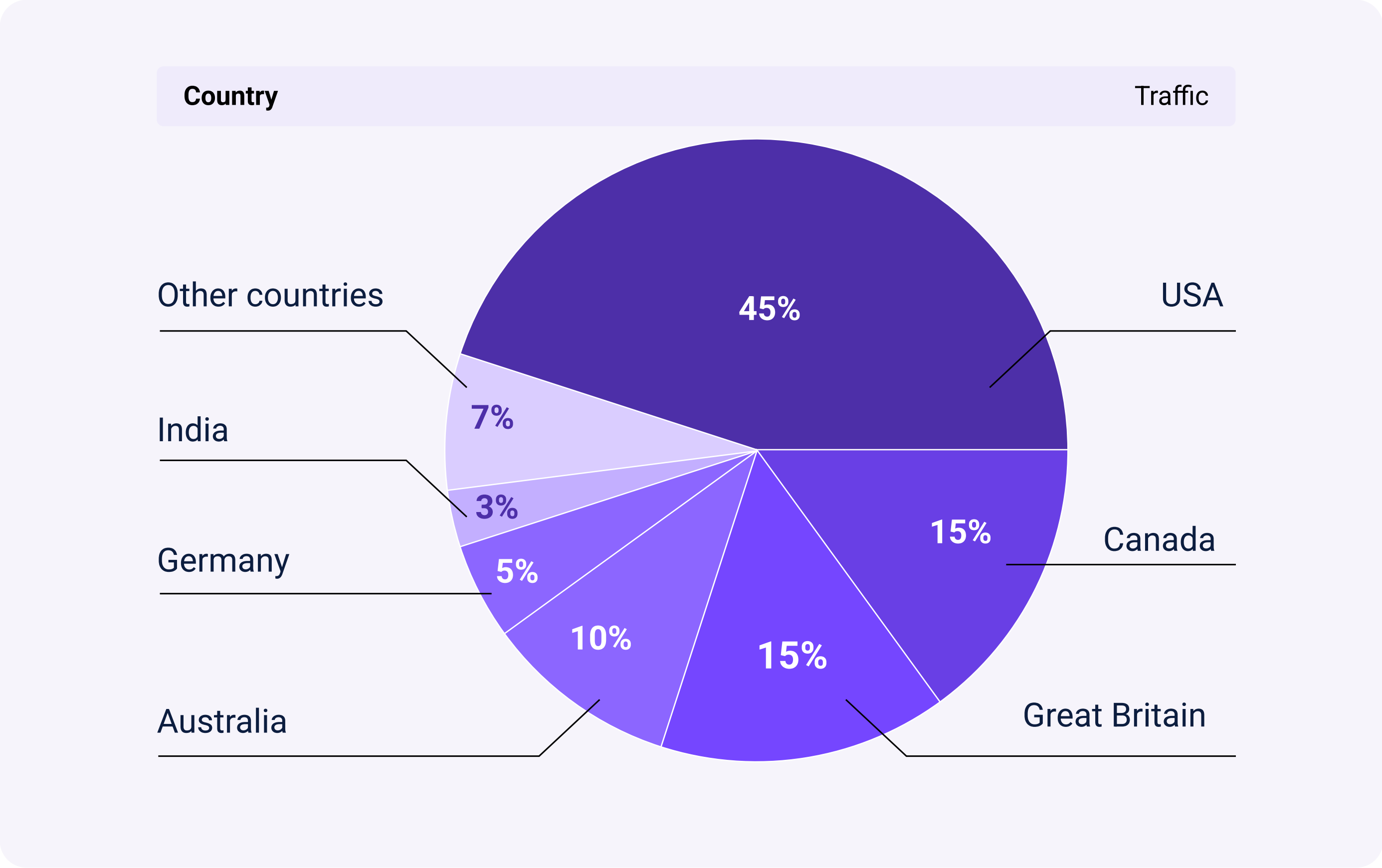
NOTE!

It is important to note that during the implementation of the quiz methodology, we encountered a couple of limitations that may affect the interpretation of our findings:

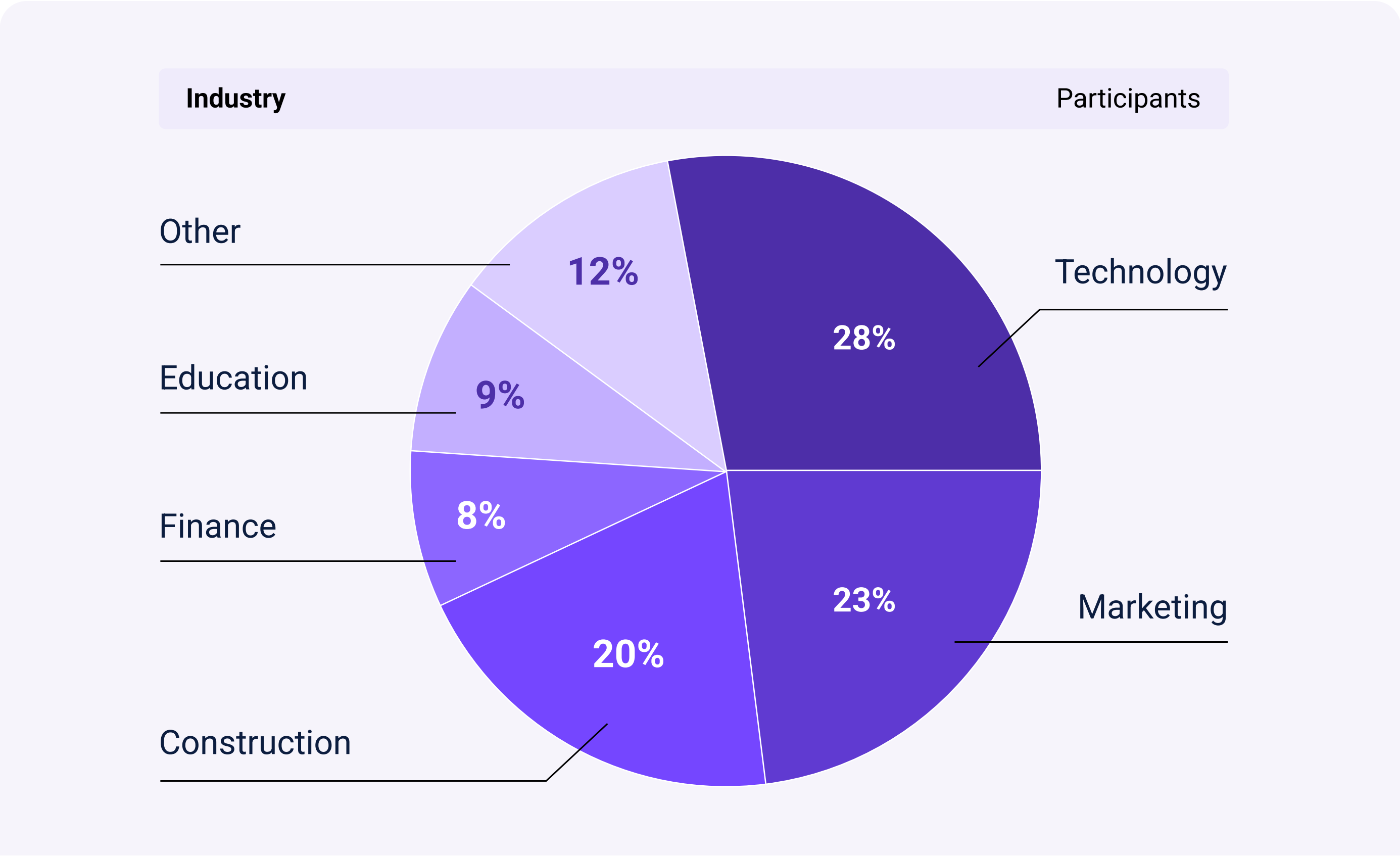
1. We were unable to account for participants utilizing Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) when determining their geographic locations. This could potentially skew our understanding of regional skill distributions and demographic insights, as users may have appeared to be located in different regions than their actual physical presence.
2. Additionally, not all participants' companies could be found in the relevant business register. This limitation may impact our ability to analyze the results in relation to specific industries or organizational contexts, as we could not fully verify the affiliations of all respondents.

Participants' Demographics

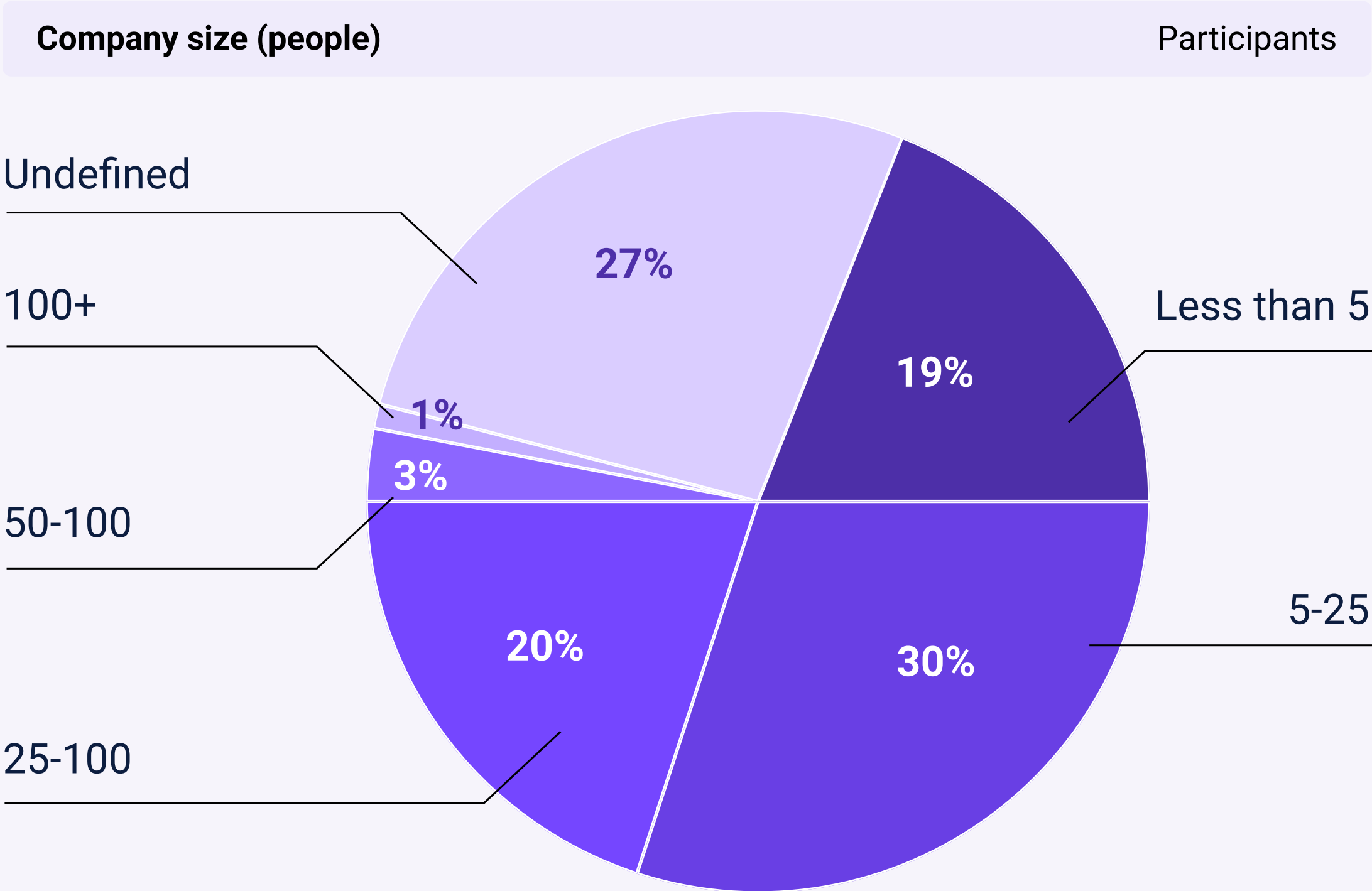
Quiz and Simulation Participants' Locations



Quiz and Simulation Participants' Industries

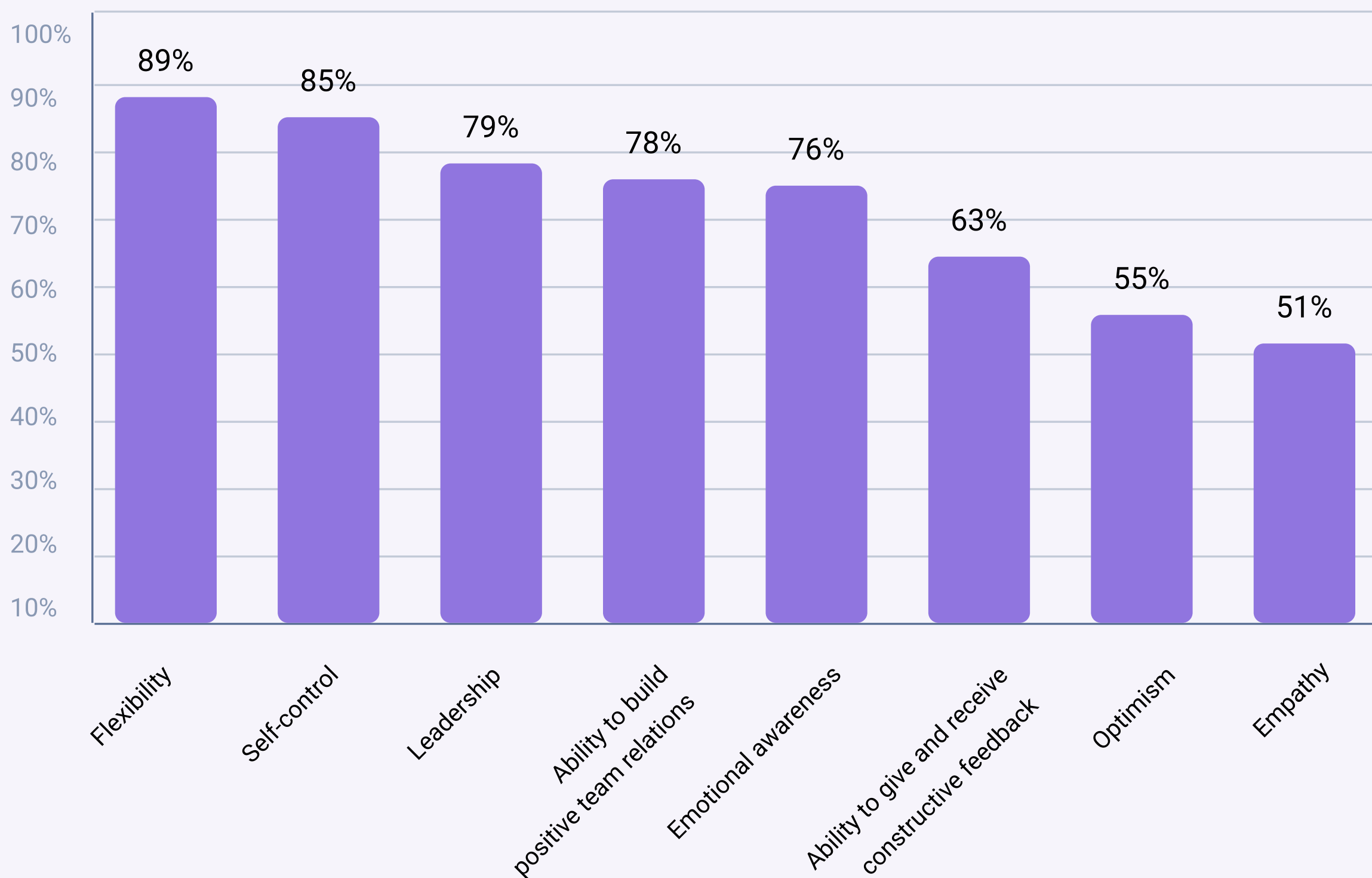


Quiz and Simulation Participants' Company Sizes



Project Manager Skills Rating

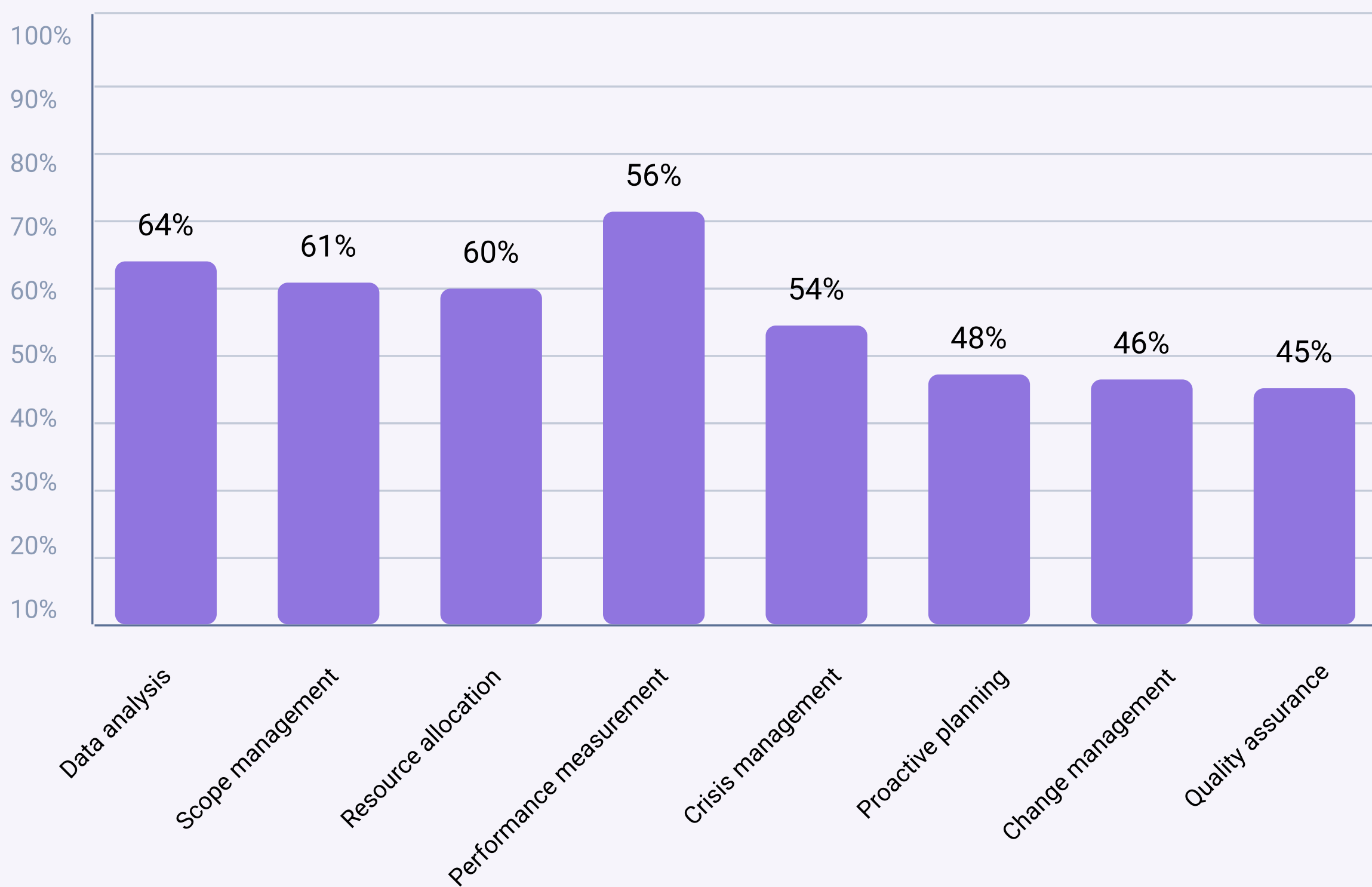
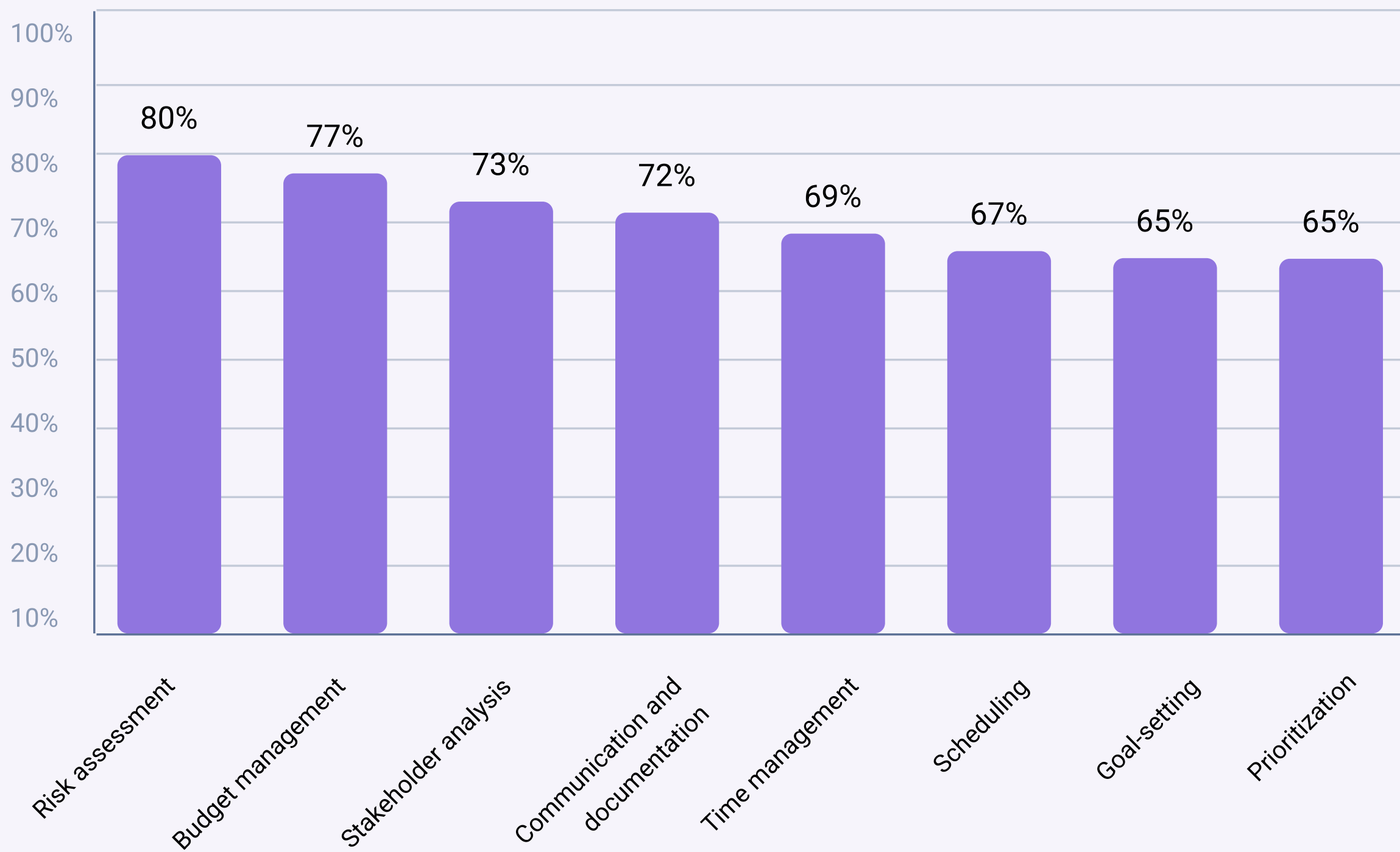
Quiz Participants' Soft Skills Rating



NOTE!

The final percentage does not equal 100% because one quiz participant may demonstrate a strong level in more than one area. This overlap can lead to a cumulative total that exceeds 100%.

Simulation Participants' Hard Skills Rating



NOTE!

The final percentage does not equal 100% because one simulation participant may demonstrate proficiency in more than one area. This overlap can lead to a cumulative total that exceeds 100%.

Top 3 Strongest Project Managers’ Skills in the Leading Countries

Soft-skills

Country	Skills
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership• Flexibility• Ability to build positive team relations
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flexibility• Self-control• Ability to build positive team relations
Great Britain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership• Ability to build positive team relations• Emotional awareness
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flexibility• Leadership• Self-control
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership• Flexibility• Self-control

Hard skills

USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time management• Goal-setting• Scheduling
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritization• Scheduling• Time management
Great Britain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget management• Risk assessment• Time management
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritization• Budget management• Scheduling
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risk assessment• Budget management• Scheduling

Top 3 Strongest Project Managers’ Skills by Company Size

Soft-skills

Company size (people)	Skills
Less than 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flexibility• Self-control• Ability to give and receive constructive feedback
5-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to build positive team relations• Flexibility• Self-control
25-50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-control• Leadership• Flexibility
50-100	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-control• Leadership• Flexibility
100+	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-control• Leadership• Emotional awareness

Hard skills

Less than 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritization• Scheduling• Time management
5-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget management• Communication and documentation• Scheduling
25-50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder analysis• Communication and documentation• Budget management
50-100	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risk assessment• Budget management• Time management
100+	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget management• Stakeholder analysis• Scheduling

Top 3 Strongest Project Managers’ Skills in the Leading Industries

Soft-skills

Industry	Skills
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership• Flexibility• Ability to build positive team relations
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership• Ability to build positive team relations• Self-control
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership• Flexibility• Self-control

Hard skills

Industry	Skills
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risk assessment• Budget management• Data analysis
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget management• Data analysis• Scheduling
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritization• Scheduling• Risk assessment

Key Takeaways

The demographics of our participants align closely with countries renowned for their robust project management practices and competitive salaries within the industry.

This correlation underscores the relevance and credibility of our findings, providing valuable insights for stakeholders across the globe.

1. Flexibility, self-control, and leadership emerge as the primary soft skills across various locations, industries, and company sizes.
2. In smaller organizations, particularly in the technology sector, the importance of positive team relations and emotional awareness is amplified.
3. Risk assessment, budget management, scheduling, prioritization, and time management are universally recognized as critical hard skills for project managers.
4. Project managers in smaller companies seem to face a unique set of challenges due to their broader range of responsibilities and smaller company budgets. Therefore, strong communication and documentation skills become vital for ensuring clarity and alignment among team members.

Empower Your Team with the Right Tools

As the demands of project management continue to evolve, the integration of automation into daily workflows is becoming increasingly essential.

Tools like [actiTIME](#) not only streamline project planning and budget management but also provide valuable support in risk assessment.

Here's what we have to offer:

- Task allocation based on team members' availability and expertise.
- Visual project planning on a Kanban board.
- Time-tracking features that allow team members to log hours spent on specific tasks or projects.
- Real-time updates on task progress.
- Tracking labor costs associated with your projects.
- Insights into project budgets versus actual expenditures.
- Integration with actiPLANS for easier work scheduling and resource management.
- and more!

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 Tasks
 Reports
 Users

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Task <small>Customer / Project</small>	Sort: by task ↓ Show details ⋮	Mon 07	Tue 08	Wed 09	Thu 10	Fri 11	Sat 12	Sun 13	Remove Row
		<div>Locations: ⓘ</div>							
Total Leave Time: 0:00		no leave time	no leave time	no leave time	no leave time	no leave time	no leave time	no leave time	
New ▾ Customer demo Insight Partners / Client	136.7% <div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: orange;"></div> No deadline 0			1:00					
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Total Working Time: 27:00		4:00	9:00	8:00	6:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	
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To experience the benefits firsthand, we invite you to take advantage of our [free trial](#).

Discover how our solution can empower your project management efforts and lead your projects to successful completion.



Thank you for engaging with our research, and we look forward to supporting your journey toward project excellence.