

# How Warehouse Leaders Turn Uncertainty Into Advantage



New industry report reveals how data-driven leaders use operational agility to turn supply chain disruption into strong performance and growth.

## **INTRODUCTION**

---

Uncertainty has become the constant in modern warehouse and distribution operations. Labor runs short, order volumes rise and fall without warning, and shipments face delays due to port congestion or extreme weather events. Add the ripple effects of a shifting tariff environment to the situation and it's pretty clear why planning feels more complex than ever.

Even routine decisions about staffing, purchasing or scheduling can feel like high-stakes bets in an environment where conditions change daily. One day the challenge may be finding enough workers to keep pace with peak demand, and the next it may be slowing production to avoid stockpiling excess inventory.

Volatility isn't just a source of risk. It's also an opportunity for organizations that can move quickly and make confident decisions based on accurate, reliable data. Operational agility is essential in this ever-changing environment. Defined as the ability to move quickly and easily when the situation calls for fast, strategic moves, agility helps leaders adapt without having to give up control. It's also what separates teams that get caught off guard from those that view disruption as fuel to sharpen their performance and deliver consistent results.

## **ABOUT THE SURVEY**

---

These findings are drawn from more than 120 industry professionals, most of whom hold senior management, VP, or C-suite roles (see sidebar for full breakdown). Respondents represent manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, and logistics providers of all sizes, from small businesses to billion-dollar enterprises. Nearly all play a direct role in supply chain and warehouse decision making, bringing a perspective that reflects both strategic oversight and operational accountability.

## WHAT DOES AGILITY MEAN TODAY?

Operational agility isn't about having a single backup plan or reacting when things go wrong. It's about designing systems, processes and teams that can flex with whatever the market throws at them. An agile operation can shift production schedules on short notice, reallocate labor to cover sudden spikes in demand and draw on data to make confident decisions in real time. It's not about locking into one plan. It's about responding fast when the ground shifts and keeping operations moving without losing control.

Agility shows up in many forms:

- Warehouses can use real-time performance data to quickly reassign shifts before bottlenecks form.
- Manufacturers that have clear visibility into supplier inventories can secure alternate materials before shortages ripple through the line.
- Distribution centers using multiple carriers can redirect outbound freight when weather threatens deliveries.

These examples point to a bigger truth: agility isn't a single tactic, it's a way of operating that combines labor planning, supplier visibility and freight decisions into a single, responsive system.

Easy Metrics' new *Operational Agility in an Unpredictable Supply Chain* survey, conducted with Peerless Research Group, shows how this plays out. Nearly half of respondents said they adjust staffing or shift planning at least weekly to meet changing demand, and 25% make these moves daily. This shows how quickly managers are learning to adapt to their "new normal" operating environment.

## DISRUPTION AS A CATALYST FOR IMPROVEMENT

Agile organizations make decisions faster because they have better visibility into costs, labor and inventory. They waste less because they can align resources with actual demand instead of forecasts that are already outdated. They engage their workforce more effectively by giving people the tools and authority to solve problems on the spot. And they deliver more consistent service because they can respond to customers' changing needs without long delays.

Agility also creates space for growth. Instead of focusing all energy on fighting fires, for example, companies can use disruption as a catalyst for improvement. They spot inefficiencies sooner, test new approaches more often and turn lessons into lasting gains. The payoff goes beyond a steady state: agile teams expect change, respond with confidence and turn disruption into advantage.

That shift in mindset shows up in the survey data. For example, 63% of respondents track facility-level performance or cost metrics, and nearly half monitor labor utilization and process performance. That level of tracking gives managers the information they need to fix problems quickly and keep operations on course.

## ACT FASTER. ANTICIPATE PROBLEMS. PERFORM UNDER PRESSURE.

Volatility is the new normal for warehouse operations. Shifting order volumes, persistent labor shortages and supply chain constraints are all forcing leaders to make tough calls with limited visibility. Resilience alone doesn't cut it in this environment. To stay in control, companies must track performance closely and adjust quickly.

Easy Metrics' new survey benchmarks exactly how warehouse and distribution leaders build that control through data-driven agility. Respondents point to labor forecasting, cycle time, indirect time, missing time and labor standards as core areas of focus this year. Taken together, these metrics paint a clear picture of where time and cost go each day. Managers can act faster, anticipate problems earlier and keep performance steady under pressure.

The survey also shows that leaders aren't just tracking metrics, they're using them to drive accountability across teams. More than two-thirds of respondents set standardized labor performance goals like cases-per-hour or time-per-process. This underscores a shift toward using clear benchmarks to guide performance. When standards stay current, managers and employees have common targets to work toward. They can also identify potential issues, coach teams to success and align productivity with broader business requirements.

Amid all of the volatility and uncertainty that organizations are grappling with right now, this new survey cuts through the noise and reveals where leaders are focusing their attention. It also serves as a reference point for teams that want to balance agility with accountability. The findings offer an inside look at the metrics and practices shaping warehouse and distribution performance in 2025.

## DISRUPTION DEMANDS FASTER ADJUSTMENTS

Disruption has many faces, but survey participants highlighted the pain points that hit hardest over the past year.

Supply chain delays topped the list, with 52% saying they had the greatest impact on operations. Another 42% pointed to labor availability and 39% cited unpredictable order volumes.

Rising labor costs (29%), inaccurate forecasting that led to productivity loss (20%) and equipment restraints (18%) also made the list of challenges keeping leaders up at night. These results show how closely operational agility is tied to identifying the source of pressure and adjusting fast enough to keep performance steady.

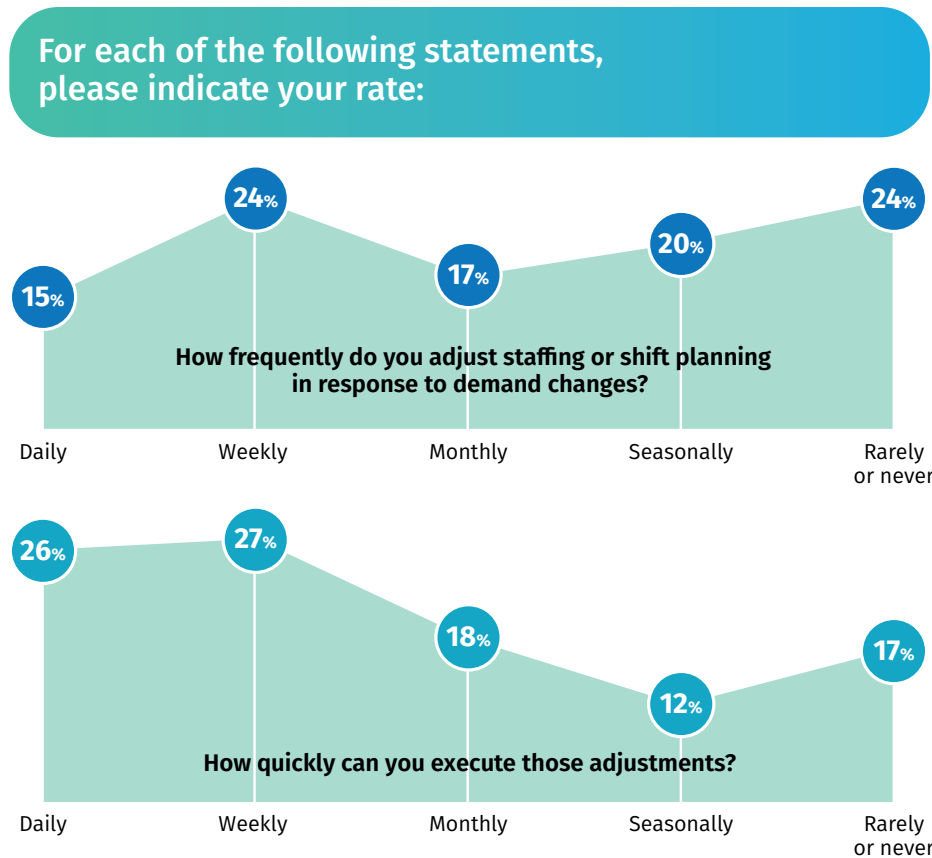
FIGURE 1



Staffing flexibility has become a core test of agility, and the survey reveals just how often managers are forced to shift gears to meet demand. About one-quarter of respondents say they rarely or never adjust staffing plans, while 20% make seasonal changes and 17% adjust monthly. Another 24% update staffing weekly and 15% do so daily.

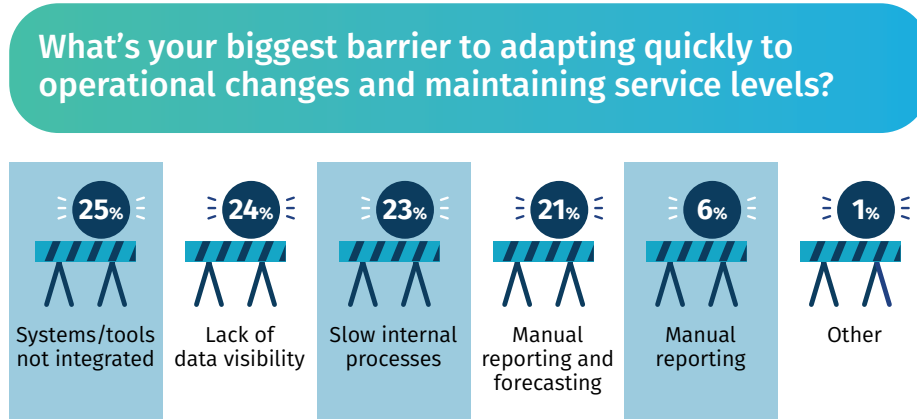
When asked how quickly they can carry out those changes, 26% said daily and 27% said weekly, while smaller groups said monthly (18%), seasonally (12%) or rarely (17%).

FIGURE 2



The path to agility isn't always easy. One-quarter of respondents said their biggest barrier is systems and tools that don't connect. Almost as many pointed to poor data visibility (24%) or slow internal processes (23%). These gaps limit how quickly managers can respond and impede steady, predictable performance amid shifting conditions.

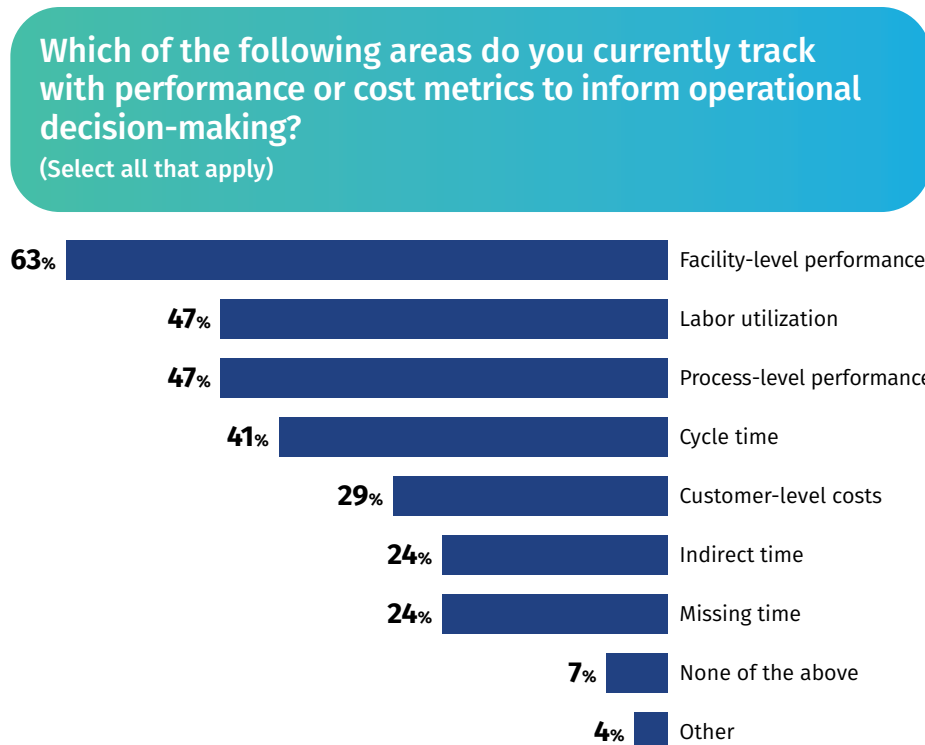
FIGURE 3



### WHO'S TRACKING WHAT?

Agility is rooted in clear visibility, and the survey shows how leaders are building that foundation. Nearly two-thirds of respondents track facility-level performance or cost metrics to guide decisions. Almost half monitor labor utilization and process performance, and more than four in ten track cycle time. Others focus on customer-level costs (29%), missing time (24%) or indirect time (24%). When the data is front and center, managers can see what's really happening on the floor and make faster, more confident moves when conditions shift.

FIGURE 4



According to the survey, most organizations set standardized labor performance goals like cases per hour or time per process (70%), but less than half (47%) update them regularly. At the same time, performance and cost metrics are reviewed with varying frequency (e.g., 33% of respondents do so weekly, 26% monthly, 15% quarterly, 8% daily, and 10% never), which reveals wide inconsistencies in how goals and reviews are managed across operations.

FIGURE 5

Do you use standardized labor performance goals across your operations (e.g., cases/hour, time per process)?



Yes,  
regularly updated  
**47%**



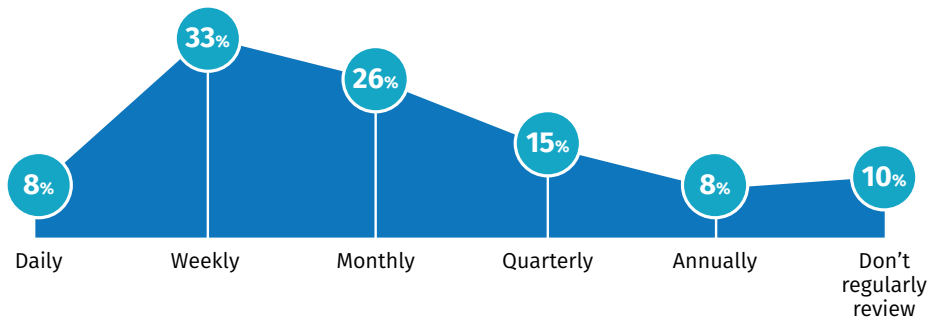
Yes,  
but they are outdated  
**23%**



No,  
do not use standardized goals  
**30%**

FIGURE 6

How often do you review performance or cost metrics with your operations team?



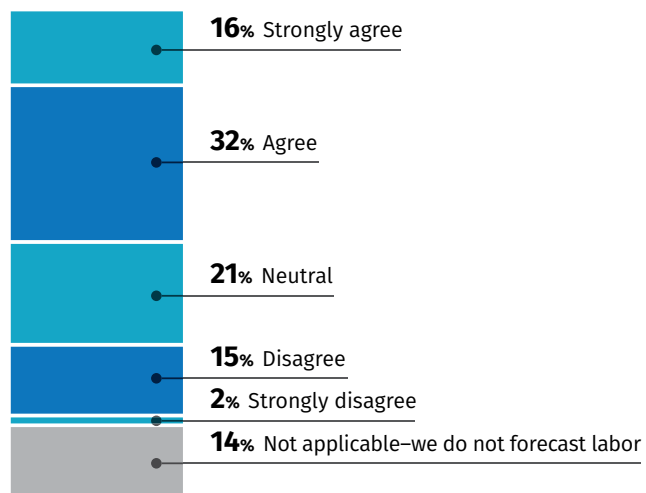


Labor forecasting confidence during peak periods is mixed: just 16% of respondents strongly agree they trust their forecasts and 32% agree, while the rest are split between neutral (21%), disagree (15%), or strongly disagree (2%). To tackle the challenge, organizations are improving their reporting and tracking strategies; enhancing their forecasting tools; and focusing on smarter resource utilization.

FIGURE 7

### How much do you agree with the following statement:

*"I have confidence in my organization's labor forecasting accuracy during peak periods"*

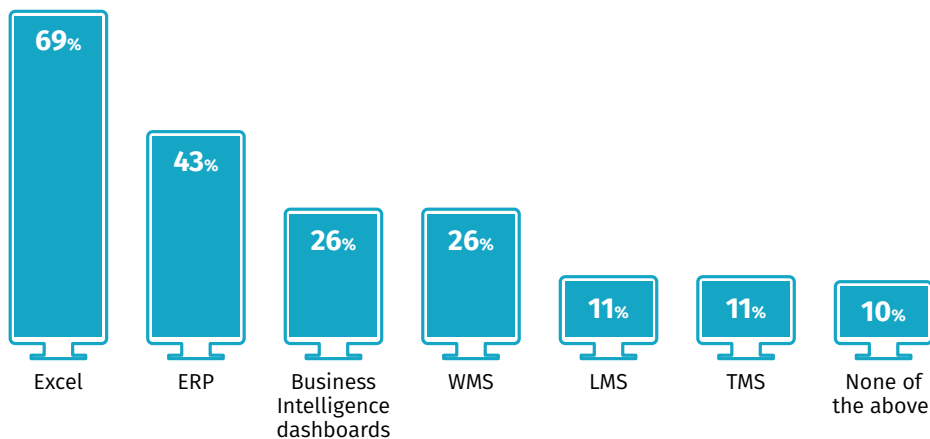


## VISIBILITY IS THE FOUNDATION FOR AGILITY

Agility starts with the tools on hand, and most companies still lean heavily on Excel (69%) to guide decisions. Others are advancing beyond spreadsheets, with 43% using enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, 26% running warehouse management systems (WMS) or business intelligence (BI) dashboards, and 11% adopting transportation management systems (TMS) or labor management systems (LMS).

**FIGURE 8**

Which of the following tools or technologies do you use to support operations decision-making?  
(Select all that apply)



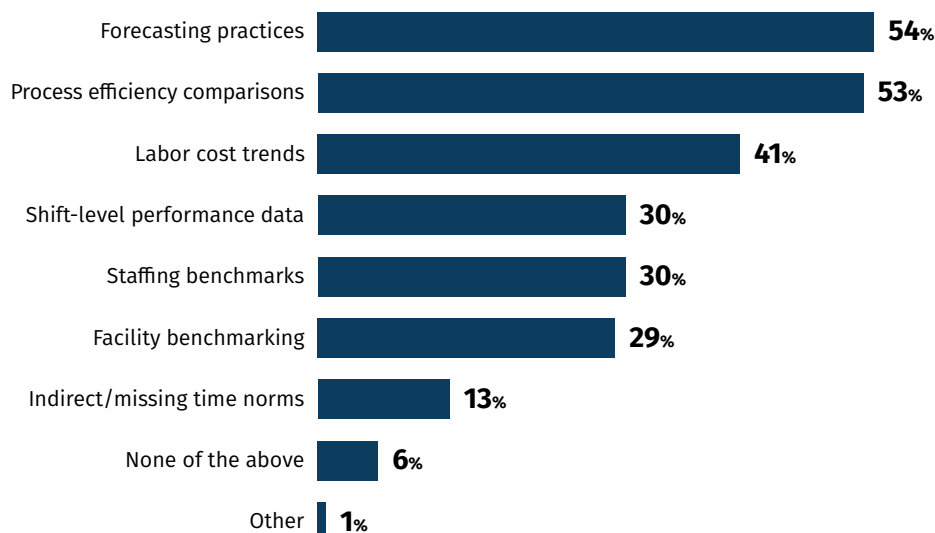
These survey results highlight a clear link between tech maturity and agility: companies with robust tech stacks are better positioned to adapt quickly, while those stuck on spreadsheets risk slower responses and missed opportunities.

Looking out one year, companies expect to use benchmarking for forecasting (54%) and process efficiency comparisons (53%). They also want better insights into labor cost trends (41%), shift-level performance (30%), staffing benchmarks (30%), facility benchmarking (29%), and even indirect or missing time norms (13%). These priorities highlight the growing need for sharper visibility in planning and execution, and reinforce agility's link to accurate forecasting and efficient operations.

FIGURE 9

### What type of benchmarking data would be most valuable to you in next year's report?

(Select all that apply)



## THE AGILITY-AUTOMATION CONNECTION

Robotics and automation continue to reshape warehouse operations but adoption has been uneven. Twenty seven percent of companies say their use of automation has increased over the last two years while 64% report it's stayed the same and 9% say it has decreased. These numbers suggest that while automation is gaining ground most companies are holding steady rather than expanding aggressively.

FIGURE 10

How has your company's use of robotics and automation in the warehouse changed over the past 2 years?

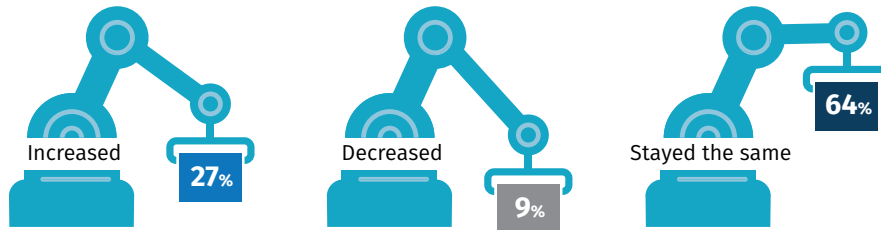
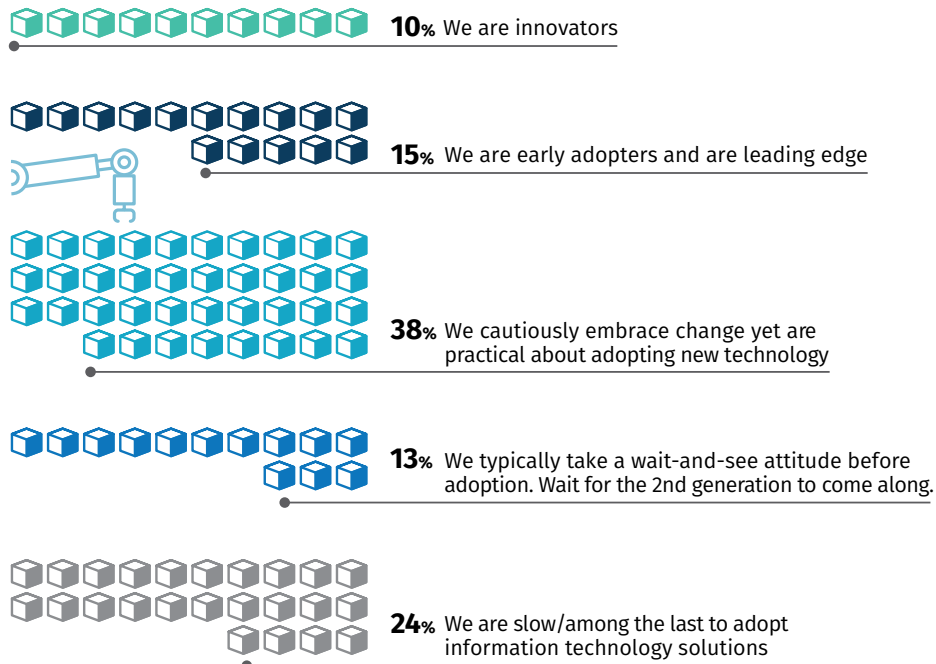


FIGURE 13

How would you best describe your company's agility in adopting robotics and automation in the warehouse?

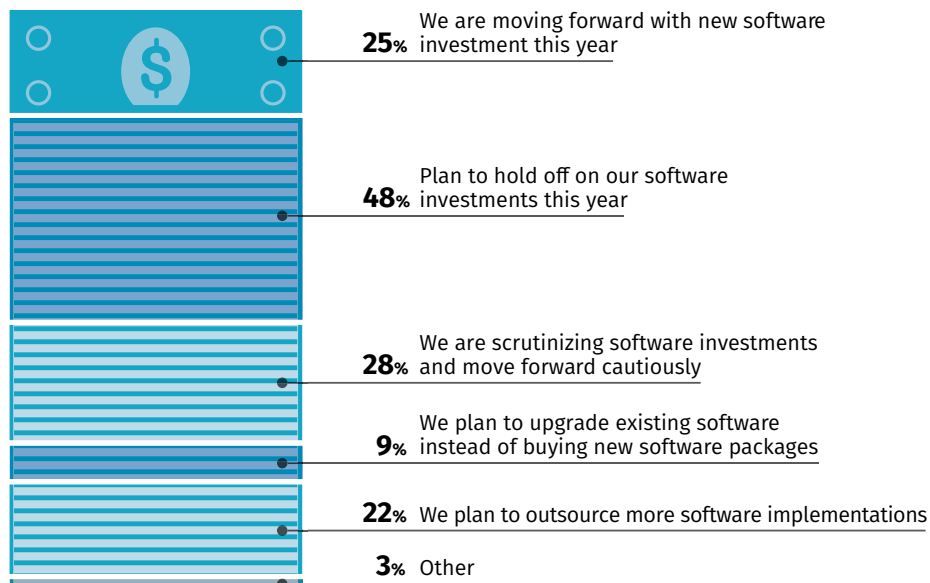


Agility plays a major role in that equation. When it comes to adopting robotics and automation 38% of companies describe themselves as cautious yet practical, 24% admit they're slow movers and 13% prefer a wait-and-see stance. In contrast 15% identify as early adopters and 10% as innovators. The results show a sizable group are still weighing options and a growing share are already proving the value of automation.

The current economic climate is shaping how companies invest in software. The majority (48%) plan to hold off this year and 28% are moving forward with caution. Even so, 25% will invest despite economic pressures, 22% will outsource more implementations and 9% will upgrade existing systems instead of buying new packages. The results prove that companies are finding ways to move their technology strategies forward despite the economic headwinds.

FIGURE 14

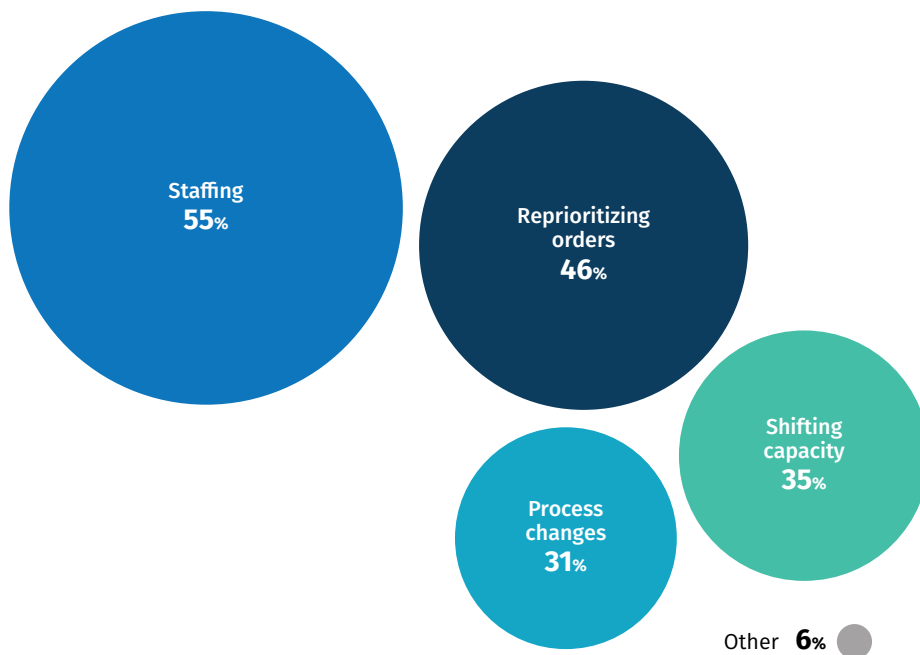
### How has the current economic climate changed your company's approach to adopting robotics and automation in the warehouse? (Select all that apply)



When disruption hits, 55% of companies prioritize staffing, 46% focus on order management, 35% shift capacity and 31% adjust processes. These survey results highlight how labor is nearly always the first lever pulled when supply chain delays or shortages occur.

FIGURE 15

When faced with unexpected disruptions (e.g., supply chain delays, labor shortages), what operational changes do you prioritize immediately?  
(Select all that apply)



### CONCLUSION: TURNING DISRUPTION INTO OPPORTUNITY

Agility is the key to staying in control when markets shift and uncertainty is the norm. Easy Metrics' Operational Agility in an Unpredictable Supply Chain survey shows that leaders who track the right data and act quickly can readily turn disruption into opportunity. The takeaway is clear: agility drives performance, resilience and growth. It also gives organizations the confidence to navigate today's unpredictable supply chain and come out stronger.

## SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Over 120 professionals participated in the survey and most of them hold senior roles. Seventy percent work in management, 18% at the VP level and 11% in the C-suite. They represent manufacturers (44%), wholesalers (27%), retailers (15%) and third-party logistics providers (2%).

FIGURE 16

Which of the following best describes your job title or function?

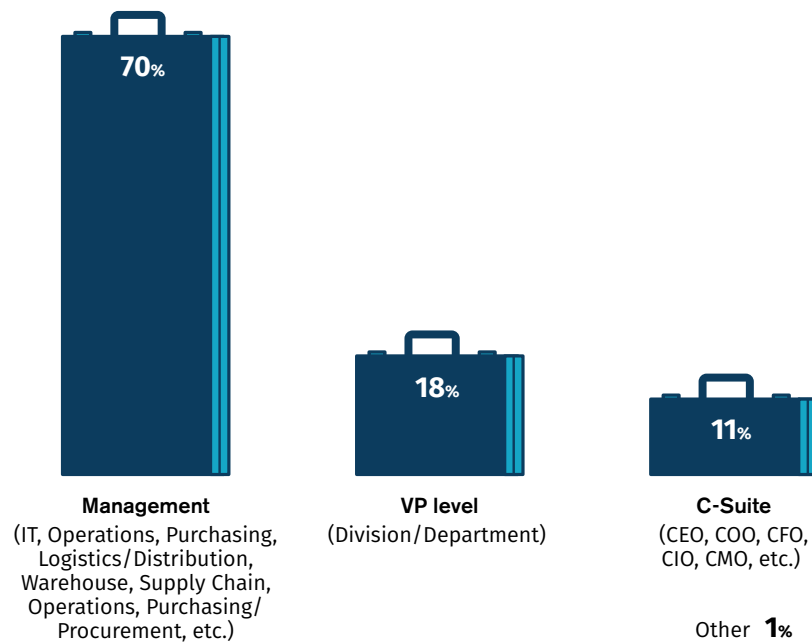


FIGURE 17

What do you estimate your company's total revenues were for 2024?

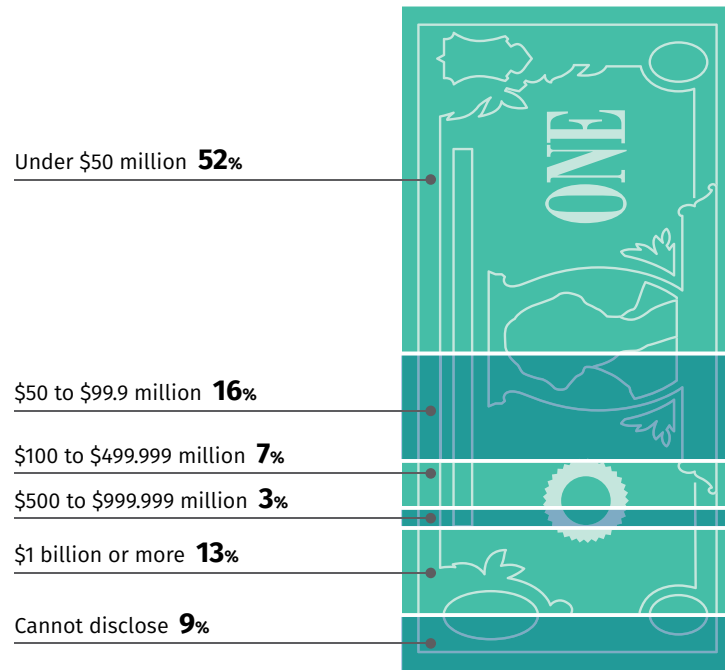


FIGURE 18

How many people does your company employ?

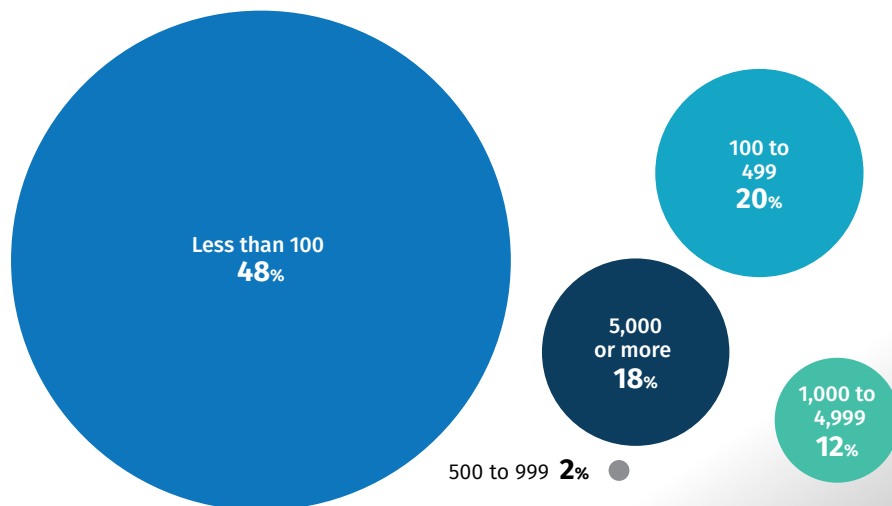




FIGURE 19

What is your involvement in the management of warehousing, inventory, order fulfillment, or any other logistics related function for either your organization or for others?  
(Select all that apply)

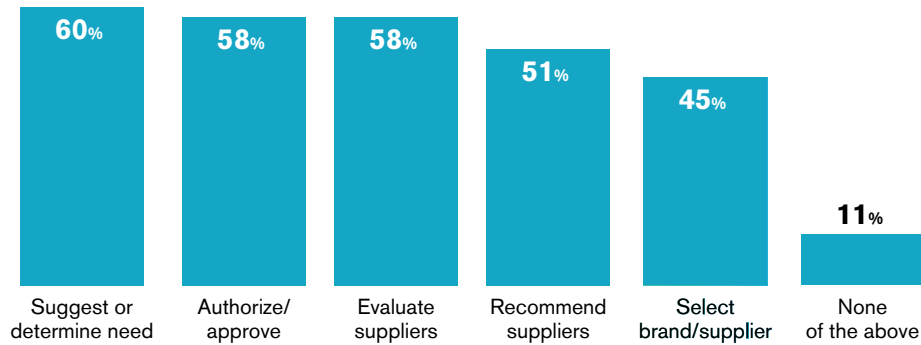
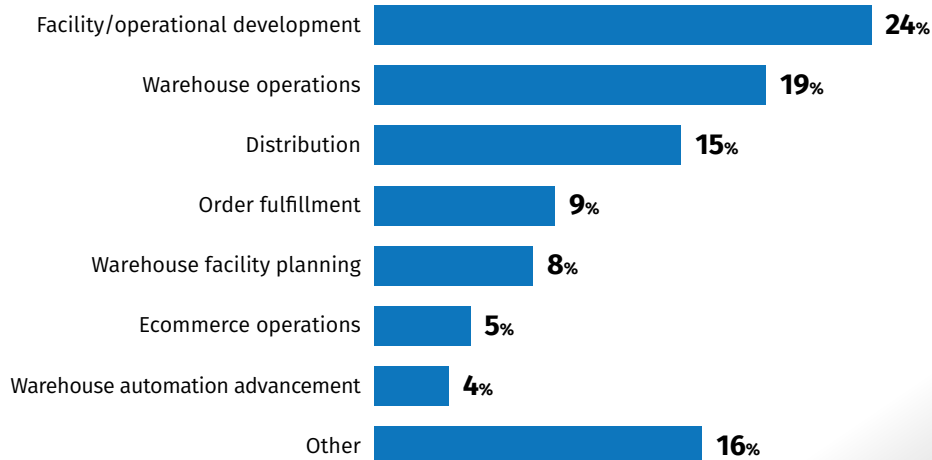


FIGURE 20

What role in your company's warehouse operations and planning do you play?



Participants come from companies of all sizes. More than half (52%) report annual revenues under \$50 million. Another 16% fall between \$50 million and \$99.9 million, 7% between \$100 million and \$499.9 million, and 13% at \$1 billion or more. Nearly half (48%) work at businesses with fewer than 100 employees. Another 20% come from companies with 100 to 499 employees, 12% from firms with 1,000 to 4,999 employees, and 18% from organizations with 5,000 or more employees.

Respondents play an active role in supply chain decision making at their organizations. Sixty percent determine the need for warehousing, inventory, order fulfillment or other logistics functions. Many evaluate suppliers (58%), authorize or approve solutions (58%), recommend vendors (51%) or select brands and suppliers (45%). These professionals split their day-to-day responsibilities across facility development (24%), warehouse operations (19%), distribution (15%) and order fulfillment (9%).

## ABOUT EASY METRICS

Operations and finance leaders use Easy Metrics' cloud platform to analyze, forecast, and manage the cost and performance of their warehouse operations. Easy Metrics empowers leaders to drive operational speed and efficiency, cut waste, prioritize investments, and adopt labor and automation strategies that fuel their business growth. Easy Metrics is based in Bellevue, Washington, and is backed by Nexa Equity, a private equity firm based in San Francisco, CA. For more information, please visit <https://easymetrics.com>.