



WHITE PAPER

STATE OF LEAN 2026 REPORT

A White Paper by GembaDocs
Based on Lean Score Assessment Data

GEMBADOCS

CONTEXT

Lean methodology has transformed how organizations approach operational excellence, waste reduction, and continuous improvement. Yet until now, the industry has lacked comprehensive, cross-sector data on how organizations actually perform against core Lean principles.

This report is built from real-world data gathered through the Lean Score tool created by **GembaDocs**. The tool was made freely available to anyone interested in measuring their Lean maturity. Each participant answered ten questions and rated themselves using six predefined response options. After submitting their answers, they received a percentage score for each category and practical suggestions for improvement.

The dataset represents 289 unique completions. Every data point comes from a voluntary, self-reported submission. No responses were filtered or adjusted, giving you a direct view into how organizations see their own Lean progress.

Participants came from a wide range of industries and company sizes. Submissions included global corporations, regional manufacturers and local operations. The mix covers electronics, software, transportation, commercial goods, food production, plastics, metal manufacturing, parts production and investment groups. The variety of respondents gives this report a broad and reliable picture of how Lean practices are being adopted across different sectors.

The ten questions that form the basis of the Lean Score are:

1. People feel safe to stop, speak up, listen and act when something isn't working.
2. Our most senior leader practices Lean daily and leads by example.
3. We address persistent misalignment quickly.
4. Everyone participates in daily Lean activities.
5. We regularly teach waste awareness, problem-solving and values.
6. We recognize Lean behaviours and address poor behaviours.
7. Visual systems make work status clear at a glance.
8. We have clear, documented standards used for training.
9. We use Kanban with clear responsibilities and visual triggers.
10. We upskill staff and track competence across the organization.

This white paper analyses the combined results of these submissions to provide a grounded view of the current state of Lean

OVERALL
52%

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The 2025 Lean Score data reveals an industry that has made meaningful progress while identifying clear opportunities for continued growth. With an overall average score of 52%, organizations demonstrate solid foundational capabilities alongside specific areas requiring focused attention.

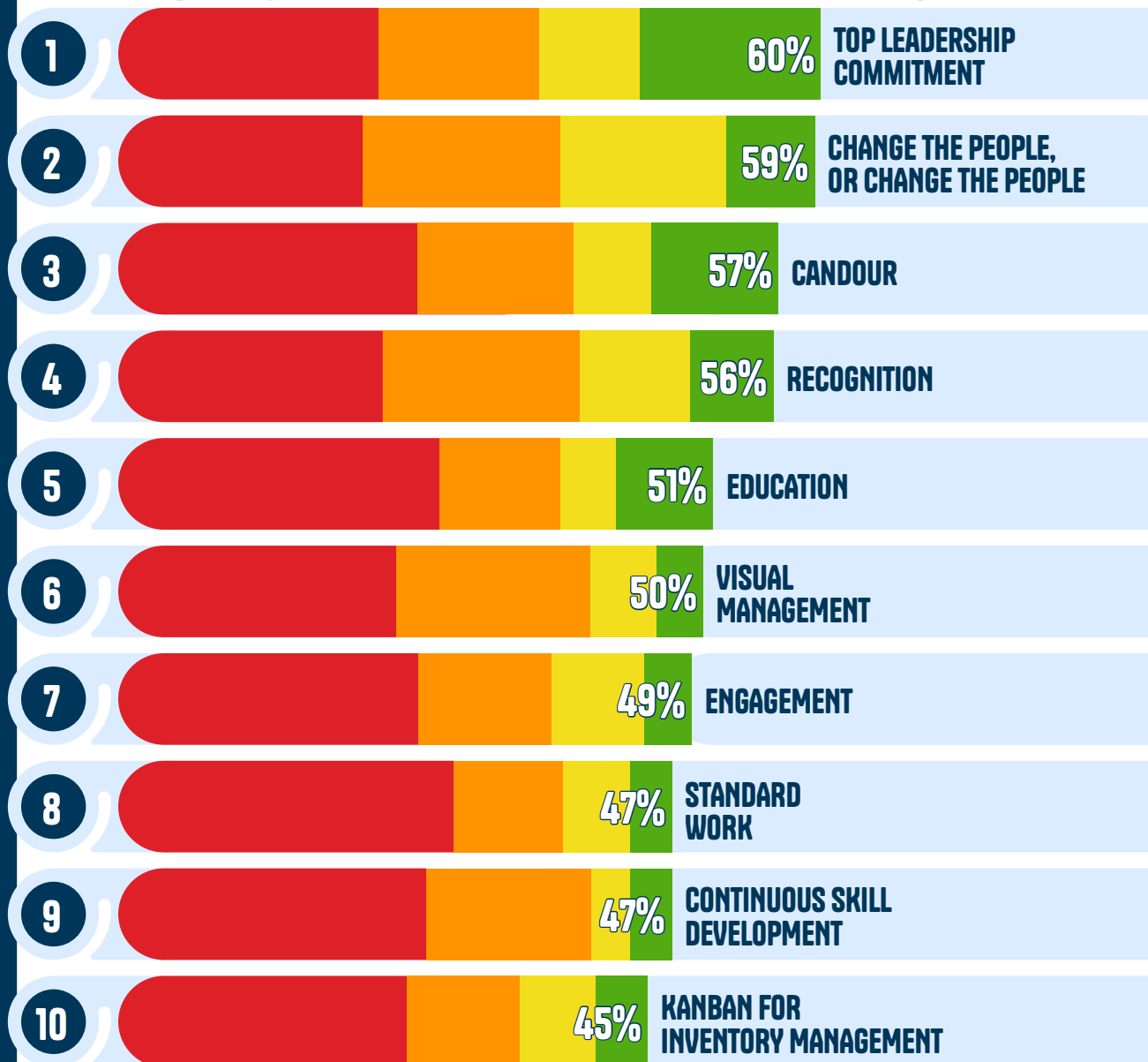
The data shows that Lean is active and growing across a wide mix of workplaces. Most organizations using the Lean Score tool show healthy engagement, open communication and a willingness to evaluate themselves honestly. That alone is a strong indicator of Lean maturity.

Teams are speaking up more often, leaders are becoming more visible in their Lean practice and daily Lean routines are showing up in many areas. Visual systems, Kanban and skill development all appear in different stages of maturity. Consistency varies, but the commitment to Lean is clearly present.

A noticeable trend is that organizations using Lean-focused software outperform those relying on traditional or manual methods. Users of Lean-specific digital tools average 56.6%, compared with 49.4% for those not using such tools. This suggests that structured digital systems help teams maintain clarity, alignment and follow-through.

Overall, Lean is not static. It's moving forward, being applied more consistently and expanding across industries.

Category Performance Rankings



CATEGORY BREAKDOWN

CANDOUR

TOP LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

CHANGE THE PEOPLE OR CHANGE THE PEOPLE

ENGAGEMENT

EDUCATION

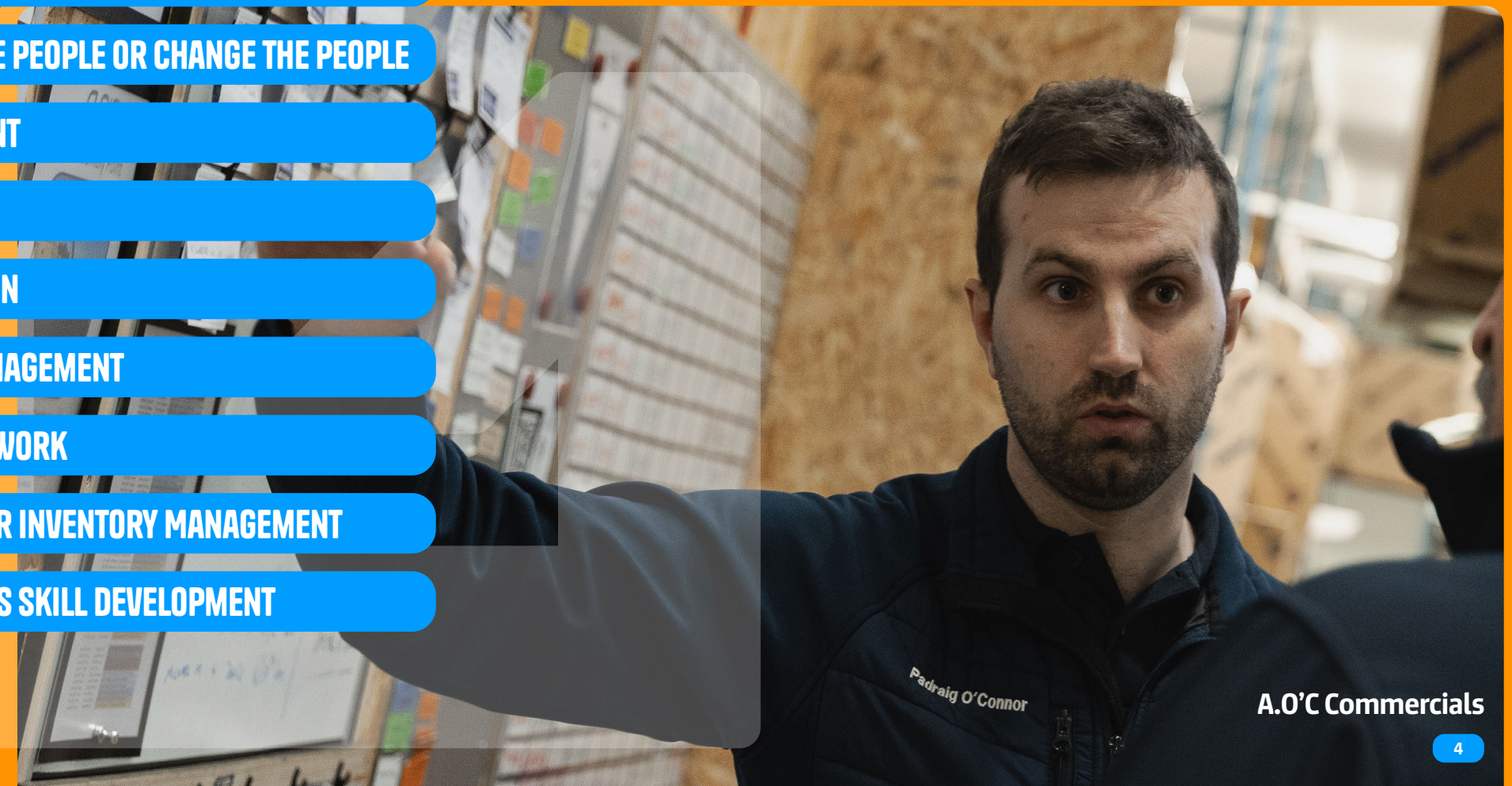
RECOGNITION

VISUAL MANAGEMENT

STANDARD WORK

KANBAN FOR INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

CONTINUOUS SKILL DEVELOPMENT



A.O'C Commercials



People feel safe to **STOP, SPEAK UP, LISTEN,** and **ACT** when something isn't working.

AVERAGE SCORE

57%

LARGEST RESPONSE

29%

CANDOUR

Many workplaces encourage open communication, and speaking up is becoming more normal. The most common pattern is inconsistency across teams. The overall score shows positive momentum toward a stronger problem-solving culture.

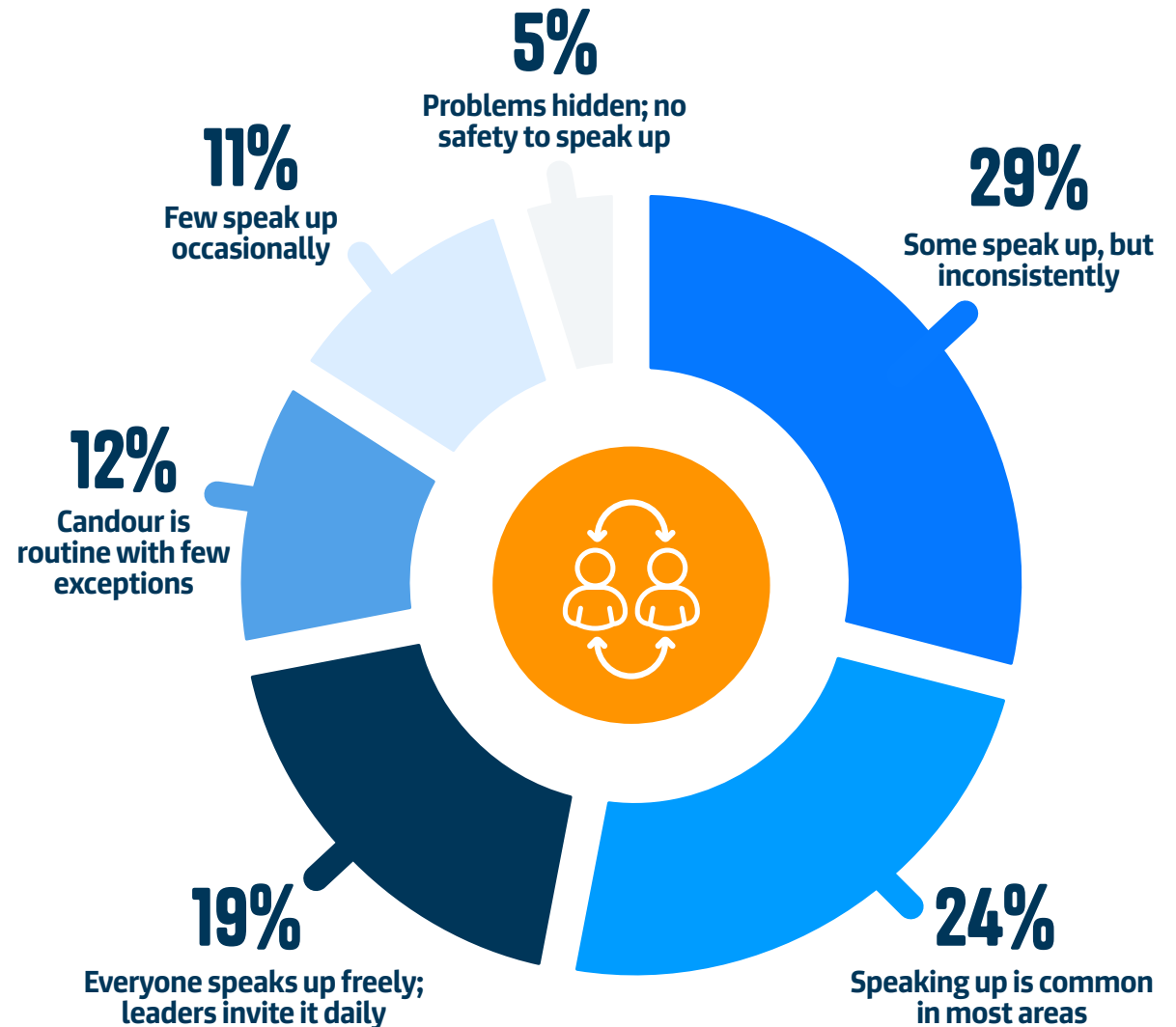
Psychological safety is building across the industry. A combined 55% of respondents report that speaking up is common, routine, or freely encouraged. Critically, only 5% indicate an environment where problems are hidden—a strong signal that most organizations have moved past fear-based cultures. The opportunity lies in converting the 29% who report inconsistent candour into consistently open environments.

Not Yet

Early

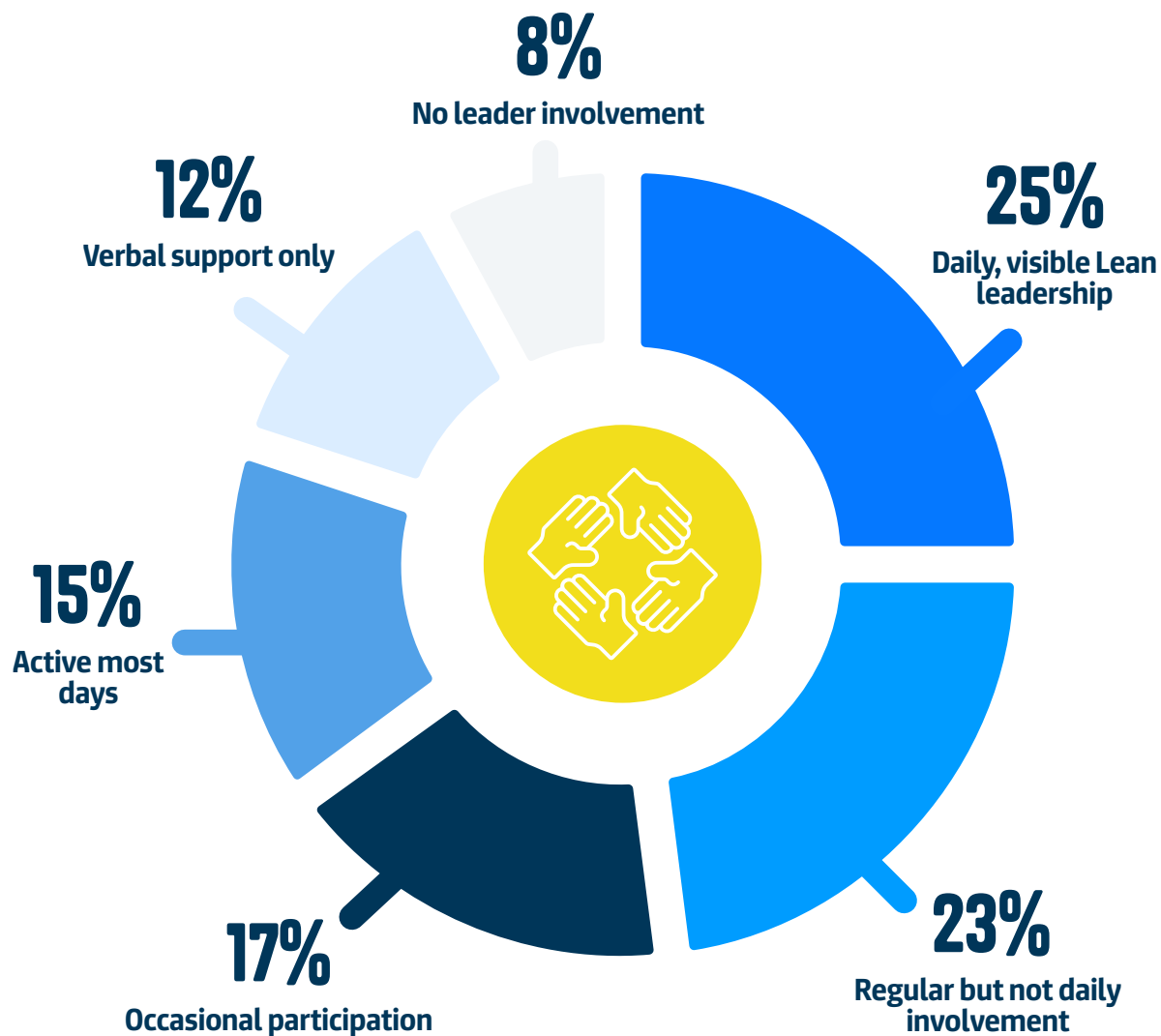
Foundation

Leader





Our most senior leader practices
Lean daily and leads by example.

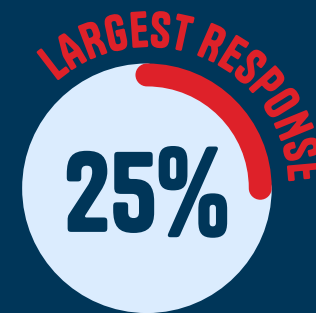


Not Yet

Early

Foundation

Leader



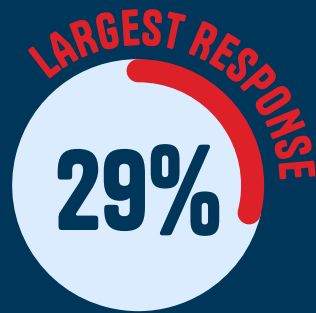
TOP LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

Leadership involvement shows strong growth. Daily visible leadership is the single most common experience, supported by frequent reports of regular engagement. This is one of the highest-performing Lean areas.

This is the highest-scoring category, demonstrating that senior leaders are actively engaged in Lean practices. A combined 63% report their most senior leader is involved at least regularly, with 40% seeing daily or near-daily engagement. Only 8% report no leader involvement whatsoever. This foundational element of Lean transformation-leadership by example-is well established.



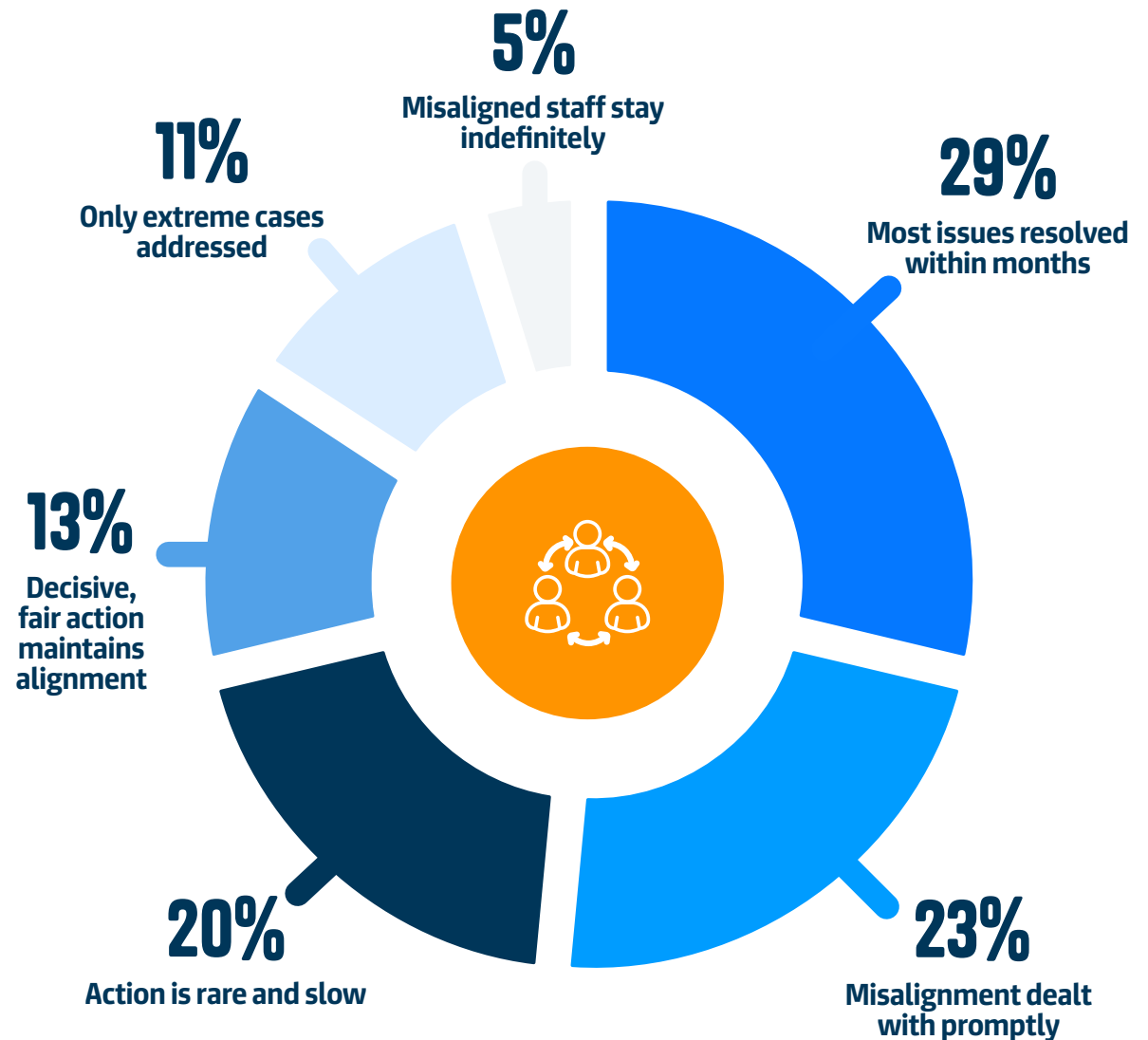
We address persistent misalignment quickly.



CHANGE THE PEOPLE OR CHANGE THE PEOPLE

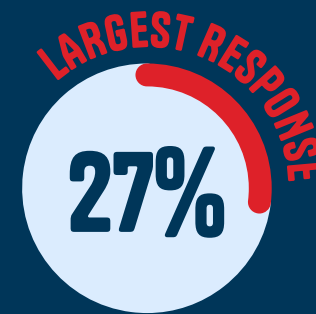
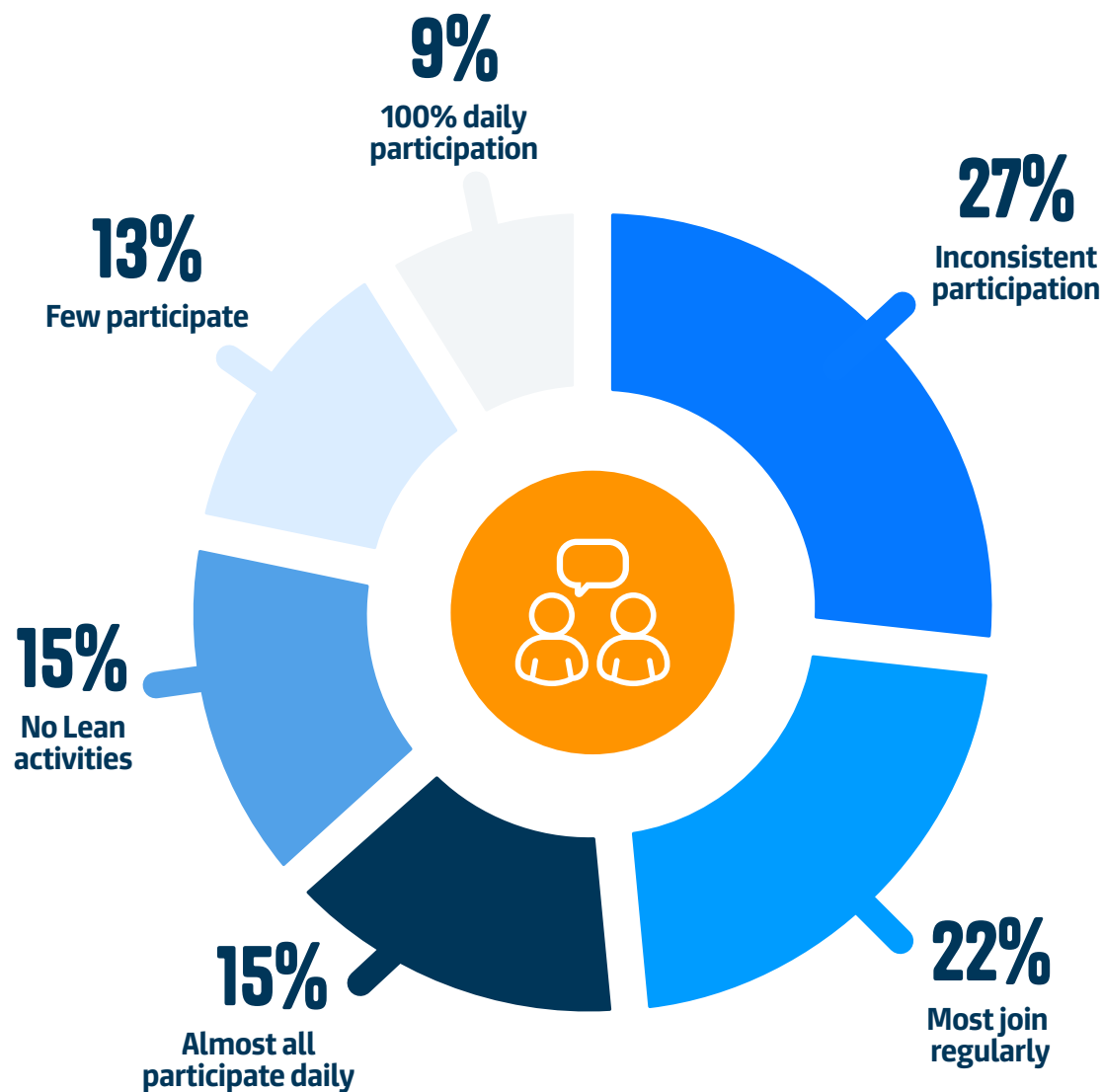
Most organizations address misalignment within a reasonable timeframe. The score reflects a willingness to confront persistent problems and maintain alignment, which supports a healthier Lean culture.

Organizations are demonstrating commitment to addressing misalignment. Over half of respondents (65%) report that alignment issues are addressed promptly or within months, with 13% noting decisive, fair action that maintains alignment. Only 5% report that misaligned staff stay indefinitely. This indicates a healthy willingness to have difficult conversations in service of organizational alignment.





Everyone participates in daily Lean activities.



ENGAGEMENT

Engagement in daily Lean activity is widespread but uneven. Many teams participate, but not every day. This is a familiar pattern for organizations transitioning from early to mid-level Lean maturity.

Daily engagement represents a significant growth opportunity. While 46% report most or all team members participating regularly, the largest single group (27%) reports inconsistent participation, and 15% have no Lean activities at all. Achieving consistent daily engagement—currently reached by only 9%—remains a key lever for embedding Lean as a way of working rather than a periodic initiative.

“ We regularly teach waste awareness, problem-solving, and values.

AVERAGE SCORE

51%

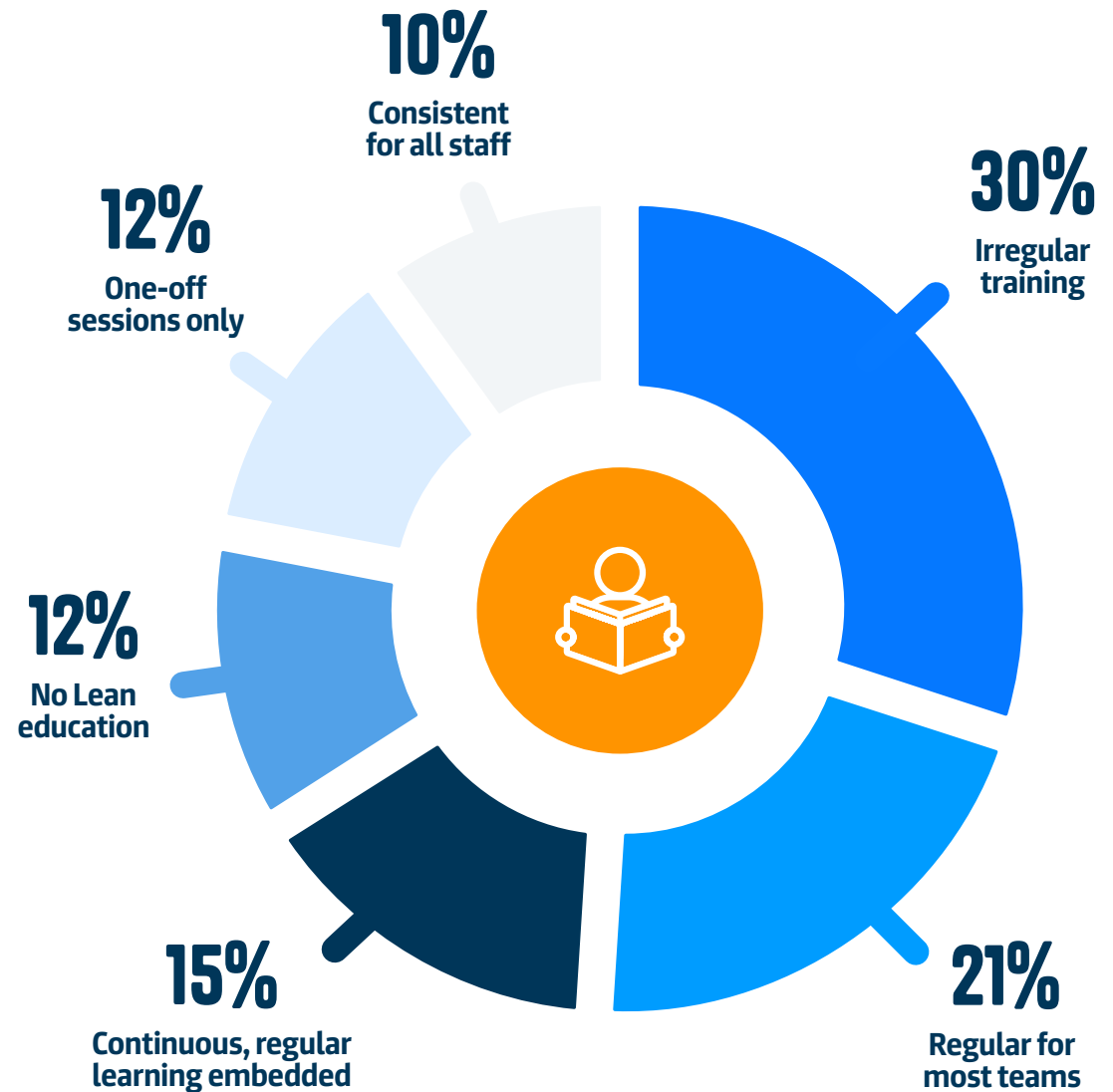
LARGEST RESPONSE

30%

EDUCATION

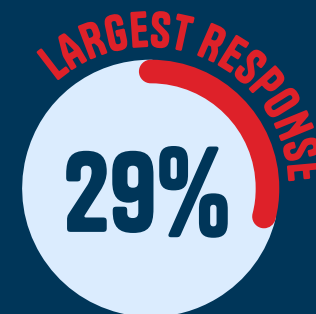
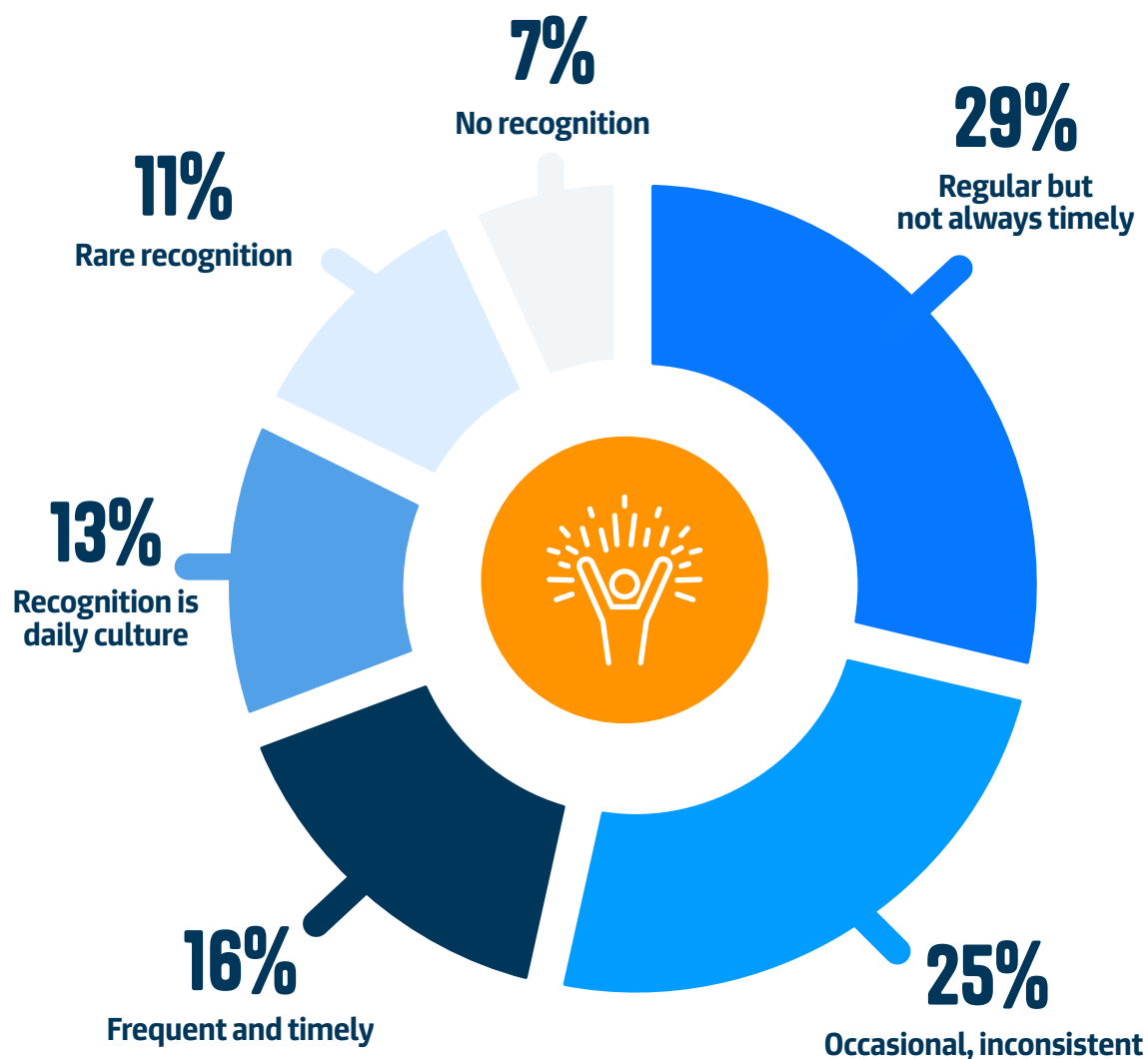
Lean education is active but not always scheduled in a predictable rhythm. Many teams receive training, but timing and structure vary. Adding consistency could raise capability quickly.

Lean education shows a split landscape. While 46% report regular or continuous training, the largest single response (30%) indicates irregular training, and 24% have only one-off sessions or no education at all. The opportunity is moving from sporadic to embedded learning, where Lean principles are reinforced continuously rather than in isolated training events.





We recognize Lean behaviours and address poor behaviours.



RECOGNITION

Recognition is happening across many organizations. While timing is not always reliable, the presence of ongoing acknowledgment is a positive foundation for building higher engagement.

Recognition practices are emerging as a strength. Nearly 6 in 10 respondents (58%) report recognition that is at least regular, with 29% achieving frequent, timely, or daily recognition. Only 7% report no recognition at all. Organizations clearly understand the importance of reinforcing positive Lean behaviours - the next step is making recognition more timely and consistent.

“ Visual systems make work status clear at a glance.

AVERAGE SCORE

50%

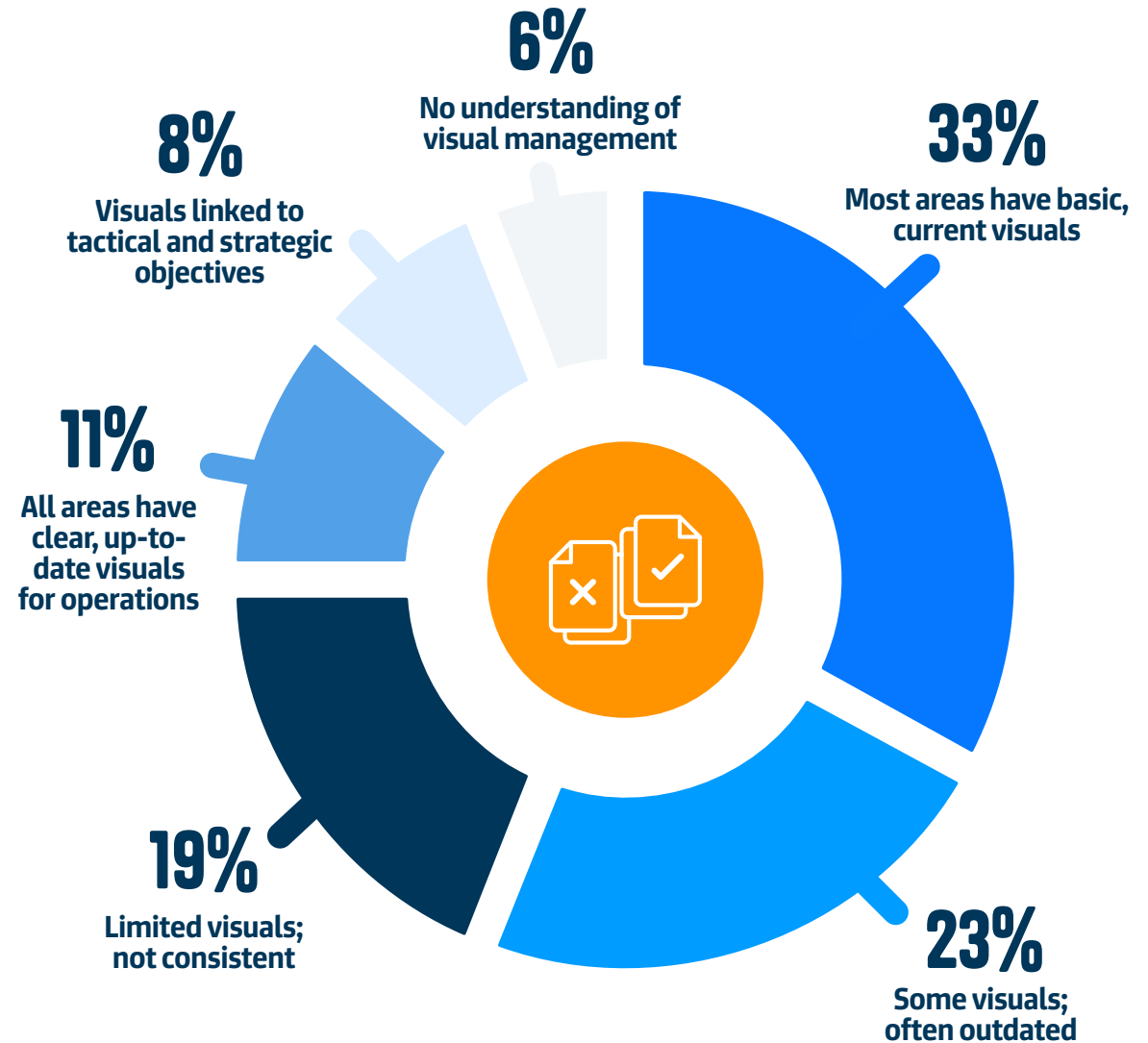
LARGEST RESPONSE

33%

VISUAL MANAGEMENT

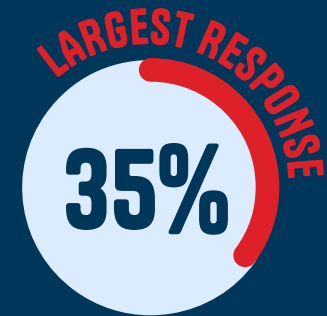
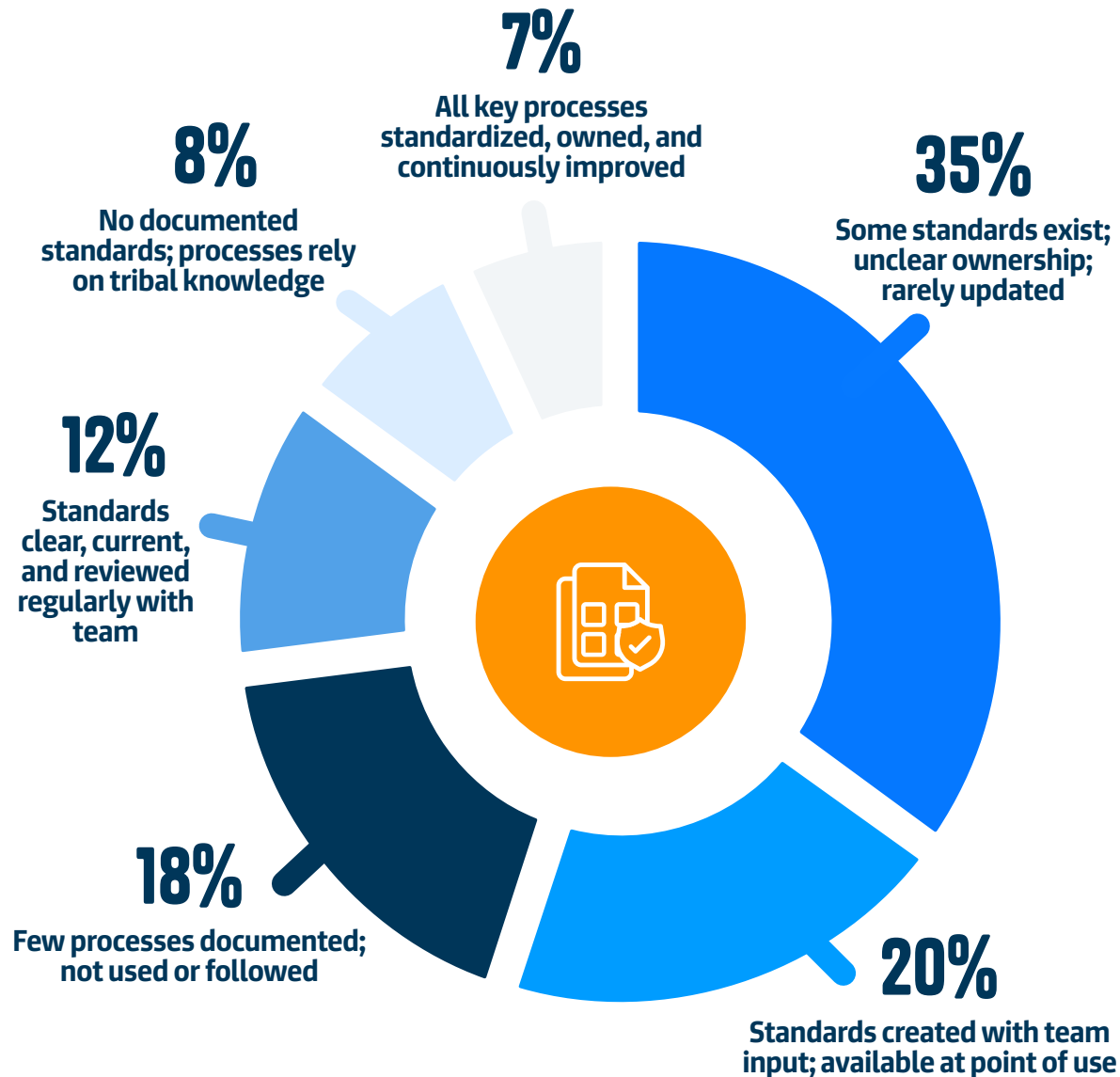
Visual systems are widely used. Many workplaces maintain up-to-date visuals, though most remain basic rather than strategic. There is strong opportunity to expand visual systems to support decision-making more directly.

Visual management shows broad adoption but limited excellence. While only 6% have no understanding of visual management, the largest segment (33%) reports basic visuals, and 23% indicate often-outdated displays. Only 8% have achieved the ideal state of visuals linked to strategic objectives. The opportunity is moving from having visuals to maintaining them as living, strategic tools.





We have clear, documented standards used for training.



STANDARD WORK

This category has one of the lowest scores. Many organizations have partial or outdated standards with unclear ownership. Improving documentation and review cycles would bring quick and significant gains.

Standard work represents one of the clearest opportunities for improvement. The largest single response (35%) indicates standards exist but suffer from unclear ownership and rare updates. Combined with 18% reporting few documented processes and 8% relying entirely on tribal knowledge, this is a critical infrastructure gap. Only 7% have achieved fully standardized, owned, and continuously improved processes.

“ We use Kanban with clear responsibilities and visual triggers. ”

AVERAGE SCORE

45%

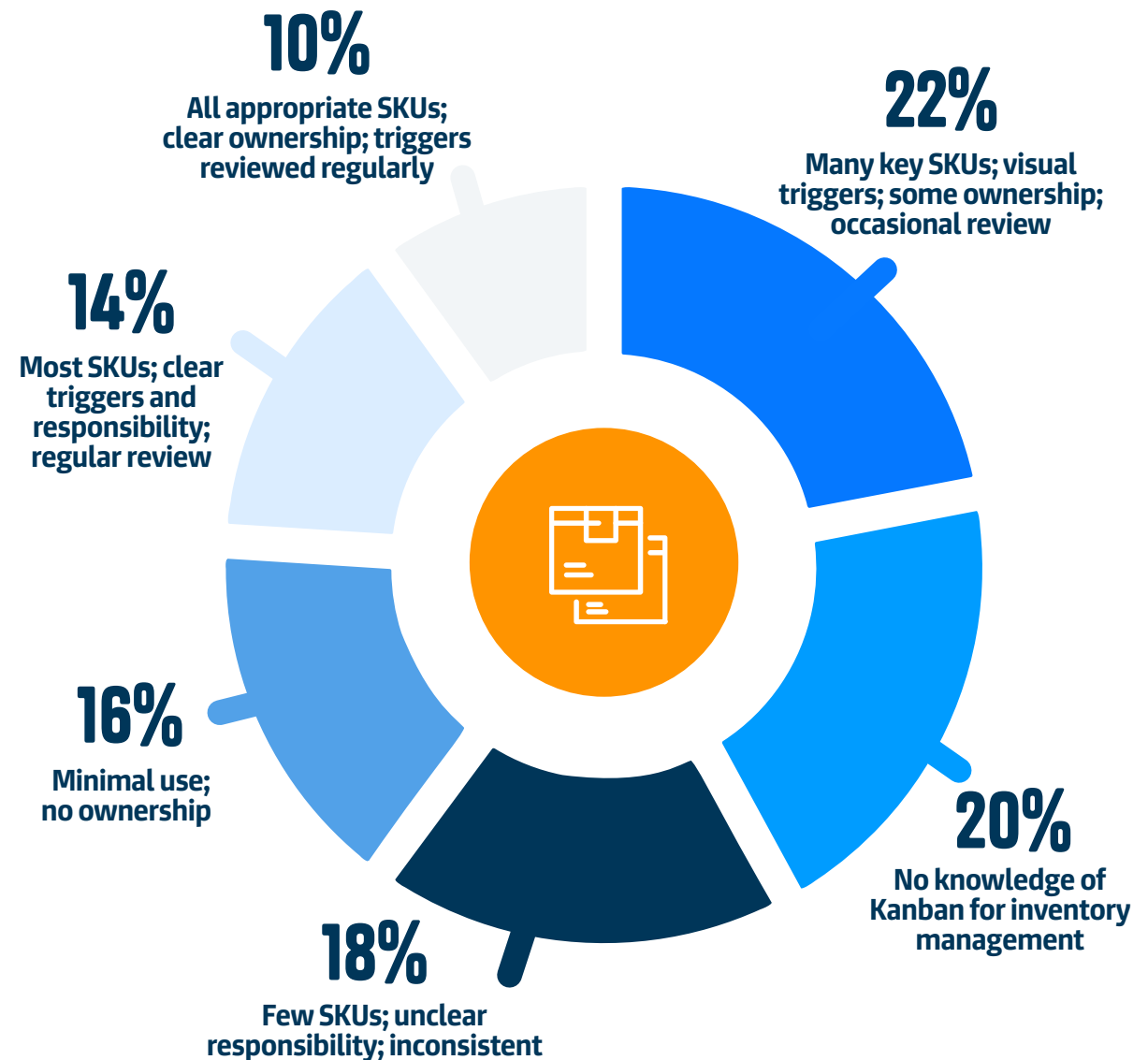
LARGEST RESPONSE

22%

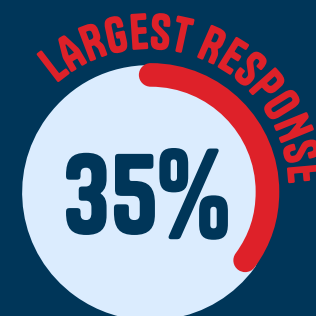
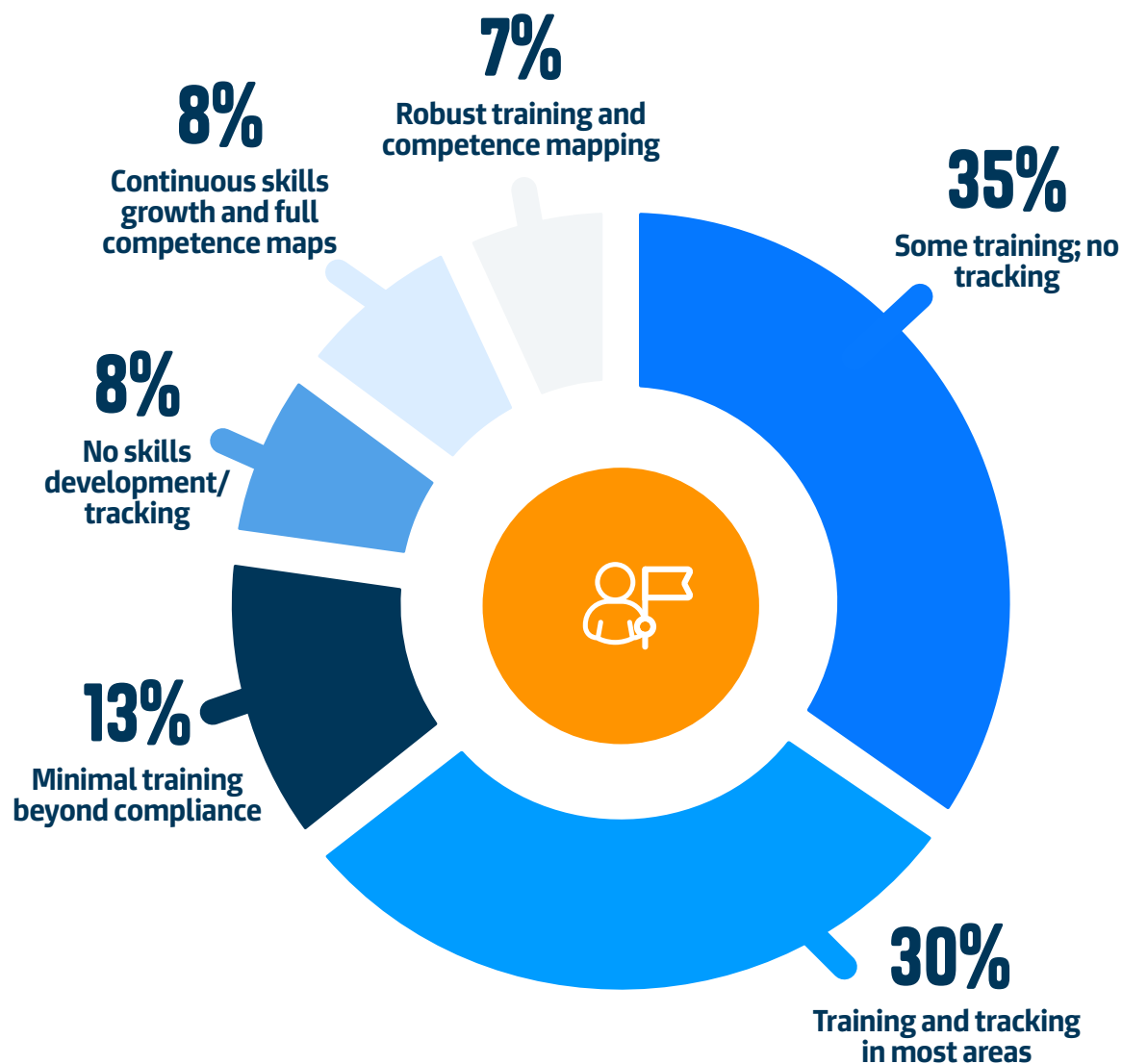
KANBAN FOR INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

Kanban adoption varies significantly. Some organizations use triggers and reviews effectively, while others report minimal or no usage.

While this is the lowest-scoring category, important context applies. Twenty percent of respondents report no knowledge of Kanban for inventory management—a figure that likely reflects the diverse industry mix in this survey. Software companies, service businesses, and other non-manufacturing organizations may not utilize physical inventory management and would appropriately score lower in this category. Among those who do use Kanban, the opportunity lies in moving from partial implementation to clear accountability with regular review.



“ We upskill staff and track competence across the organization.



CONTINUOUS SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Training is common, but tracking and competency mapping are limited. This presents a clear opportunity to strengthen skills alignment and support capability growth across teams.

Skill development shows a clear pattern: training exists, but tracking lags behind. While 30% report training and tracking in most areas, the largest segment (35%) provides some training but no tracking. This gap between developing skills and measuring competence represents an opportunity to create more robust talent development systems that verify capability rather than simply delivering content.

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES



WHERE ORGANIZATIONS ARE EXCELLING

These strengths signal a workforce that understands Leans value and is building momentum toward more consistent application.



Leadership commitment is strong

The highest-scoring category demonstrates that senior leaders are actively engaged in Lean practices.

A combined 63% of respondents report their most senior leader is involved at least regularly, with 25% reporting daily, visible Lean leadership. The foundational element of successful Lean transformation-leadership by example-is well established across the industry.



Accountability culture is taking hold

Organizations are demonstrating commitment to addressing misalignment.

Over half of respondents report that alignment issues are addressed within months or more promptly, with 13% noting decisive, fair action that maintains alignment. Only 5% report that misaligned staff stay indefinitely, indicating a healthy willingness to have difficult conversations.



Psychological safety is building

Candour-the ability for people to stop, speak up, listen, and act-shows encouraging results.

A combined 55% of respondents report that speaking up is common, routine, or freely encouraged. Only 5% indicate problems are hidden with no safety to speak up, suggesting organizations are creating environments where issues surface rather than fester.



Recognition practices are emerging

Organizations understand the importance of reinforcing positive Lean behaviours.

Nearly 6 in 10 respondents (58%) report recognition practices that are at least regular, with 16% achieving frequent and timely recognition and 13% embedding recognition into daily culture.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDUSTRY-WIDE GROWTH

These improvement simply show where teams can focus next to build stronger systems, reduce variation and support daily Lean habits.



Standard Work Needs Strengthening

The largest single response (35%) indicates standards exist but suffer from unclear ownership and rare updates.

Combined with 18% reporting few documented processes and 8% relying entirely on tribal knowledge, this represents the clearest opportunity for operational improvement. Only 7% have achieved fully standardized, owned, and continuously improved processes.



Skill Development Lacks Systematic Tracking

While 30% report training and tracking in most areas, the largest segment (35%) provides some training but no tracking.

This gap between developing skills and measuring competence represents an opportunity to create more robust talent development systems.



Daily Engagement Remains Inconsistent

Over a quarter of respondents (27%) report inconsistent participation in daily Lean activities, and 15% have no Lean activities at all.

Moving to consistent daily engagement—currently achieved by only 9%—remains a key lever for embedding Lean as a way of working.

TRENDS IDENTIFIED

These improvement simply show where teams can focus next to build stronger systems, reduce variation and support daily Lean habits.



The Leadership-Engagement Gap

While leadership commitment scores highest (60%), daily engagement by all team members scores among the lowest (49%).

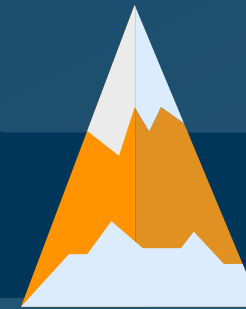
This 11-point gap suggests that leadership modelling is in place, but the mechanisms to cascade that commitment into daily habits across all levels require attention.



Documentation vs. Culture

Categories related to documented systems (Standard Work at 47%, Visual Management at 50%) score lower than categories related to behaviours and culture (Candour at 57%, Recognition at 56%).

This indicates organizations may be stronger at building Lean mindsets than at creating the systematic infrastructure to sustain them.



The “Middle Majority” Pattern

Across nearly all questions, the largest response clusters in the middle ranges- organizations that have made progress but haven't yet achieved lean excellence.

This represents a significant opportunity: the industry is not starting from zero, but neither has it reached maturity. The foundation is laid; the next phase is elevation.

THE IMPACT OF LEAN FOCUSED SOFTWARE



LEANER WITH SYSTEMS

Teams that invest in Lean-supporting systems tend to see stronger Lean maturity.

Organizations using Lean-focused software demonstrate approximately 15% higher performance than those without such tools.

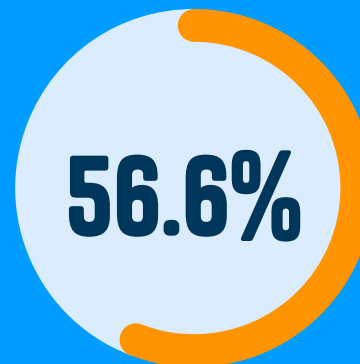
Not because the software does the work for them, but because it gives their Lean efforts a firmer foundation. As organizations seek to close the gap between cultural gains and systematic infrastructure, purpose-built Lean software may serve as an enabler-not a replacement for discipline and leadership, but a tool that makes discipline easier to maintain and scale.



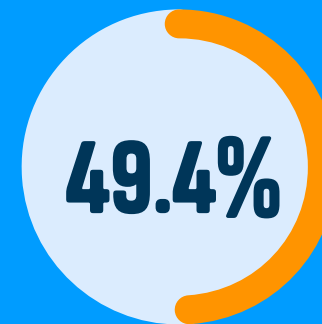
Breakdown

An additional dimension of this research examined the relationship between software adoption (users of GembaDocs) and Lean performance. Respondents who used GembaDocs were compared against those who do not.

This 7.2 percentage point difference suggests that purpose-built digital tools support more effective Lean implementation. While correlation does not imply causation-organizations committed to Lean may be more likely to invest in supporting software-the relationship is notable.



Organizations using GembaDocs software



Organizations not using Lean-focused software

In short

When you look specifically at the question, “We have clear, documented standards used for training”:

- GembaDocs users have far fewer teams with no standards or out-of-date standards.
- They also show a lower share of “few processes documented” issues.
- Their distribution clusters more tightly around mid-to-higher maturity, while non-customers have more spread toward low-maturity behaviours.

Potential mechanisms for this advantage include:

- Improved visibility into processes and performance
- Easier creation and maintenance of standard work documentation
- More consistent process adherence through digital checklists and workflows
- Better tracking of skills and competencies
- And enhanced visual management through digital displays and dashboards

REFLECTION



Not Yet

Early

Foundation

Leader

Applied Concepts

REFLECTION

The State of Lean in 2025 reveals an industry in healthy motion.

Leadership commitment is strong. Psychological safety is improving. Accountability cultures are forming. Organizations have successfully established the cultural foundations that make Lean transformation possible.

The path forward is clear: strengthen the systematic foundations—standard work, skill tracking, visual management—while maintaining the cultural gains achieved. The gap between leadership modelling and frontline daily engagement represents the next frontier. Organizations that close this gap, building the infrastructure that translates leadership intent into daily practice, will lead the next wave of Lean maturity.

The data also suggests that organizations need not go it alone. Purpose-built tools designed for Lean practitioners appear to accelerate results, providing the digital backbone that makes daily discipline easier to sustain.

For leaders reviewing this data against their own organizations, several questions emerge: How does your organization compare to industry benchmarks? Where are your cultural strengths, and where does your systematic infrastructure need reinforcement? What would it take to move from the “middle majority” to true excellence?

The foundation is laid. The next phase is elevation. And the organizations that act on these insights will be the ones that define what Lean excellence looks like in the years ahead.

This appendix provides complete transparency on the source, methodology, and limitations of the data presented in this white paper.

All data in this report was collected through the Lean Score tool, developed and maintained by GembaDocs. The tool was made freely available to professionals seeking to assess their organization's Lean maturity. Respondents completed the assessment voluntarily, without compensation or incentive.

Assessment Structure

The Lean Score assessment consisted of ten questions, each addressing a core dimension of Lean practice. For each question, respondents selected from six response options representing a progression from minimal maturity to full excellence. Upon completion, respondents received a percentage score for each category along with personalized recommendations for improvement.

The Questions

1. People feel safe to STOP, SPEAK UP, LISTEN, and ACT when something isn't working.
2. Our most senior leader practices Lean daily and leads by example.
3. We address persistent misalignment quickly.
4. Everyone participates in daily Lean activities.
5. We regularly teach waste awareness, problem-solving, and values.
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7. Visual systems make work status clear at a glance.
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10. We upskill staff and track competence across the organization.

Dataset Characteristics

- Total submissions: 289 completed assessments between 20/08/2025-25/11/2025
- Data type: Self-reported organizational assessments
- Collection method: Voluntary online tool completion
- Industries sample: Electronics manufacturing, software development, transportation, commercial goods, food manufacturing, plastics, metal manufacturing, and investment groups
- Organization size: Ranging from local businesses to global enterprises
- Where totals appear off by 1%, it's due to rounding to whole numbers for display, not a data error.

Limitations

- As with any self-reported assessment, this data reflect respondents' perceptions of their organizations rather than externally verified performance. Self-reporting may introduce response bias, with some respondents potentially over- or under-estimating their organization's capabilities.
- The sample represents organizations whose professionals chose to complete a Lean assessment, which may skew toward organizations with existing interest in Lean practices. Results should be interpreted as indicative of trends among Lean-engaged organizations rather than as representative of all organizations across all industries.
- Despite these limitations, the dataset provides valuable directional insight into the state of Lean practice across a meaningful cross-section of industries and organization types.

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GEMBADOCS

GembaDocs Limited

Unit 5G Shivers Business Park, Hillhead Road
Toomebridge, Antrim, Northern Ireland, BT41 3SF
gembadocs.com | hello@gembadocs.com

Strong foundation

