



2026

ACC CHIEF LEGAL OFFICERS SURVEY

Australia Supplement

Overview

This supplement presents findings from ACC's [2026 Chief Legal Officers Survey](#), produced in collaboration with [FTI Consulting](#).

Purpose of This Supplement:

- Provides insights tailored for Australian Chief Legal Officers (CLOs) by comparing their responses to the global findings.
- Highlights key differences and similarities to help Australian CLOs benchmark their roles, priorities, and strategies against global trends.

What's Included:

- **Role and Reporting Structure:** Titles, reporting lines, and governance responsibilities.
- **Board and Executive Influence:** CLO involvement in strategic decision-making.
- **Skills Development:** Areas of focus for CLOs and their teams.
- **Resourcing:** Staffing expectations and outsourcing trends.
- **Technology and AI adoption:** Plans for legal tech and generative AI.
- **Regulatory Environment:** Enforcement concerns and compliance challenges.
- **Challenges and Priorities:** Top risks, barriers, and strategic initiatives.
- **Participant Profile:** Demographics of Australian respondents.



ROLE AND REPORTING STRUCTURE

SECTION 1



Section 1 – Key Takeaways

1. CEO Reporting Gap

While the global trend has solidified with 84% of CLOs reporting to the CEO in 2026, Australia remains an outlier with a reporting rate of **66%**. This figure has recovered from a low of **57%** in 2025, but there is still an 18-point gap compared to the global result. If CLOs do not report to the CEO, they are more likely to report to the COO (**24% vs. 17% globally**).

2. Narrower Functional Oversight

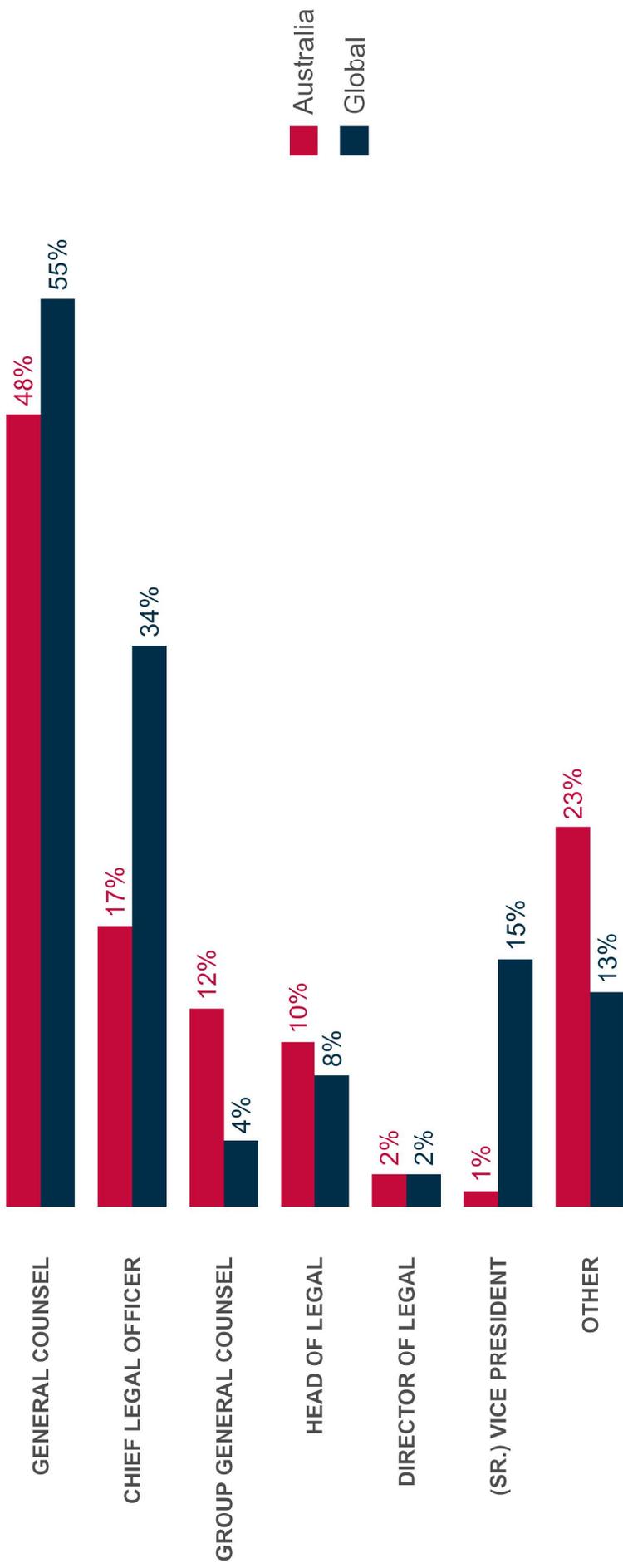
Australian respondents maintain a more traditional legal focus in terms of functional oversight. Globally, 64% of CLOs oversee compliance and 41% oversee ethics. In Australia, those figures drop to **39%** and **17%**, respectively. Furthermore, Australian CLOs are nearly twice as likely to report that no other functions report to them (**27% vs. 16% globally**).

3. Distinct Titles

Titles in Australia differ significantly from the global average. The CLO title is half as common in Australia (**17%**) as it is globally (**34%**), with general counsel being the preferred term. Furthermore, 15% of global respondents hold a vice president title, while it is virtually non-existent in Australia (**1%**).

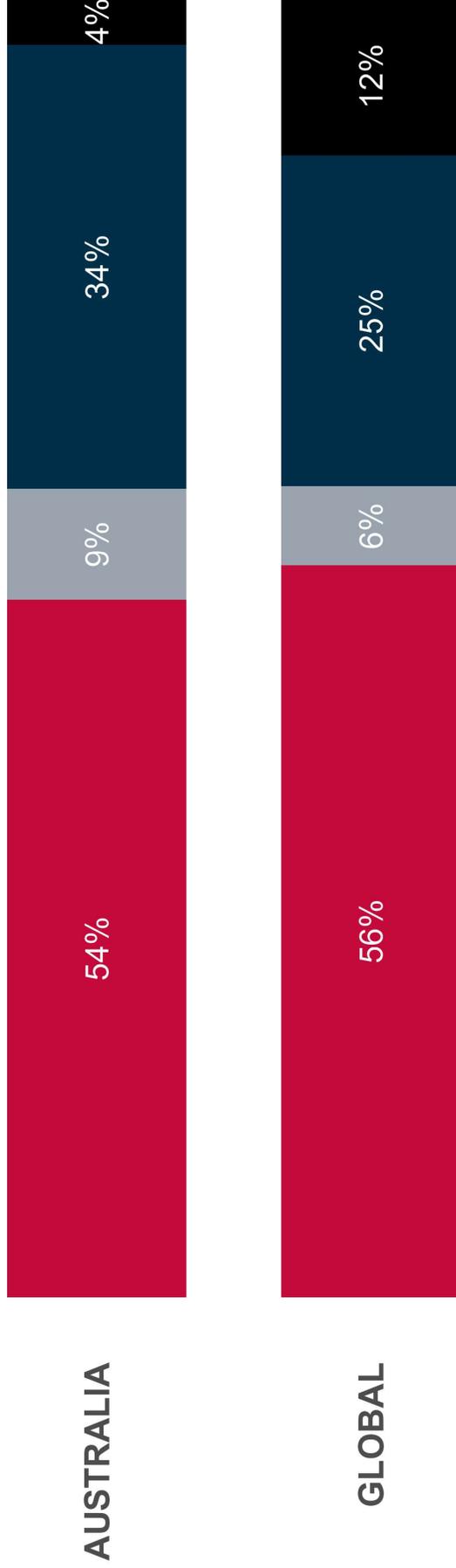
Most Common Title

What is your current job title? Select all that apply.



Corporate Secretary Role

Do you also hold the title of or assume the role of corporate/company secretary?

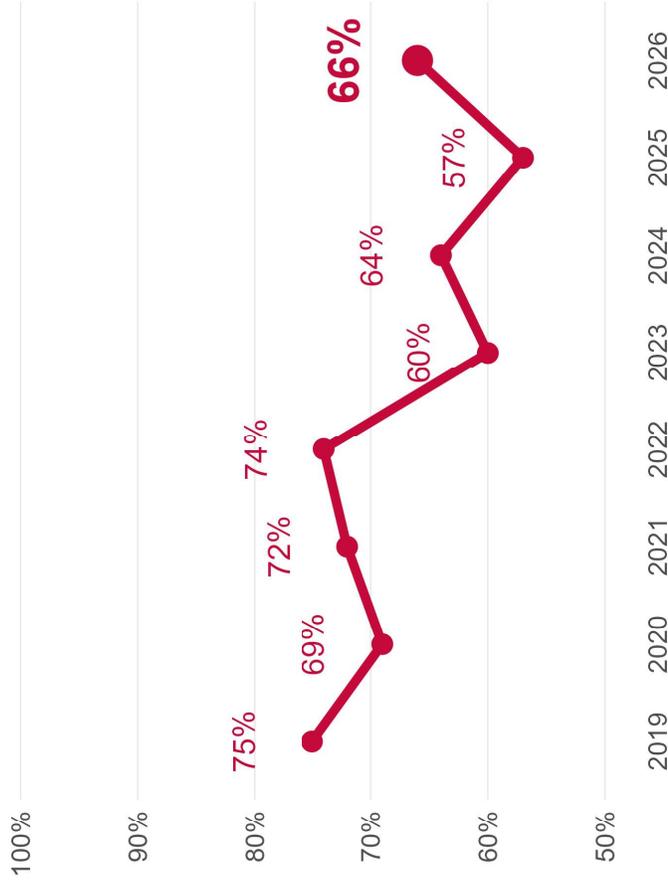


■ Yes
■ No
■ Corporate secretary position does not exist

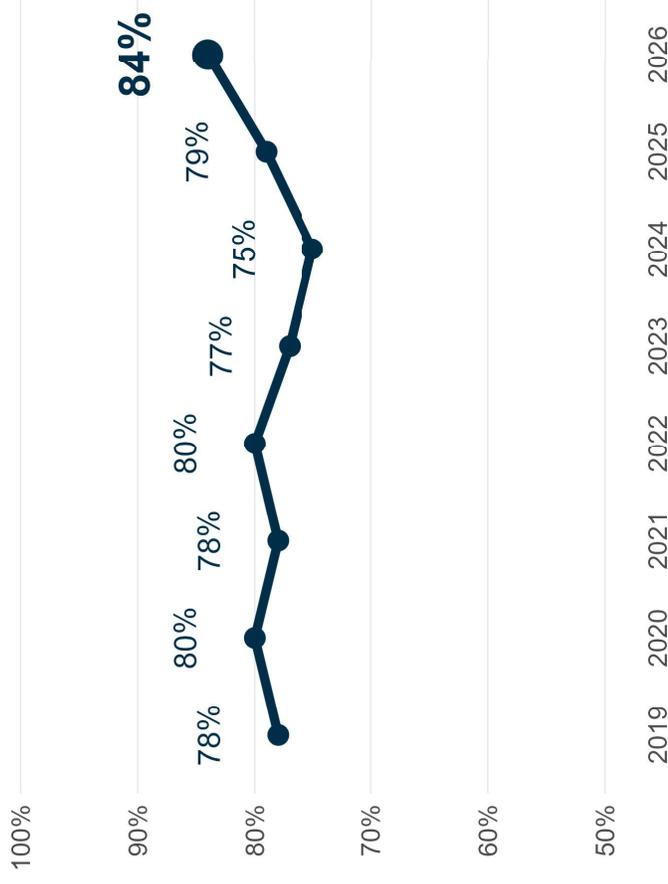
Reporting to the CEO

Do you report directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or highest-ranking executive officer?

AUSTRALIA



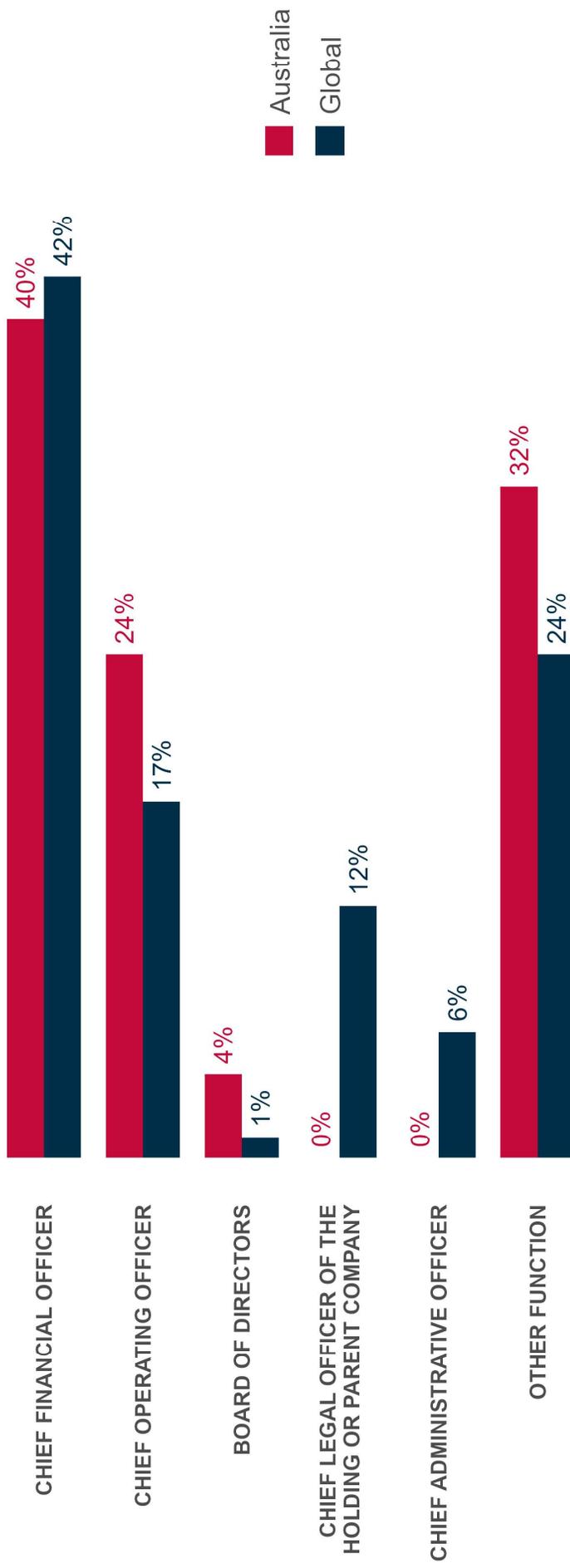
GLOBAL



Note: Percentages shown indicate "Yes" responses.

Reporting to Other Positions

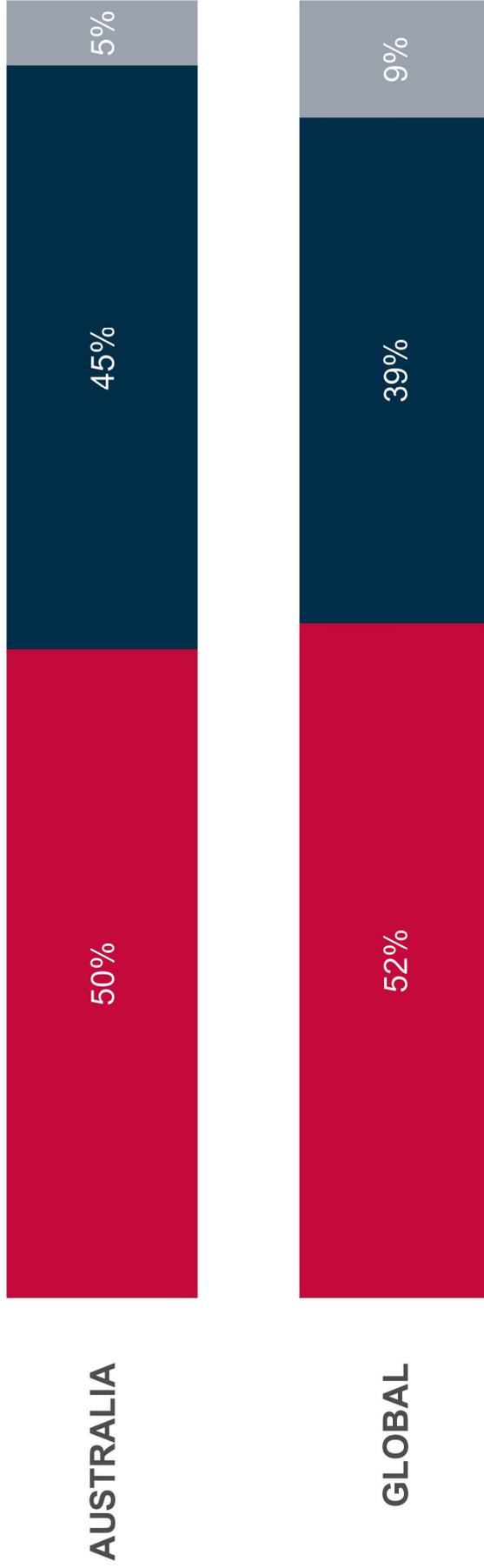
To whom do you directly report in your organisation? Select all that apply.



Note: Only asked to those who do not report directly to the CEO.

Reporting to the Board of Directors

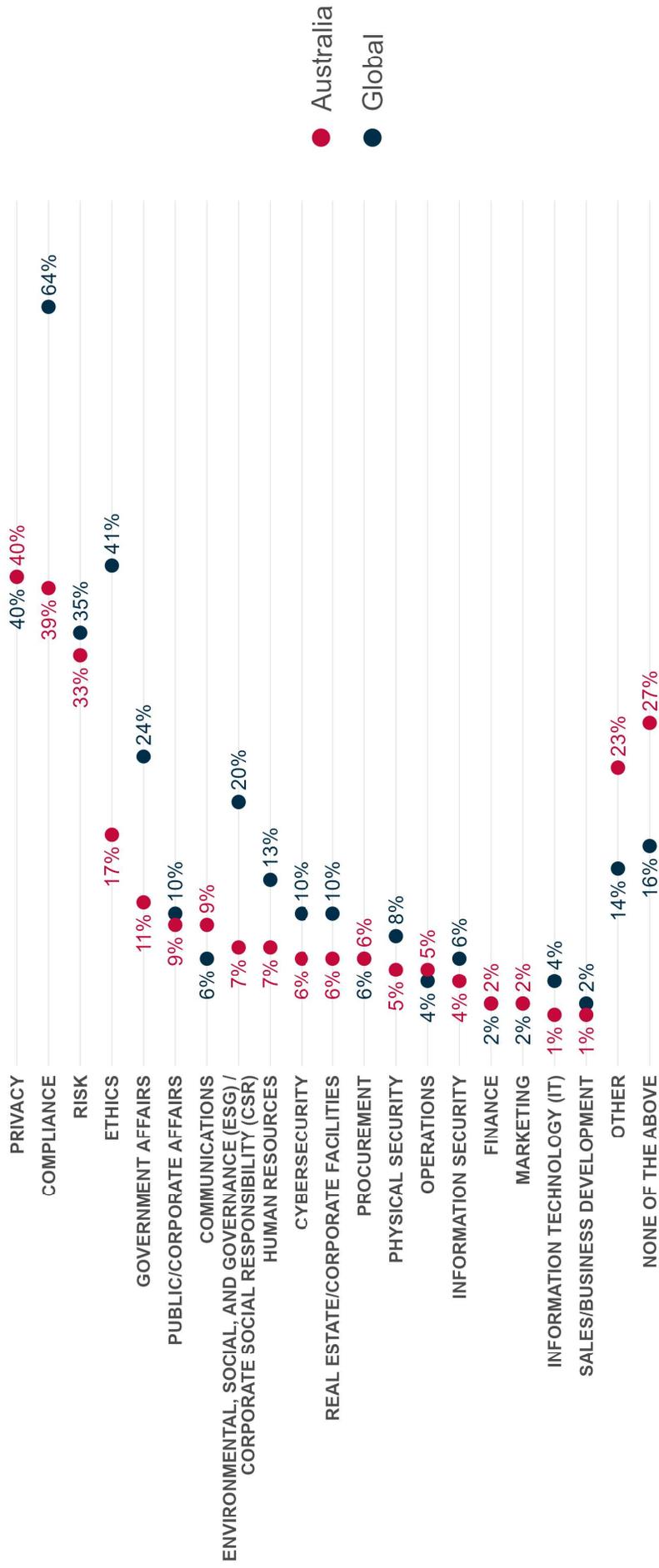
Do you have a reporting line to the board of directors?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Do not have a board of directors

Corporate Functions Reporting to Legal

Which of the following corporate functions report to you? Select all that apply.





BOARD AND EXECUTIVE INFLUENCE

SECTION 2



Section 2 – Key Takeaways

1. High Strategic Alignment

Australian CLOs' corporate strategic influence is strong. They lead the global average in providing proactive strategic counsel (**76%** to 74%) and report a higher expansion in the scope and areas of input (**41%** vs. 37%). Australian CLOs are effectively integrated into decision-making processes, with **63%** reporting that the executive team “almost always” seeks their input on strategic decisions, exceeding the global result.

2. Emerging Risk Engagement Gap

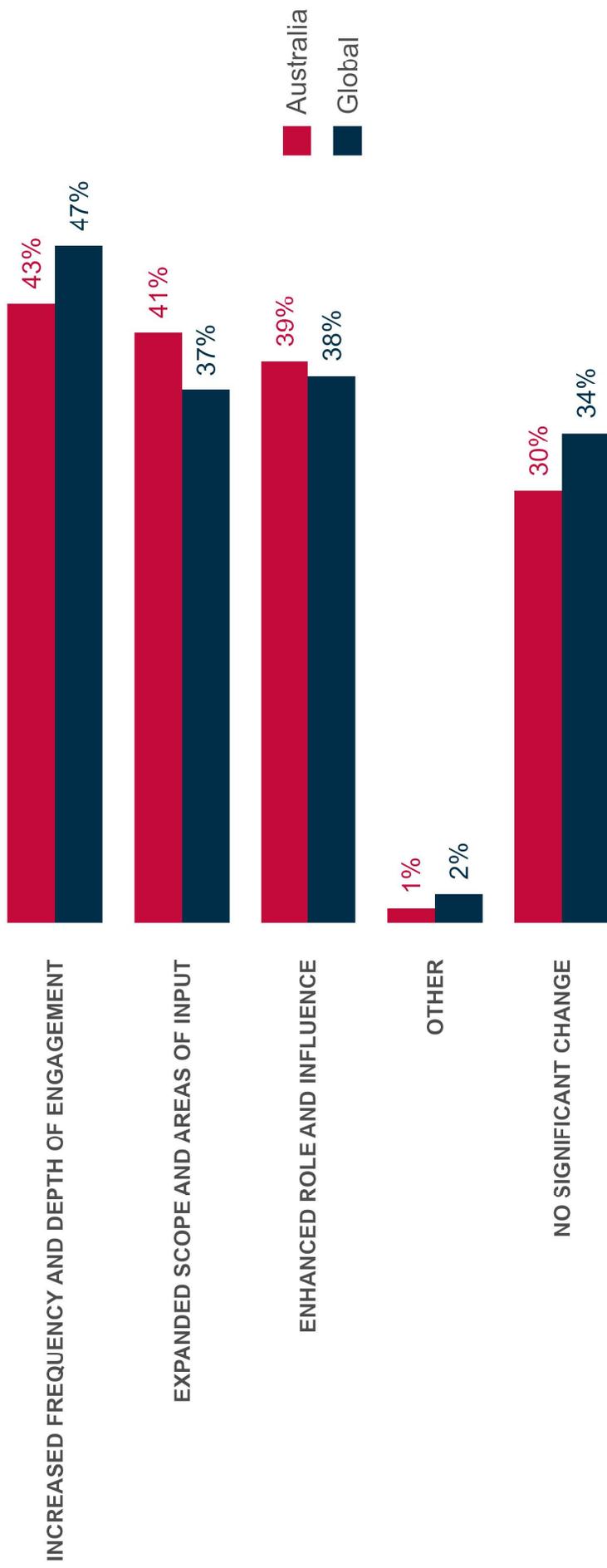
While Australian CLOs are viewed as trusted partners for traditional business strategy and M&A, they have not yet been brought into the fold for new and emerging global risks to the same extent as their international counterparts. Only **24%** of CLOs have seen increased input in AI and technology (vs. 42% globally), and **15%** provide guidance on geopolitical risks (vs. 41% globally).

3. A More Distributed Impact Profile

Australian CLOs report a more distributed range of influence than their global peers. While they are less likely to focus primarily on advising the CEO (**20%** vs. 25%), they place a higher emphasis on organisational culture and integrity (**18%** vs. 13%) and other impact areas (**9%** vs. 3%). This suggests the Australian CLO's role is evolving into a multifaceted leadership position that extends well beyond traditional C-suite advisory.

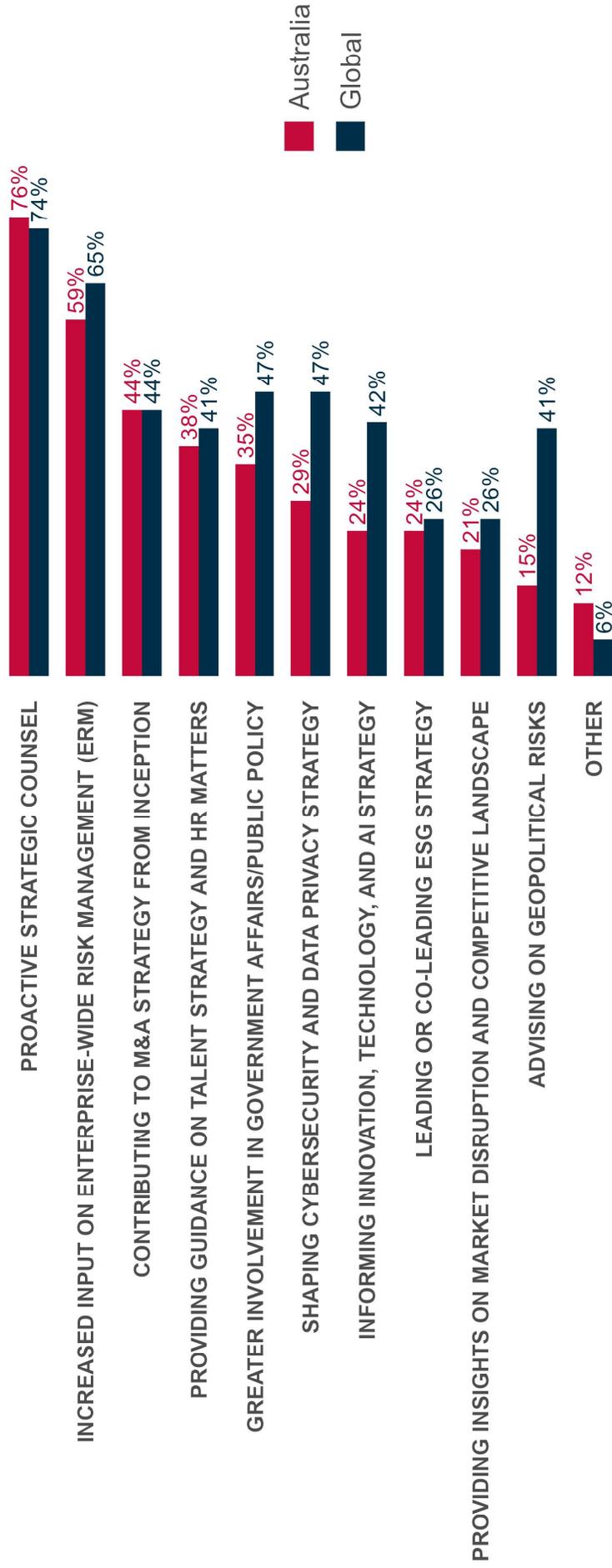
Evolution of Board Involvement

How has your involvement in board-level discussions and C-suite strategic planning evolved in the past three years?



Strategic Areas of Growing Legal Significance

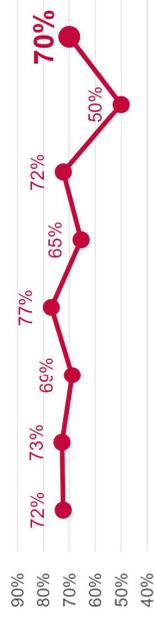
*In which strategic areas has your input in board discussions become more significant over the past three years?
Select all that apply.*



Input on Board and Operational Strategy

Select your most accurate response to the following:

When your organisation holds a board meeting, how often do you attend?



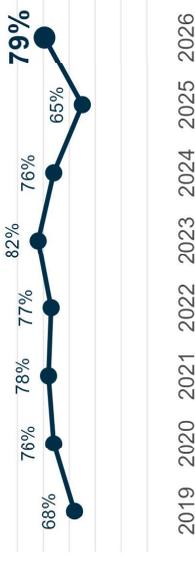
How often do you meet with business leaders at your organisation to discuss operational issues and risk areas?



How often does the executive leadership team seek your input on strategic business decisions?



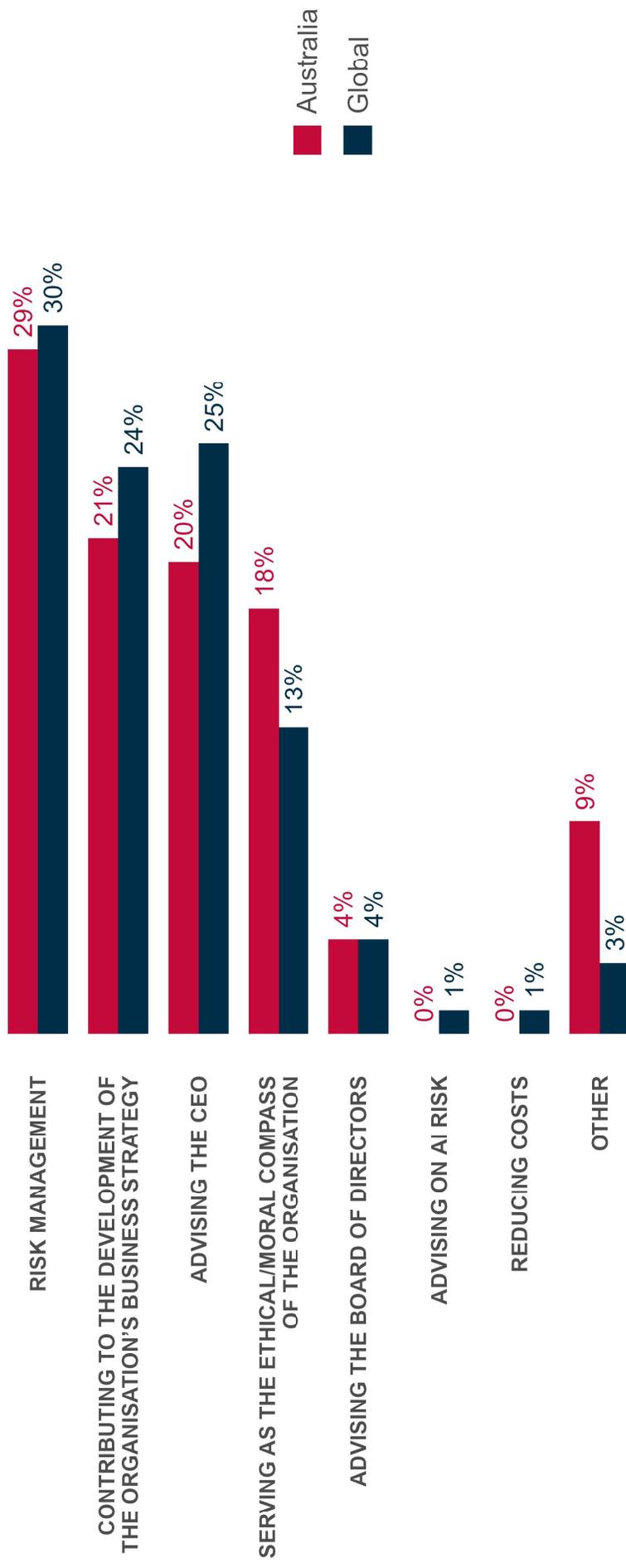
GLOBAL



Note: Percentages shown indicate those who responded "Almost always".

Greatest Impact on the Organisation

In what way do you believe you are making the greatest impact on your organisation?





SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

SECTION 3



Section 3 – Key Takeaways

1. High Tech and AI Priority

Australian and global CLOs report that technology and AI strategy have emerged as the primary development goal requested by CEOs (**44%** and **47%**, respectively). This is further reflected in the skill-building priorities for their teams, where technological fluency is also a top-tier focus (**32%** in Australia). Australian CLOs are actively working to bridge that gap to meet CEO expectations and future-proof their legal departments.

2. Focus on Cross-Functional Influence

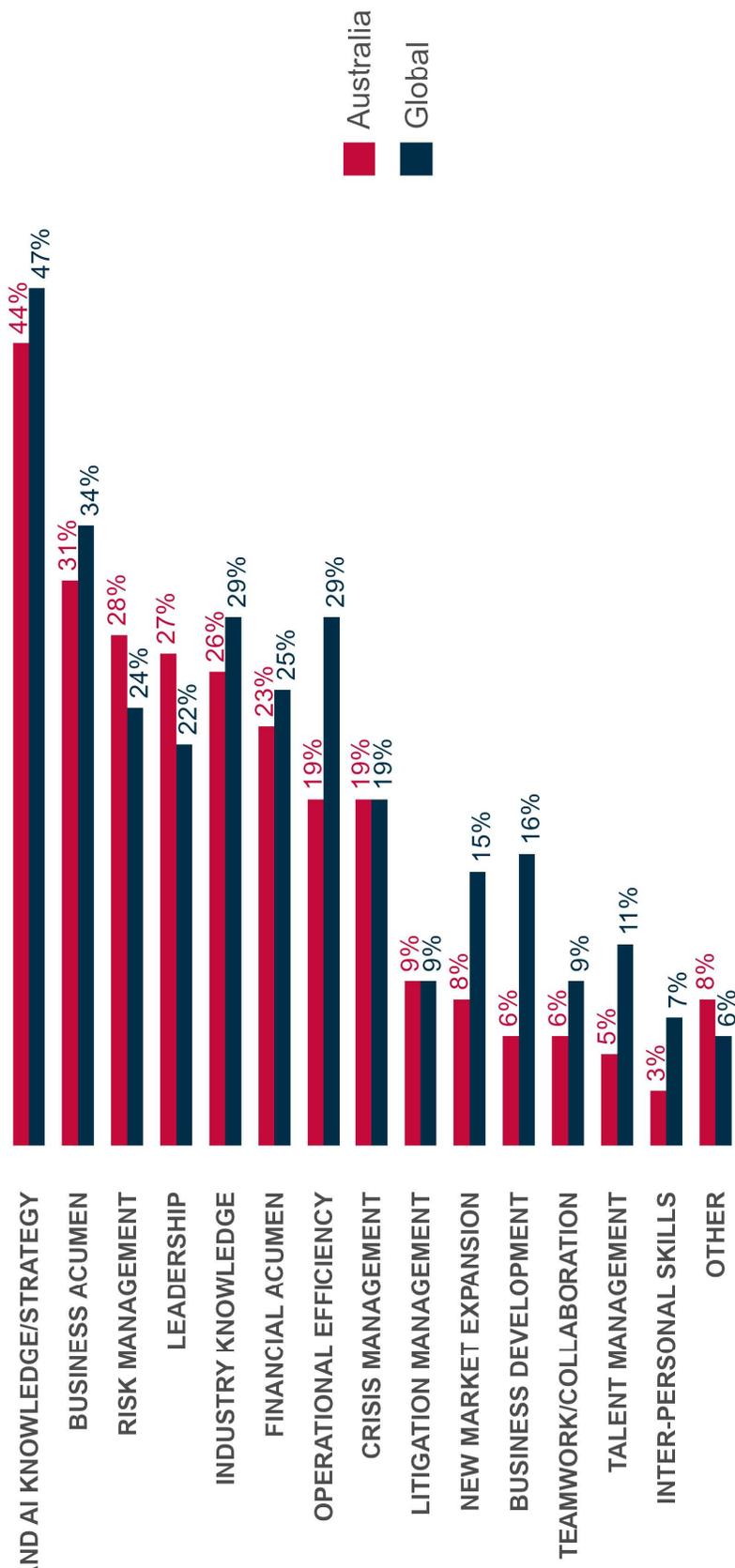
Australian legal leaders are more likely than their global peers to identify collaboration and influence as the most significant competency they have refined recently (**15%** vs. **12%**). Furthermore, while global CLOs focus heavily on developing leadership skills among their staff (**39%**), Australian CLOs are more singularly focused on business acumen (**67%**) and executive presence (**44%**).

3. Divergent Soft Skill Priorities

Australian CLOs place a lower importance on developing emotional intelligence (**13%** vs. **26%**), project management (**17%** vs. **31%**), and presentation skills (**18%** vs. **27%**) for their legal staff. Australian CLOs focus their training resources on high-impact, outward-facing skills like business acumen and communication.

Areas the CEO Would Like the CLO to Further Develop

In which areas do you believe the CEO would like you to further develop? Select all that apply.



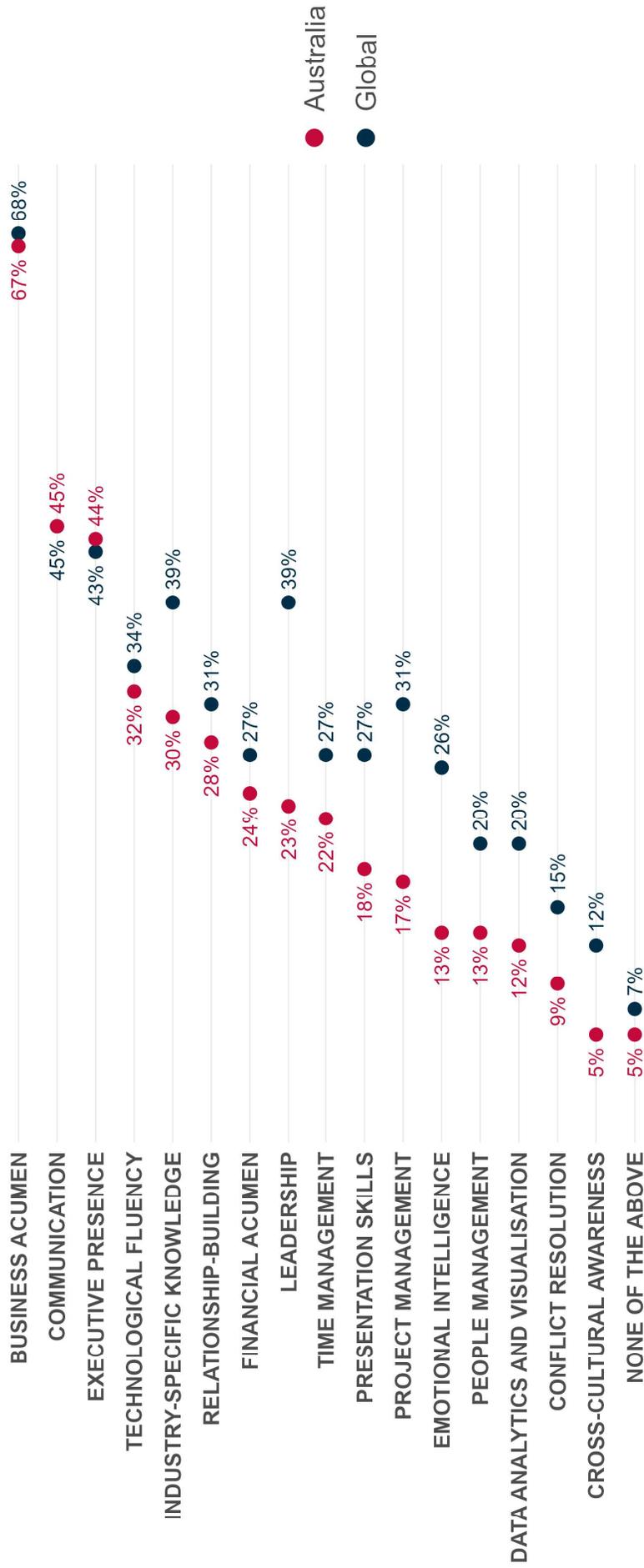
Skills CLOs Are Focused on Developing

What is the single most significant skill or competency you have had to develop or refine in your role as CLO over the past three years to meet evolving business demands?



Skills to Develop for the Lawyers in the Department

Which of the following skills are you seeking to develop for the lawyers in your department? Select all that apply.





INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RESOURCING

SECTION 4



Section 4 – Key Takeaways

1. Stability in Legal Staffing

Australian departments show a stronger trend toward maintaining current headcount compared to the more volatile global market. While roughly **31%** of Australian CLOs plan to increase their lawyer headcount (vs. **33%** globally), a higher portion plan for it to stay the same (**62%** vs. **56%**). Legal leaders in Australia are less likely to be unsure about their lawyer staffing plans (only **1%** vs. **5%** globally).

2. Outsourcing Momentum for Law Firms

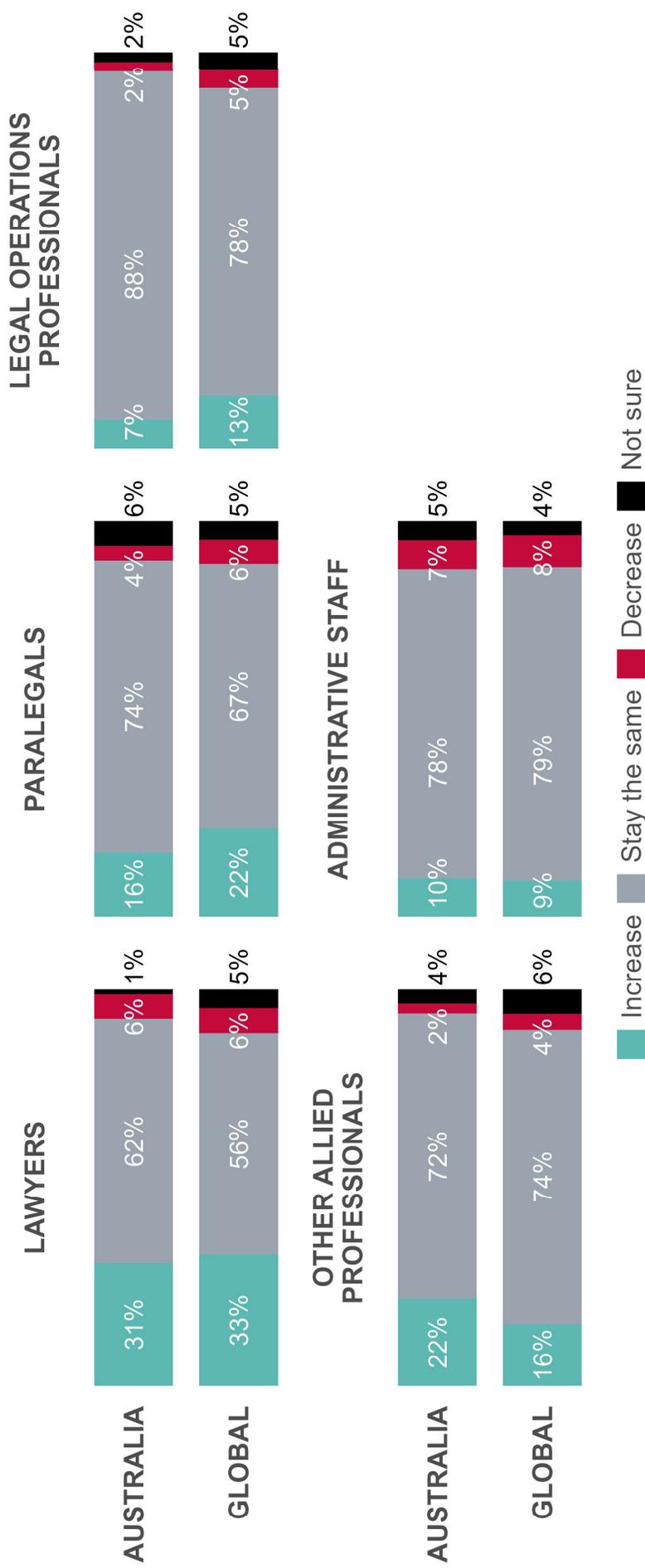
Australia is leaning more heavily into traditional law firm partnerships than the global average, with less interest in alternative providers. **41%** of Australian CLOs expect to increase the work sent to law firms, surpassing the global average of **37%**. Only **11%** expect to send less work to law firms, compared to **18%** globally. Australian CLOs show less appetite for increasing their reliance on alternative providers (**13%** vs. **18%**).

3. Lag in Operations Investment

Australia is trailing in the expansion of dedicated legal operations roles. Only **7%** of CLOs plan to increase their legal ops staff, nearly half the global rate of **13%**. Instead, Australian CLOs prioritise other staff (**22%** increase vs. **16%**). The shift toward operations appears to be moving slower in Australia. The focus is on broader support rather than the specialized operations roles that are becoming standard in large global legal departments.

Expected Change in Legal Department's Staffing Levels

Do you anticipate your department's staffing levels will decrease, stay the same, or increase in the next 12 months?



■ Increase
 ■ Stay the same
 ■ Decrease
 ■ Not sure

Expected Change in the Amount of Work Outsourced

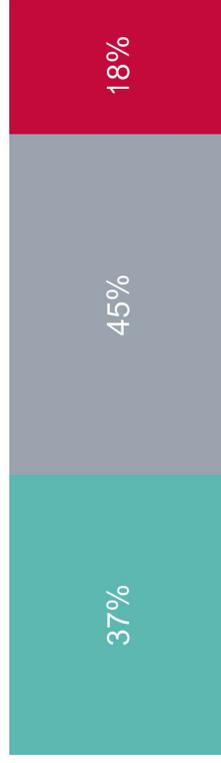
Do you anticipate the amount of work you send to law firms and other legal service providers will decrease, stay the same, or increase in the next 12 months?

LAW FIRMS

OTHER LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDERS



AUSTRALIA



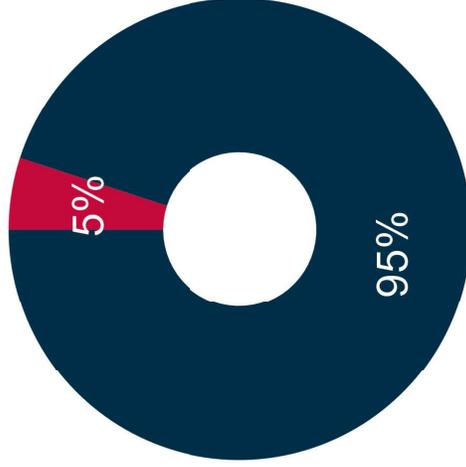
GLOBAL

Increase No change Decrease

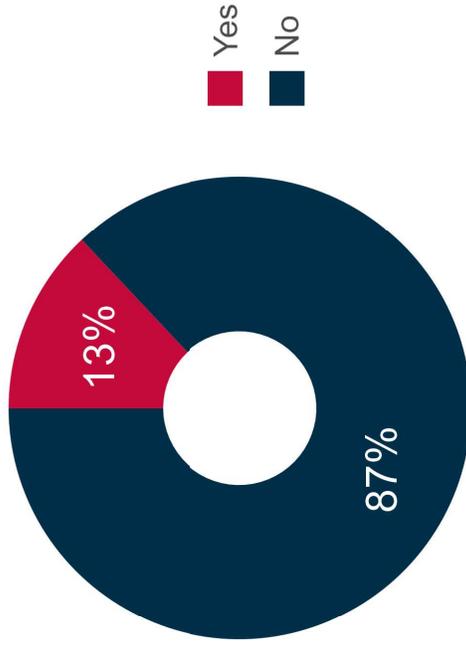
Change in Approach to Evaluating and Selecting Outside Counsel

Given political developments in the US over the past year, has your organisation changed its approach to evaluating and selecting outside counsel?

AUSTRALIA



GLOBAL



■ Yes
■ No

Note: Participants who responded "Yes" were asked a follow-up question on the specific changes in the approach to evaluating and selecting outside counsel. The results are not shown due to the limited number of responses. Review the full report for more details on this follow-up question.



TECHNOLOGY AND AI ADOPTION

SECTION 5



Section 5 – Key Takeaways

1. Dominant Focus on Generative AI

For Australian CLOs, legal technology has become almost synonymous with generative AI. They are bypassing broader digital transformation categories to focus specifically on the potential of large language models. Only **39%** of Australian CLOs plan to adopt new legal tech in the next year (vs. 52% globally). However, among those looking to invest, an overwhelming **81%** are targeting generative AI (69% globally).

2. Basic Infrastructure Over Automation

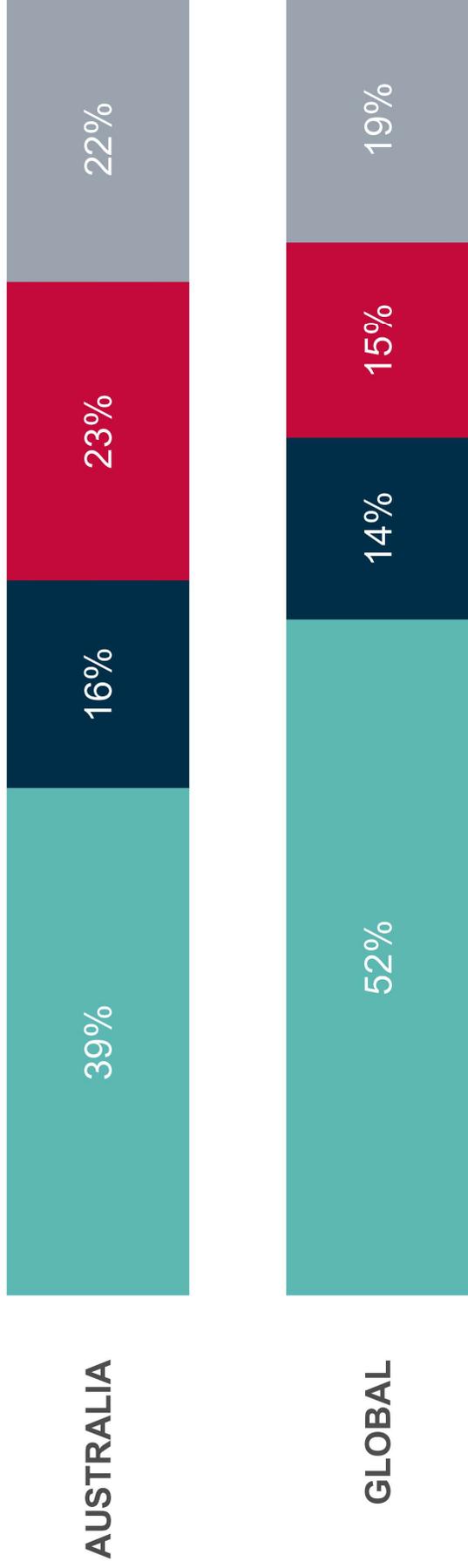
Outside of AI, Australian investment is directed toward foundational back-to-basics tools rather than advanced workflow automation or analytics. CLOs in Australia are more likely than global peers to invest in document management (**31%** vs. 24%) and record management tools (**19%** vs. 11%). Conversely, they show much lower interest in contract management (**31%** vs. 55%) and collaboration tools (**6%** vs. 15%).

3. Cautious Approach, Optimistic Outlook

Despite the high interest in AI investment, only **15%** of Australian departments have implemented AI for select tasks (vs. 22% globally). However, **67%** of CLOs believe headcount will remain stable while roles evolve, a more optimistic view than the global average of 63%. Australia is currently in a "wait and see" phase. The intent to spend on AI is high, but actual implementation is currently cautious and task-specific.

Plans on Adopting New Legal Technologies

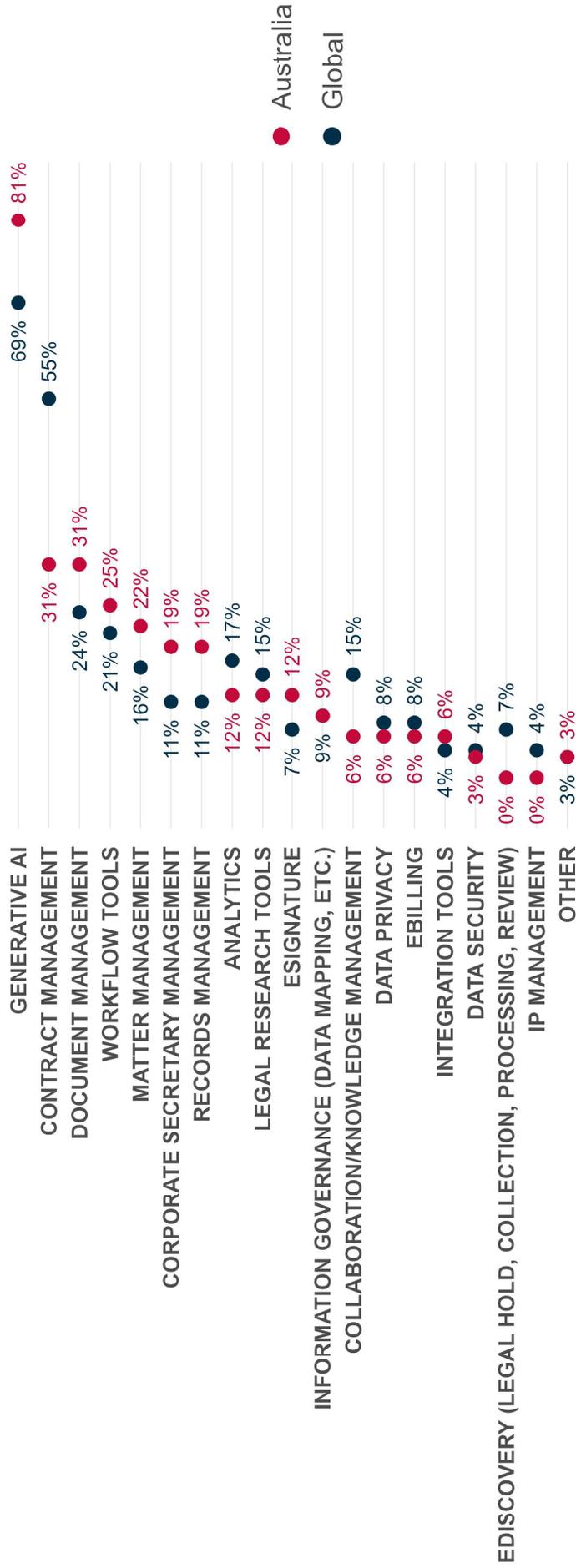
Are you planning on adopting any new legal technology solutions in your legal department to improve efficiency in the next 12 months?



■ Yes ■ No, because we recently adopted new technology solutions ■ No ■ Not sure at this time

Expected Areas of New Technology Investment

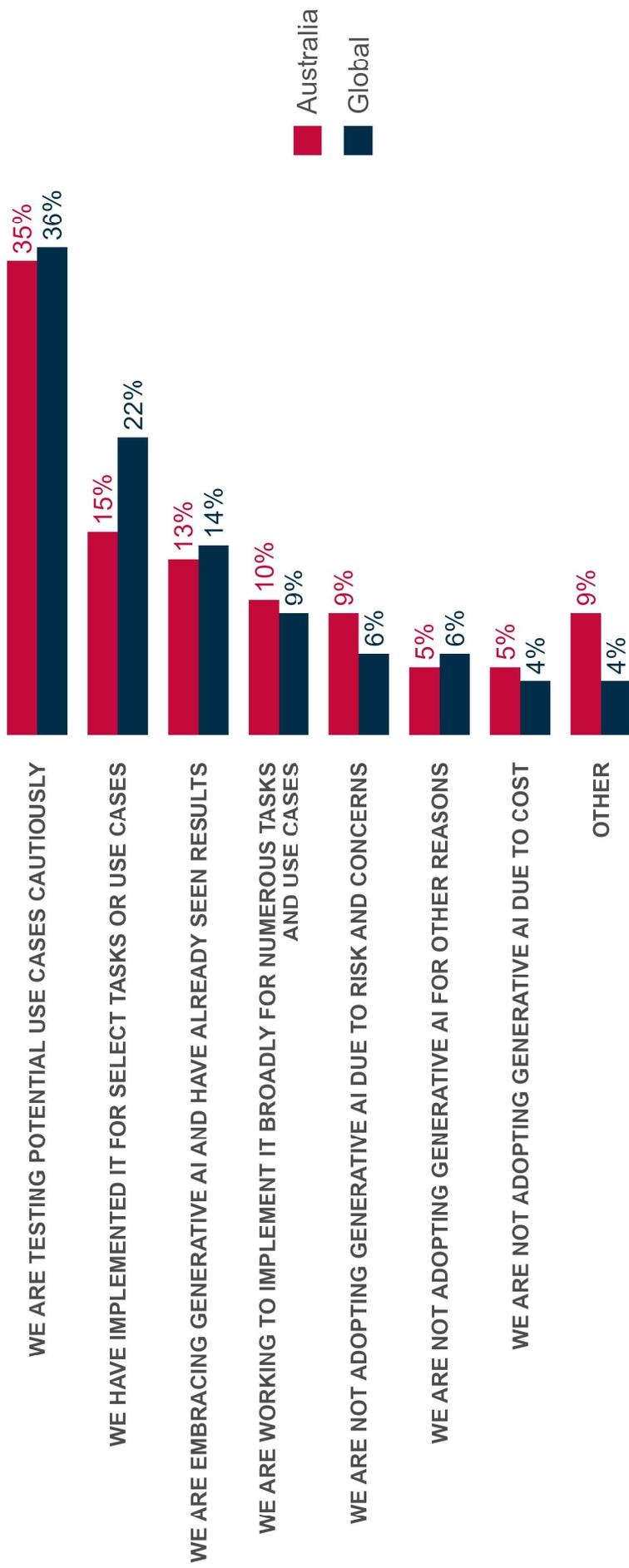
Specifically, what types of legal technology are you looking to invest more in over the next 24 months?
Select all that apply.



Note: Only asked to those planning to invest in new legal technology in the next 12 months.

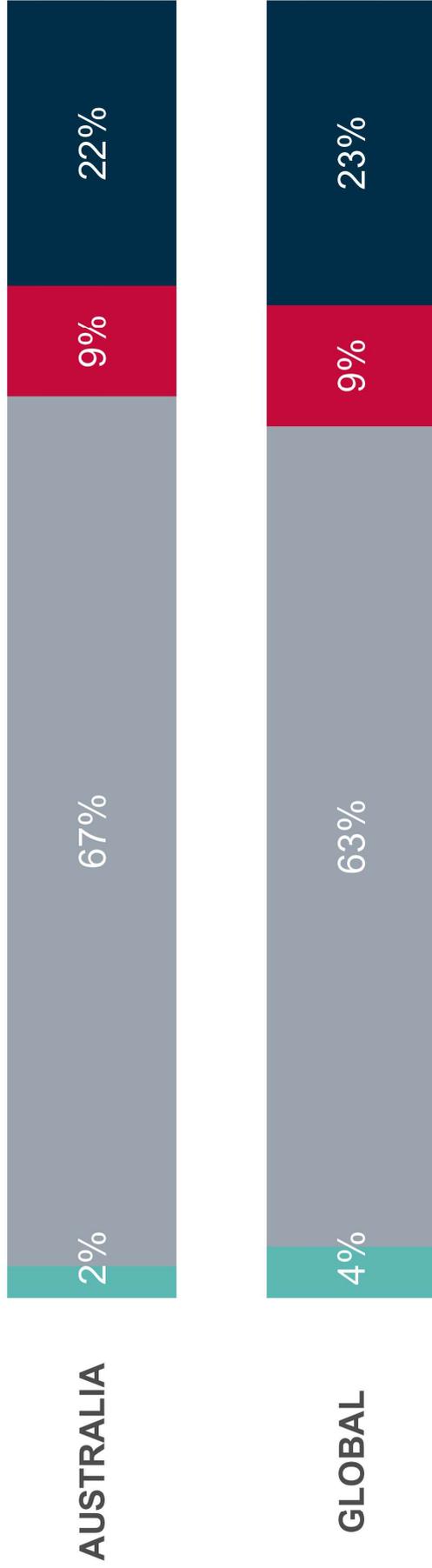
Position on Generative AI Adoption

What is your position regarding generative AI adoption within your legal department?



Expectation on the Impact of AI Adoption on Staffing and Legal Work

How do you anticipate AI adoption will impact your legal department's staffing and the nature of legal work over the next 3-5 years?



Net increase in headcount, due to new needs
Net reduction in headcount



REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

SECTION 6



Section 6 – Key Takeaways

1. Elevated Regulatory Pressure

Australian organisations face a more aggressive regulatory environment than their global counterparts. A remarkable **33%** of Australian CLOs report having been subject to a regulatory investigation or enforcement action in the last year, compared to 25% globally. This heightened activity is driving a massive focus on industry-specific regulation (**72% vs. 64%**) and labour and employment (**39% vs. 35%**).

2. Intense Individual Accountability Focus

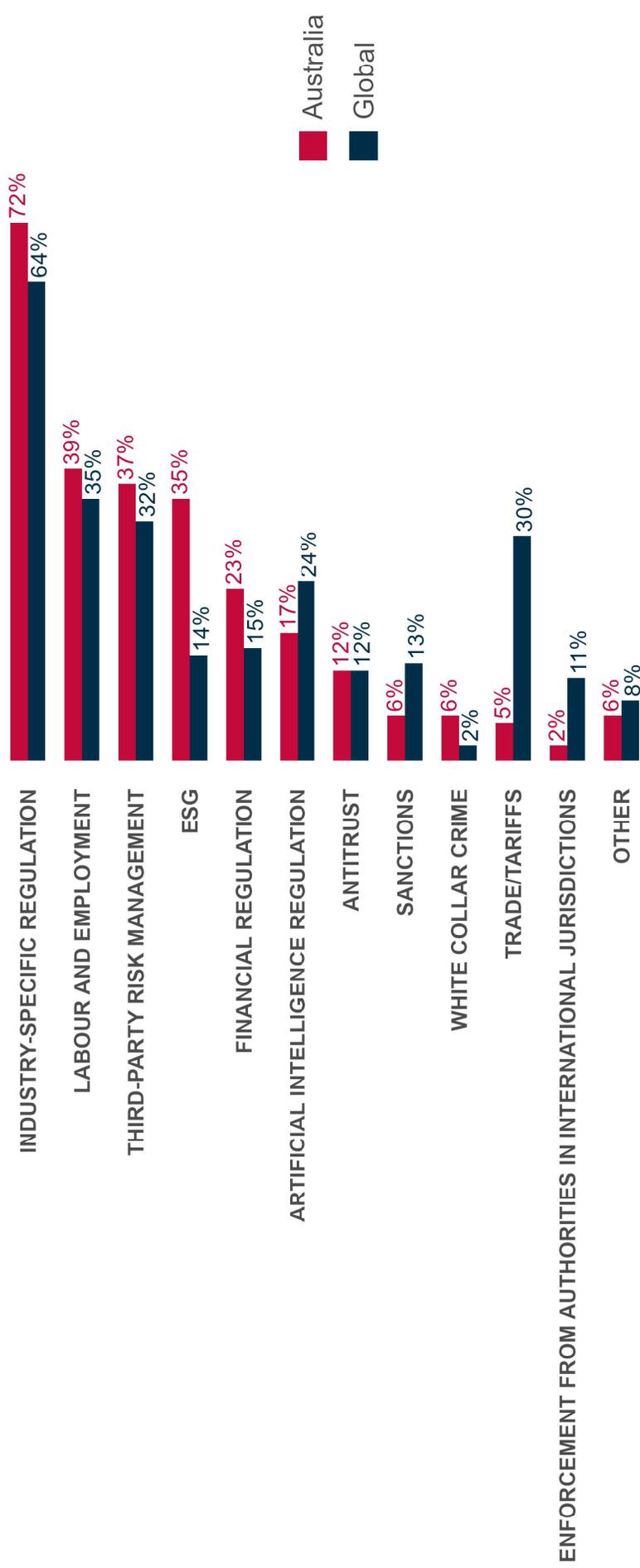
Australian regulators are viewed as being far more focused on holding individuals accountable than regulators in other jurisdictions. **54%** of Australian CLOs report seeing heightened scrutiny of specific high-risk areas compared to just 32% globally, and **26%** see an increased focus on individual accountability (11% globally). This has likely contributed to the **48%** of Australian CLOs reporting a greater emphasis on proactive compliance programs.

3. Escalating Investigation Complexity and Costs

While the volume of litigation is lower in Australia, the burden of investigations (both internal and external) is rising sharply in cost and complexity. Australian respondents report higher increases in the cost of external investigations (**38% vs. 28%** globally) and internal investigations (**36% vs. 26%**). They also find these investigations to be more complex than the global average.

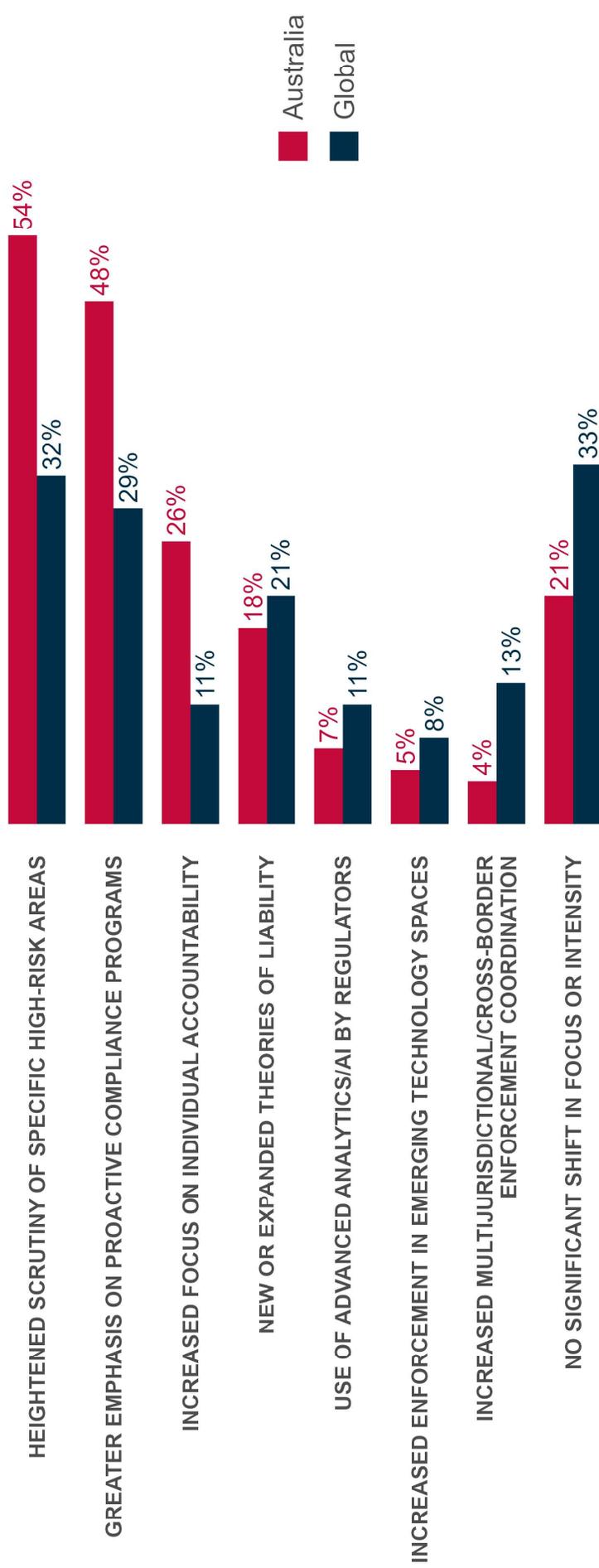
Areas of Regulatory Enforcement Concern

What areas of regulatory enforcement is your organisation concerned about? Select top 3.



Shifts in the Focus or Intensity of Regulatory Enforcement Actions

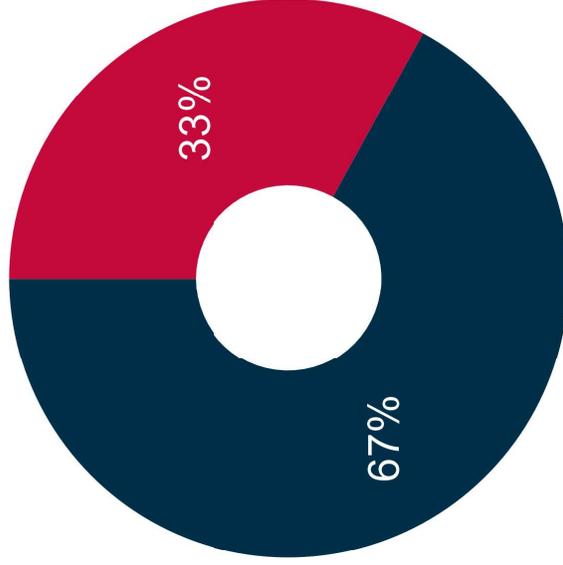
Are you seeing any of the following shifts in the focus or intensity of regulatory enforcement actions in your industry?
Select all that apply.



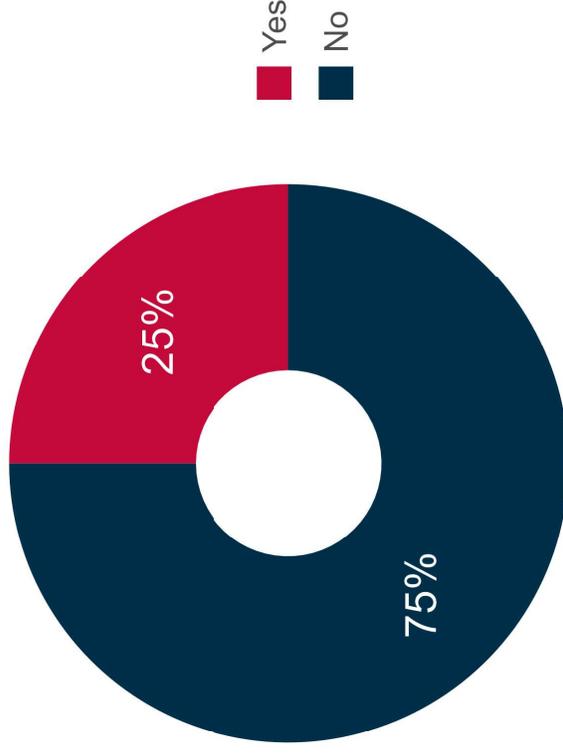
Regulatory Investigations or Enforcement Actions

Has your organisation been subject to a regulatory investigation or enforcement action in the past year?

AUSTRALIA



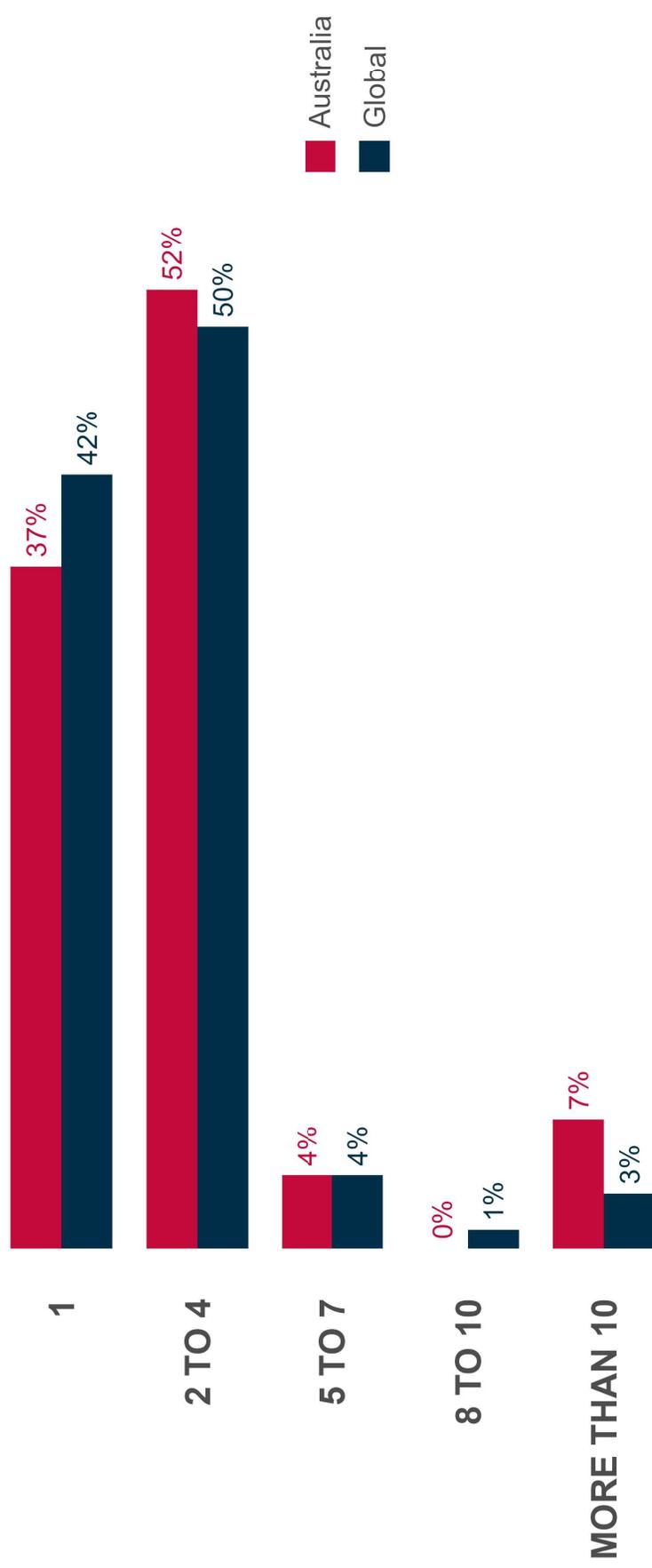
GLOBAL



■ Yes
■ No

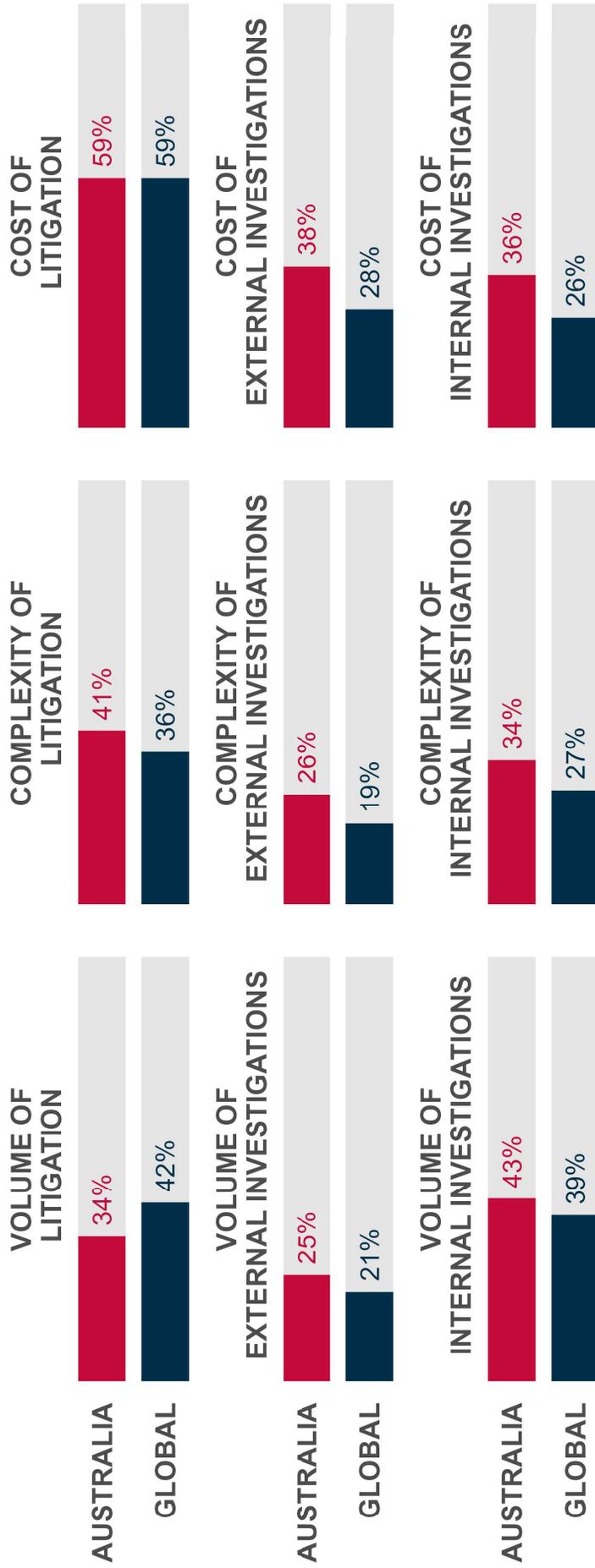
Number of Investigations or Enforcement Actions in the Past Year

Please indicate how many regulatory investigations or enforcement actions in the past year.



Increase in Volume, Complexity, Cost of Litigation and Investigations

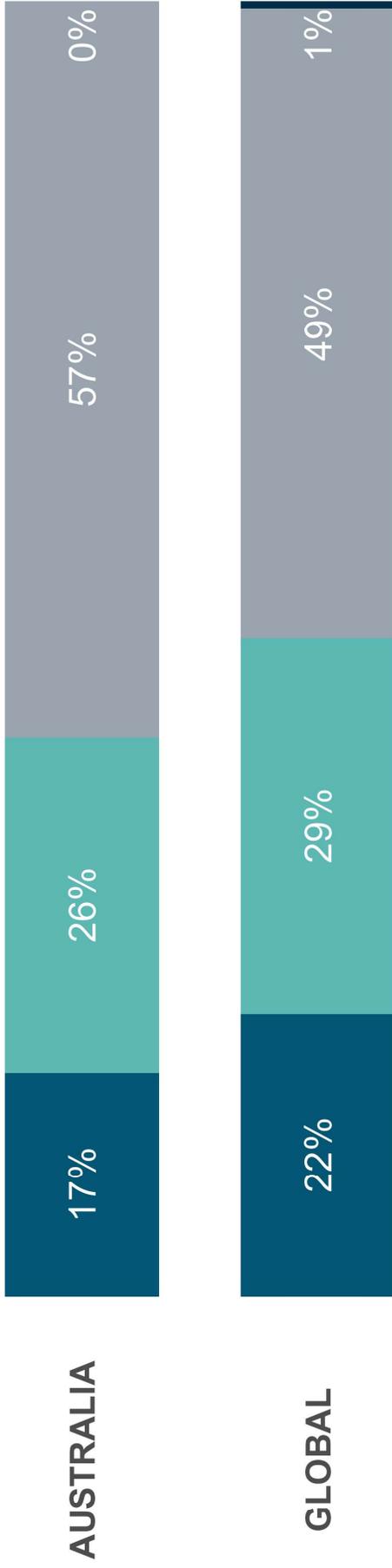
Has the volume, complexity, and/or cost of litigation, and/or investigations increased over the past year?



Note: Values indicate the percentage that reported an "increase".

Impact of Policy Changes on Legal Department Workload

Is your legal department spending more time and resources supporting significant business changes driven by new government policies, regulations, or tariffs?



■ Yes, significantly more ■ Yes, somewhat more ■ No, about the same ■ No, less

Impact of Global Regulatory Risk on Departmental Resourcing

How have changes in global regulatory risk impacted your legal and/or compliance departments' hiring/resourcing decisions in the past year?





CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

SECTION 7



Section 7 – Key Takeaways

1. Regulatory Compliance Dominates Risk

Australian organisations enter 2026 with a sharper focus on compliance and privacy than their global counterparts. Regulatory compliance and enforcement is the top concern for **21%** of CLOs (vs. 16% globally). While growth remains a shared global priority, the Australian legal landscape is defined by a compliance-first approach. This is reflected in strategic initiatives, where **49%** of Australian CLOs prioritize regulatory compliance (vs. 39%).

2. People-First Retention Strategy

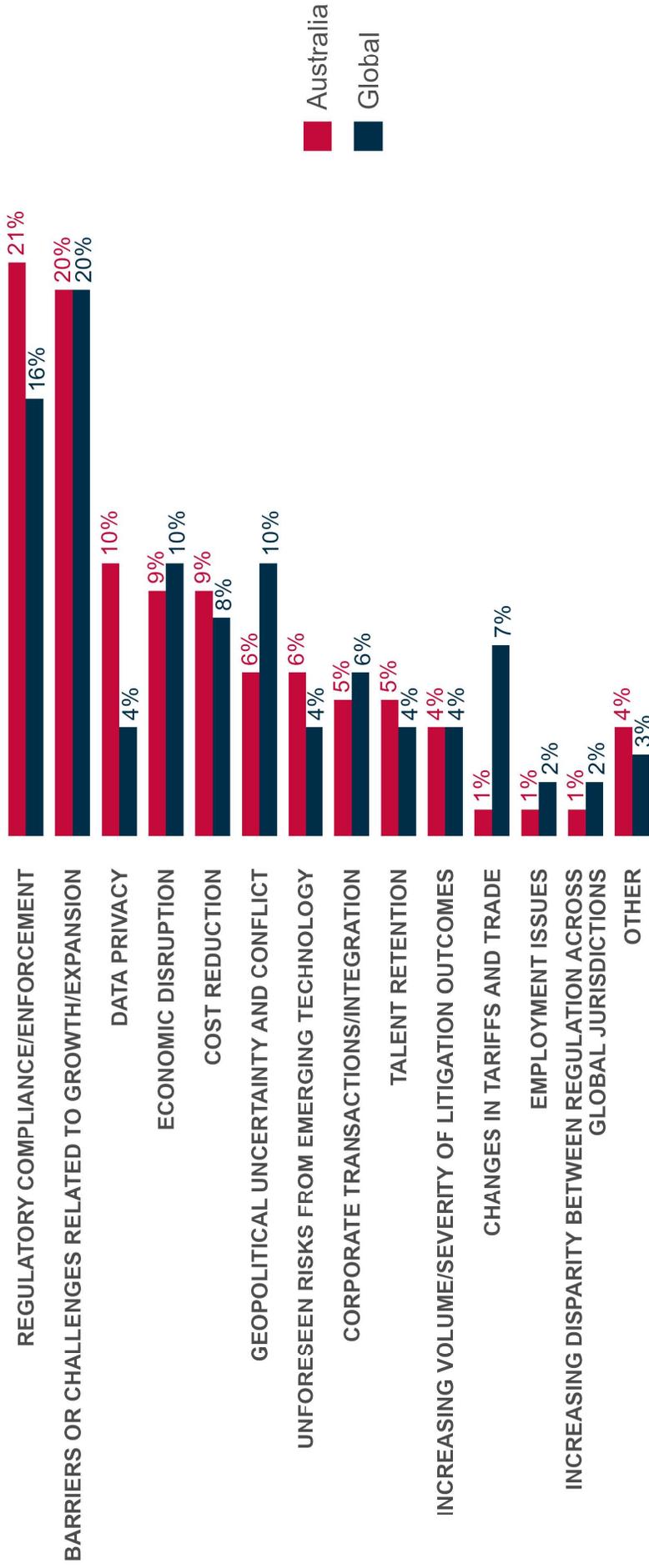
To address talent challenges, Australian CLOs lean heavily on flexible work arrangements (**74%** vs. 58%) and culture and engagement (**60%** vs. 47%). They are less likely to use competitive compensation (**39%** vs. 46%) or professional development (**41%** vs. 50%). The Australian legal talent market is being managed through workplace wellness and flexibility.

3. Efficiency Through Right-Sourcing

Budget and resources is the single greatest barrier to success for **38%** of Australian CLOs. To combat this, **33%** are prioritizing the right-sourcing of legal services—a massive jump over the 20% globally. Interest in tech implementation as a strategic initiative is lower in Australia (**27%** vs. 38%). While many departments globally look to tech to solve efficiency gaps, Australian CLOs are focused on the most cost-effective way to manage their workload.

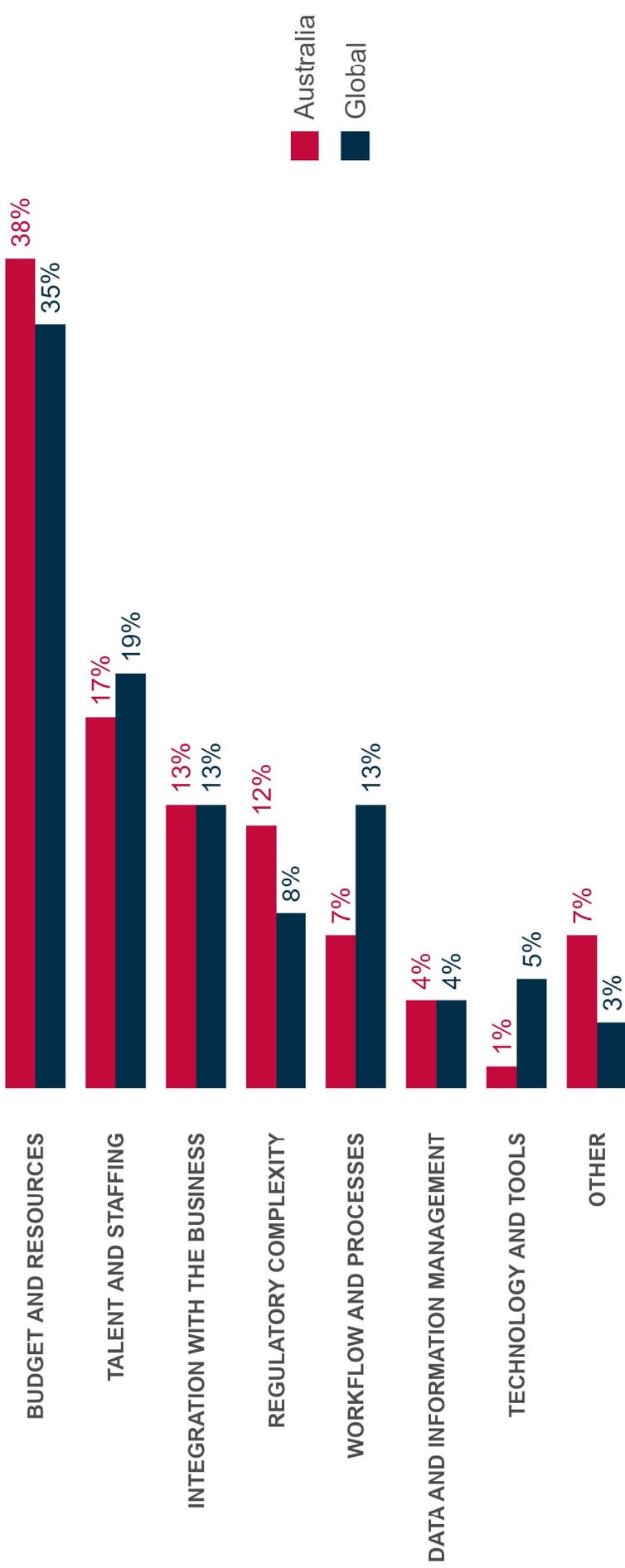
Top Organisational Risks

What risk is your organisation most concerned about heading into 2026?



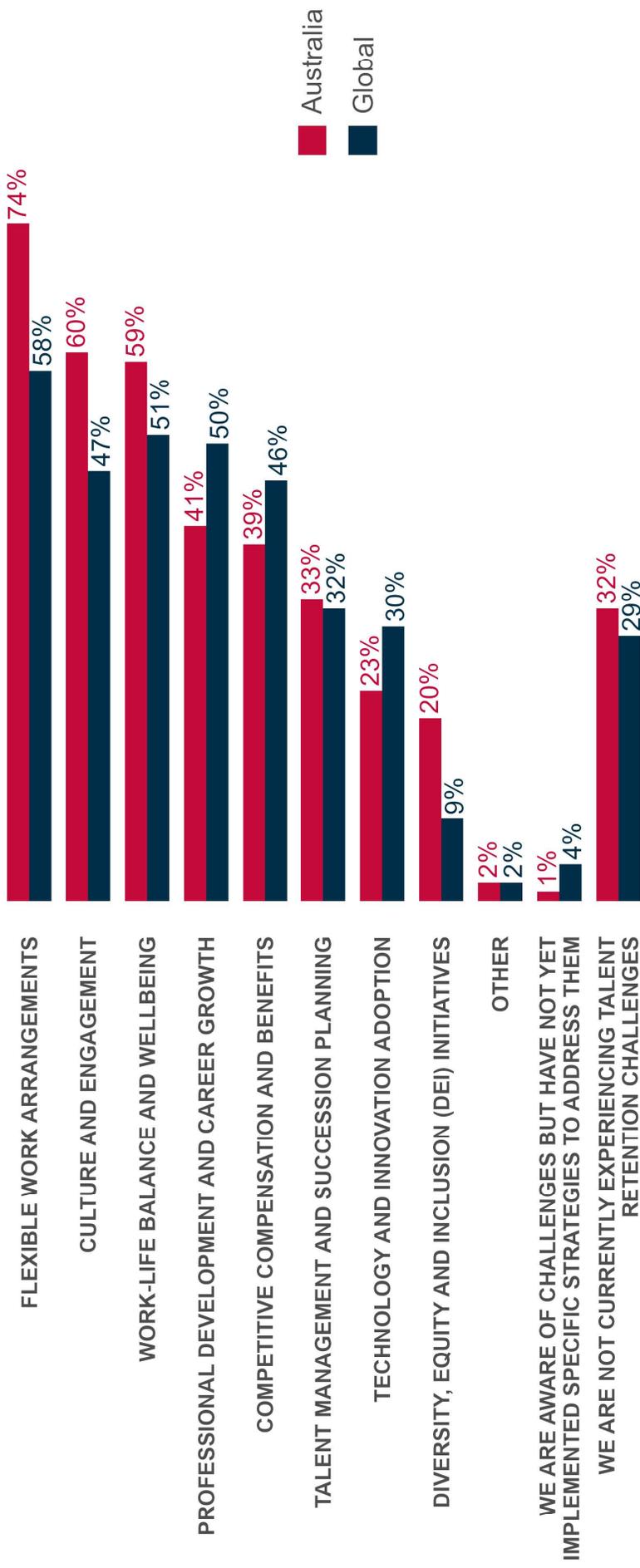
Single Greatest Barrier to Legal Department's Success

Which of the following do you consider to be the single greatest barrier to success for your legal department?



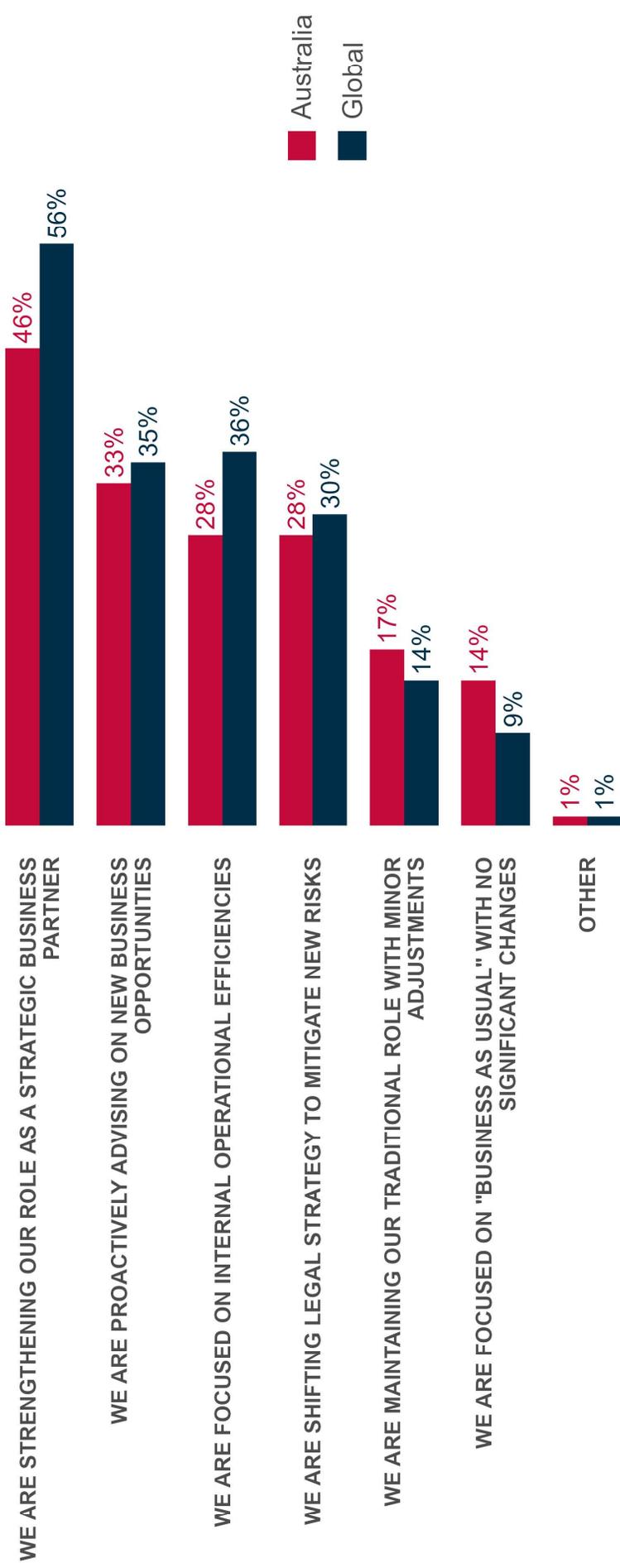
Strategies to Address Talent Retention Challenges

How are you addressing talent retention challenges within your legal department, if at all? Select all that apply.



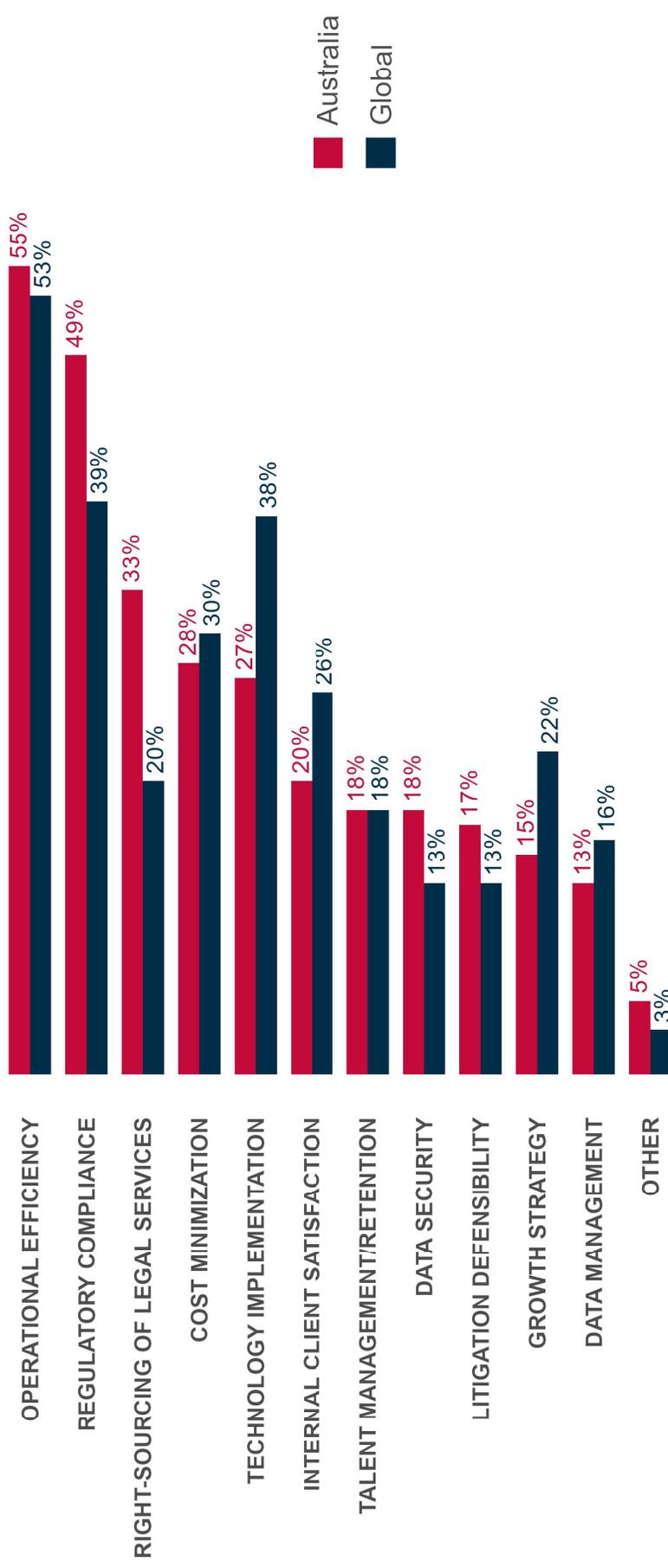
Legal Department's Responses to Evolving Global Challenges

How would you describe the legal department's current response to evolving global challenges? Select all that apply.



Top Legal Department Strategic Initiatives

What are your legal department's top 3 strategic initiatives over the next 12 months?





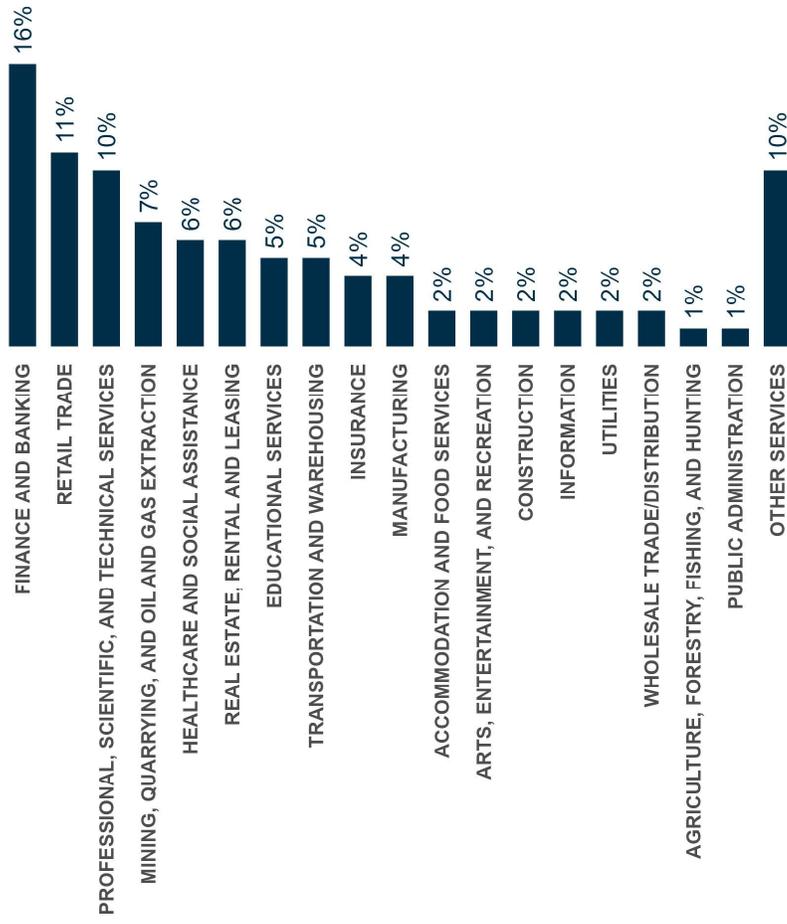
PARTICIPANT PROFILE



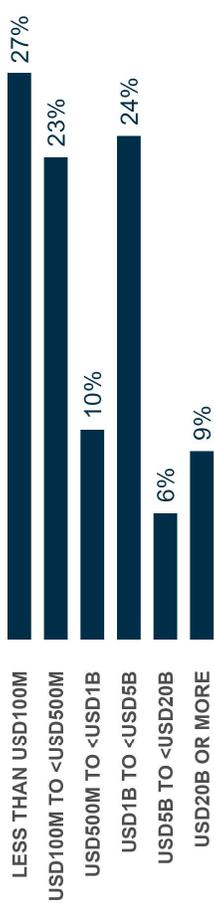
Survey Participant Demographics

Global Participant Pool: **1,049** CLOs | Australian Participant Pool: **82** CLOs

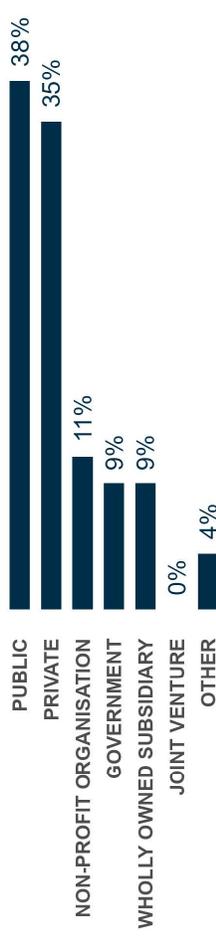
Industry



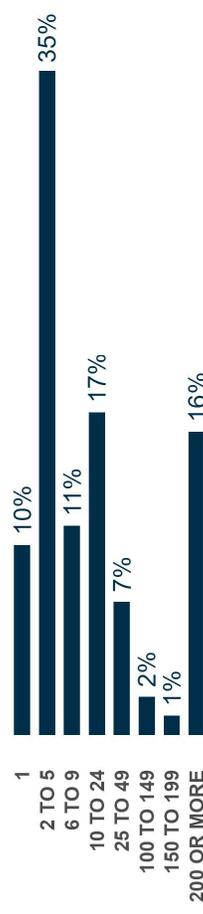
Company Revenue



Company Type



Number of Legal Staff



ABOUT ACC

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