



Rebels at work:

Motivated
to make a difference

research highlights

“

These people are
‘truth tellers’ who
have the courage to
challenge the status quo
and question assumptions.

Without rebels
who are willing to seek
and drive change,
stagnation sets in.

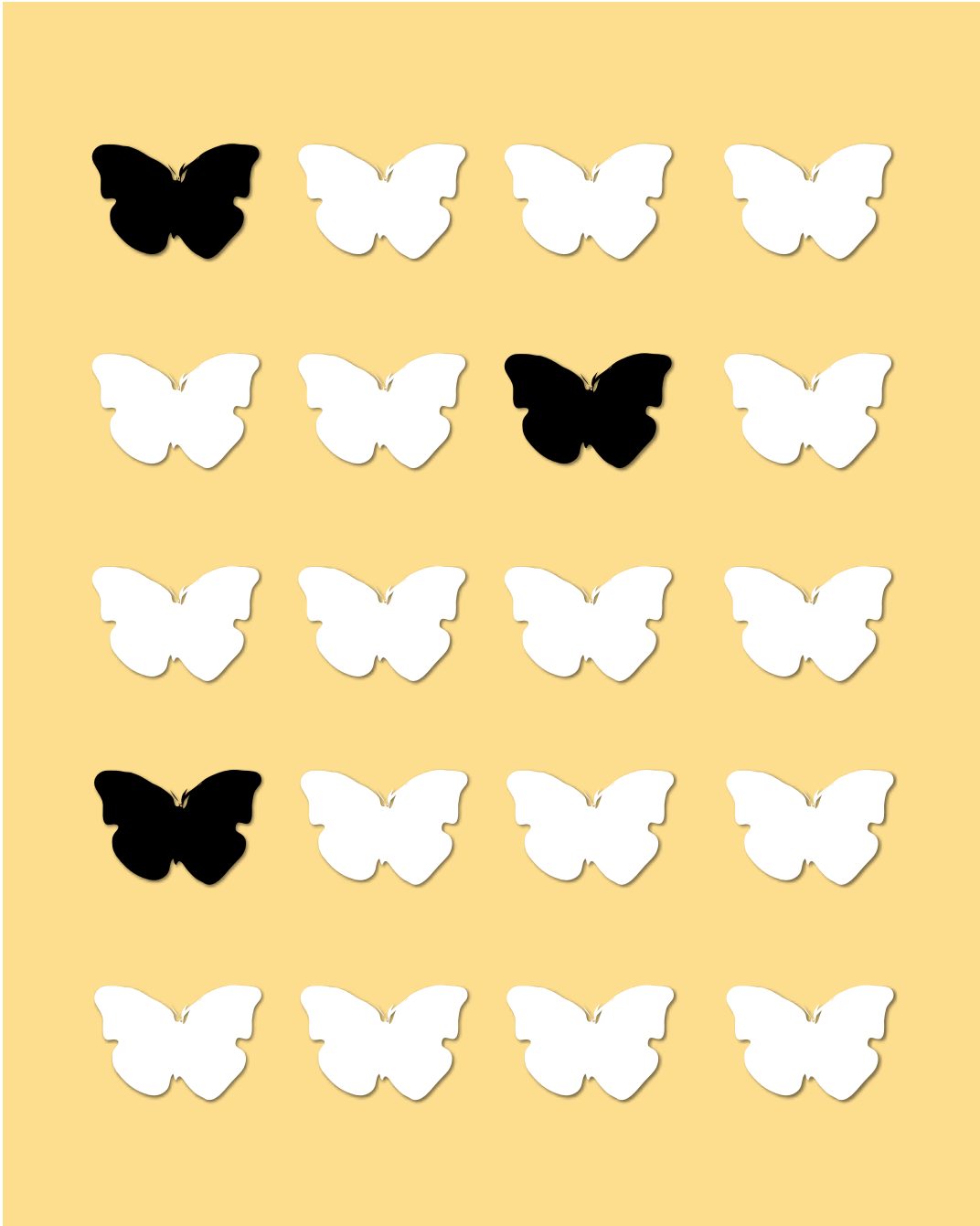
”



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WHY LOOK AT REBELS?

I have been a rebel most of my life, spending junior high school in detention writing “obedience to authority is essential to growth and development” 100, 500, 2,000 times. As an outsider, I have never felt comfortable with the status quo, never quite “fitting in” with any groups. I appear kind of corporate, but I have never been mainstream.

This early outsider status helped me see things differently, forever asking “what if” and coming up with unusual approaches. This rebel wiring also frustrated me.

Bosses and mentors would advise me to focus more, curb my passion, and stick to a more disciplined career path. Though my fingers still have calluses from writing, “Obedience to authority...,” I have never been able walk away from my curiosity. I love the path my career has taken, but there are no straight lines for a rebel.

In the past few years, I’ve been helping big companies and non-profits get unstuck and find new ways to achieve their goals. My approach is to bring together all kinds of people to find new ways. Our workshops use an unstructured structure to get to “ahas.” Agendas are never completely followed, and outcomes are always completely unexpected because of the creative brilliance that emerges from people thinking together in new ways.

During workshops, I started noticing an interesting pattern: many of the most insightful questions and ideas came from people who are considered outsiders—the rebels, outliers, mavericks and skeptics. Not necessarily the rising stars or the most senior executives, but the people slightly outside who feel compelled to bring up unusual views and question sacred cow assumptions.

What is it about rebels, I wondered. What value do people with these characteristics bring to organizations? Why aren’t their voices heard more? Why do so many companies exile their rebels to corporate Siberia at the very same time they’re trying to make their companies more innovative?

What follows are highlights from this initial research—as well as 10 questions for every leader to consider.



“

We all want to be rebels, but in large organizations only the FEW survive that label.

“Change agent” has an advantage; it suggests that you are capable of working with others to create success, but you are NOT a destructive troublemaker.

”

Rebelling against a label?

Most of those surveyed don't like the label "rebel" because they feel the word has too many negative associations, i.e., troublemaker.

Almost half (49%) prefer change agent, 21% like maverick.

To report on the results we'll use rebel, but rebel as in change catalyst vs. rebel the troublemaker. Rebel as in one who resists the status quo when they see that there could be a better way.



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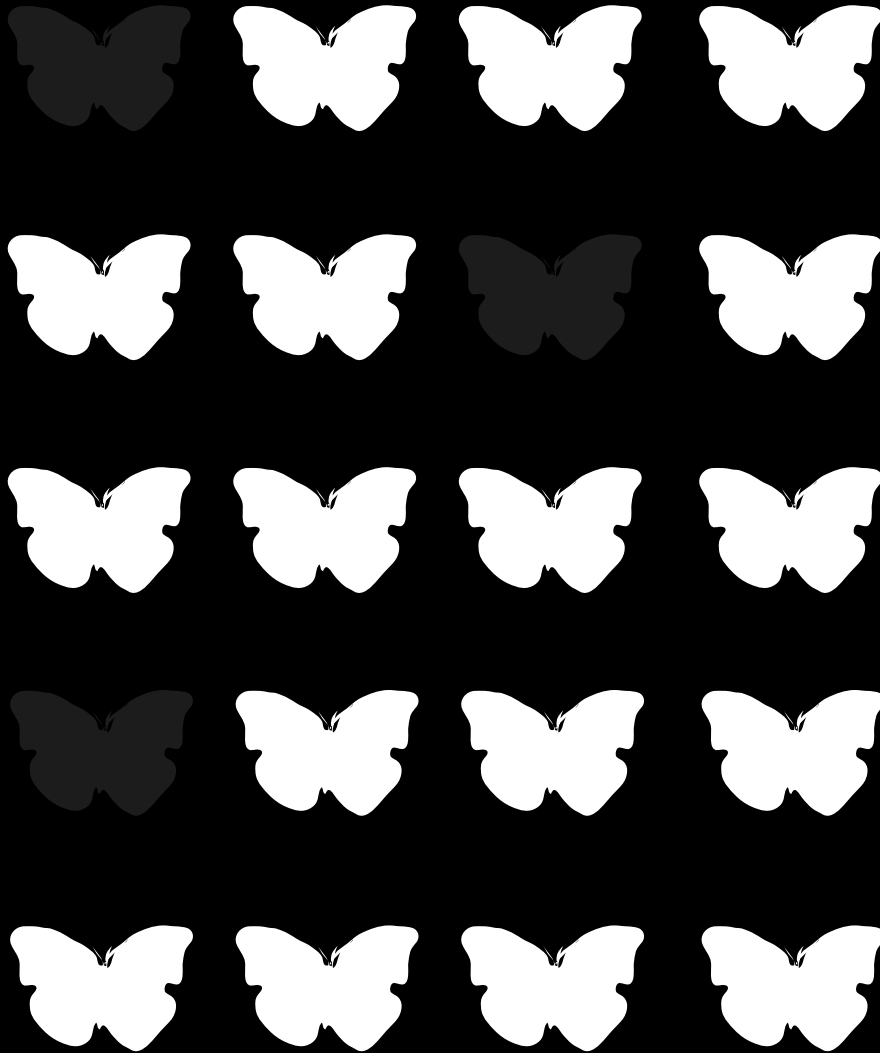
Overall highlights

Rebels are perceived to provide tremendous value in creating change, seeing and improving what no longer works.

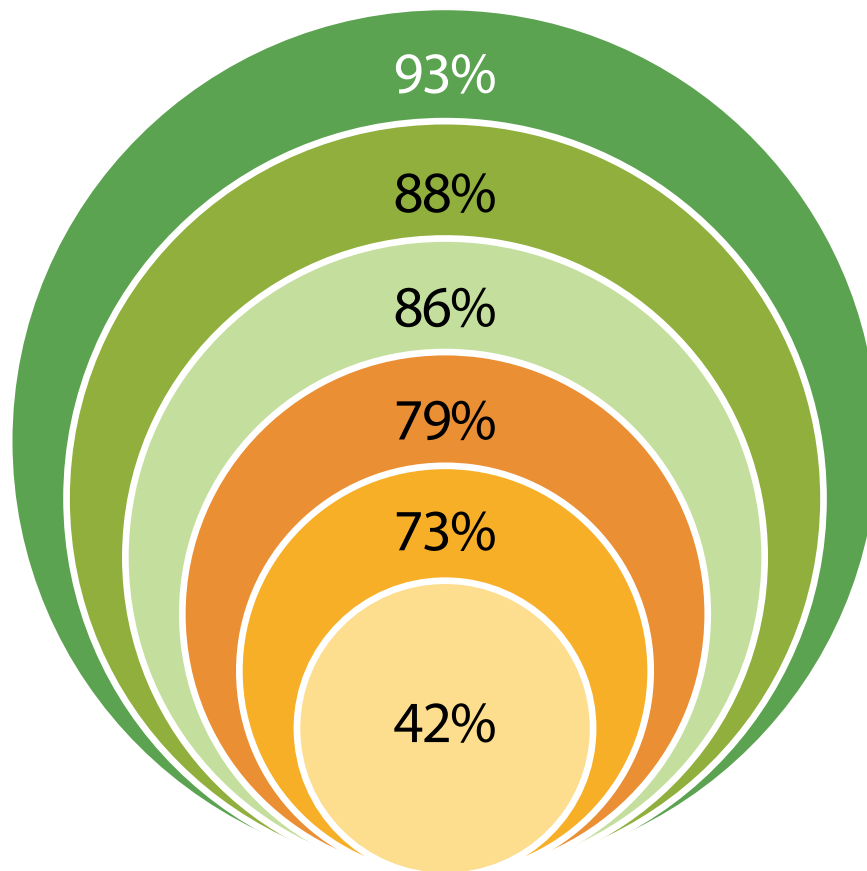
Most companies don't know how to tap into the value of this internal talent, and have organizational cultures and mindsets that make it hard for rebels' views to be heard.

even in large organizations.

motivated by the ability to make a difference, and least motivated by financial compensation, formal recognition, or personal aggrandizement.



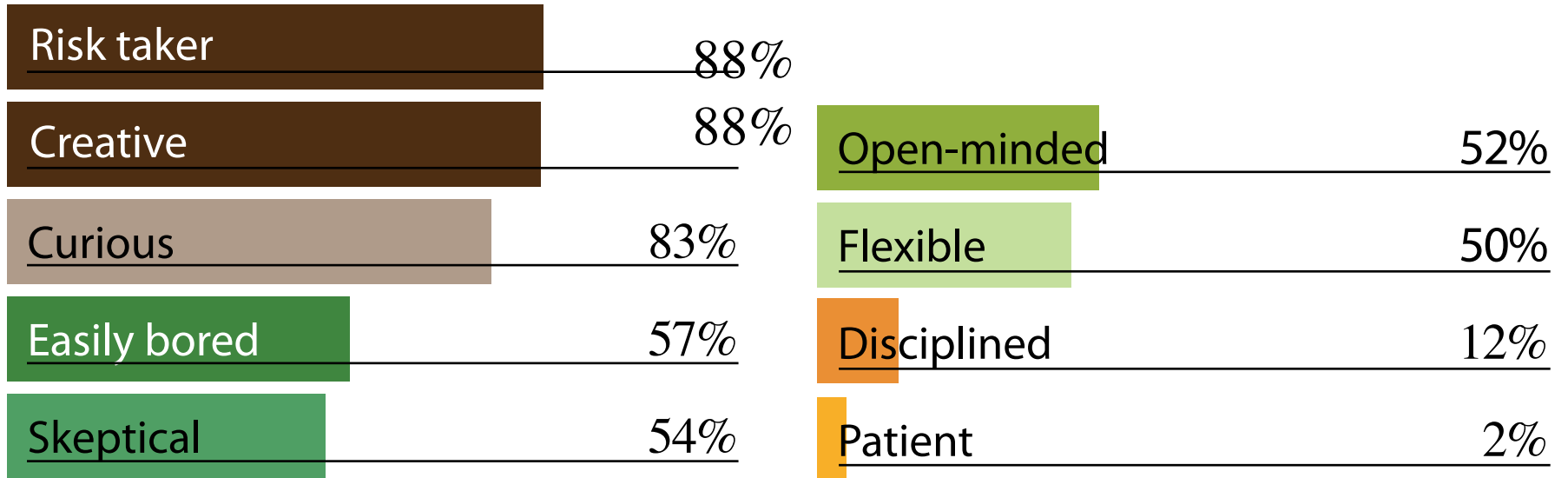
Greatest value rebels provide



- Call out problems others afraid to
- Challenge ineffective sacred cow practices
- Willing to be the first to try new approaches
- See new ways to solve problems
- Bring outside ideas into the organization
- Have ideas to improve products/services
- Detect emerging issues early
- Have a good pulse on what customers want



Profile of a rebel



What motivates rebels?

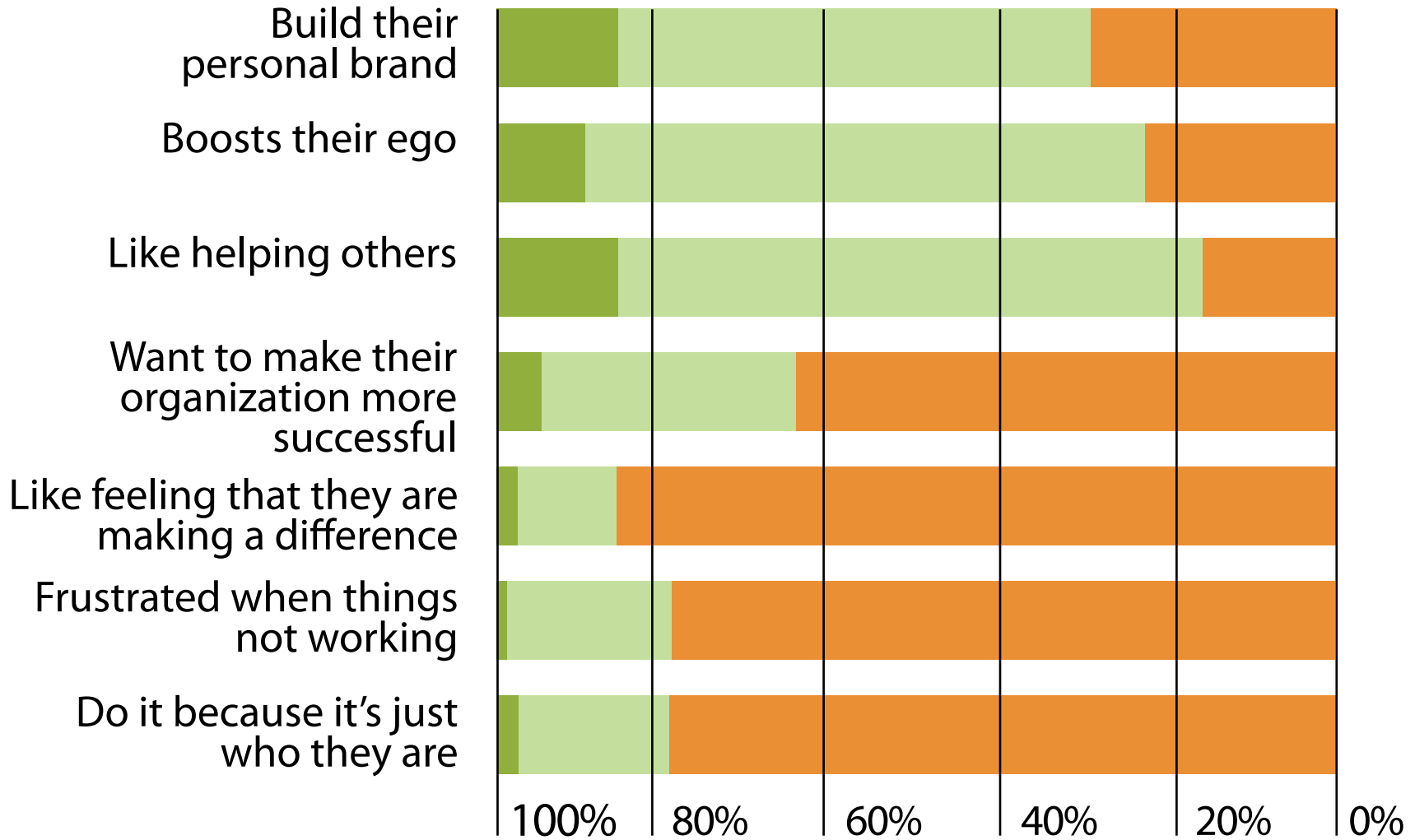
not at all

somewhat

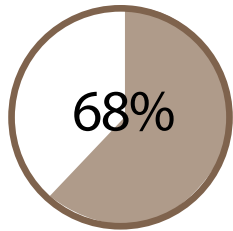
very



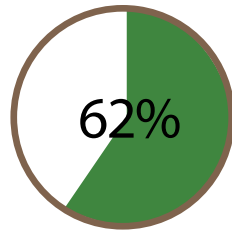
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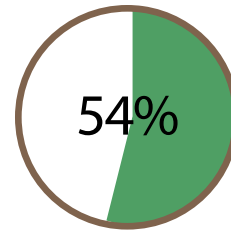
What motivates rebels to provide value?



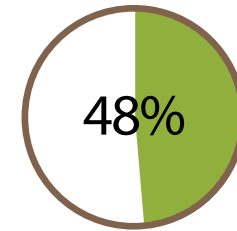
Just being asked more for her/his opinion



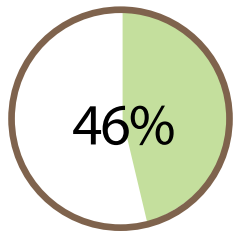
Encouragement from her/his boss



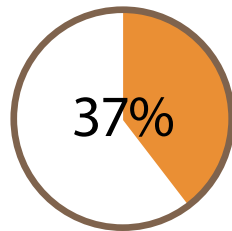
Get credit in performance review



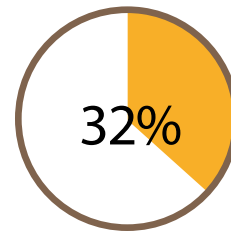
Informal recognition
(thanks from execs)



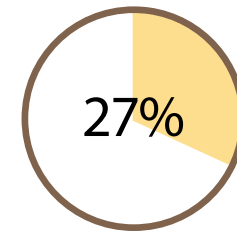
Being part of special "rebel" problem-solving team



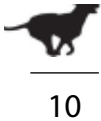
Financial incentives



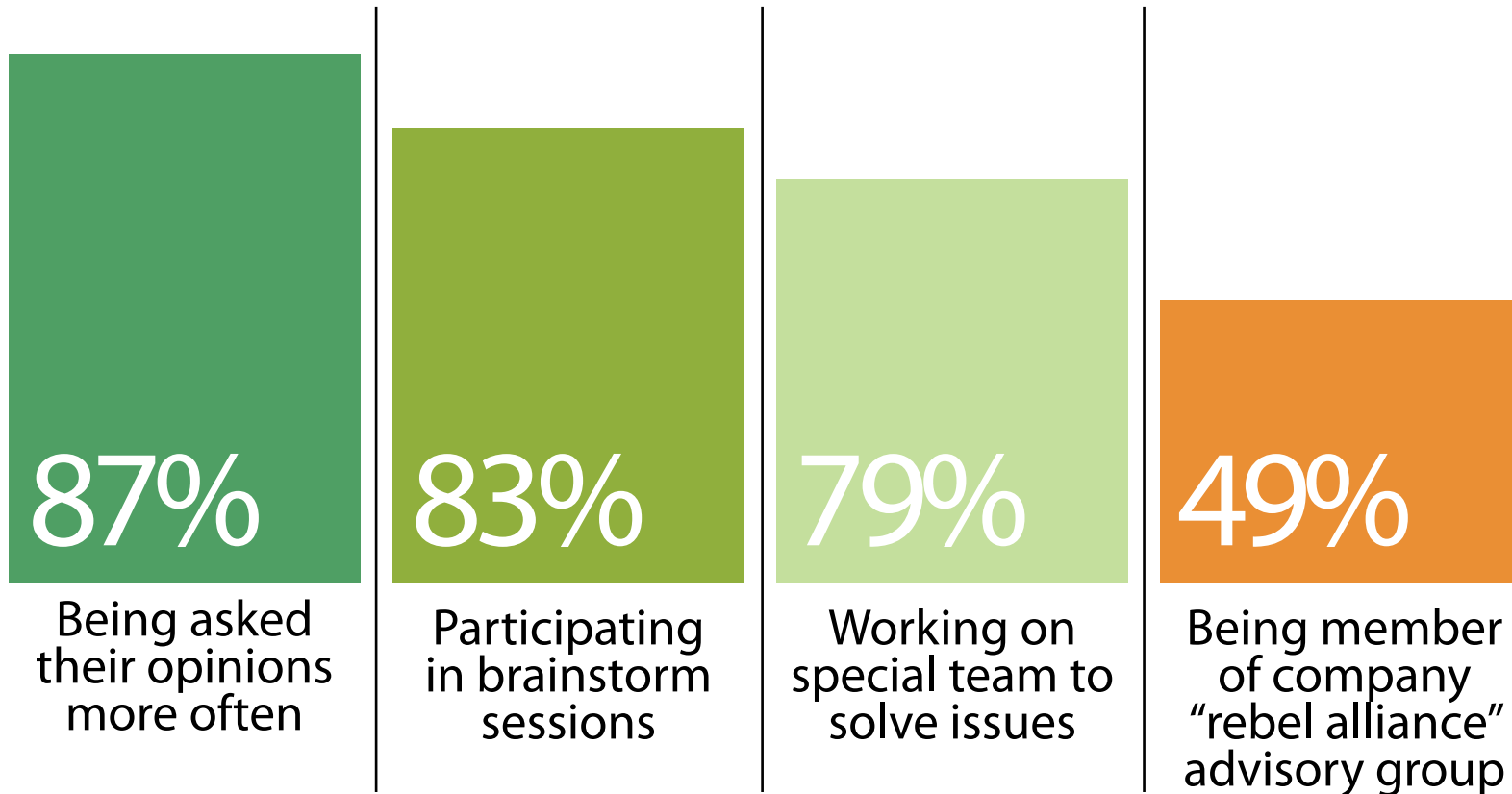
Part of job description



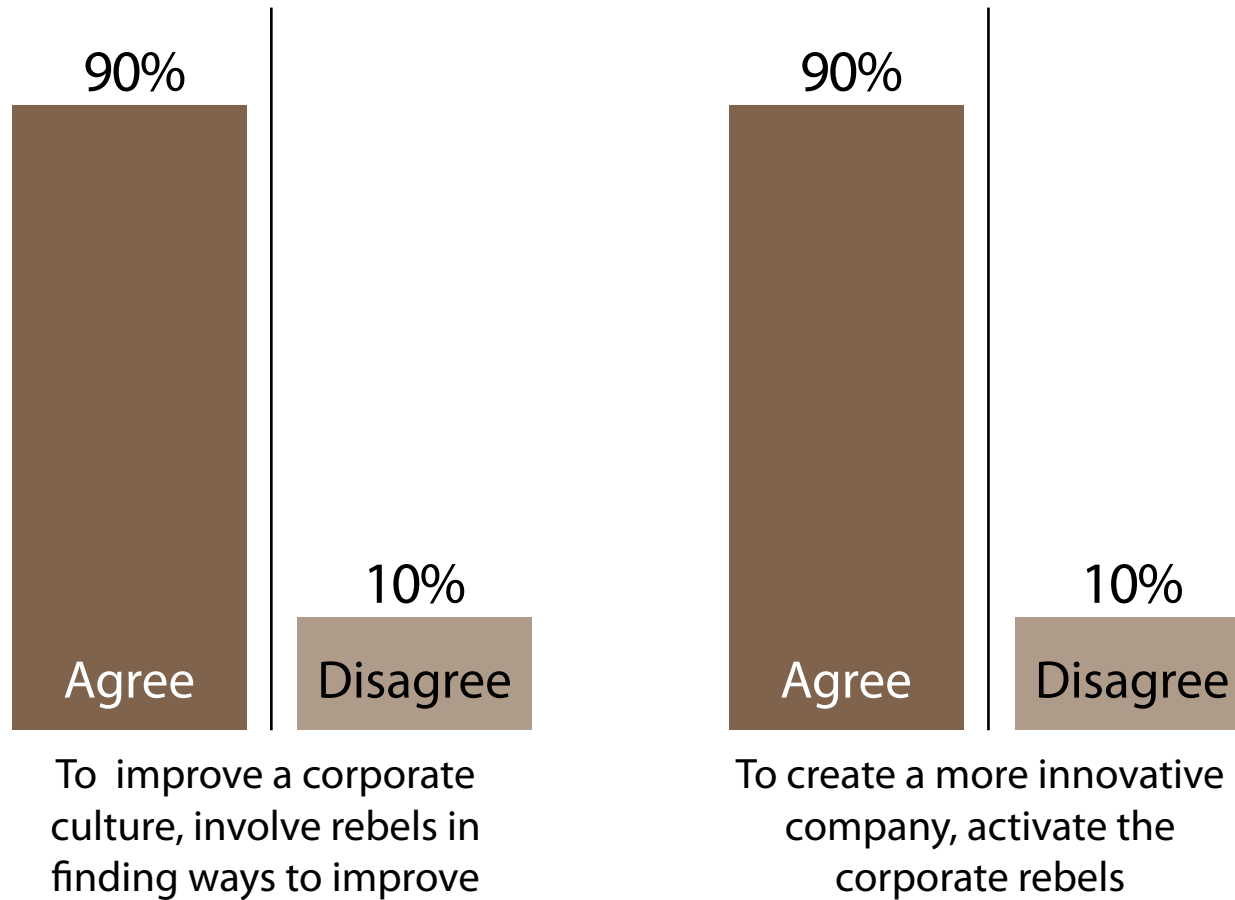
Formal recognition
(awards)



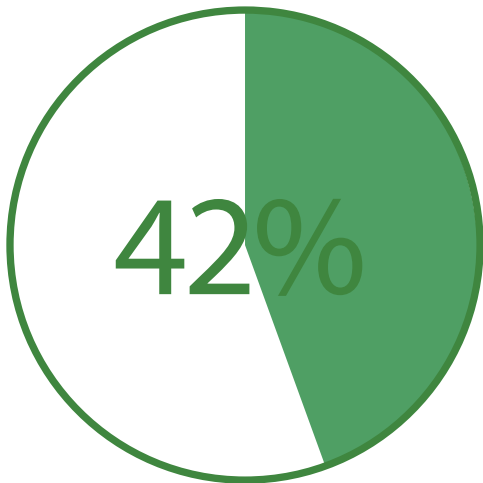
How rebels want to be more involved



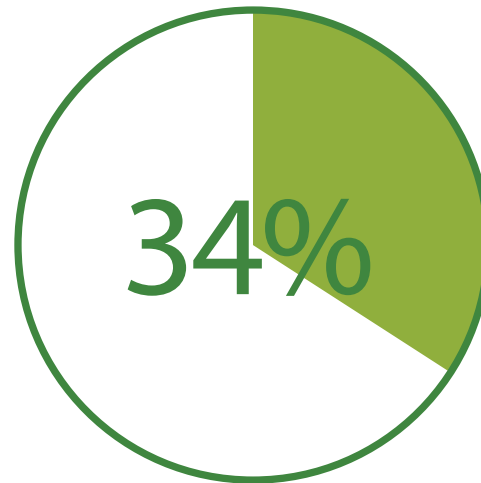
Value rebels provide to organizations



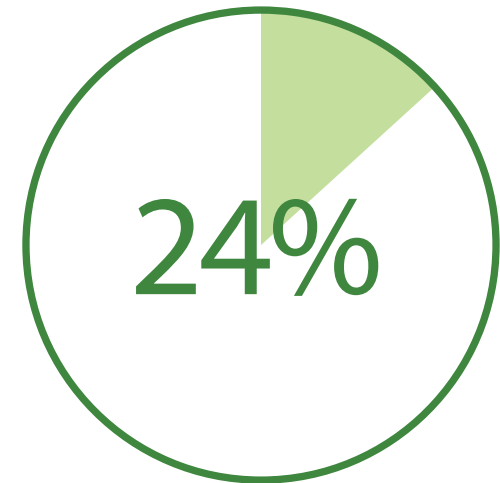
Satisfaction with rebels' ability to add value



Somewhat
satisfied



Very
satisfied



Not at all
satisfied

The 90/30 conundrum

If 90 percent believe that rebels help innovate, but only a third are very satisfied that rebels are able to provide that value, what's going on?



Greatest value rebels provide

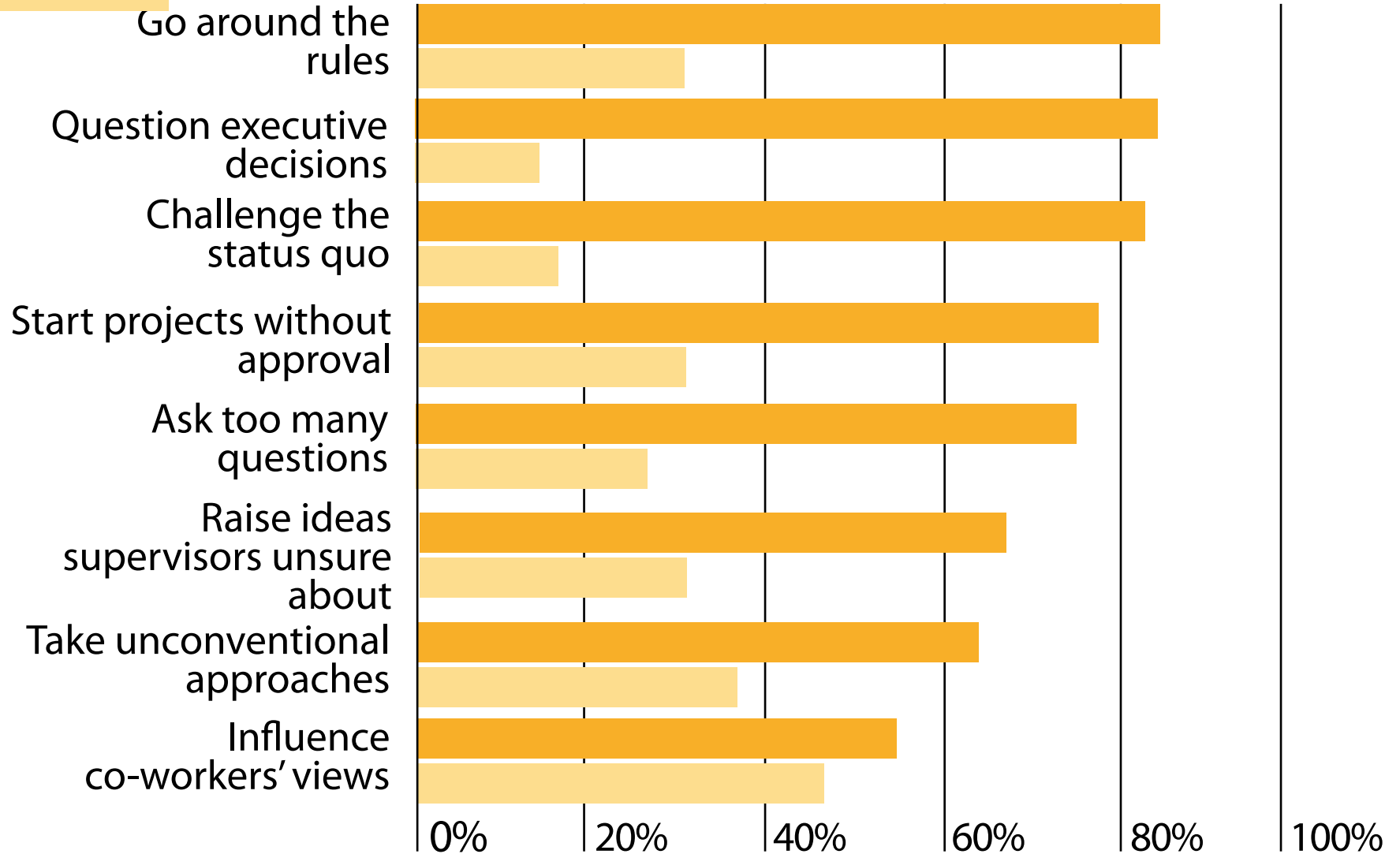


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Rebel behaviors that make companies feel uncomfortable

Very accurate

Somewhat accurate



Wait a minute

Did you catch that rather important contradiction?
92 percent say the greatest value rebels provide is
challenging ineffective sacred cow practices.
But 82 percent say rebels make their organizations
uncomfortable when they challenge the status quo.



Is challenge a threat?

Or is challenge an
opportunity to see things
differently?





10 questions
for every leader who values innovation,
creativity and talent.



Culture of innovation & change

1

When you look in the corporate mirror do you see a culture open to new perspectives?



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“Rebels often butt heads with their immediate supervisors who want helpers, not rebels. Rebels don’t want to hear, “that’s not the way we do things here.” — survey respondent

2

How do you lead management discussions so that people learn how to make decisions within a paradox of innovation?

“Of balancing the paradox of getting work done — with finding new ways to work?”

“Of adhering to standards and processes — with taking risks to get to get to get a better outcome?”

“Of rewarding employee cooperation — with recognizing employees for challenging the status quo?”



3

Is your culture averse to rebels?
Does it create obstacles or opportunities
for people with the courage to challenge
assumptions and ask new questions?



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“Hierarchical companies and committees kill rebel ideas because the need for consensus is often at odds with the definition of rebel ideas. Companies should encourage every employee to provide input to managers and C-level executives without fear of reprisal.” — survey respondent

4

If your people are your most valuable resource, how are you creating ways to tap into that their collective brilliance? How do you make sure that diverse perspectives are heard?



“How can we have a say and know our ideas are valued and will be acted on?” — survey respondent

5

Who and what filters new ideas? Are they helpful filters - or blinders?



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“Look to those who are not the shooting stars, but underutilized, smart, frustrated people. They have a point of view and good ideas if only someone would listen and give them support...The rising stars aren't the only people who have great ideas.” — survey respondent

6

Do your corporate values and beliefs encourage behaviors needed to innovate?

“Few of us want to be a rebel without a company.” — survey respondent



Talent development

7

If quickly adapting to opportunities and changes is important, how do you attract and support people who see new ways and are not afraid to change?



“Because of the dynamic world we live in, we need more rebels. I want to hire as many as I can in the coming years and be wowed by how they bring ideas together.” — survey respondent

8

Do you know who and where your rebels are?
Are they understood, appreciated and valued?
Or are they mislabeled, misunderstood and
misplaced in your organization?



“Organizations must foster a culture where rebels are not the exception,
but the the rule. No more lemmings.” – survey respondent

9

How can you train all your people to appreciate rebels for the unique value they bring — vs. labeling them as malcontents?



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“Rebels need to understand how much their velocity scares other people. We take it for granted that everyone possesses our energy levels and ability to discern.” — survey respondent

10

How do you help your rebels provide positive change vs. disruptive dissent?



29

“Rebels would like to be more involved with their organizations by getting training and mentoring to help bring out the best of what they have to offer.” — survey respondent

About Foghound

Foghound helps organizations get unstuck—and get on a fast track to accomplishing what's possible. We tap into the collective brilliance of your people to uncover new ways to solve thorny problems and create new ways forward. Doing so burns down obstacles and speeds adoption and change. (We also free your rebels.)



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For more about our work, clients, background and philosophy, go to

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