

## ***What's Next?***

The impact of COVID-19 on  
Singapore corporate legal  
departments



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## Foreword

2020 has been a watershed year for individuals, organisations and governments, reshaping our future in ways we cannot yet fully understand. Work from home, online collaboration tools, social isolation, job reductions, stock market volatility and e-schooling have become the new normal. The impact of COVID-19 has left inhouse legal teams reimagining their functions during a real-time crisis which is challenging across all bases.

Now more than ever, it is critical to reflect on our shared experiences and benchmark ourselves against other corporate legal departments to ensure that we learn the lessons from the pandemic which will enable us to continue to deliver greater value and service to our organisations and teams. Accordingly, Dazychain and the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association conducted an online survey of legal departments in Singapore to consider the impact and challenges faced by legal teams due to the pandemic and the response of organisations as well as forecasting the post-pandemic future for in-house legal teams.

Dessi Silassie

President of Singapore Corporate Counsel Association  
APAC General Counsel & Global Head of IP Legal  
Managing Director  
IHS Markit

## Research notes

Dazychain and the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association (SCCA) conducted an online survey of corporate legal counsel in legal departments across Singapore from 28 April 2020 to 15 May 2020. The survey considered:

- The impact and challenges faced by legal teams due to COVID-19 outbreak;
- Organisations' response to the pandemic; and
- The post-pandemic future of in-house legal teams.

Legal teams have, to date, only had anecdotal information about how legal teams are being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. With economic predictions varying wildly between business as usual and doomsday scenarios, we were keen to objectively measure the impact the pandemic has had on legal teams in Singapore.

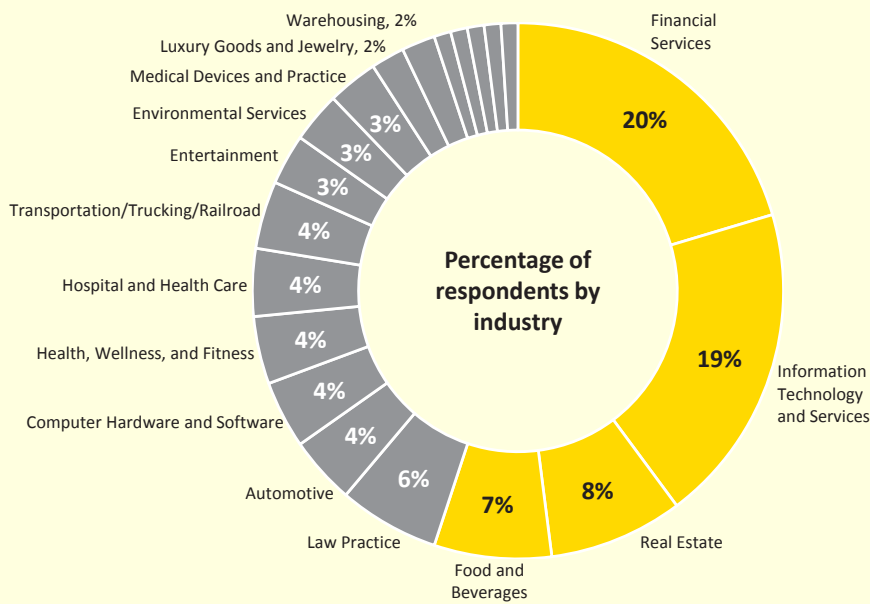
One hundred and one responses were received, 98 of which were from Singapore-based counsel. This report analyses the Singapore-based legal team responses, including 16 follow-up interviews that Dazychain conducted with respondents, and provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on Singapore legal departments.

# Respondent profile

## Respondent profile by industry

Ninety-eight respondents from 20 industries completed the survey, with the majority from the following economic sectors:

- Financial services (20%)
- Information technology and services (19%)
- Real estate (8%)
- Food and Beverages (7%)

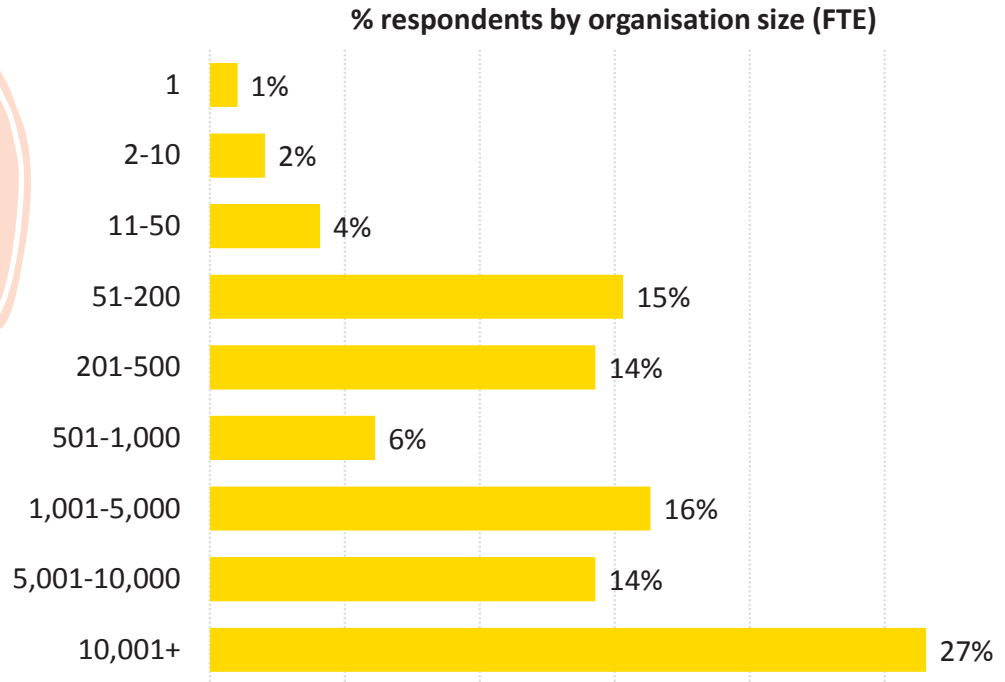


Throughout this survey we have collated a holistic perspective of the impact of COVID-19 on the different industries present in the Singapore economy.

Respondents representing a cross-section of organisational sizes participated in the study:

- Organisations with more than 10,000 staff (27%)
- Organisations with 5,001 to 10,000 staff (14%)
- Organisations with 1,001 to 5,000 staff (16%)
- Organisations with 201 to 500 staff (14%)
- Organisations with 51 to 200 staff (15%)
- Organisations with 1 to 50 staff (7%)

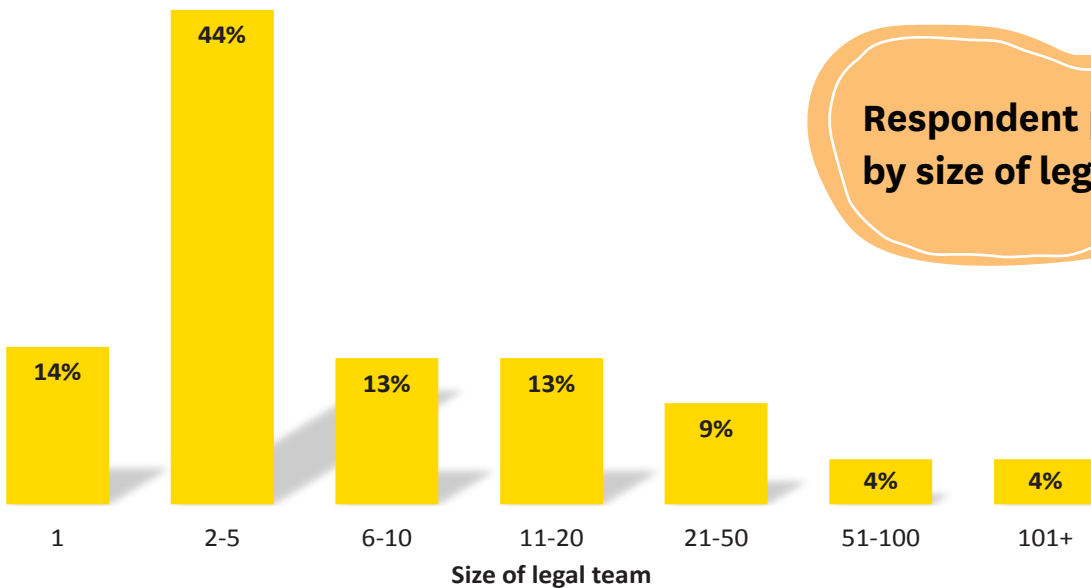
**Respondent profile by size of organisation**



The sizes of legal teams at respondents' organisations vary. Interestingly, close to half (44%) of the respondents' legal teams are comprised of 2-5 lawyers:

- 14% have a legal team of 1
- 44% have a legal team of 2-5
- 13% have a legal team of 6-10
- 13% have a legal team of 11-20

**% respondents by size of legal team**



**Respondent profile by size of legal team**

Our results begin to paint a picture of the correlation between the size of an organisation and the size of its legal team.

## Size of legal team by size of organisation

		Size of legal teams (FTE)							
Size of legal teams by organisation		1	2-5	6-10	11-20	21-50	51-100	101+	Total
Size of organisations (FTE)	1	1							1
	2-10		2						2
	11-50	2	1	1					4
	51-200	4	8	2		1			15
	201-500	2	8	2	2				14
	501-1,000	2	3		1				6
	1,001-5,000	1	7	4	4				16
	5,001-10,000		6	1	3	4			14
	10,001+	2	8	2	2	4	4	4	26
	Total	14	43	12	12	9	4	4	98

A majority of the respondents' legal teams are between one and ten lawyers, although the respective workforces that these teams support can range from very small to very large organisations. While legal teams of over 20 corporate counsel are generally found in the largest corporates, teams of 2-5 lawyers support corporates ranging from 2-10 employees through to more than 10,000 employees.

## Size of legal teams by industry

Analysis of legal team size by industry reveals varying sizes of legal teams across the sectors. The size of a legal team does not appear to relate too strongly to industry segment. Team size is much more likely to be determined by a GC's predilection for briefing external counsel.

Size of legal teams by industry	1	2-5	6-10	11-20	21-50	51-100	101+	Total
Automotive	1	1	1	1				4
Biotechnology	1							1
Computer Hardware and Software	1	2			1			4
Defense and Space		1						1
Entertainment		2		1				3
Environmental Services	1	1	1					3
Financial Services	1	9	4	2	2	2		20
Food and Beverage	3	4						7
Health, Wellness, and Fitness	1	1	1				1	4
Hospital and Health Care		3			1			4
Information Technology and Services	3	6	2	4	1	1	2	19
Insurance		1						1
Law Practice		3	1	1	1			6
Luxury Goods and Jewellery		2						2
Medical Devices and Practice		2				1		3
Outsourcing/Offshoring	1							1
Real Estate	1	4		1	2			8
Telecommunications			1					1
Transportation / Trucking / Railroad		1		1	1		1	4
Warehousing			1	1				2
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>98</b>



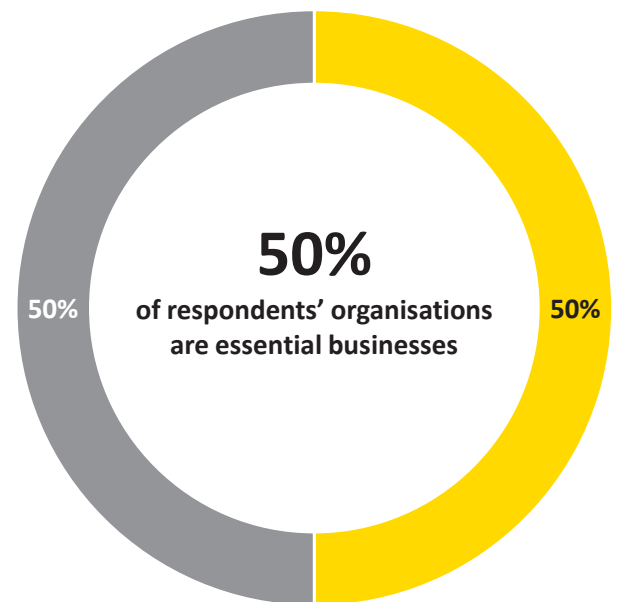


# How organisations have responded to COVID-19

## Essential and non-essential businesses

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, organisations have developed and implemented business continuity plans that manage workforce and business risks. The Singapore government's orders required the closure of "non-essential" business premises while "essential" business premises were permitted to remain open but were required to operate with minimum staff to ensure strict physical distancing measures were followed.

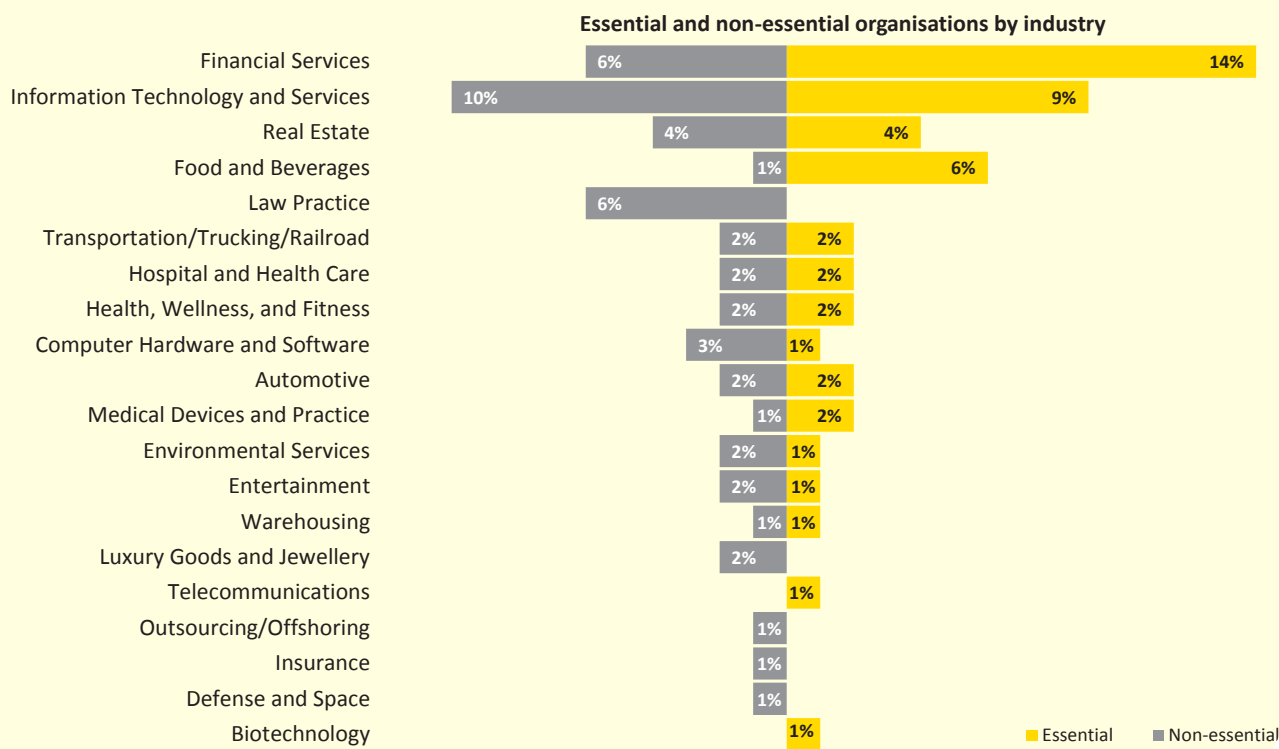
To clarify the list of essential services, the Singapore Government created the GoBusiness COVID website (<https://covid.gobusiness.gov.sg/>). Fifty percent of the respondents in this survey revealed that their organisations are classified as essential businesses, which permits a small proportion of a workforce to attend the office premises while the majority of staff work from home.



■ Non-essential business      ■ Essential business

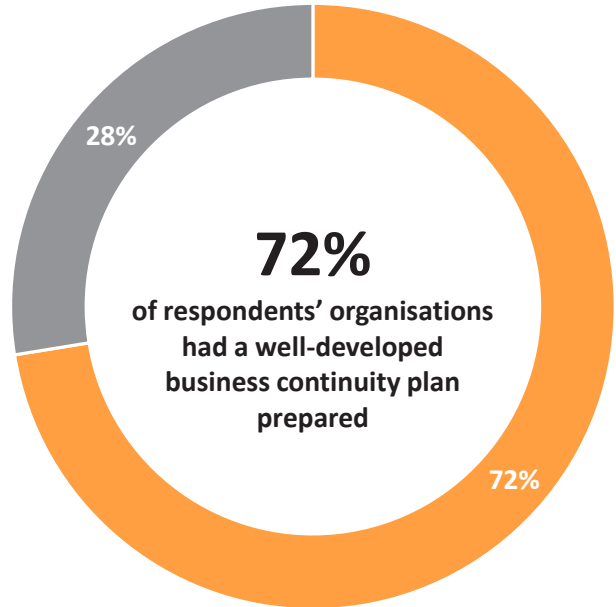
## Essential and non-essential organisations by industry

As the pandemic unfolded in Singapore, only those organisations classified as ‘essential businesses’ could continue to work from their office premises. Most respondents in the financial services, information technology and food industries were classified as essential businesses.



### Percentage of respondents with a continuity plan

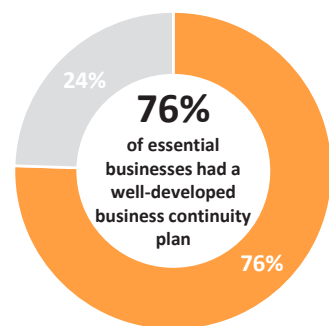
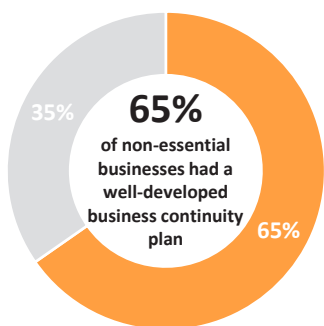
The requirement for all of our respondents' organisations to transition to remote work (a requirement for most staff even at businesses classified as 'essential') pulled into focus the necessity to have a business continuity plan. Our survey reveals that the majority (72%) of respondents' organisations had a well-developed business continuity plan already prepared.



■ Had a business continuity plan  
■ Did not have a business continuity plan

### Continuity plans by business type

Delving further into these results reveals that a slightly higher proportion of essential businesses had a business continuity plan in place than did non-essential businesses. This may be driven by the regulatory requirements that apply to these businesses, given that a majority of them came from the financial services and information technology sectors.



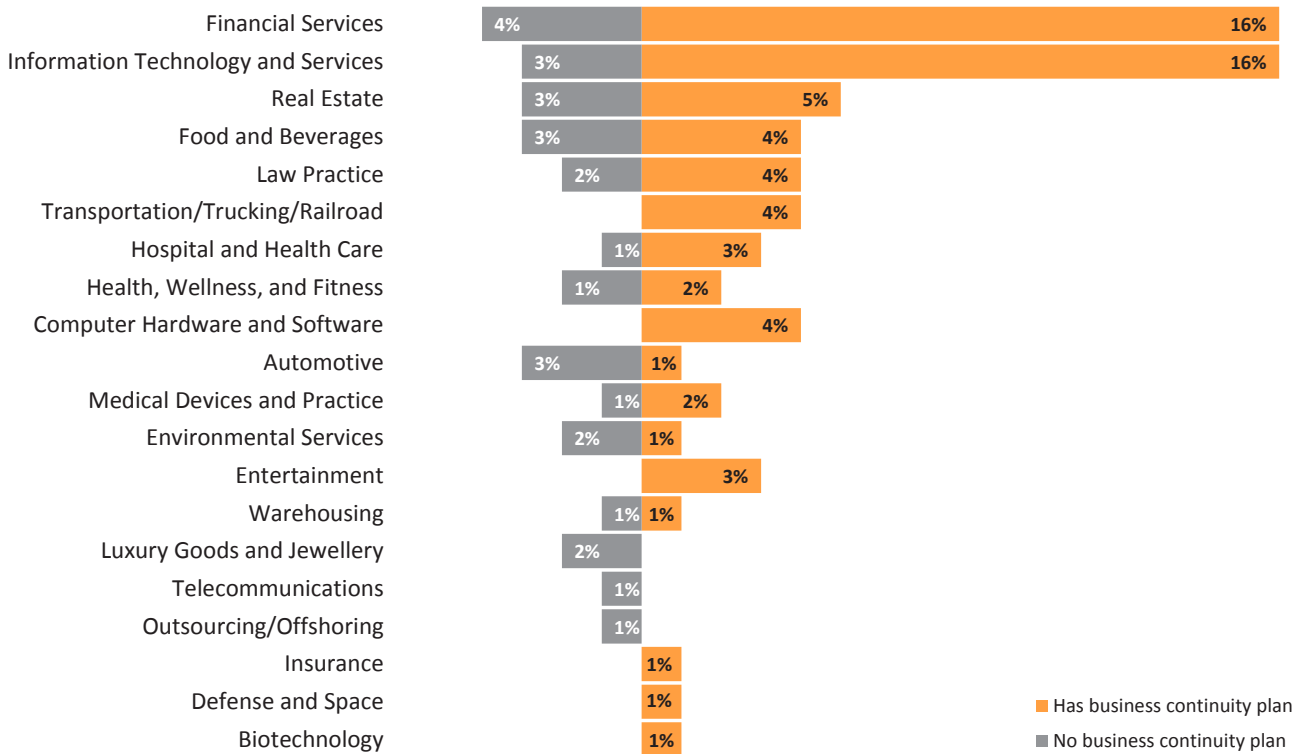
■ Essential business  
■ Had a business continuity plan  
■ Non-essential business  
■ Did not have a business continuity plan

## Business continuity plans by industry

Half of respondents' organisations were classified as essential businesses in Singapore. Of these, 76% already had a well-developed business continuity plan ready for immediate launch. This compared to 65% of non-essential businesses that had a well-developed business continuity plan in place.

Organisations in industries where the majority of respondents reported that their organisations are classified as essential businesses, like financial services and information technology, were best-prepared to enact a business continuity plan in response to the pandemic.

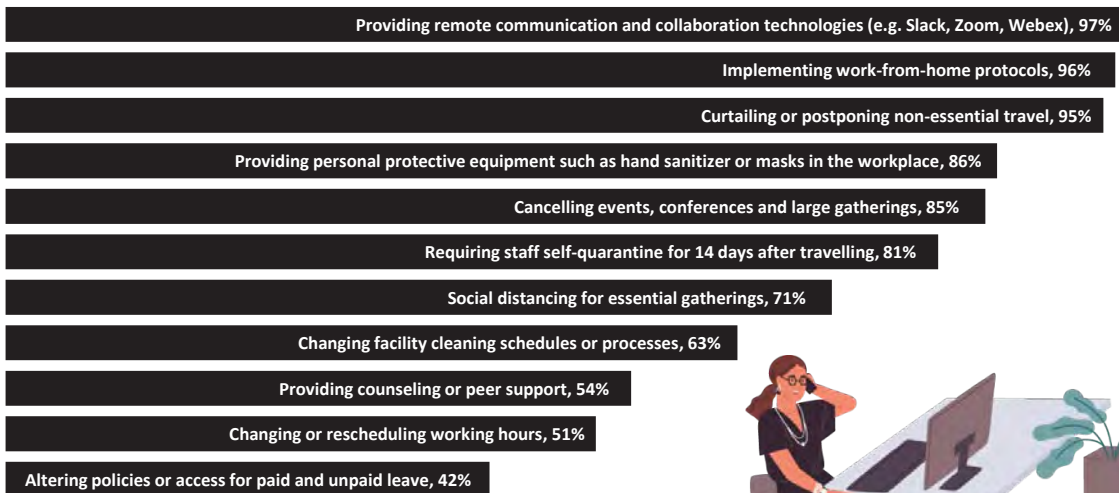
Organisations with or without a well-developed business continuity plan by industry



## Procedures implemented by respondents' organisations

To shed a light on the different measures implemented, we also asked the respondents about the procedures implemented by their organisations.

Procedures implemented by respondents' organisations (% respondents)



Providing remote working technologies (97%), activating work-from-home protocols (96%) and curtailing non-essential travel (95%) were the main procedures implemented across Singapore. Other measures introduced included providing personal protective equipment such as hand sanitizer or masks in the workplace (86%), cancelling face-to-face events like conferences and meetings (86%), and requiring staff to self-quarantine for 14 days after overseas travel (81%). Less than half (42%) of the respondents' organisations altered policies for, or access to, paid and unpaid leave.

Senior in-house lawyers interviewed following the survey revealed that 38% of their organisations developed and implemented a business continuity plan before the pandemic unfolded. The following statement from an interviewee illustrates how an organisation in Singapore implemented its business continuity plan.

*“We already had a business continuity plan prepared. The plan was to establish a business management team and the crisis management team in Singapore and other countries. Both teams had weekly meetings to ensure our organisation’s response was up to date to the local government’s instructions as well as to ensure coordination between our counterparts in other countries in the region”*

– General Counsel, multinational corporation.

In addition, the interview respondents noted that their organisations split teams and implemented work from home policies. The following quote from another General Counsel reveals how this measure was rolled out at a large multinational company’s Singapore office.

*“We had a global response team that kept everyone updated and coordinated responses as the pandemic unfolded. We started by implementing rotational shifts by splitting into teams that worked from home and those that worked from the office.”*

-General Counsel at multinational corporation

A couple of themes that came through from the interviews were the importance of constant communication with internal and external stakeholders and the formation of a crisis management team to coordinate the organisation’s response. In addition, having a business continuity plan helped ease the transitions at interviewees’ organisations as they implemented their plans in accordance with government advice.

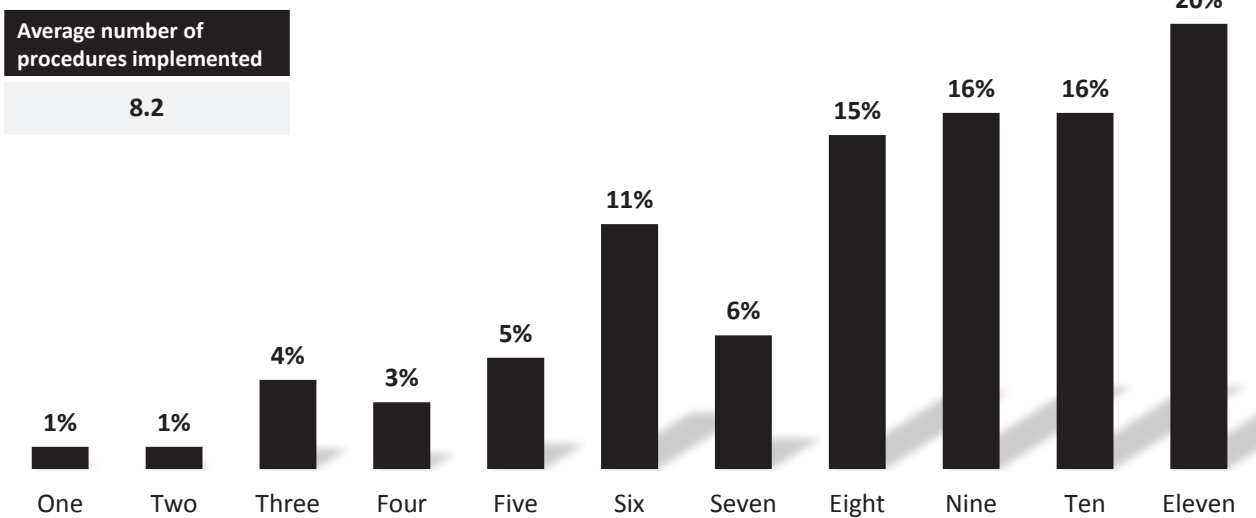
**Number of procedures implemented by respondents' organisations**

Two-thirds of respondents' organisations implemented eight or more procedures as the pandemic unfolded and Singapore's government announced additional lockdown restrictions.

Examining the number of procedures implemented by industry reveals a cluster of respondents that have implemented more than eight procedures in response to COVID-19 in financial services, information technology and services, food and beverage, and real estate.

When asked about what the respondents' organisations could have done differently to improve their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost half (43%) of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their organisation's COVID-19 response.

Number of procedures implemented by respondents' organisations (% respondents)

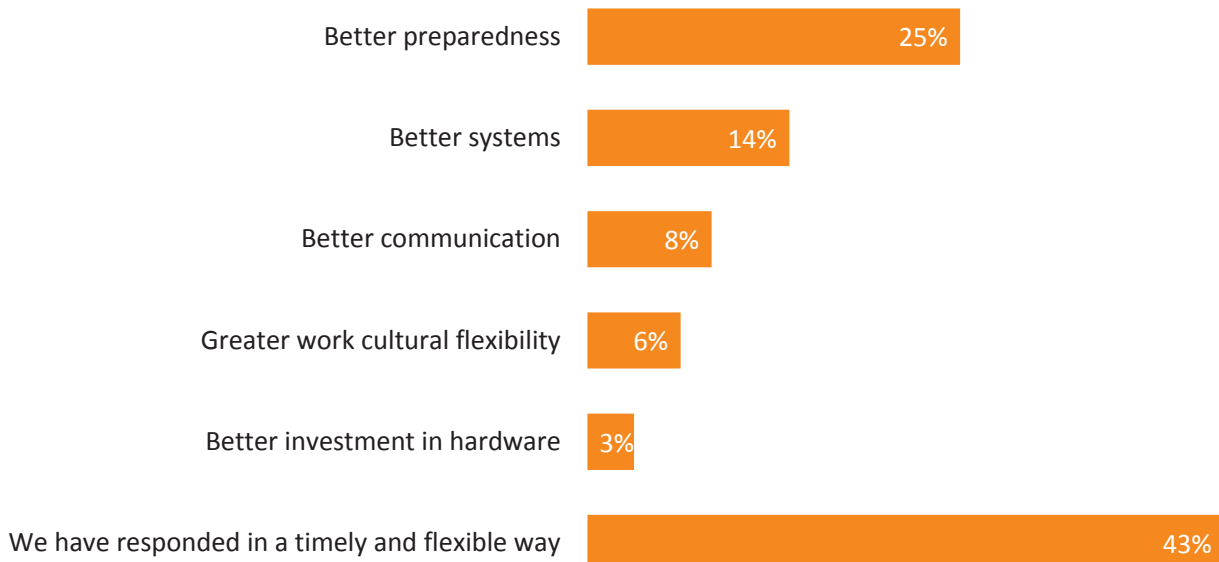




## What companies could do to improve their responses to COVID-19

Another 25% felt that their companies could have responded better by being better prepared. For example, some companies had business continuity plans in place but were not well prepared to activate them. The remaining respondents felt that their organisation's responses contained gaps in systems, communications, cultural flexibility and hardware. These are areas that legal teams can assist their organisations to resolve as the Singapore economy recovers.

Cluster analysis of open-ended responses to what respondents felt their companies could have done differently to improve their response to COVID-19



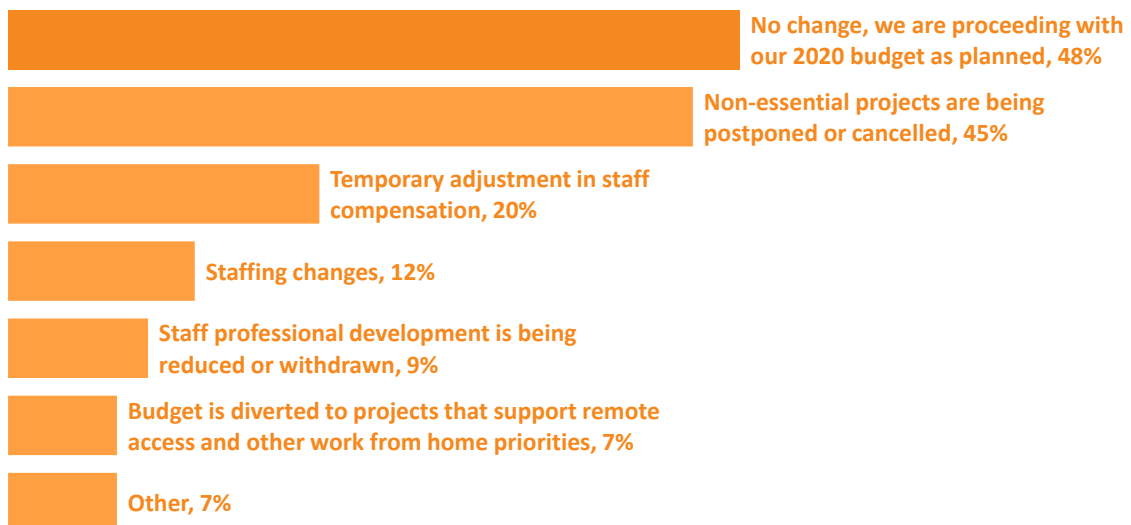
## How legal departments have responded to COVID-19

### Impact of COVID-19 on legal department budget

As the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded, in-house lawyers have had to adjust their service models on the fly to ensure they could still service the whole of the organisation's legal needs, while also complying with the shifting government advisories regarding workplace health and safety orders. These measures ranged from physical restrictions at offices to split teams, work-from-home protocols, temperature screening, notices to employees regarding personal health and hygiene, and increased cleaning frequency of office common areas.

When asked about the impact of COVID-19 on legal department budgets, close to half of respondents (48%) noted no change to established budgets.

Impact of COVID-19 on legal budget (%)

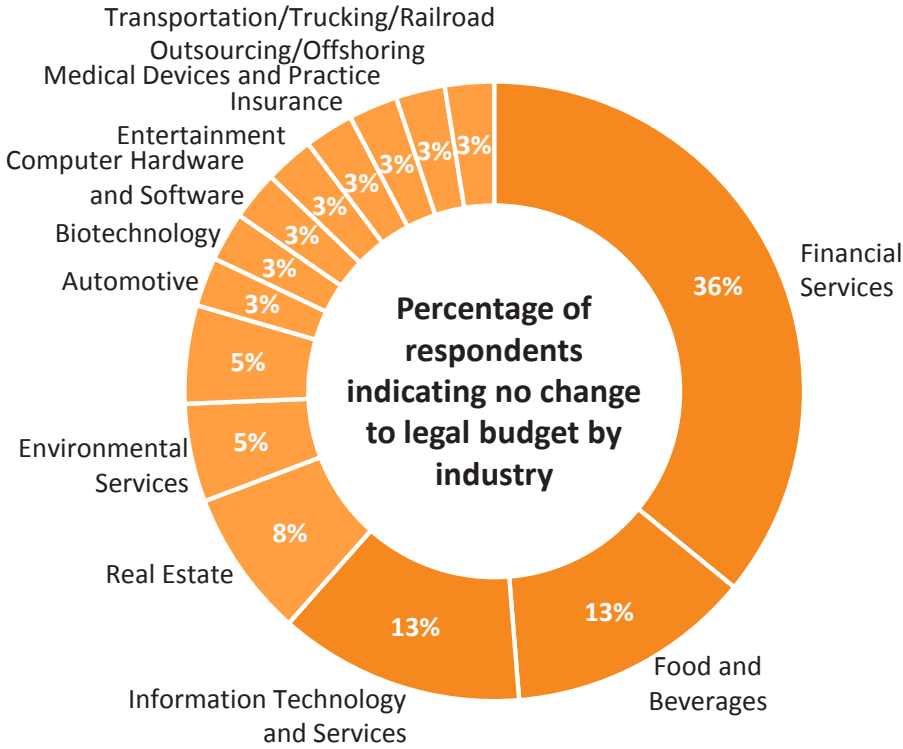


## Change to the legal budget by industry

Forty-five percent reported non-essential projects being postponed or cancelled, 20% indicated temporary adjustments to compensation, and a further 12% indicated staffing changes. A few respondents also indicated that spending on staff professional development was being reduced or withdrawn (9%), and that budget was being diverted to support remote working and other work-from-home priorities (7%).

“Other” responses included increased legal department budget to address business continuity, reduced compensation, and hiring freezes.

A breakdown of respondents who indicated no change to their legal department budget (48%) by industry and legal team size reveals an interesting trend. A majority of these respondents are from financial services (36%), food and beverages (13%) and information technology and services (13%); industries where the majority of businesses are classified as essential.



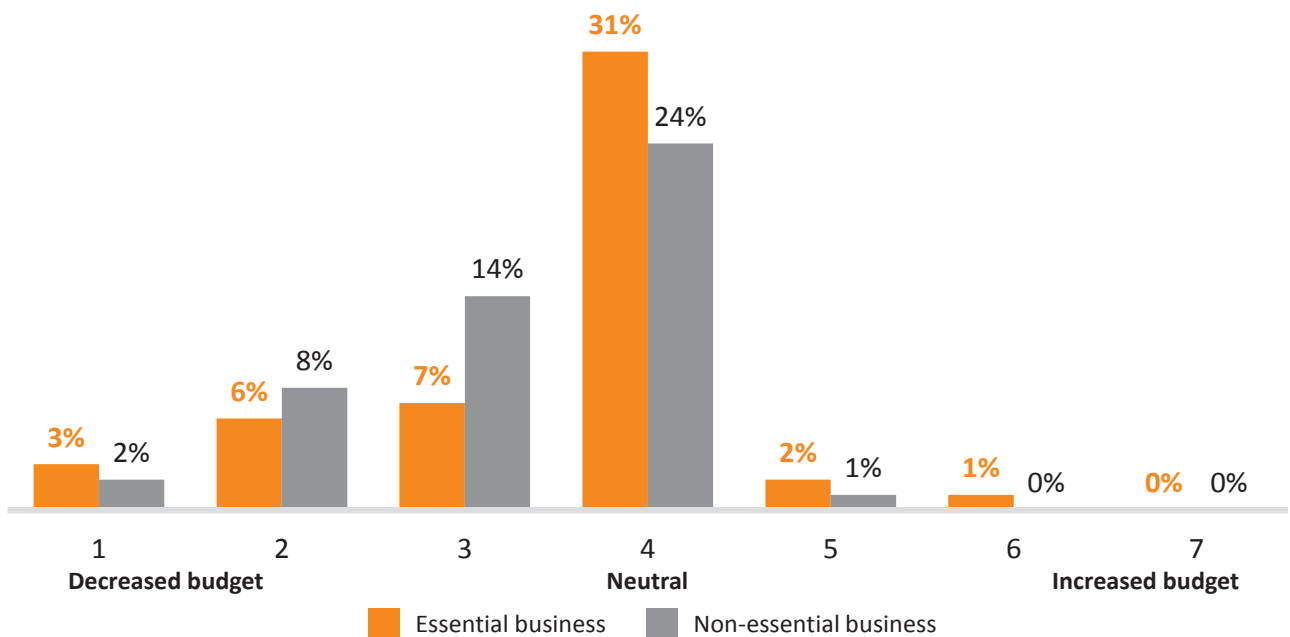
## The impact of COVID-19 on legal department budgets by business type

To shed a further light on the impact of COVID-19 on legal department budgets, we also asked respondents whether their legal department budgets have increased, stayed the same (neutral) or decreased, on a scale of 1 to 7.

Over half of the respondents (55%) indicated no impact to their legal department budgets as a result of COVID-19, while 40% indicated a decrease in legal department budget. Only 4% indicated an increase in their legal department budget to meet changing organisational needs. In other words, those reporting an impact reported decreases in legal department budgets ten times more frequently than increases.

Classifying responses by essential and non-essential businesses reveals proportionately more non-essential businesses (24%) indicated a negative impact on legal department budgets than did essential businesses (16%).

% of respondents on the impact of COVID-19 on legal budget



## Impact of COVID-19 on legal department budgets by industry

Looking at the impact of COVID-19 on legal department budgets by industry reveals a negative impact to some legal department budgets at companies in the information technology and service, financial services, law practice, automotive, medical devices and practice, real estate and transportation/trucking/railroad sectors.

That being said, the majority of respondents from financial services, information technology and service, food and beverages, computer hardware and service, and real estate sectors reveal no impact (neutral) to their legal department budgets.

As most legal department budgets were either neutral or negatively impacted, we also asked respondents about impact of COVID-19 on workloads in their legal departments.

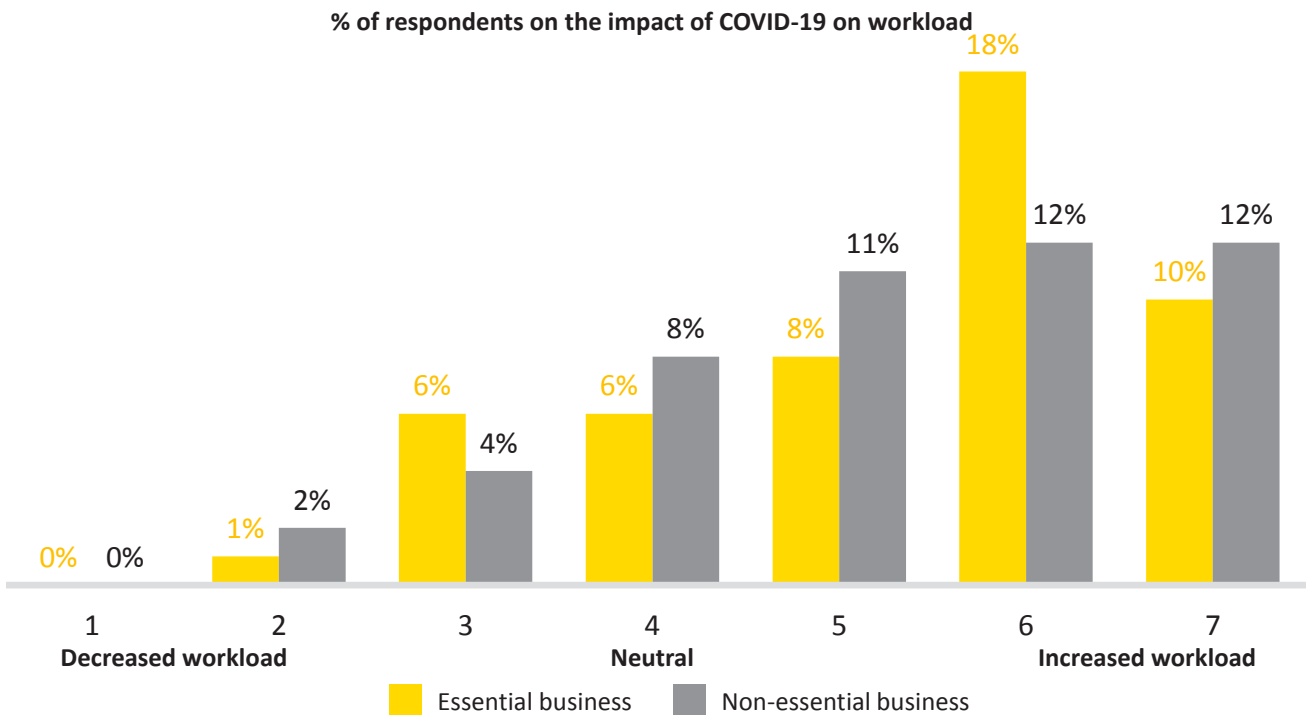
Impact of COVID-19 on legal budgets by industry	Decreased budget			Neutral		Increased budget	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Automotive		1	2	1			
Biotechnology				1			
Computer Hardware and Software		1		3			
Defense and Space			1				
Entertainment			1	2			
Environmental Services			1	2			
Financial Services	1	1	2	16			
Food and Beverage			1	5	1		
Health, Wellness, and Fitness			1	2	1		
Hospital and Health Care		3		1			
Information Technology and Services	1	2	4	12			
Insurance				1			
Law Practice		1	3	2			
Luxury Goods and Jewellery		2					
Medical Devices and Practice	1	1	1				
Outsourcing/Offshoring				1			
Real Estate	1	1	1	3	1	1	
Telecommunications				1			
Transportation / Trucking / Railroad			3	1			
Warehousing	1	1					
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

## The impact of COVID-19 on legal department workload

The majority of respondents (72%) indicated that COVID-19 has increased their legal team’s workload. Interestingly, this compares to 41% of respondents who indicated that their legal department budgets have decreased.

Applying a filter of essential vs non-essential business classification to respondents’ responses on the impact of COVID-19 on legal department workloads reveals that workload has increased for legal teams across the board in Singapore.

A breakdown of COVID-19 impact on legal department workload by industry identifies sectors with increased workload. Legal departments in industries including financial services, information technology and service, real estate, automotive, and transportation / trucking / railroad reported an increased workload.



## Impact of COVID-19 on legal department workload by industry

Our cross analysis of respondents’ responses on the impact of COVID-19 to legal departments’ budgets and workloads reveals that 30% of respondents have seen their workloads increase and legal department budgets decrease. The pandemic has hastened Susskind’s ‘more-for-less’ world for these respondents.

Impact of COVID-19 on legal department workload by industry	Decreased workload			Neutral		Increased workload	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Automotive					1	3	
Biotechnology						1	
Computer Hardware and Software		1			1	1	1
Defense and Space							1
Entertainment					2	1	
Environmental Services					2	1	
Financial Services		1	3	1	3	10	2
Food and Beverage				4		2	1
Health, Wellness, and Fitness				1	1	1	1
Hospital and Health Care				1		2	1
Information Technology and Services		1	4	4	4	2	4
Insurance					1		
Law Practice			2	1		1	2
Luxury Goods and Jewellery							2
Medical Devices and Practice				1		2	
Outsourcing/Offshoring						1	
Real Estate			1	1	2	1	3
Telecommunications							1
Transportation / Trucking / Railroad					1	1	2
Warehousing					1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>22</b>

## Impact of COVID-19 on legal departments' budgets and workloads

Only four percent of the respondents reported an increase in legal department budgets to cope with increased workload as a result of COVID-19. Interestingly, another four percent indicated a decrease in legal department budgets that mapped with a decrease in workload for their legal departments.

As workloads have increased and legal budgets are being squeezed, 75% of the senior in-house counsel that we interviewed following the survey are outsourcing work to law firms. Law firms on panels and pre-approved lists were legal departments' go-to as the pandemic created legal queries from the wider business on implications to their contractual obligations.

When asked how respondents' legal departments are responding to COVID-19, almost all of the respondents (95%) are working remotely and the vast majority have implemented work from home procedures (87%). Another 50% indicated that they have implemented legal technology solutions to enable their legal department to work from home.

Increased legal budget	7								
	6						1%		
Neutral	5						1%	2%	
	4		2%	7%	7%	12%	18%	8%	
	3		1%	2%	4%	5%	4%	5%	
Decreased legal budget	2			1%	3%	2%	4%	4%	
	1						2%	3%	
	0								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
		Decreased workload			Neutral		Increased workload		



## How respondents' legal teams are responding to COVID-19

In terms of legal work being done, 66% of the respondents are reviewing their organisation's legal position in existing contracts in order to assess and advise on contractual impact and risk brought on by the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, 49% of respondents also reported dealing with Force Majeure notifications during the unfolding pandemic.

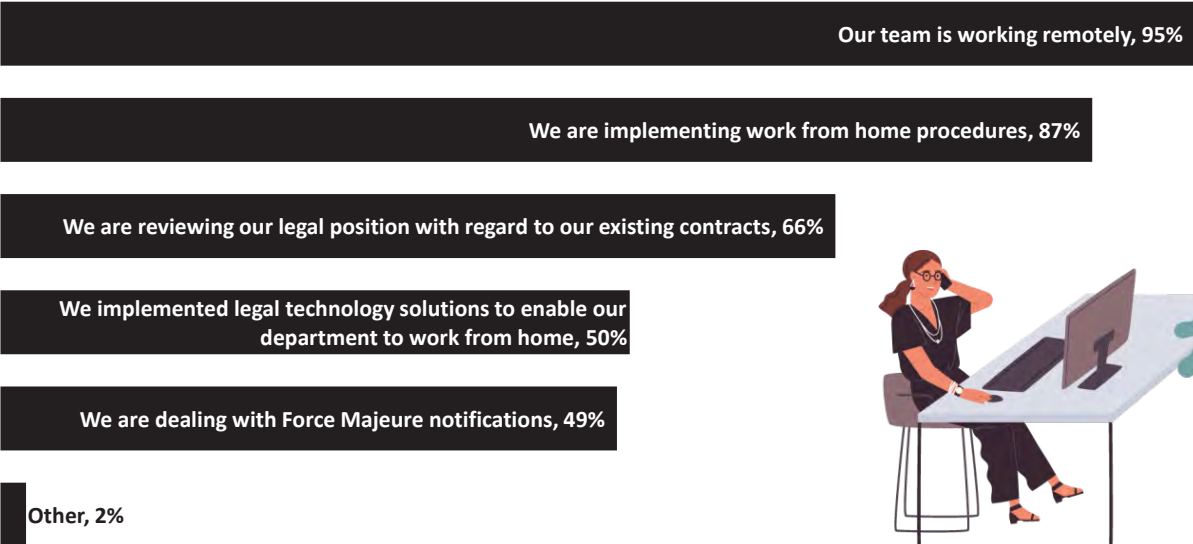
Those who indicated 'Other' are reviewing flexible contract acceptance procedures, taking on more responsibility for managing government relations, and supporting their organisation's business continuity arrangements.

Respondents to our interview also noted the importance of cloud-based systems that enabled their lawyers to continue to work productively from home. Here is a quote from one of the General Counsels on lessons learnt from this:

*"While we have cloud-based system implemented throughout the legal team, for historical reasons, not everyone from the legal team has adopted those systems. This meant a delay in getting those systems fully calibrated across the team while the late adopters were setting up their system and then familiarising themselves with new tools"*

- General Counsel from multinational corporation

How respondents' legal teams are responding to COVID-19 (% respondents)



There were also legal teams that investigated how they could work with internal and external clients while working remotely, and how to adjust their contracts to reflect the shifting business environment, as this quote illustrates:

*“Our legal team were looking at the possibility of contractual discussion on claims from customers and how we were going to receive instructions and run matters. We were also looking into the possibility of amending our contract to cater to the economic consequences of COVID-19”*

- General Counsel from multinational corporation

The interviewees, without exception, also noted the challenge of transitioning to remote working. This transition has created a blurring of lines between home and work life, as this quote from an interviewee illustrates:

*“As we transition to working from home, we start to forget the boundaries between work hours and out of office hours. For example, before remote working, everyone would respect the 6pm cut-off time for phone calls or meetings. This has changed now and sometimes I could be working until after 12am”*

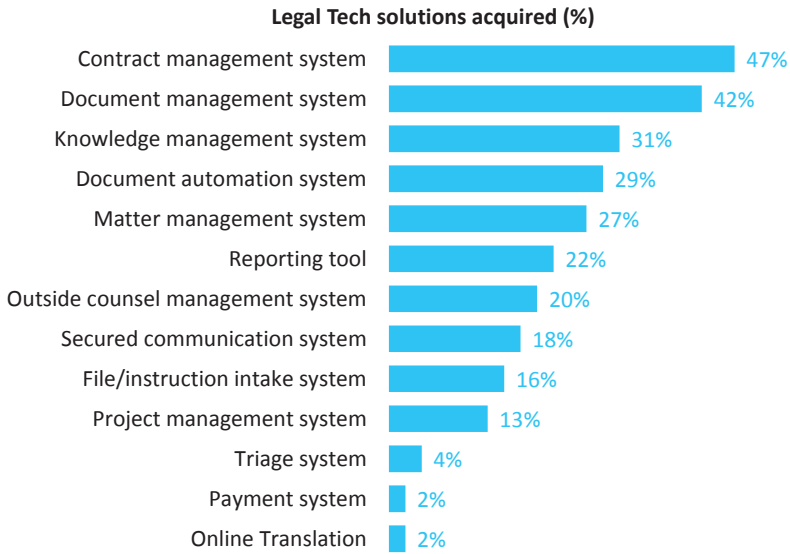
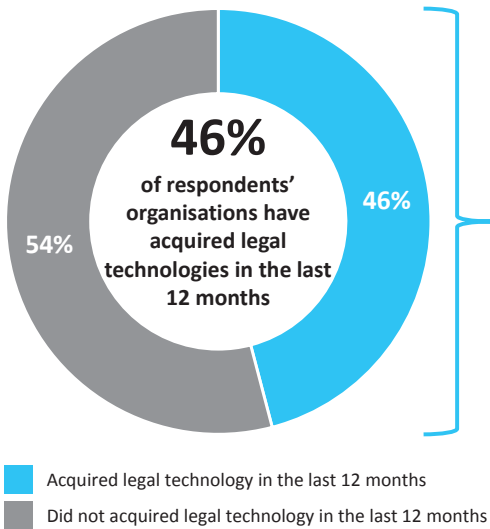
- General Counsel from multinational corporation

Another senior in-house lawyer noted that there is no substitution for human interaction while we work from home. That being said, a good internet connection and the right home office setup (e.g. desktop monitor, video camera) are important to productive work.

# COVID-19 driven legal technology consumption

## The acquisition of legal technology

As legal departments have adjusted to remote working, the importance of legal technology (Legal Tech) to supporting lawyer productivity has come into focus. Forty-six percent of respondents indicated that they have acquired legal technology in the last 12 months. This has eased the transition to remote working for many in-house lawyers.



For those respondents who reported acquiring Legal Tech in the last 12 months, 47% acquired contract management systems, 42% acquired document management systems, 31% acquired knowledge management systems and 29% acquired document automation system. These are all lawyer productivity tools that would facilitate the transition to working remotely.

## Legal technology investment by size of legal team

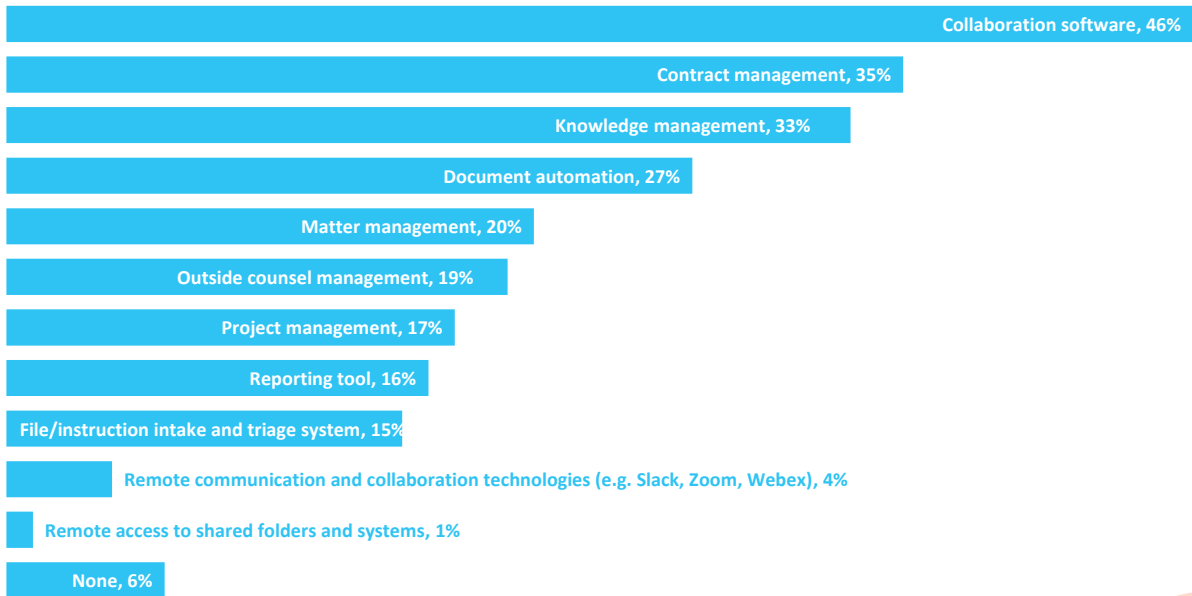
A breakdown of the types of legal technology acquired by size of legal team reveals interesting insights on the concentration of types of Legal Tech consumed. Legal teams with 2-5 lawyers seem most interested in contract management, document automation, knowledge management, matter management and outside counsel management systems.

Legal Tech investment by Size of legal teams	1	2-5	6-10	11-20	21-50	51-100	101+	Total
Contract management system	1%	6%	3%	4%	2%	1%	1%	17%
Document automation system		7%	1%	2%	2%			11%
Document management system		6%	3%	2%	2%		2%	14%
File/instruction intake system		2%	1%	1%	2%		1%	6%
Knowledge management system		6%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	12%
Matter management system		5%	1%		1%	2%	1%	9%
Online Translation				1%				1%
Outside counsel management system		4%	2%	2%				8%
Payment system		1%						1%
Project management system			2%	2%		1%	1%	5%
Reporting tool		3%	1%	3%	2%		1%	8%
Secured communication system		1%	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	7%
Triage system				1%			1%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Useful software tools when transitioning to remote working

We also asked respondents what types of legal technology tools have been most useful to their legal departments' transitions to remote working.

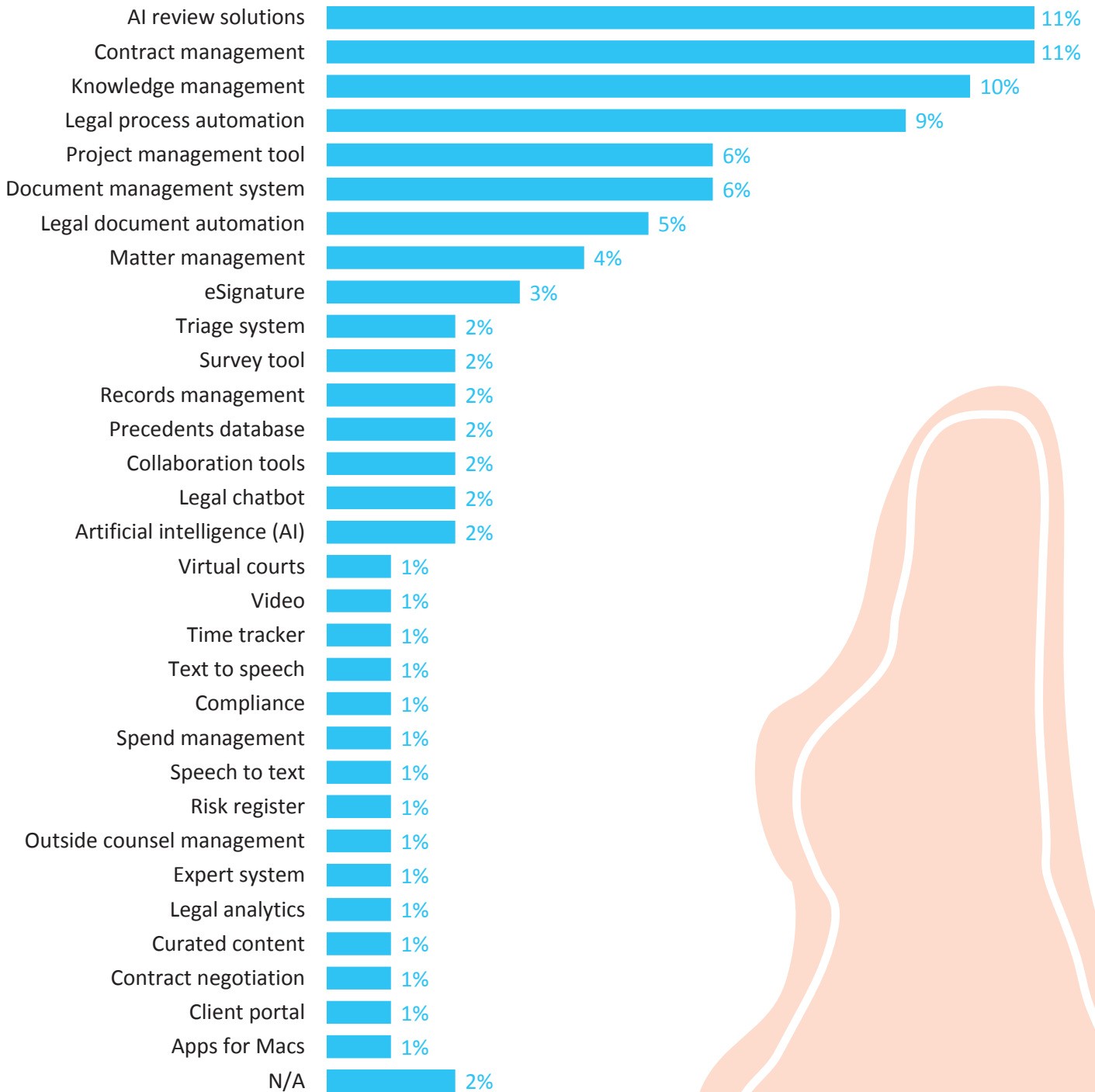
Respondents indicating the tools they have found most useful when transitioning to remote working (% respondents)



**Legal technology solutions that would make work easier**

We also asked respondents about the legal technology solutions that would make their work easier. Common responses included AI review solutions (11%), contract management tools (11%), knowledge management solutions (10%), legal process automation software (9%), project management tools (6%) and document management systems (6%).

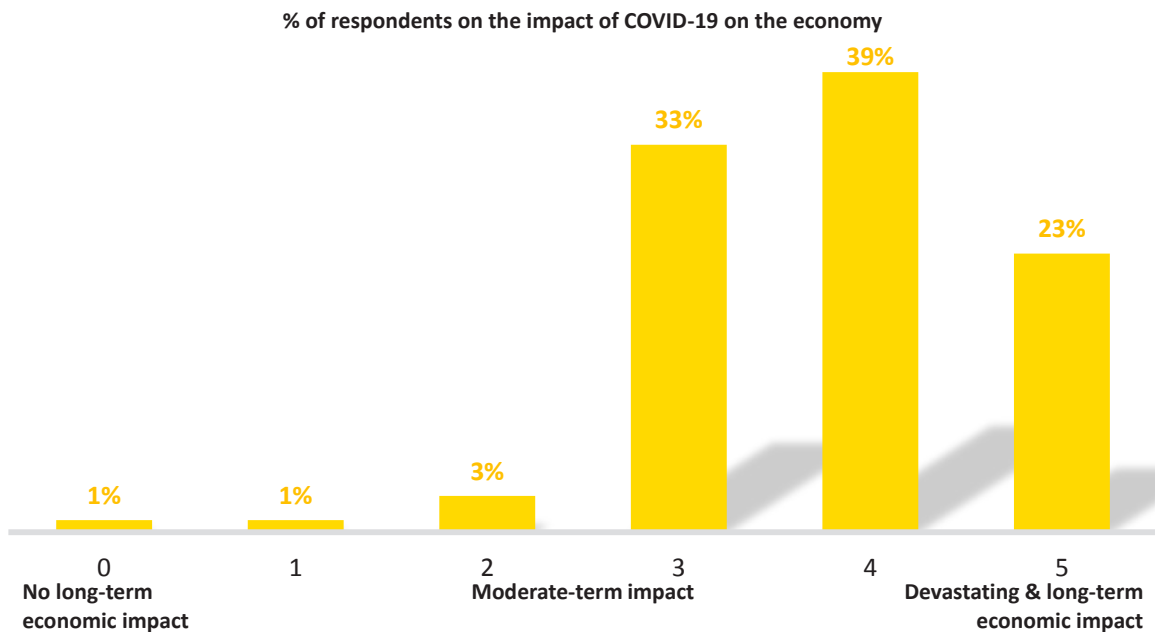
Cluster analysis of respondents' open-ended responses to the Legal Tech solutions that would make their work easier



# Strategising for post-COVID-19 world

## Respondents' perception of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy

To get an insight into how legal departments are preparing for a post-COVID-19 world, we asked respondents for their predictions on the impact of the pandemic to the economy.

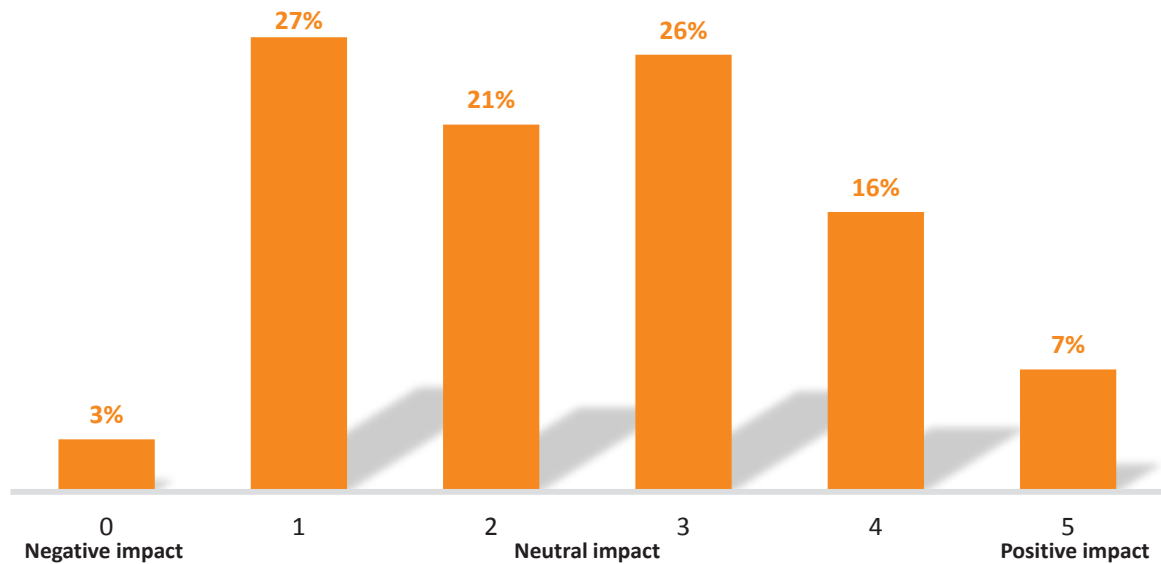


### Respondents' perception of the impact of COVID-19 on their organisations

Virtually all respondents predict that COVID-19 will have a moderate-term impact or devastating and long-term impact on the economy.

We also asked the respondents for their predictions on the impact of COVID-19 to their organisation's financial performance.

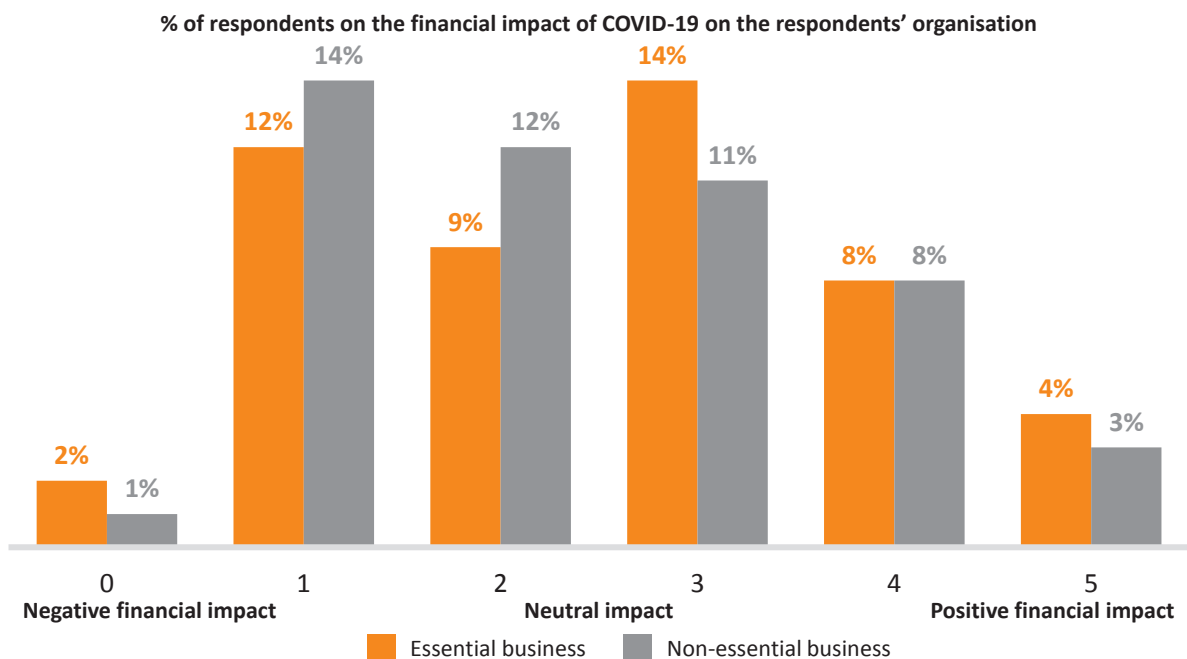
Percentage of respondents on the impact of COVID-19 to the respondent's organisation





## The perception of the financial impact of COVID-19 on the economy

Interestingly, respondents are evenly divided as to whether COVID-19 will have a negative or positive impact on their organisations. Thirty percent of respondents predict a negative impact while almost a quarter (23%) believe that the pandemic will deliver a positive impact to their organisation.



Being categorised as an essential or non-essential business does not make a substantial difference to the respondents' predictions of financial impact for their organisations.

Two of the interviewees noted that, as essential businesses, their organisations should continue to grow during the pandemic. This, however, would depend on international supply chains not being affected.

Our cross analysis of respondents' response on the impact of COVID-19 to the economy and financial performance of their organisations reveals that 20% of legal teams are bracing for negative financial impact to their organisation along with devastating and long-term impact to the economy. Support while the Singapore economy recovers may be of most benefit to counsel in these legal teams.

**Perceived impact of COVID-19 on the economy and financial performance of respondents' organisation**

Interestingly, while 12% of respondents forecast devastating and long-term economic impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, they also predict a positive financial impact to their organisation's business.

To further understand the impact of COVID-19 on working life, we asked the respondents whether work life will change post-COVID-19.

Devastating & long-term economic impact	5	3%	8%	5%	2%	4%	1%
	4		9%	10%	12%	7%	
Moderate-term impact	3		9%	5%	9%	4%	5%
	2	<i>20% of legal teams are bracing for negative financial impact with devastating and long-term impact</i>		1%	1%	1%	
1				1%			
No long-term economic impact	0						1%
	-	0	1	2	3	4	5
		Negative financial impact		Neutral impact		Positive financial impact	

## Changes to working life

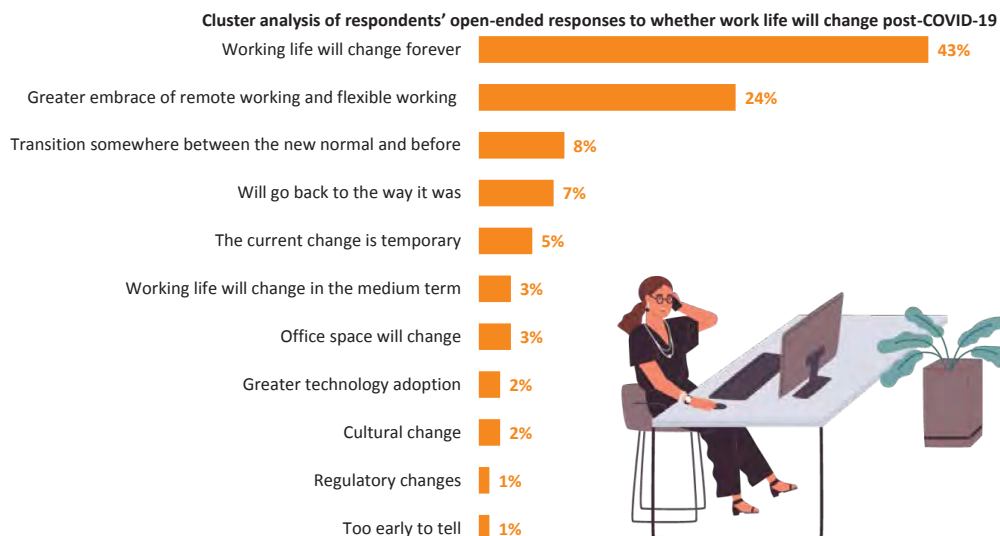
Those respondents predicting that working life will change forever believe that the current change will be the new normal in the long run. Respondents that believe a greater embrace of remote working and flexible working will transpire note that telecommuting will be the norm for some and that working from home will be much more accepted. These respondents believe that current remote working arrangements have proven that the workforce can still be productive outside of the office.

The senior in-house lawyers interviewed following the survey support the sentiment that work life will change post-COVID-19. Embracing remote working was mentioned multiple times as the biggest change to working life, as the following quote illustrates:

*“My perspective is that flexible working will be embraced. Our organisation already has a flexi scheme that allows staff to work half the day from the office and the other half from home. Moving to a full remote working day would be beneficial, as this pandemic reveals.”*

-General Counsel at multinational corporation

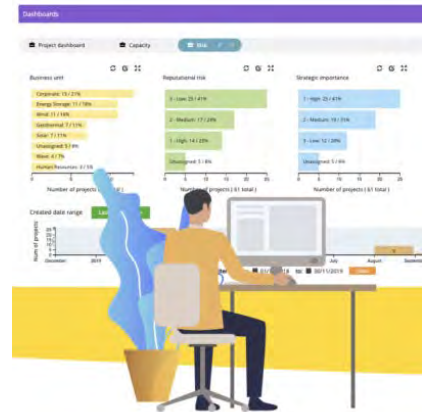
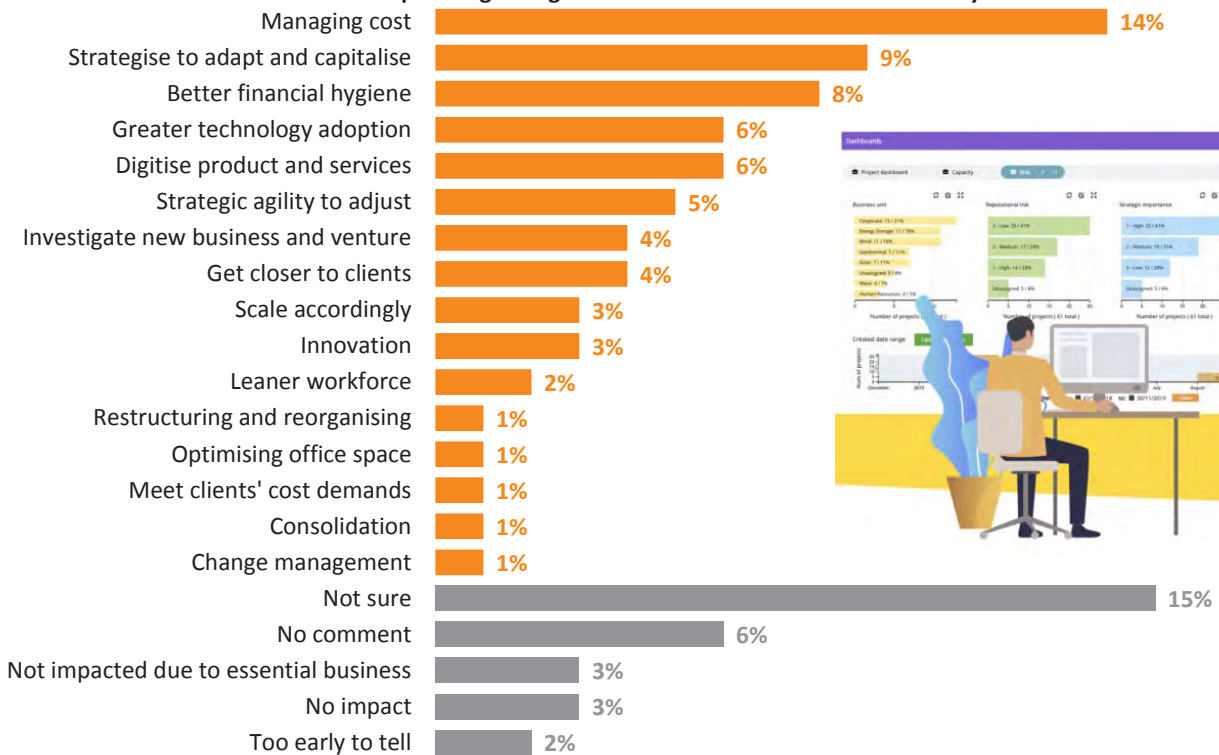
Respondents generally believe that working life will change post-COVID-19. This ranges from working life changing forever (43%) to greater uptake of remote working and flexible working (24%). There are also some who believe that workplaces will go back to the way things were (7%), that the current change is temporary (5%), or that it is too soon to tell (1%).



**How organisations will meet the financial demands of upcoming changes to markets and the broader economy**

When asked how organisations are adjusting their responses to meet the financial demands of the upcoming changes to the markets and the broader economy as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, our respondents provided a variety of responses, many of which centred on financial management, strategy and technology.

**Cluster analysis of respondents' open-ended responses of how their organisation will meet the financial demands of upcoming changes to markets and the broader economy**



Respondents that indicated their organisations were managing cost revealed actions including cost-cutting, deferring payments, reducing working hours, reducing discretionary spend, and postponing non-essential expenses. Respondents that indicated better financial hygiene were looking to stay lean, being more agile and aggressive in using strong financials and conserving cash.

Respondents whose organisations were strategising to adapt and capitalise, were redirecting their strategy based on market needs, contemplating strategic options, and executing on plans to sustain their growth trajectory.

Respondents who indicated greater technology adoption at their organisations identified remote work and workflow as focus areas, while respondents digitising their products and services are providing new online products, focusing on online sales channels and leveraging new technology to digitise services.

Interestingly, 15% of the respondents were not sure how their organisations were gearing up to meet the future. These legal teams can help their organisations by involving themselves in strategic conversations about the future of their organisations.

A key imperative for legal departments and organisations alike is to internalise lessons learned from developing and implementing pandemic response plans, and navigating the economic consequences of the pandemic. The senior in-house lawyers that were interviewed noted that lessons learned include the importance of having a business continuity plan and the agility to evolve the plan to fit unfolding circumstances. Many large multinational corporations benefitted from a global response team coordinating and sharing organisational activities from other countries where the pandemic response was more advanced.

The general counsels we interviewed for this study also highlighted the importance of team morale and trust. This meant continuous and open communication to ensure everyone was up to date with the company's actions and policies.

When asked what they would change about their organisational and legal team responses, a clear focus was on the need to run business continuity plan fire drills to ensure that potential problems are identified and addressed before-hand. Other responses also identified hardware constraints (the need for more laptops) and over-reliance on hard-copy files (need to digitise their filing system).

Ultimately, most of the interviewees noted the importance of being better prepared for crisis management. This quote illustrates the importance of agility and adaptability for lawyers

*"The thing that stood out, is just that it's a challenge that no one was prepared for. This is not what we learnt in law school as a lawyer. You have to learn as you go and respond very quickly. Our company and legal team have been very agile in how we responded."*

-General Counsel from multinational company

## Conclusion

This report analysed the impact of Covid-19 on corporations and corporate legal teams in Singapore, and explored the ways in which the organisations have responded to the ongoing crisis.

Many organisations immediately commenced remote working, except those few essential services requiring on-site presence. Challenges included accessing the appropriate collaboration software, acquiring required hardware and providing access in our security-conscious age to key corporate information via the internet or a VPN. Legal teams were also challenged by larger numbers of matters, and in some circumstances, a substantially reduced budget.

We found the responses of Singapore teams to the pandemic to be rapid, comprehensive and ongoing with a focus on sustaining the businesses, the teams and the external customer relationships. Organisations were well prepared to respond, with most having business continuity plans and pandemic response procedures ready to launch.

We also examined the post-pandemic future of in-house legal teams given the dual threats of the ongoing pandemic and the economic downturn. While our respondents generally believed that working life will change forever post-COVID-19 there were still also some who believed that workplaces will go back to the way things or that the current change is temporary, but many added the caveat that the duration of the pandemic will be a vital determiner of the way we work.

Respondents who believed a greater embrace of remote working and flexible working will transpire noted that telecommuting will be the norm for some and that working from home will be much more accepted. These respondents believed that current remote working arrangements have proven that the workforce can still be productive outside of the office.

Perhaps the most compelling conclusion we can draw from our research is that the prevailing resilience of the Singapore in-house teams: remote work is embraced, teamwork is prioritised, safety procedures are in place, business continuity plans are enacted, higher work volumes are embraced and managed, and business continues despite the challenges.

Dr Katherine King  
Yarris Technologies  
[www.yarris.com](http://www.yarris.com)  
[www.dazychain.com](http://www.dazychain.com)

Katherine is the Chief Operating Officer of Yarris Technologies, and Co-founder and Product Owner of the Dazychain matter management platform.



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