Q2 - 2026

STATE OF THE MARKET

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STORY recruitment

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We polled over **350 Finance professionals across Australia** on retention, hiring patience, team rebuilding, employer brand, and AI adoption.

The data points to a market where the cuts are largely behind us, but the implications are still working through. Leaner teams are creating retention strain.

Hiring managers are holding the line on quality, but using interim bridges to do it. Resignations are no longer triggering reflexive replacement and AI has moved from talking point to live implementation across most Finance functions.

Included in this report is a detailed breakdown to help you navigate Q2 and the rest of the year ahead.

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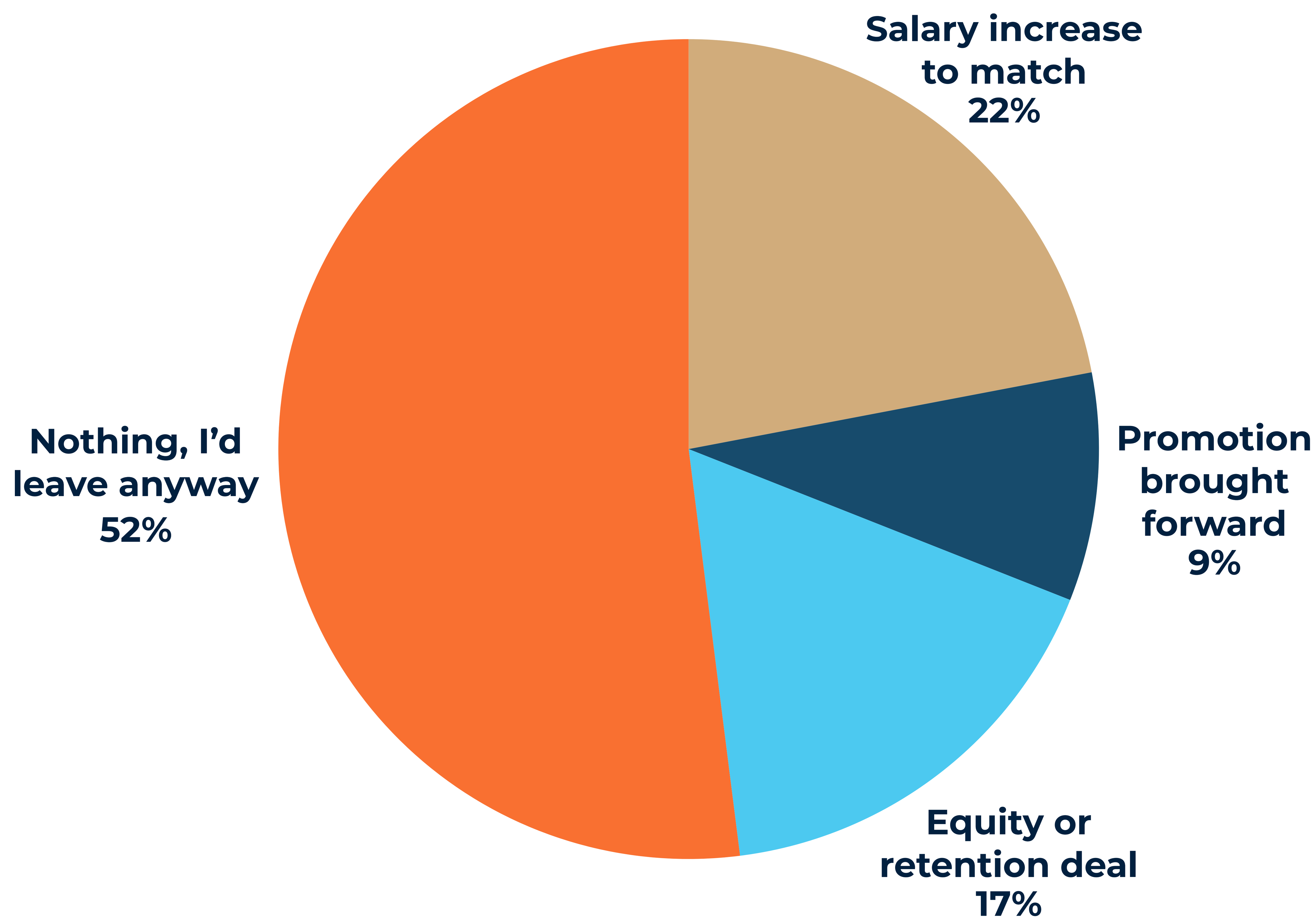
RETENTION IS BREAKING: 52% WOULD LEAVE ANYWAY

QUESTION

If you were offered your ideal role today, what would make you stay put?

KEY INSIGHTS

52% of Finance professionals would walk away from their current role for an ideal opportunity, regardless of what their employer offered to keep them.



The takeaway is uncomfortable for retention strategies built around reactive counter-offers. More than half of Finance professionals are not negotiating; they are leaving.

The remaining **48%** can be retained, but only with specific levers. Salary alone works for **22%**. Equity or retention deals **(17%)** and promotion acceleration **(9%)** account for the rest. Notably, no single lever pulls more than a quarter of the market.

For employers, the message is that the retention conversation has to start well before a competing offer arrives. Once a Finance professional has mentally accepted their next role, the door is largely closed.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** The cost of losing a key Finance hire continues well past their exit. Identify your at-risk talent now and address the underlying drivers (scope, stretch, recognition) before the resignation conversation, not during it.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** When making an offer to a finalist, assume their employer will counter. Build your value proposition around what the counter cannot match: role design, mandate, leadership, growth.
- **For Candidates:** Be honest with yourself about whether you would actually stay if your employer matched. If the answer is no, the most respectful thing for both sides is to leave a counter-offer conversation off the table.

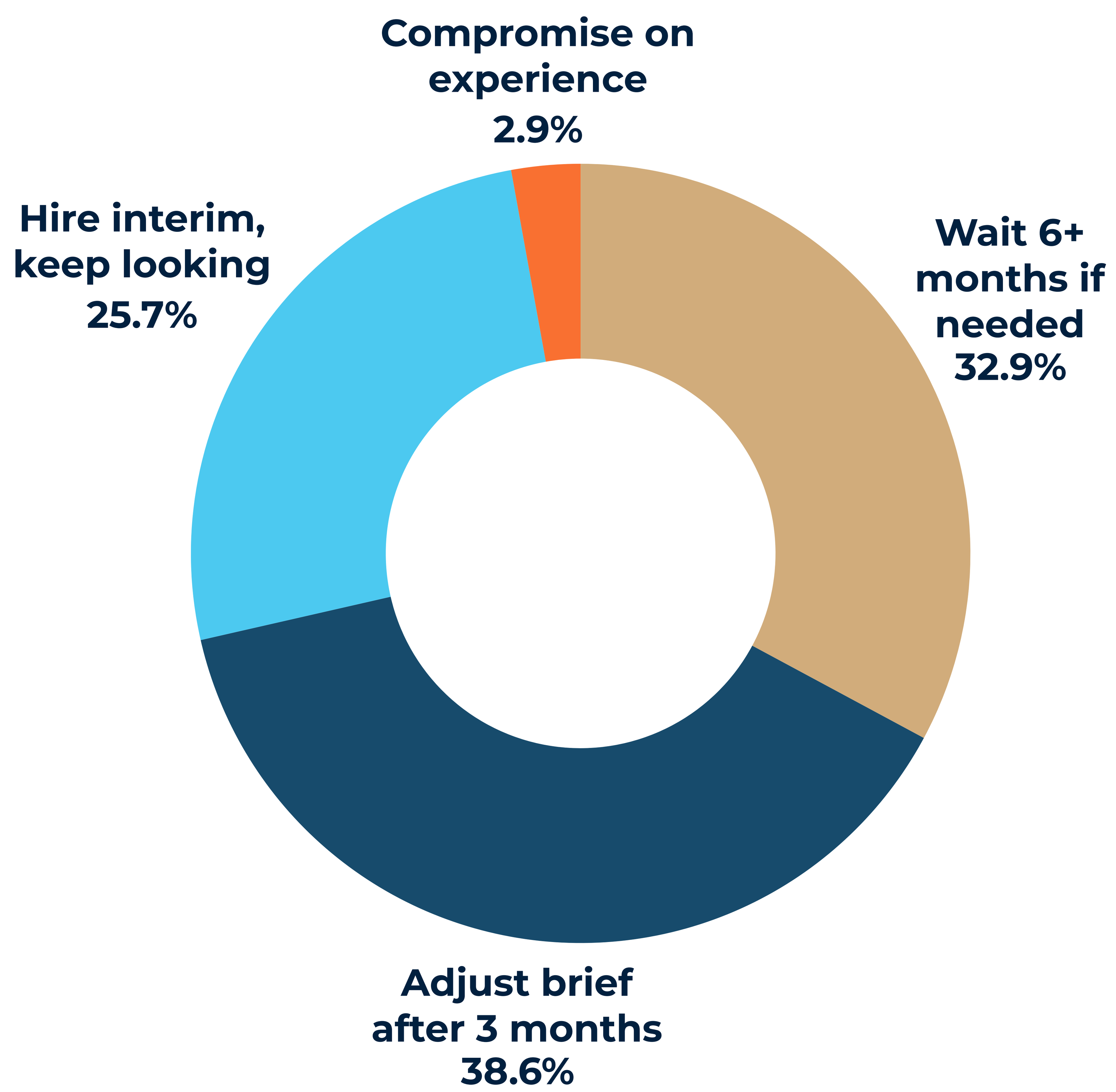
THE INTERIM BRIDGE: HIRING DISCIPLINE HOLDS THE LINE

QUESTION

When hiring senior Finance talent, what's your breaking point?

KEY INSIGHTS

98% of hiring managers refuse to compromise on experience for senior Finance hires. 48% will bring in an interim while continuing the permanent search.



Standards have not dropped. Only **2%** of hiring managers said they would compromise on experience to fill a senior Finance role; for practical purposes, that option is off the table.

What has changed is how businesses manage the wait. Nearly half **(48%)** now hire an interim to bridge the gap rather than leave the function exposed.

The implication for the contracting market is significant. Interim Finance hires are no longer a stopgap of last resort, they are the default solution while businesses hold out for the right permanent candidate.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** Build a relationship with a strong interim partner before you need one. The right bridge hire prevents a fatigue-driven compromise on the permanent appointment.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** If you're three months in and your brief has not surfaced the right candidate, the issue is more often the brief than the market. Reassess scope and seniority calibration before adjusting standards.
- **For Candidates:** Strong interim experience is now a credential in its own right, not a CV gap to explain. Position it as the hands-on commercial exposure it actually is.

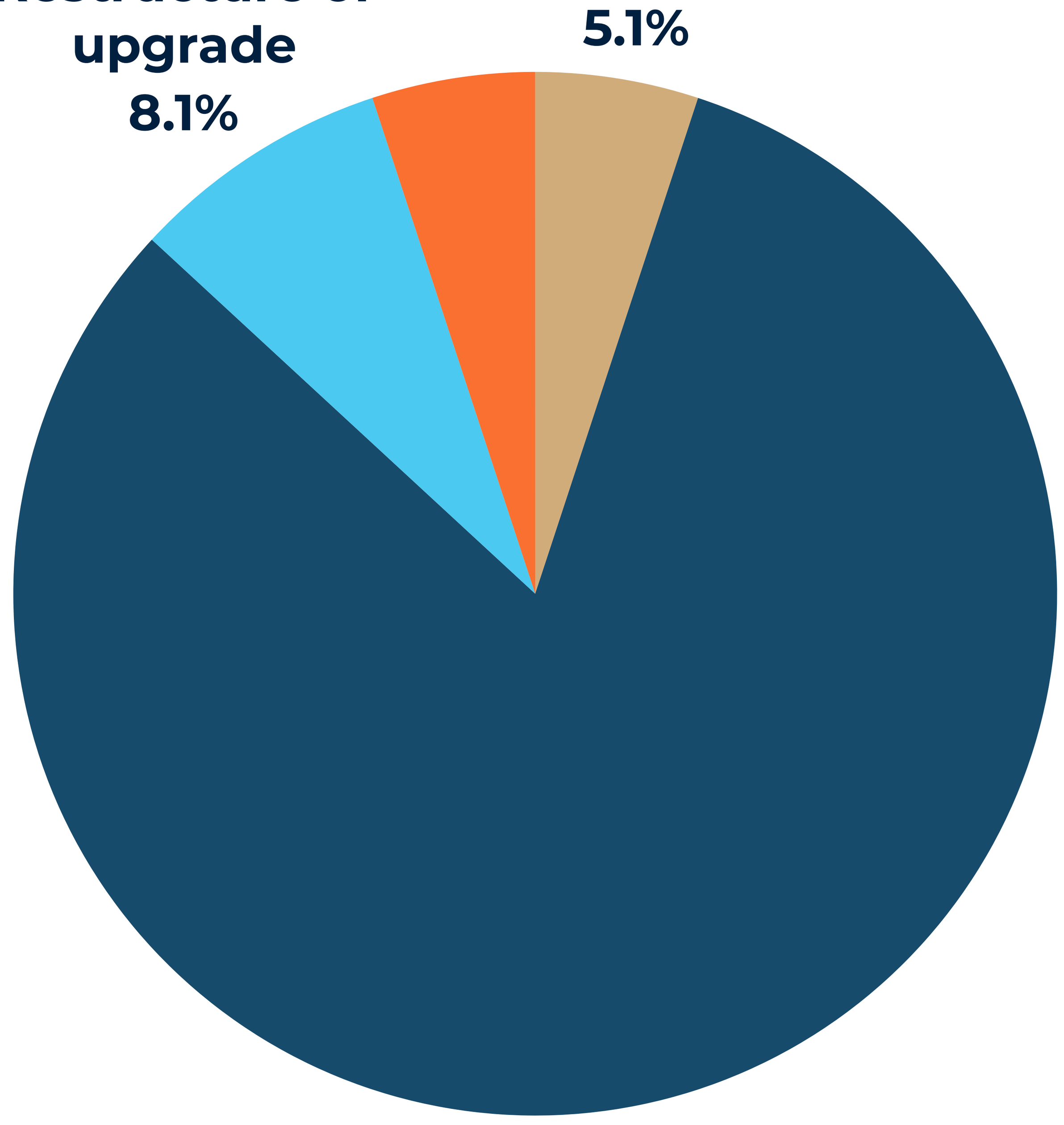
PAUSE AND REASSESS: 81% NO LONGER REPLACE AUTOMATICALLY

QUESTION

When someone resigns from your Finance team, what's your first move?

KEY INSIGHTS

81% of Finance leaders now pause to reassess before replacing a resignation. Only 5% will replace like-for-like immediately.



This is the single biggest behavioural shift in the data. The reflexive 'who do we find next' response to a Finance resignation has been replaced by a structured pause across more than 4 in 5 businesses.

Compounded with the **8%** who actively use a resignation to restructure or upgrade, the picture is clear. Almost 9 in 10 Finance leaders see a resignation as an opportunity to interrogate the shape of the role and the team before committing to another hire.

For candidates, this changes the timing of opportunities. Replacement roles are now slower to surface, but the briefs that emerge are more deliberate, more senior, and often broader in scope than the role they replaced.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** Use the pause well. A 2-week structured review (scope, capacity gaps, future skill needs) before re-engaging the market is now best practice, not bureaucracy.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** If you are reassessing a vacant role, communicate that clearly internally and externally. Candidates and recruiters can support a deliberate process, but lose patience with one that looks indecisive.
- **For Candidates:** When you see a Finance role come to market, recognise it has likely been through weeks of internal review. The brief in front of you is probably the role the business actually wants now, not the one that just left.

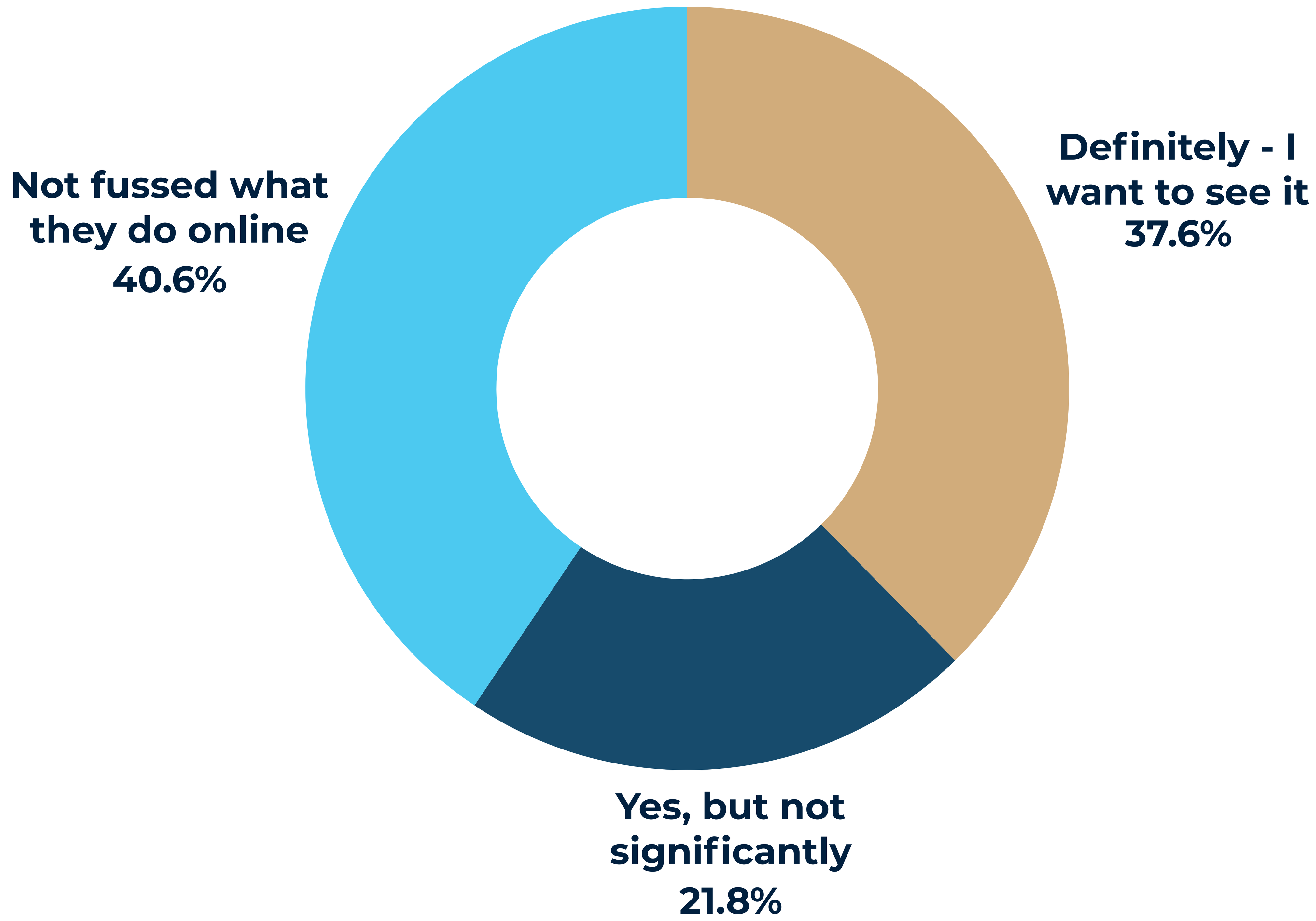
EXECUTIVE VISIBILITY: A QUIET BUT REAL EVP LEVER

QUESTION

When evaluating a business to work for, would a visible online presence from the executive team make you want to join that business more?

KEY INSIGHTS

60% of Finance professionals say executive online presence positively influences their decision to join a business.
38% say it definitely does.



This poll is the most polarised in the report. Although **41%** say executive online presence is not a factor, **60%** say it positively influences them, with **38%** giving it meaningful weight.

For senior Finance hires, executive visibility is a soft lever. It may not secure a candidate on its own, but it helps build early confidence. In 2026, candidates expect to find credible signs of leadership online.

Importantly, they are not looking for constant thought leadership. They are looking for visible, engaged leaders who can clearly signal the business's direction, credibility, and alignment.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** A modest, consistent professional presence (1 or 2 posts a month with substance) is enough to materially improve how candidates perceive your team and business.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** Reference your executive team's public presence in candidate conversations. It reinforces credibility and helps strong candidates self-validate during a process.
- **For Candidates:** Before saying yes to a role, look beyond the JD. How the leadership team shows up publicly is the closest proxy you have for how they operate behind closed doors.

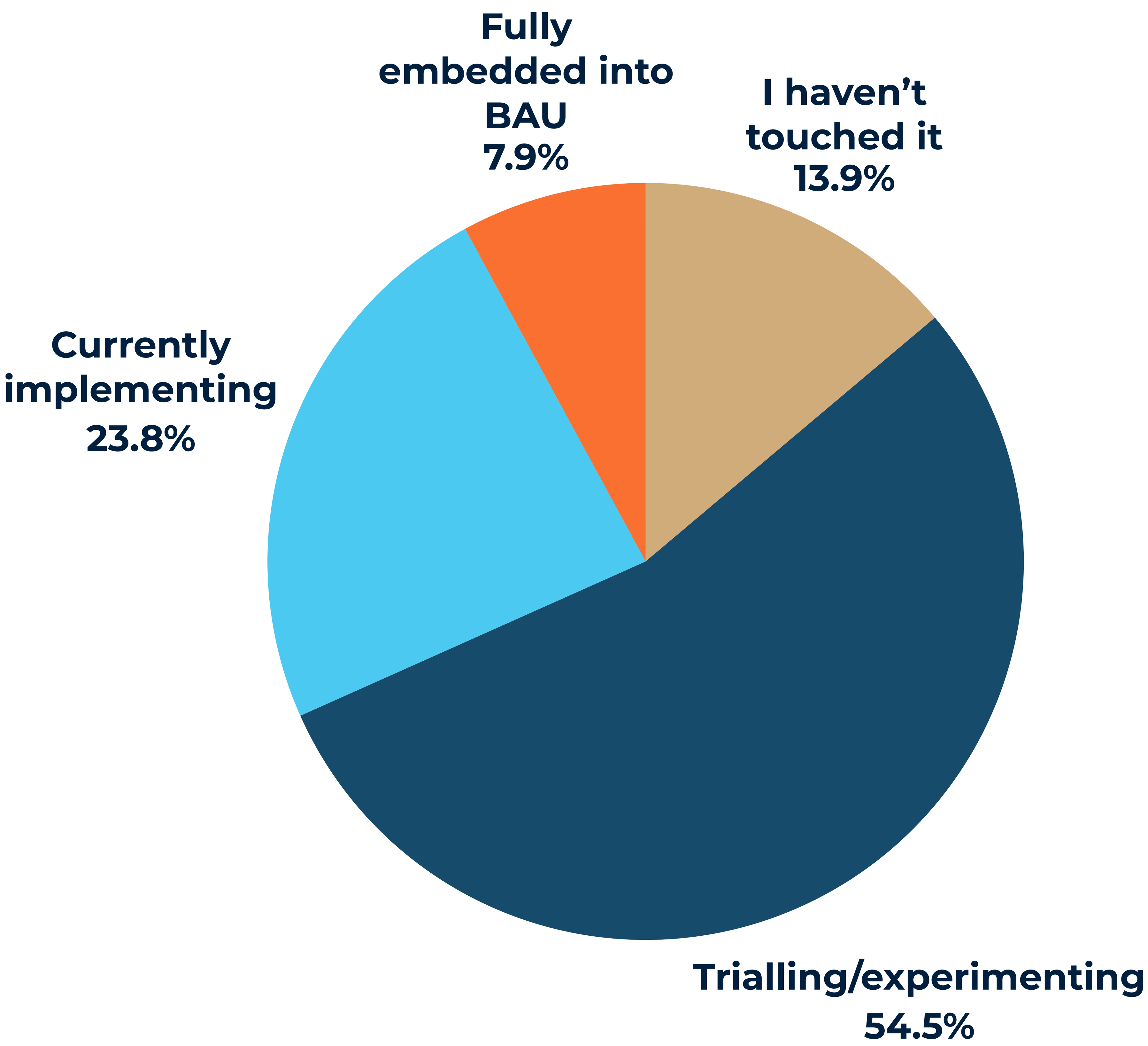
AI IN FINANCE: FROM TRIAL TO IMPLEMENTATION

QUESTION

Where is your finance team at with embedding AI into the BAU for Finance?

KEY INSIGHTS

86% of Finance teams are now engaging with AI in some form. **32%** have moved past experimentation into implementation or full BAU adoption.



The Q1 report identified accuracy as the dominant concern slowing AI adoption in Finance. Three months on, the data shows that concern has not stopped adoption, it has shaped its pace.

Most Finance teams **(53%)** are still in the trial phase, learning where AI helps and where review still has to sit with a person. But almost a third **(32%)** have moved past trials into active implementation or full BAU. That is a meaningful share of teams now operating with AI as a working part of the function, not an experiment on the side.

The **14%** who have not touched it remain a real cohort. For some, the absence is deliberate (industry constraints, low value at current scale). For others, it is starting to look like a competitive gap.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** Move beyond trial mode by choosing 1 or 2 narrow, controllable AI use cases to take into BAU next quarter. Implementation builds confidence faster than continued experimentation.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** Position AI fluency as desirable, not essential. Mandatory AI experience can filter out strong candidates whose value lies in judgement, commercial thinking, and decision-making.
- **For Candidates:** You do not need to be a power user, but you do need a credible view on where AI supports Finance, and where its limitations sit. It is now part of every senior Finance interview.

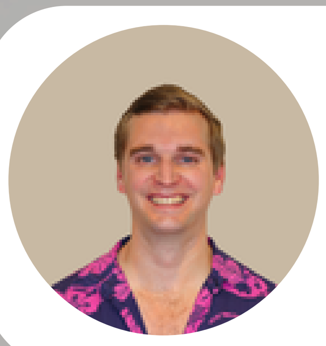
MOVING FORWARD

Q2 2026 has been a quarter of recalibration. The headcount correction that defined Q1 has settled into structural change in how Finance functions are built, sustained, and replaced.

- **Retention is fragile.** More than half of Finance professionals would leave for their ideal role regardless of what their employer offered to keep them.
- **Hiring standards are holding,** but interim bridges are now the default tactic for protecting permanent quality.
- **Resignations no longer trigger reflexive replacement.** 8 in 10 Finance leaders pause to reassess first.
- **Executive visibility is a quiet but real EVP lever.** Most candidates value it, even if a plurality say it doesn't sway them.
- **AI has moved from concept to implementation.** A third of teams are now beyond experimentation, with the gap widening on those who have not started.

The businesses and Finance professionals that adapt to these shifts deliberately, rather than reactively, will be the ones setting the standard through the rest of 2026.

If you would like to discuss what these trends mean for your team or your next career move, feel free to reach out.



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