ASSESSING GAPS
IN CRITICAL THINKING &
CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING
IN CORPORATE WORKFORCES

ABSTRACT

In an era defined by rapid change and complexity, critical thinking and creative problem-solving are vital for corporate success. Proten International, recognising their importance, conducted a survey to evaluate these skills within Nigeria's corporate workforce, aiming to identify gaps and inform organisational strategies.

The survey explored employees' intrinsic motivation, comfort with unconventional ideas, and perceived needs for additional training or tools. The findings reveal a workforce that is largely motivated and open to innovation, with 63.4% intrinsically driven to improve efficiency and 70.4% seeking diverse perspectives.

However, significant gaps exist, notably with 45.7% indicating a need for further training and inconsistent recognition of innovative contributions. Cross-tabulation of work approaches by functional area highlights varying levels of proactivity, with Marketing/Sales leading at 48.6% proactive, while Finance and Operations lean towards more cautious approaches. The report offers detailed recommendations, including targeted training and cultural enhancements, to empower organisations in bridging these gaps and strengthening workforce agility in a dynamic business landscape.

An Overview and Analysis of the Workforce Landscape

The report outlines surveyed responses from participants across various functional areas, assessing their critical thinking and creative problem-solving capabilities in corporate settings.

01 Primary Functional Area

Human Resources professionals make up 44.66% of the respondents, Marketing/Sales came up at 20.95%, Operations at 16.6%, Finance at 13.44%, while others came up to 4.35%. This showed a heightened interest from HR professionals due to their strategic role in talent development, while respondents from other functional areas such as sales, operations, and finance, provided counterbalance, reflecting perspectives from technical, customer-facing and process-oriented roles.

What is your primary functional area?

- 4.35% : Other
- 16.6% : Operations
- 13.44% : Finance
- 20.95% : Marketing/Sales/Business Development
- 44.66% : Human Resources
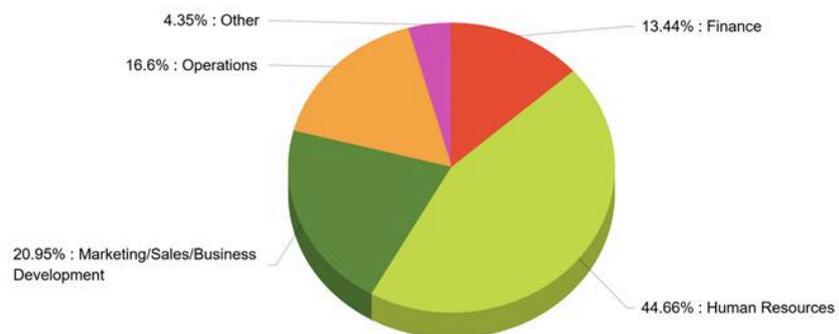
02 Years of Professional Experience

The majority (58.1%) fall within the 2–10 years range, indicating a mid-career-heavy sample. 11–15 years (13.4%), More than 15 years (12.4%), Less than 2 years (16.1%).

How many years of professional experience do you have?
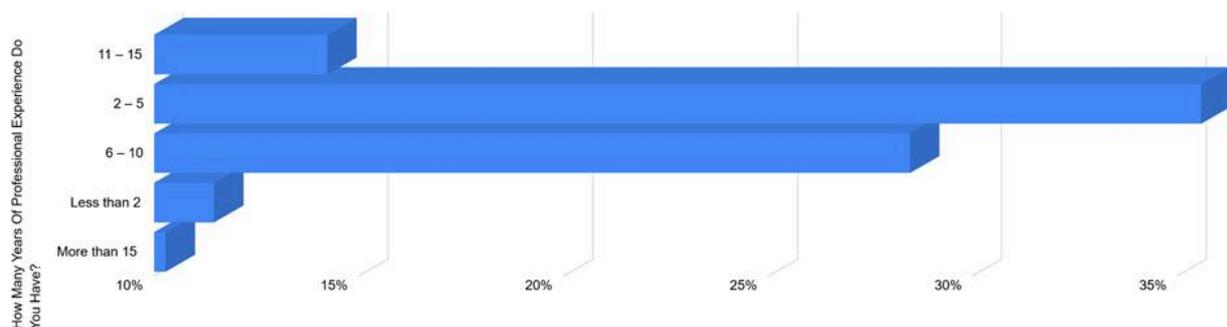
03 Does Your Current Role Involve Critical Thinking and Creative Problem-Solving?

A strong majority (81.03%) report that their roles involve critical thinking and creative problem-solving, suggesting these skills are integral to most respondents' jobs. The 12.65% who say No may indicate roles with more routine or execution-focused tasks. The outcome aligns with global trends emphasising agility in the workforce. It suggests that most roles, even those traditionally execution-focused, now demand some level of analysis or creativity.
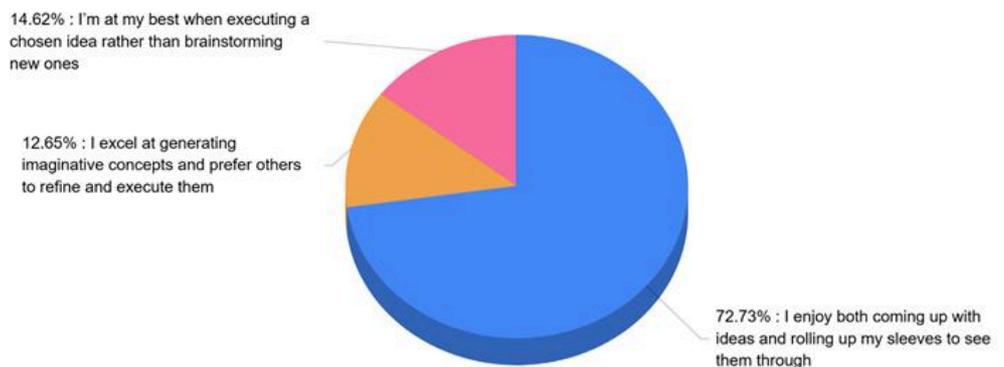

6.32% : Maybe
12.65% : No
81.03% : Yes
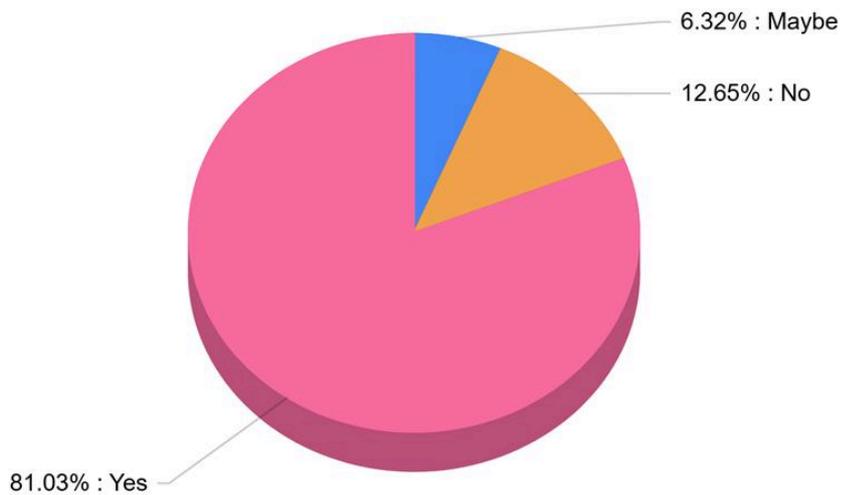
04 Natural Tendency

The majority (72.73%) were versatile in both ideation and execution, indicating a workforce capable of holistic problem-solving, which is valuable in dynamic settings requiring end-to-end ownership. The smaller groups favouring ideation (12.65%) or execution (14.62%) suggest specialised strengths, possibly tied to personality (e.g., creative vs. detail-oriented) or job demands.
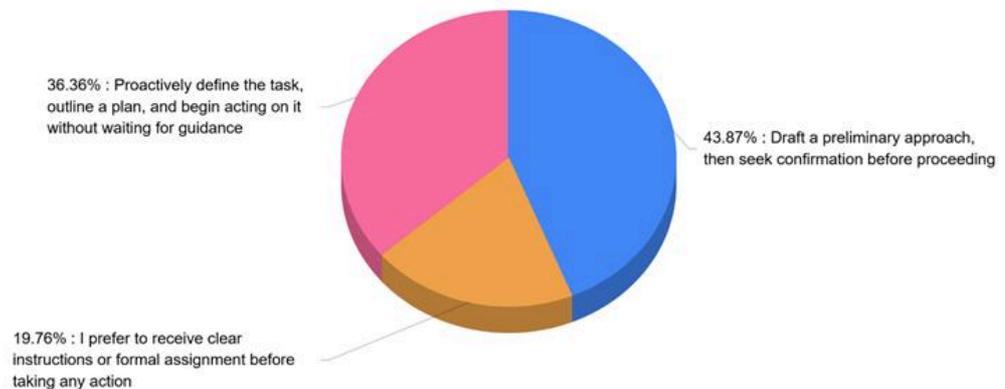
Which statement most closely reflects your natural tendency?

14.62% : I'm at my best when executing a chosen idea rather than brainstorming new ones

12.65% : I excel at generating imaginative concepts and prefer others to refine and execute them

72.73% : I enjoy both coming up with ideas and rolling up my sleeves to see them through

05 Work Approach

The leading approach (43.87%) of drafting then confirming suggests a preference for collaboration and validation, potentially reducing risk but slowing pace. The 36.36% proactive group indicates initiative, while the 19.76% instruction-preferring group may favour structure. The proactive 36.36% are likely self-starters, critical for innovation, while the 19.76% who prefer instructions might excel in execution but falter in ambiguity, possibly early-career staff or those in rigid roles.
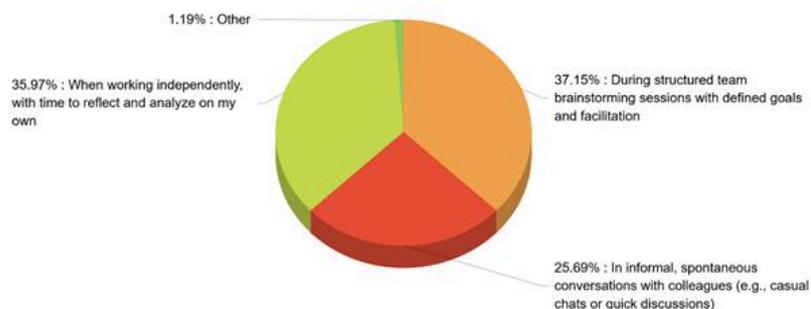
Which of these statements best describe you and the way you work?

36.36% : Proactively define the task, outline a plan, and begin acting on it without waiting for guidance

43.87% : Draft a preliminary approach, then seek confirmation before proceeding

19.76% : I prefer to receive clear instructions or formal assignment before taking any action

06 Scenarios Where Critical Thinking/Problem–Solving is Strongest

The near-even split between team brainstorming (37.15%) and independent work (35.97%) shows a workforce valuing both collaboration and autonomy. Informal conversations (25.69%) suggest spontaneous creativity, while combinations (1.19%) indicate high adaptability. The 1.19% who thrive across scenarios may be natural leaders or highly flexible, capable of toggling between contexts seamlessly.

In which of the following scenarios do you feel your critical thinking and problem-solving abilities are strongest?

1.19% : Other

35.97% : When working independently, with time to reflect and analyze on my own

37.15% : During structured team brainstorming sessions with defined goals and facilitation

25.69% : In informal, spontaneous conversations with colleagues (e.g., casual chats or quick discussions)

07   Recent Product/Service Improvements from Ideas

The 66.4% "Yes" reflects a workforce actively contributing to innovation, suggesting an environment that at least partially supports idea implementation. The 16.21% "No" could be lacking in creativity, stifled by bureaucracy, lack necessary resources, or operate in a culture that doesn't celebrate contributions—potentially demotivating further input.

### Has any recent product/service improvements originated from ideas you provided?

- 16.21% : No
- 17.39% : Somewhat
- 66.4% : Yes
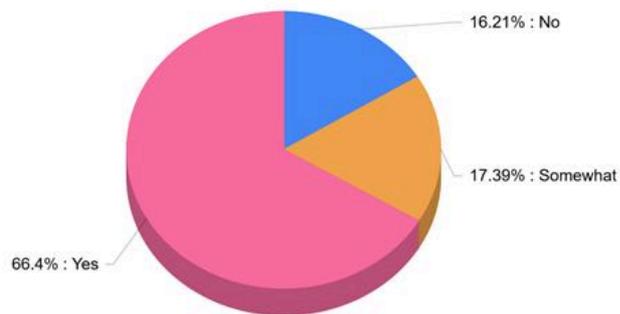
08   Motivation

A robust 78.26% of respondents (Strongly Agree + Agree) report intrinsic motivation to enhance efficiency, with only 11.06% disagreeing. The high agreement suggests a workforce naturally inclined towards process improvement, with the 10.67% neutral responses possibly reflecting situational variability (e.g., lack of opportunity or resources) rather than disinterest. The low disagreement indicates minimal apathy, reinforcing a positive baseline of self-driven initiative.

I am intrinsically motivated to find smarter or more efficient ways to works
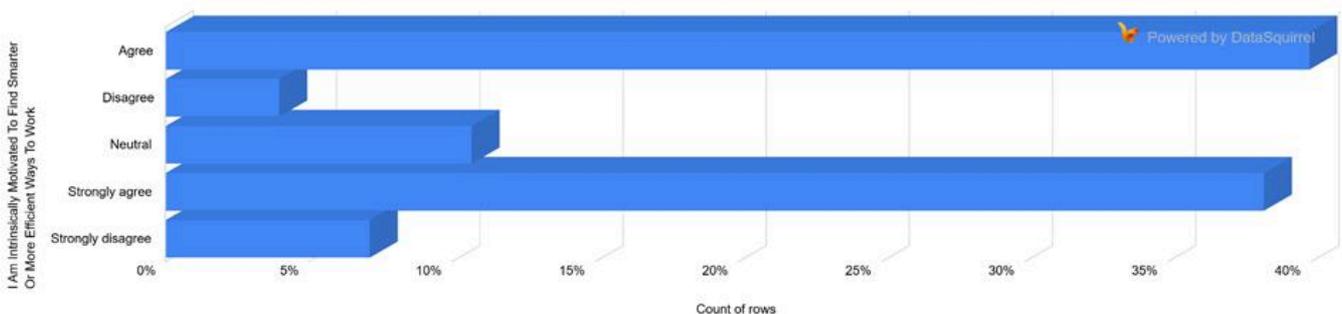
09   Comfort with Unconventional Ideas

Over half (54.94%) feel comfortable proposing unconventional ideas, with results showing a split between strong (17.79%) and moderate (37.15%) confidence. The 25.69% neutral responses suggest hesitation, possibly due to perceived risks or cultural norms, while the 30.44% disagreeing indicate a significant group with higher risk aversion. This distribution reflects a workforce moderately open to innovation but not universally bold.

I am comfortable proposing unconventional ideas even if they might be rejected.
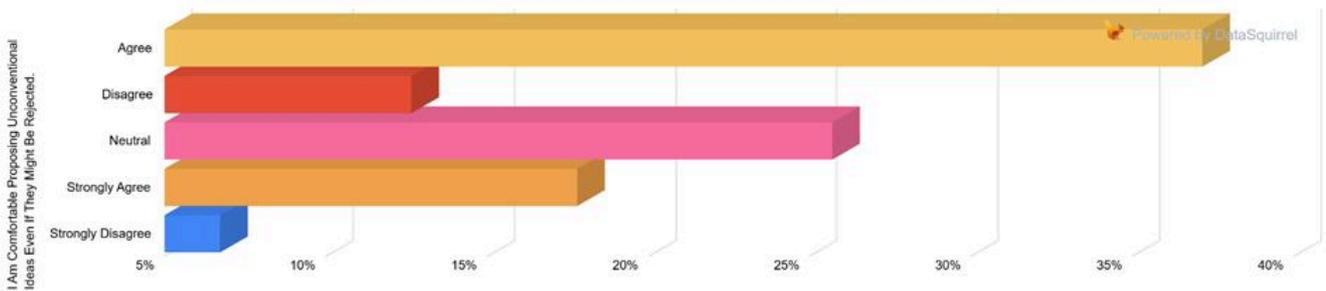
10   Interest in Diverse Perspectives

A strong 81.25% actively seek diverse perspectives, with 29.58% highly committed and 51.67% moderately so, reflecting a workforce attuned to collaborative problem-solving. The 10.42% neutral responses may indicate occasional rather than consistent behaviour, possibly due to time constraints or limited access to diverse teams. Only 8.33% disagree, suggesting rare resistance to inclusivity.

**I actively seek diverse perspectives when tackling complex issues.**
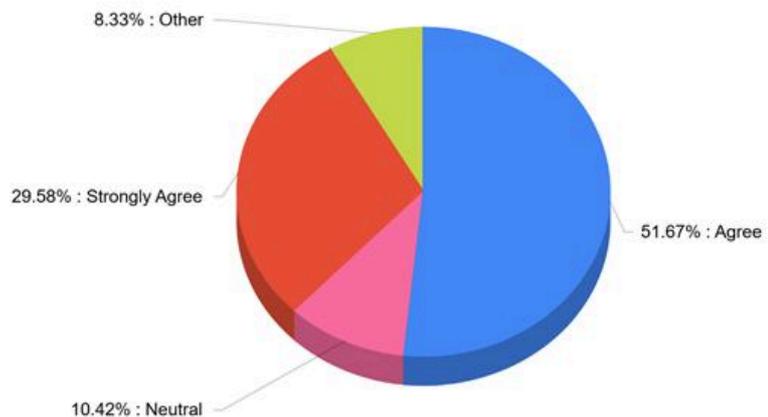
11 Organisational Reward for Innovative Contributions

More than half (66.67%) feel their team celebrates innovation, with a modest 20.42% strongly agreeing. The 22.08% neutral responses indicate ambiguity or inconsistency in recognition practices, while 11.25% disagreeing (Disagree + Strongly Disagree) suggest some portion feel unrewarded. Organisations could address this by implementing formal reward systems—e.g., bonuses, public praise, or career advancement—for innovative contributions.

### My team celebrates and rewards innovative contributions.

3.33% : Other
20.42% : Strongly Agree
46.25% : Agree
22.08% : Neutral
7.92% : Disagree
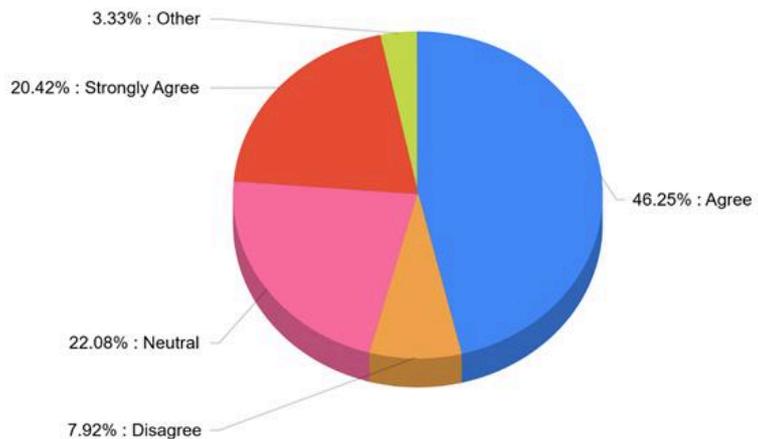
12 Job Expectations for Creativity and Problem-Solving

A solid 73.75% feel expected to take initiative and solve problems creatively, with balanced strong (35.83%) and moderate (37.92%) agreement. The 11.25% neutral responses may reflect unclear expectations or varying departmental cultures, while the 15.0% disagreeing suggest pockets where proactivity isn't prioritised. This overall picture indicates a generally proactive organisational stance.

I am expected by my organisation to take initiative and creatively problem-solve.


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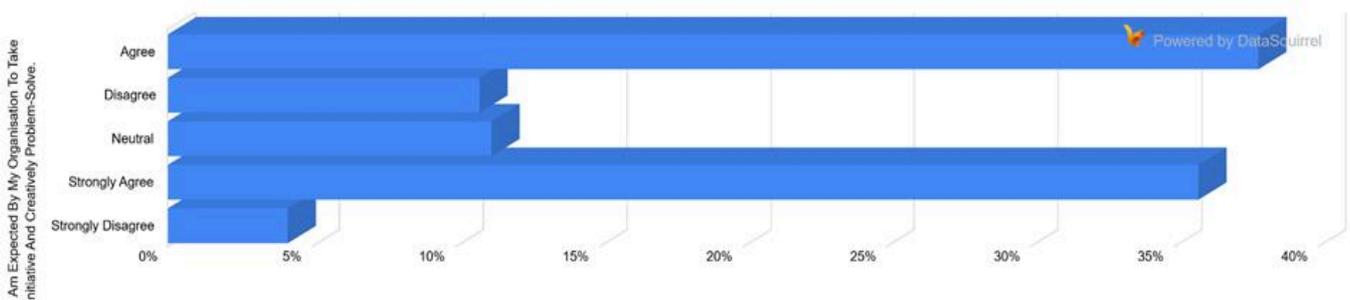
13 Confidence in Critical Thinking and Creative Problem-Solving Abilities

Only 18.33% admit struggling with these expectations, contrasted by 64.58% who disagree, indicating broad confidence. The 17.08% neutral responses suggest uncertainty or occasional difficulty, possibly tied to resource gaps or situational pressures rather than inherent inability. The low agreement reflects a capable workforce, with some self-doubt lingering.

I struggle to take initiative, think critically, or creatively solve problems as I'm expected to.

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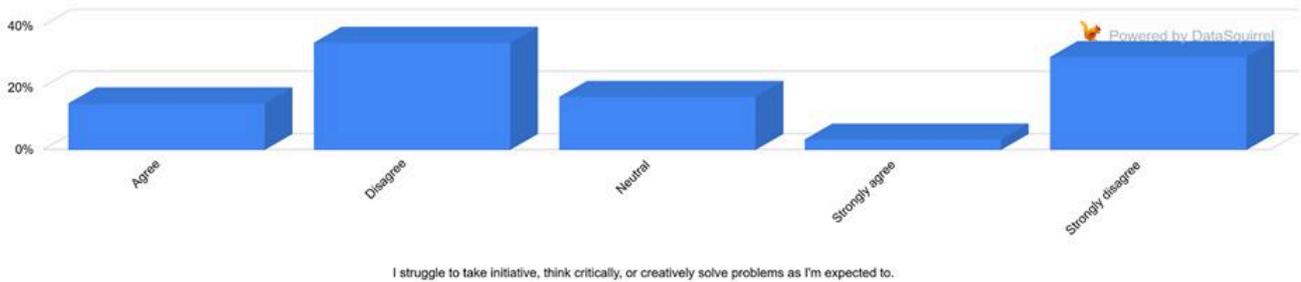
14 Need for Training for Problem-Solving Effectiveness

More than two-thirds (71.5%) expressed a need for additional training or tools, with 13.75% strongly feeling this gap. The 17.92% neutral responses suggest indecision, possibly due to untested resources or unclear needs, while 10.83% disagree, indicating a minority feel sufficiently equipped. This points to a significant perceived deficit in support structures. The 71.5% need signals an urgent call for investment in creative problem-solving resources—e.g., workshops on design thinking or access to analytical tools. Addressing this gap is critical to unlocking the workforce's full innovative potential.

I need additional trainings or tools to improve my creative problem-solving effectiveness.

- 3.33% : Other
- 13.75% : Strongly Agree
- 17.92% : Neutral
- 7.5% : Disagree
- 57.5% : Agree
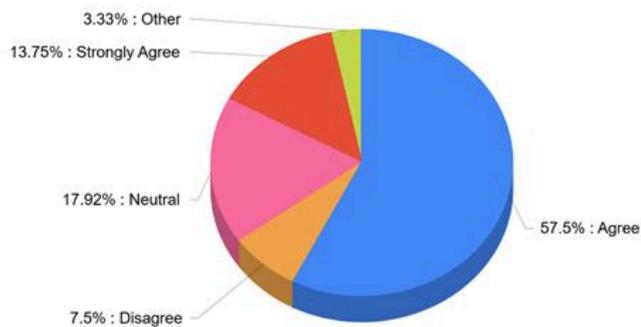
Overall Critical Thinking and Creative Problem-Solving Capabilities.

A majority (68.34%) feel well-equipped, with 50.42% moderately confident and 17.92% highly so. The 22.5% neutral responses reflect ambivalence, possibly from inconsistent experiences, while 9.17% disagree, indicating a minority with notable deficits. This suggests broad self-assurance, tempered by some uncertainty.

Overall, I believe I am well equipped with the critical thinking and creative problem-solving capabilities I need to tackle rapidly changing business
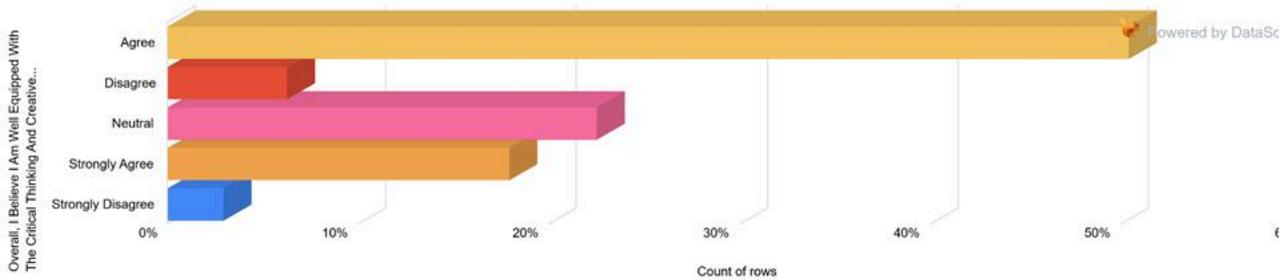
Additional Analytical Charts for Trends

To uncover deeper insights, here are additional charts that analyze relationships between variables, focusing on trends across functional areas, experience levels, and critical thinking/problem-solving confidence.

01 Critical Thinking Involvement by Functional Area

HR's near-universal "Yes" (93.5%) reflects its strategic, problem-solving nature. Lower "Yes" rates in Finance (63.6%) and Operations (66.7%) suggest a focus on execution over analysis. HR's high involvement likely stems from navigating complex human dynamics, while Finance and Operations may prioritize compliance or efficiency, sidelining creative thinking. The 27.3% "No" in Finance and 21.2% in Operations indicate untapped potential—e.g., Finance could innovate in forecasting, while Operations could get creative in logistics.
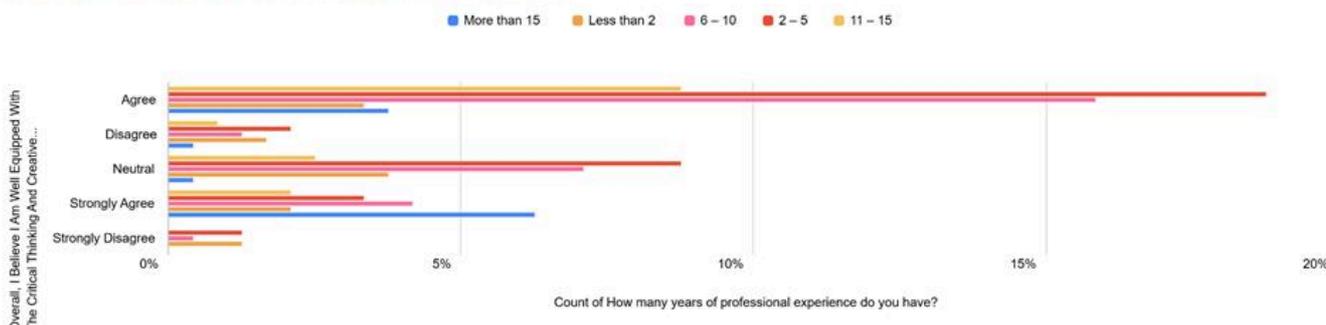

What is your primary functional area? per Does your current role/responsibilities involve critical thinking and creative problem-solving?
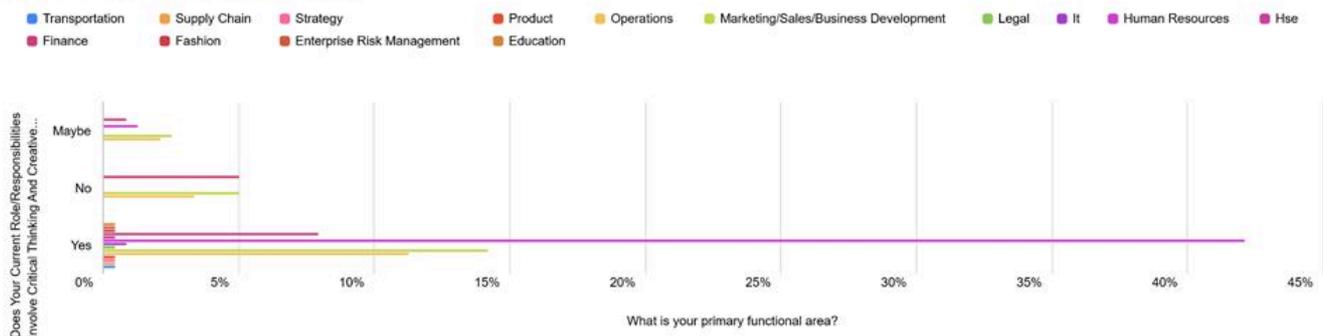
02   Confidence in Problem-Solving by Experience Level

Confidence rises with experience, peaking at 11–15 years (68.0%), then dips slightly for >15 years (65.2%), possibly due to role shifts. Early-career low confidence (50.0%) reflects limited exposure, while the peak at 11–15 years shows mastery. The slight >15-year dip might indicate adaptation challenges or delegation.

How many years of professional experience do you have? per Overall, I believe I am well equipped with the critical thinking and creative problem-solvi

Legend: ■ More than 15   ■ Less than 2   ■ 6 – 10   ■ 2 – 5   ■ 11 – 15

Y-axis (Overall, I Believe I Am Well Equipped With The Critical Thinking And Creative...):
Agree, Disagree, Neutral, Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree

X-axis: 0%, 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%

Count of How many years of professional experience do you have?

03   Idea Contribution vs. Team Celebration

A clear link exists between idea implementation and perceived celebration (64.3% vs. 34.8%), showing recognition fuels contribution. The 64.3% suggests that celebrating success encourages further ideas, while the 34.8% indicates a lack of reinforcement may suppress creativity.

My team celebrates and rewards innovative contributions. per Has any recent product/service improvements originated from ideas you provided?

Legend: ■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Strongly Agree   ■ Neutral   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree

Y-axis (Recent Product/Service Improvements d From Ideas You Provided?):
No, Somewhat, Yes

X-axis: 0%, 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%, 25%, 30%, 35%

My team celebrates and rewards innovative contributions.
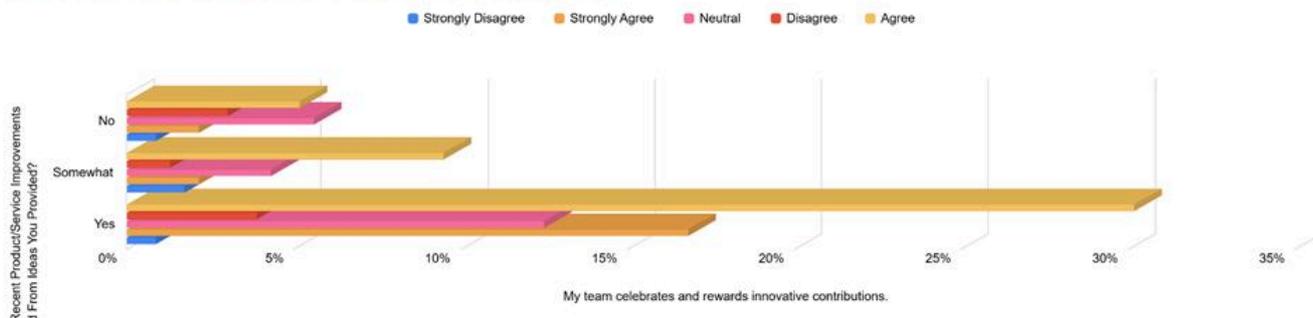
CONCLUSION

This survey by Proten International underscores a Nigerian corporate workforce with significant strengths in critical thinking and creative problem-solving, yet marked by addressable gaps. A majority exhibit intrinsic motivation (78.26%) and seek diverse perspectives (81.25%), forming a solid foundation for innovation. However, over two-thirds (71.5%) crave additional training, and recognition of innovative contributions remains inconsistent (66.67% agree it occurs), while functional differences in work approach highlight uneven proactivity.

These findings call for a multi-faceted response: robust training programmes to bridge skill gaps, a reinforced culture celebrating innovation through tangible rewards, and targeted encouragement of proactive behaviour, particularly in cautious areas like Finance and Operations. By investing in these areas, Nigerian organisations can transform a motivated workforce into a powerhouse of critical thinking and creativity, ready to excel in a rapidly evolving business environment. This report offers a strategic blueprint for leaders to harness their employees' potential and drive sustained corporate success.

NEXT STEPS

Unlock your workforce's potential with Proten International, Nigeria's leading experts in critical thinking and creative problem-solving training. Our customised programmes empower employees to innovate, adapt, and excel in today's business world. Beyond skill-building, Proten International offers comprehensive human resources and workforce management solutions, from talent acquisition and outsourcing to strategic HR consulting, ensuring your organisation thrives.

Partner with us to bridge skill gaps, foster a culture of innovation, and drive sustainable success.

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