



# The Architect's Journey to Specification

Improving the built environment through stronger relationships  
between architects and contractors

## 2022

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# Introduction

In construction, two key players are positioned to act “in the best interests” of the owner: the architect and the general contractor. Yet, they each play a different role that often puts them at odds with one another. Why? The supposed conflict over good design versus effective cost management is typically posited as an excuse for continued friction. But are there deeper forces at play? At a time when humanity expects better from the built environment—and from the construction industry—can we afford to allow differences to get in the way?

AIA is committed to helping its members adopt collaborative strategies to realize their design intent and build a better world. One of the most important opportunities for collaboration exists between architects and contractors. Both parties are dedicated to delivering on their clients’ expectations. Ensuring a strong bond between them can help to ensure success on the project.

This study was conducted with our colleagues at Associated General Contractors of America (AGC), the largest and most respected

organization representing the people and businesses that build the places where we work, live, play, heal, learn, and grow. The purpose: to uncover what makes the successful architect–contractor relationship work—and what causes others to break down or fail.

Together, AIA and AGC believe our constituencies can execute on a blueprint for a better world. How that happens is in the hands of the architects and contractors out there making it happen every day.

AIA will be exploring how to partner with AGC to develop tools, resources, and programs that support a more collaborative approach to the architect/contractor relationship. For now, it is our hope that this report can help you prepare for change in your practice to support that effort.

**LAKISHA ANN WOODS, CAE**

Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer  
The American Institute of Architects

# Chapter 1

## Key learnings & recommendations

## Architects and contractors see benefits in collaboration

# More collaborative ways of working together are popular with both architects and contractors

This report explores the relationships between architects and contractors, and how the needs of the two parties align, differ, and depend on each other.

A significant majority of architects and contractors want to work more collaboratively with the other party for the benefit of all: 9 in 10 contractors want to work more closely

with architects than they do today, and 8 in 10 architects want to work more closely with contractors.

Some prefer integrated project delivery (IPD) and design-build (DB), while others simply want a collaborative and trusted working relationship across projects.

### ARCHITECTS

“The [‘hard bid’] relationship is structured to be confrontational. The architect does not have time or fee to show scope completely or to fully coordinate the project. The GC is required to bid low to get the project, then exploit information gaps in bid documents to improve profitability.”

### CONTRACTORS

“We earn a very high percentage of our sales as a result of our successful team-based approach to working closely with architects and owners to achieve mutual success.”

“In general, we have very strong working relationships with architects on design-build projects. On other project delivery types, our experience has been mixed.”

## Architects and contractors disagree on product substitutions and client advocacy

# The working relationship would benefit from mutual understanding and alignment about client advocacy and the purpose of substitutions

Contractors and architects have differing views on their roles and motivations in two key areas: product substitutions and client advocacy.

VALUE ENGINEERING	CLIENT ADVOCACY
<p>Only 2 in 10 architects believe contractors propose substitutions with the client's best interests in mind. Almost all contractors disagree.</p> <p>Some architects understand why competitive situations force contractors to seek additional value, while others view contractors as putting their own needs before those of the client and project.</p> <p>Contractors agree that competitive bid situations can put pressure on the relationship but maintain that value-engineering often serves the client's interests, given limited budgets and other constraints.</p>	<p>Nearly half of architect respondents believe the responsibility of advocating for the client's best interests falls "mostly" on the architect, with less than a tenth (7%) saying it falls only on them. By contrast, nearly 9 in 10 contractors consider it a responsibility shared equally by both parties.</p> <p>Contractors point to timing and budget as key areas where they look out for the client's interests, while architects worry about value-engineering and its impact on the client and project.</p>

## Documentation and communication challenges persist

# Expressing and following design intent is challenging because written communication between both parties lacks clarity

A significant source of inefficiency in the working relationship between architects and contractors comes from construction documents, drawings, and specifications. Contractors and architects often disagree on responsibilities and the degree of detailing and specificity required in the documentation.

Contractors note that drawings and specs are submitted incomplete, with errors, or without clearly expressing design intent. This leads to requests for information (RFIs), loss of time, and additional work for both parties.

Architects report that they are providing sufficient information and that sometimes contractors lack the willingness to follow stated intent, in favor of “doing things their way.”

In the middle of this challenge is the client, who often limits the budget for construction documents, leaving less time for detailing.

### ARCHITECTS

“Contract documents are not shop drawings, and the contractor should not expect every nut, bolt, and screw to be drawn by the architect. The current trend has been for the contractors (and often owners) to expect the architect to do more of the traditional job of the contractor with no additional remuneration.”

### CONTRACTORS

“I’ve noticed that the details I used to draw (as an architect) are no longer in the construction documents and are now required as shop drawing submittals from my subcontractors. Scope definition that was part of my job as a young architect has unintentionally become the responsibility of the general contractor.”

## Building relationships relies on transparency and communication

# Transparency and communication are key to building more trusted working relationships for the benefit of all parties and the built environment

In assessing the similarities and differences in contractors' and architects' views on their relationship and views on each party's responsibilities in the design and construction process, there were clear areas for improvement for each party that could further foster collaboration, efficiencies, and client satisfaction.

### ARCHITECTS

Architects should work to be more responsive and receptive to RFIs, working toward a swift and satisfactory solution.

It is important to recognize client advocacy as a joint responsibility, shared with the contractor, in good faith.

Complete and accurate documents are the most important area of concern to contractors, as well as clearly expressed design intent. Proactive communication will help alleviate bottlenecks.

In design development, it is important to be mindful of budgetary constraints and constructability, as contractors sometimes work with construction documents that work in theory but not in practice.

### CONTRACTORS

Contractors should demonstrate and clarify value-engineering being in the client's best interests and a willingness to follow design intent. Being responsive to intent or explaining why another approach is preferred will ensure the best outcome.

As sustainability drives specification and long-term thinking, contractors should be mindful of communicating the client's best interests and budgetary constraints to avoid being pigeonholed with a "cost-first" mindset.

Finally, architects are concerned about supply chain constraints and the challenges of the contractor talent pool. Being proactive in addressing these concerns will build trust.

# Chapter 2

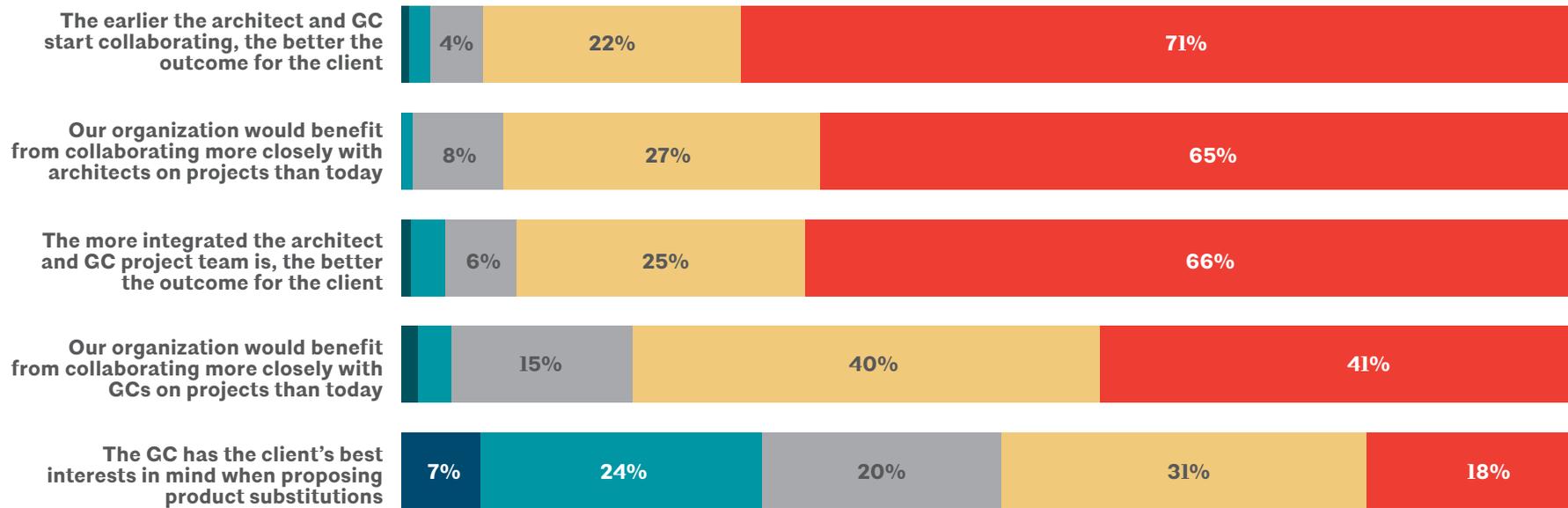
# Collaboration & project success

**Architects and contractors recognize the need for better collaboration**

# A significant majority of architects and contractors want to collaborate earlier and more closely on projects

Architects and contractors alike recognize that close collaboration starting early in the process results in better outcomes for the client and for themselves. A significant point of disagreement lies in product substitutions. Architects believe contractors are putting their needs first, while contractors maintain that they are acting in the best interests of the client.

*Percent that report somewhat agree/strongly agree by respondent type*



	Overall	Architects	Contractors
The earlier the architect and GC start collaborating, the better the outcome for the client	93%	89%	99%
Our organization would benefit from collaborating more closely with architects on projects than today	91%	–	91%
The more integrated the architect and GC project team is, the better the outcome for the client	90%	86%	97%
Our organization would benefit from collaborating more closely with GCs on projects than today	80%	80%	–
The GC has the client's best interests in mind when proposing product substitutions	49%	22%	87%

■ Strongly disagree  
 ■ Somewhat disagree  
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree  
 ■ Somewhat agree  
 ■ Strongly agree

■ Significantly higher cells are highlighted

### Where do primary responsibilities lie?

## Architects and contractors align on their responsibilities, except in the area of client advocacy

Architects and contractors also are mostly aligned regarding which party is primarily responsible for key milestones during the design and construction process. They disagree, however, about who should be primarily responsible for advocating for the client: While contractors view the task as equal, nearly half of architect respondents believe the responsibility rests mostly on themselves.

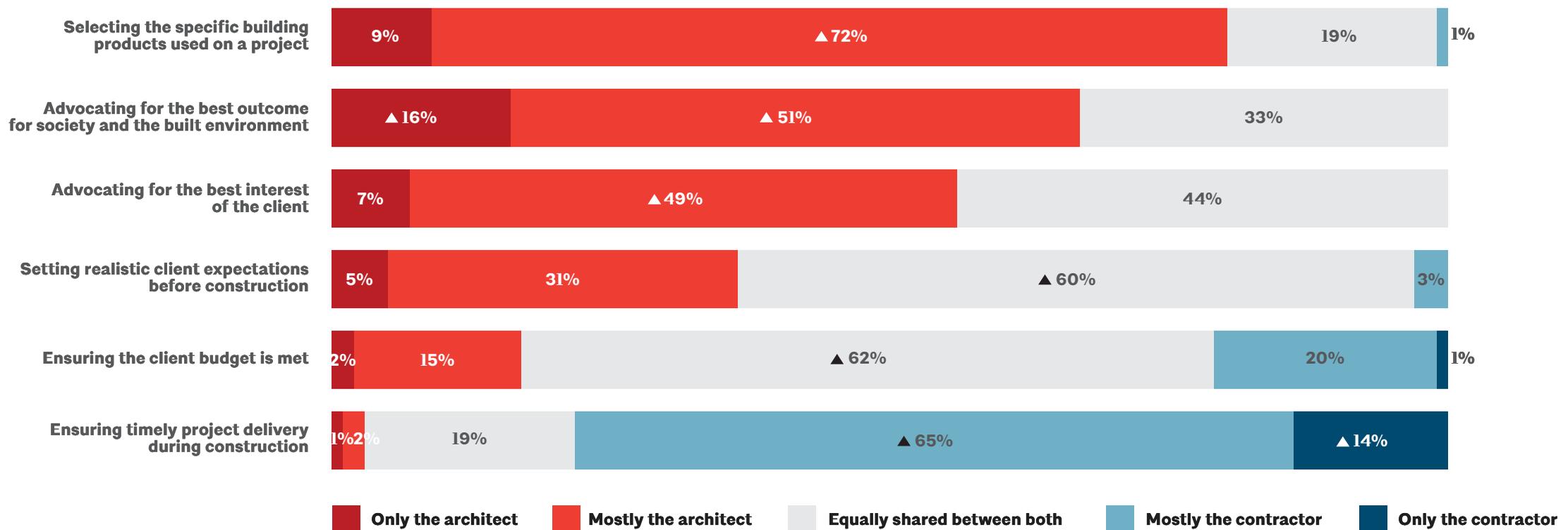
**Who do architects believe is responsible for client advocacy?**

# Architects take responsibility for product selection as well as advocacy for the client and the wider built environment

Architects firmly believe that the responsibility for selecting products and advocating for the client’s best interests rests primarily with them, rather than the contractor. The majority say the responsibility for setting client expectations and meeting budget is shared equally between architects and contractors. They also feel timely project delivery rests mostly with the contractor, though 14% of architects believe that responsibility rests solely with the contractor.

## The architect’s perspective

▲ Significantly higher percentage



Note, not all bars equal 100% due to rounding.

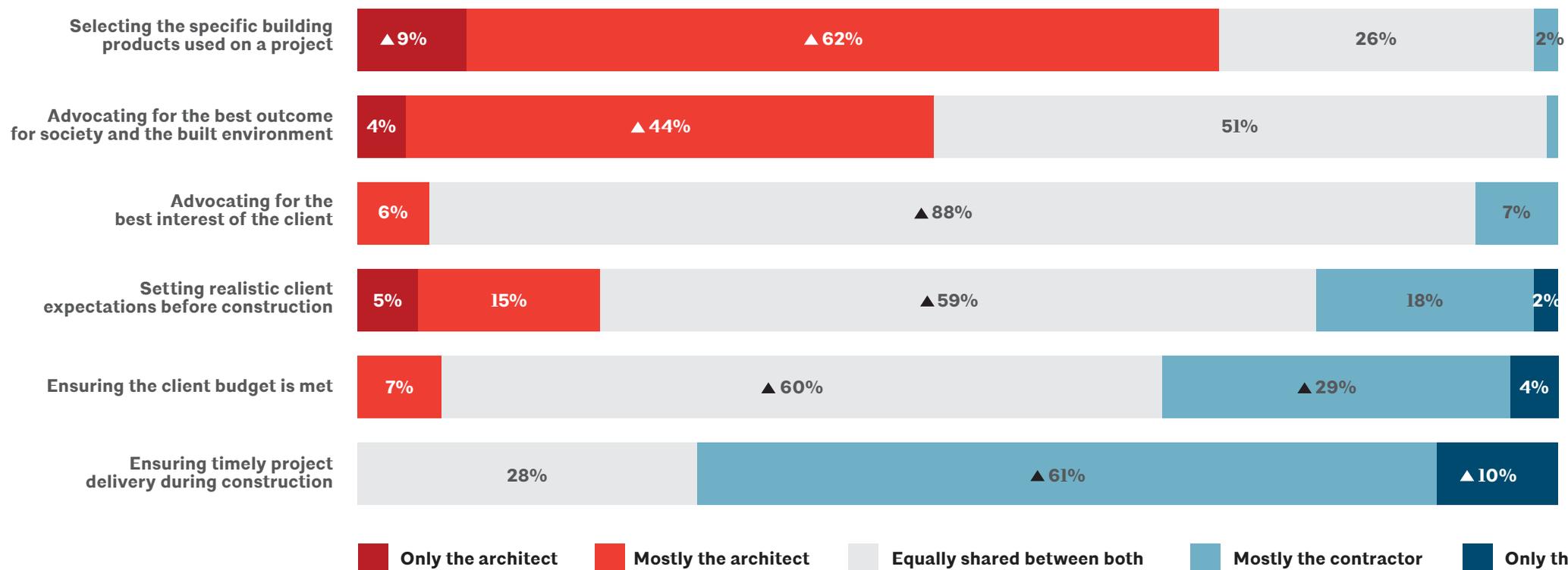
**Who do contractors believe is responsible for client advocacy?**

# Contractors see client advocacy as an equally shared responsibility and are more likely to see themselves as responsible for the client budget

Unlike architects, the majority of contractors view client advocacy as a mutual responsibility. They agree that setting client expectations and meeting budget is equally shared between the two parties. Similarly, the majority of contractors say the responsibility for ensuring timely project delivery falls on them, with 10% believing it's solely their responsibility.

## The contractor's perspective

▲ Significantly higher percentage



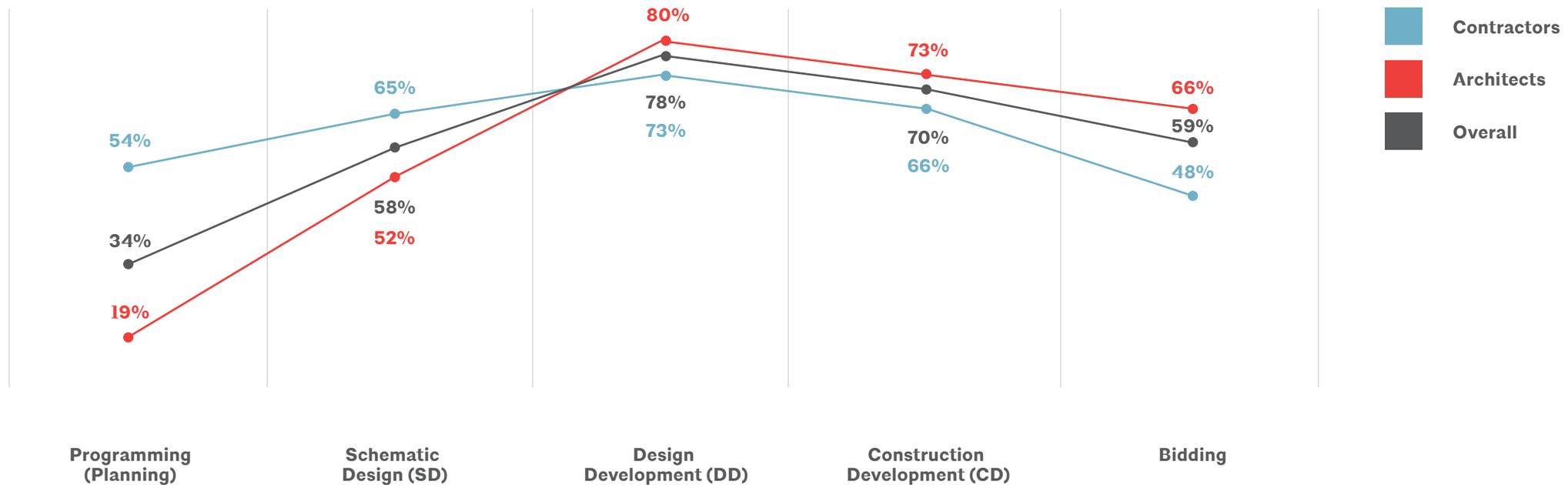
Note, not all bars equal 100% due to rounding.

**When should architects and contractors collaborate?**

# Contractors want closer collaboration early in the project, while architects seek more collaboration at the end of projects

Both architects and contractors wish for more collaboration throughout the process, though they differ on the desired level of involvement at the beginning versus the end. The majority of both parties agree that collaboration provides the best project outcome during the schematic design (SD), design development (DD), and construction development (CD) stages, with the highest levels of collaboration desired during DD. Broader differences emerge for the bidding

process, where 66% of architects believe collaboration is needed versus 48% of contractors. The sharpest contrast comes at the planning stage, where more than half of contractors believe there should be collaboration, while just 19% of architects feel the same. Small contractors (<\$25m) are significantly less likely to want early collaboration (programming, 36%; schematic design, 47%).

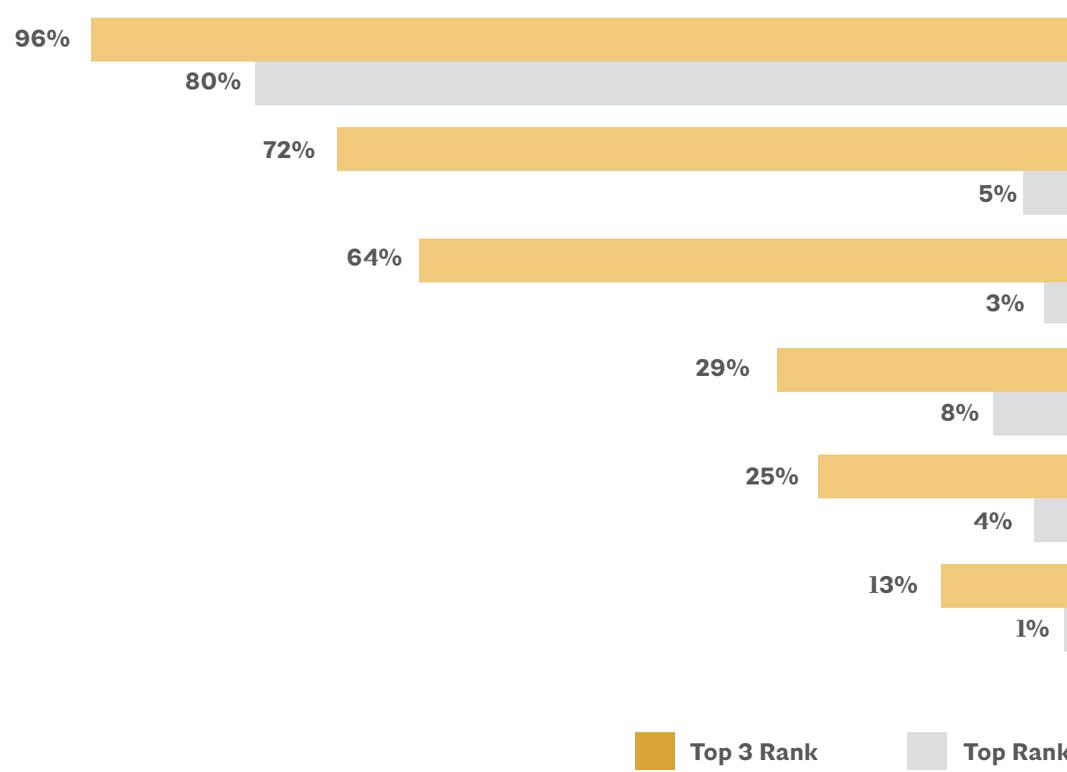


**What determines project success?**

# Client satisfaction is the leading indicator of project success for architects and contractors

Among all respondents, four in five rank client satisfaction as the most important indicator of project success, followed by being on time and then being on budget.

Architects focus more on environmental impact, while contractors focus more on on-time delivery and profitability.



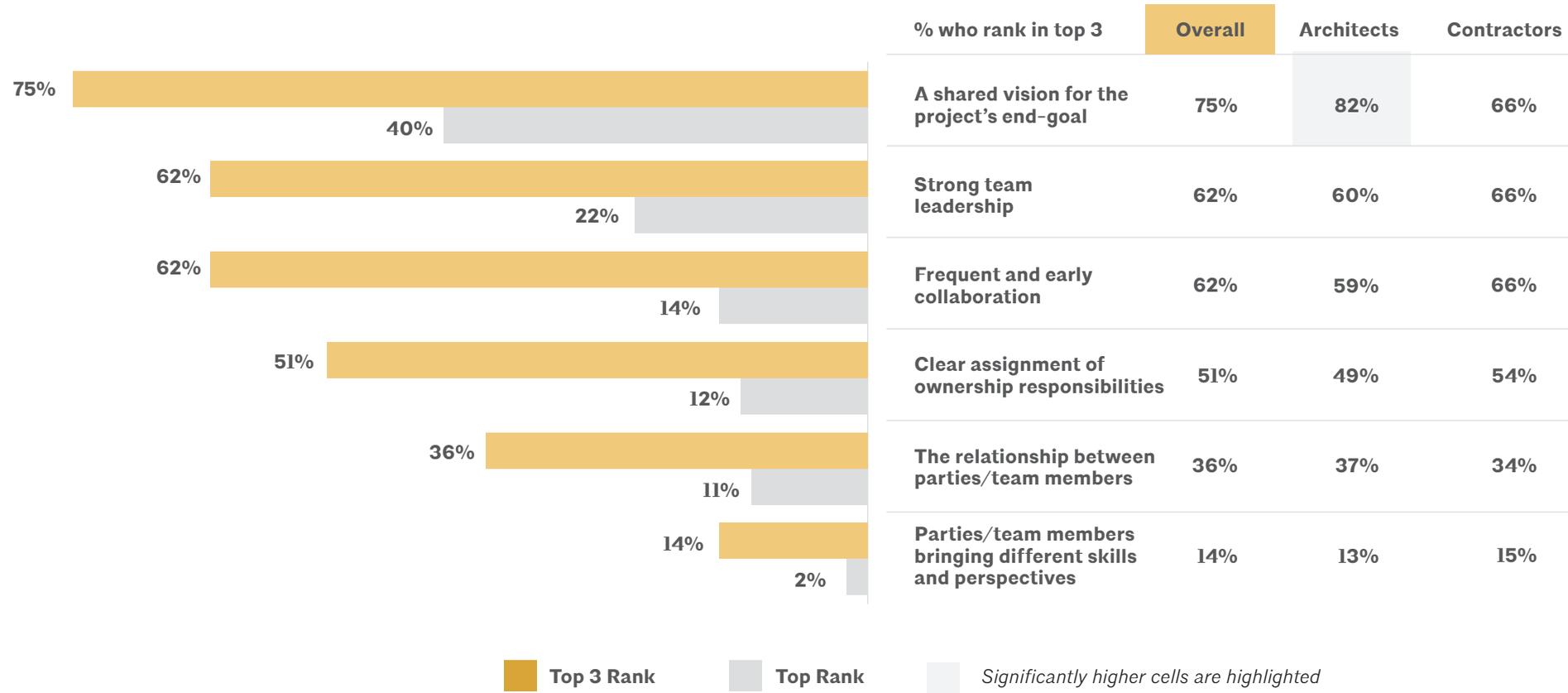
	% who rank in top 3	Overall	Architects	Contractors
Client/owner satisfaction	96%	96%	98%	95%
On-budget project delivery	72%	72%	72%	73%
On-time project delivery	64%	64%	56%	74%
A positive impact on the built environment	29%	29%	39%	15%
Profitable for my organization	25%	25%	21%	31%
Minimal RFIs/changes	13%	13%	14%	12%

*Significantly higher cells are highlighted*

**What determines team success?**

# A shared vision of the project’s end goal is the most important trait of a successful project team, especially through the eyes of architects

Architects are significantly more likely to consider a shared vision the most important factor in team success, while contractors consider leadership and frequent and early collaboration equally important. Starting collaboration early in the process and setting clear goals in writing can help ensure that architects and contractors align on a shared vision.



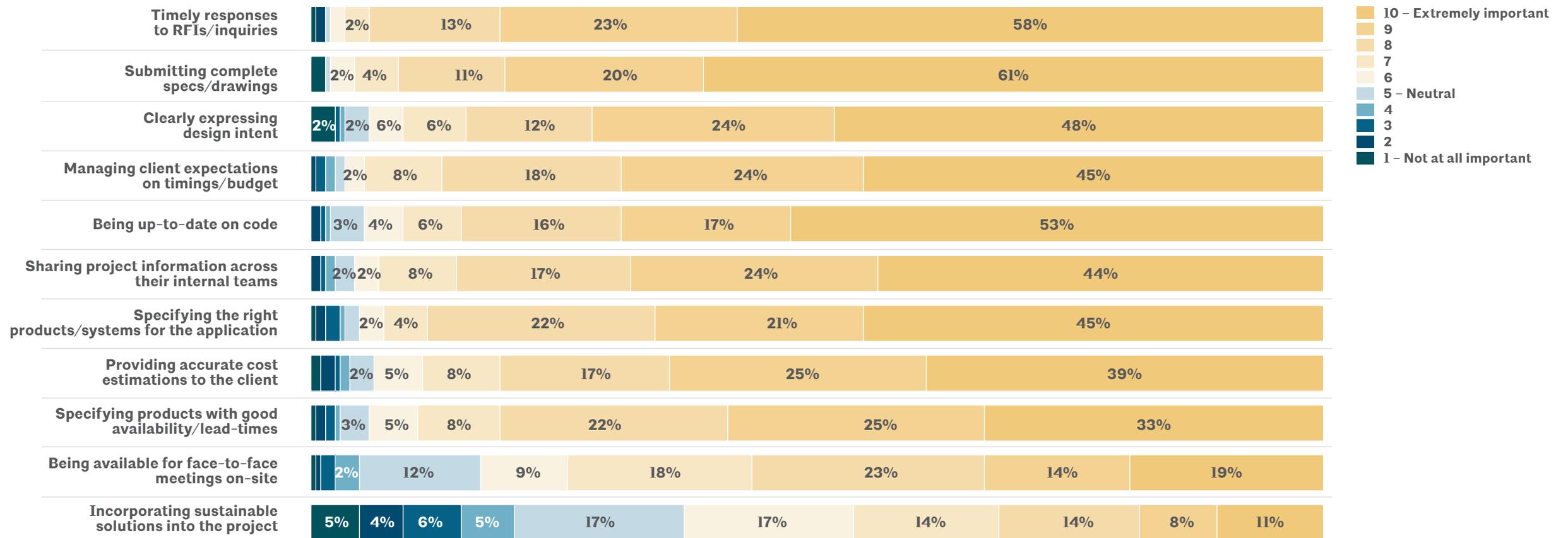
# Chapter 3

## Meeting the needs of contractors

**What is most important to contractors?**

# Contractors want architects to submit timely responses and complete drawings that clearly express design intent

The majority of contractors want architects to provide timely responses to requests for information (RFIs) as well as complete specifications and drawings. Similarly, they place importance on clearly expressing design intent. Sustainable solutions were of the least importance. The most important needs were consistent across different types of contractor roles (GCs, CMs, subcontractors) and contractor firm sizes.



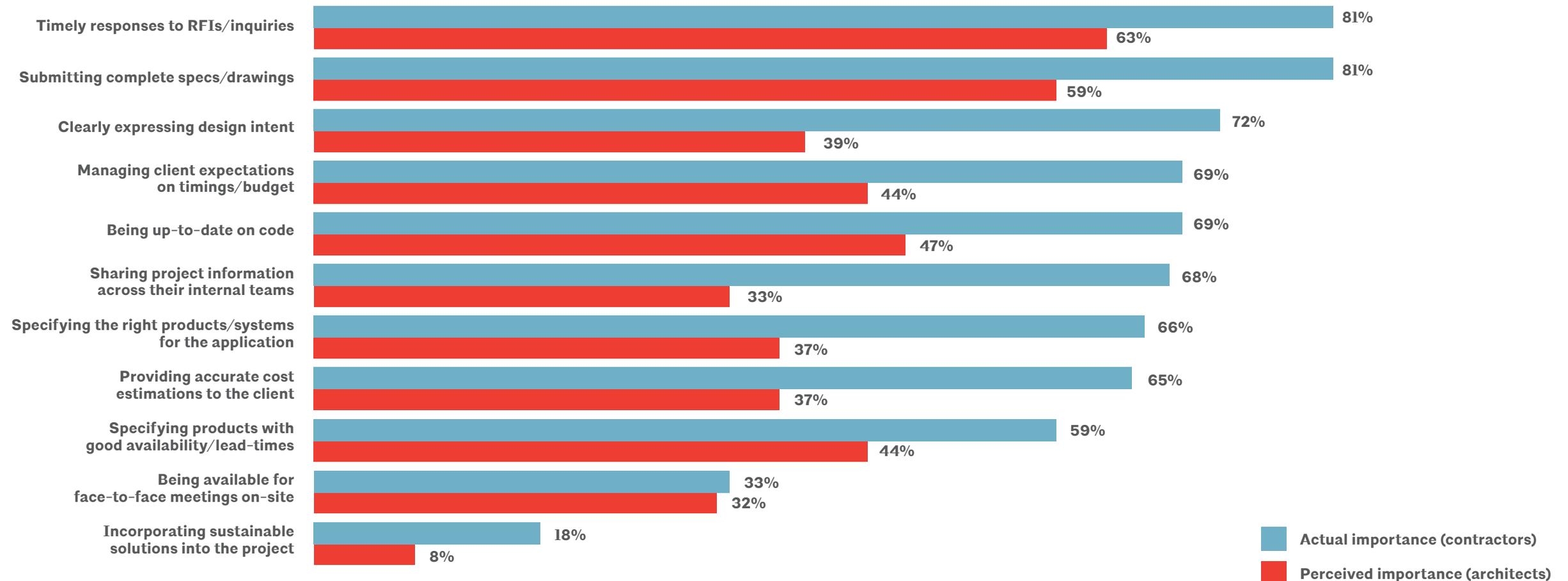
Base: n=209  
(Contractors)

Q6. When it comes to working with architects, how important are the following to you?  
Please answer on a scale from '1' meaning 'not at all important' to '10' meaning 'extremely important'

**What do architects think contractors want?**

# Architects underestimate the importance to contractors of clearly expressed design intent

When architects were asked how much importance contractors place on these factors, they correctly predicted timely responses and complete specs. However, they underestimated the importance of clear expression of design intent and overestimated the importance of specifying products with good availability and lead times.



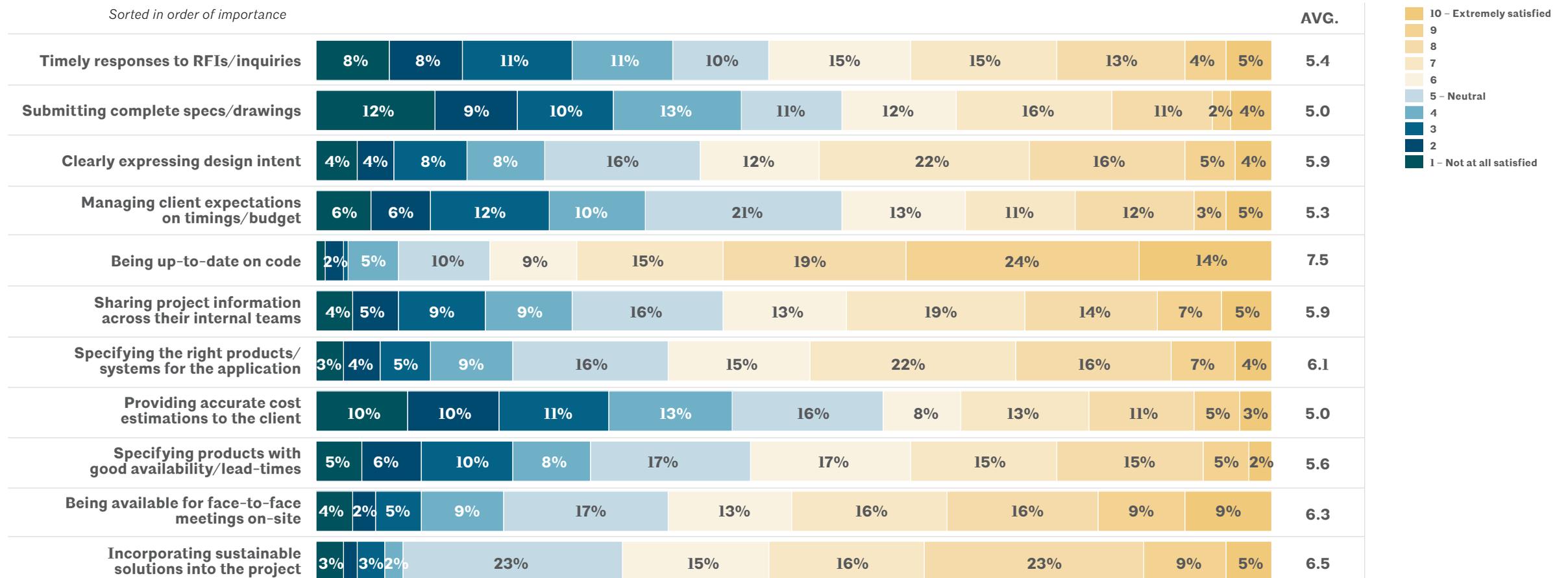
Q6. When it comes to working with architects, how important are the following to you?

Q7. How important do you think general contractors (GCs) consider the following when it comes to working with architects?

**Contractor satisfaction with architects**

# Architects fall short of expectations in the most important areas for contractors

In the areas in which contractors place the most importance—timely responses, submitting complete specs and drawings, and clearly expressed design intent—they reported room for improvement by architects. Contractors were most satisfied with architects’ code knowledge.



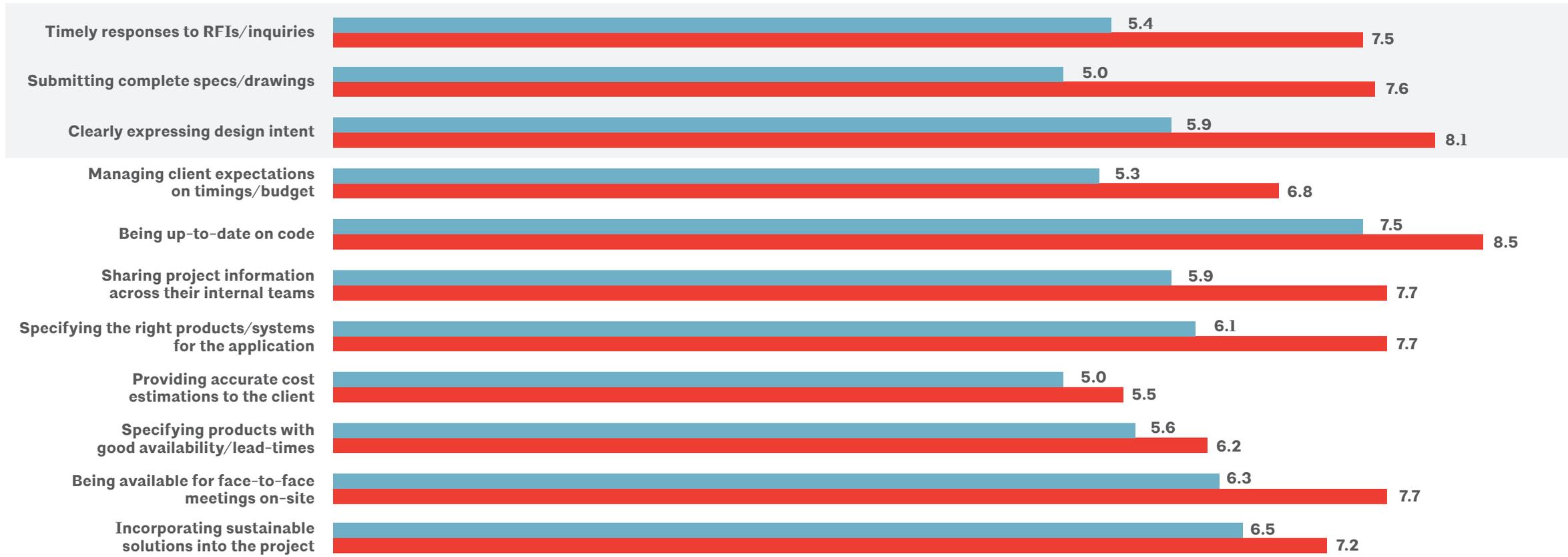
Base: n=209 (Contractors)

Q8. And thinking about your experience working with architects in the last 12 months, how satisfied are you with their performance in each of these areas? Please answer on a scale from '1' meaning 'not at all satisfied' to '10' meaning 'extremely satisfied'

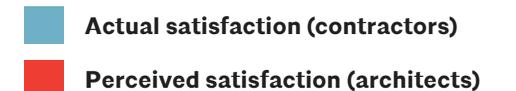
**How do architects perceive contractor satisfaction?**

# How do architects perceive contractor satisfaction?

Architects overestimate contractor satisfaction in all areas, with gaps in actual and perceived satisfaction greatest in the areas of most importance to contractors: timely responses to requests for information (RFIs), submitting complete specs, and clearly expressing design intent.



Sorted in order of importance

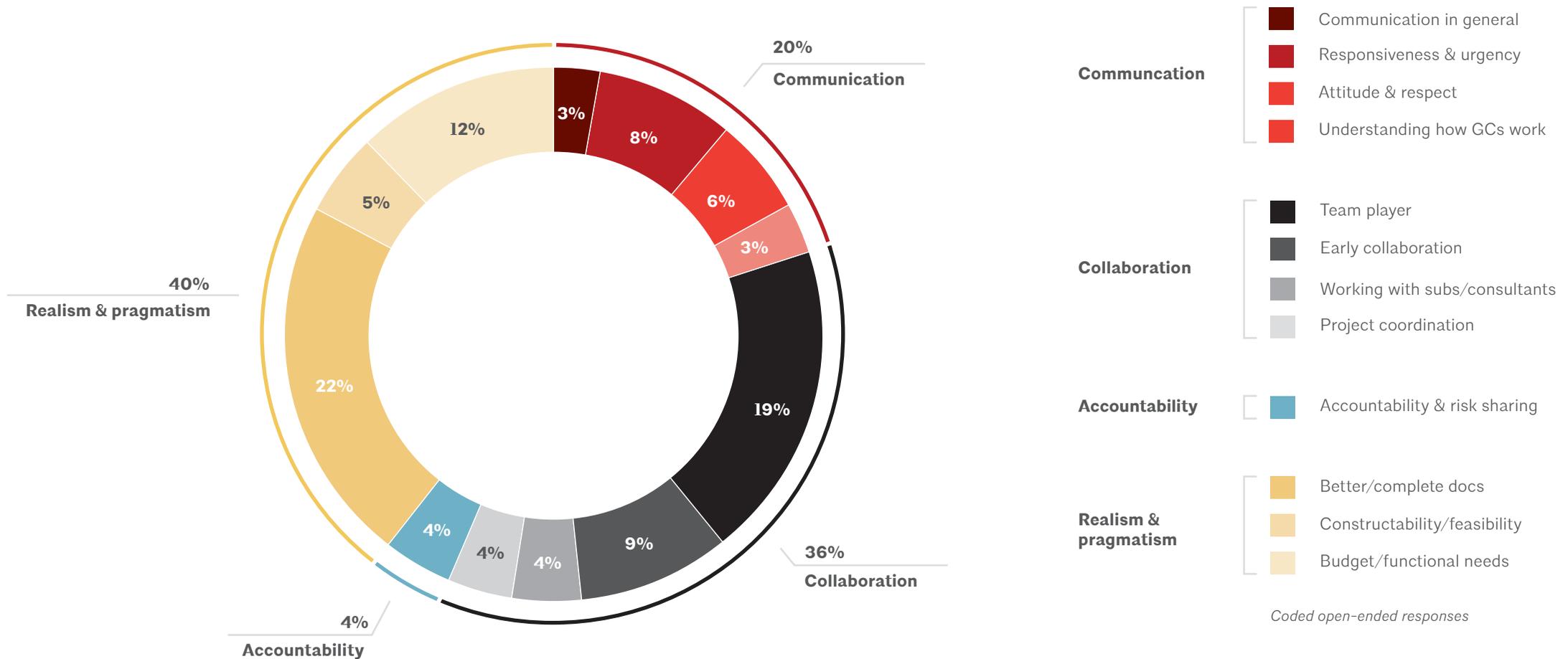


**What do contractors want architects to improve most?**

# Contractors want complete specs and drawings, a “team-player” mentality, and realism about budget constraints from architects

If contractors could improve only one thing about working with architects, they would choose more complete documents and drawings. Contractors feel design intent is often unclear or documents are incomplete, which requires additional communication and RFIs, and can slow down a project. They are also seeking a more collaborative, team-player mentality. Often, the two sides can seem at odds, with finger-pointing and poor communication.

Some contractors feel that architects fail to keep budgetary constraints and functional client needs in mind. This leads to necessary value-engineering to meet the client budget and lengthens project timelines. Many contractors want to start collaborating with architects earlier, including during design development. In addition, greater responsiveness to RFIs and communication would help keep projects on track.



*Coded open-ended responses*

Base: n=170  
(Contractors)

Q10. If you could improve one thing about working with architects, what would it be? -Coded

### What would contractors improve most in working with architects?

## Contractors would like to see more realism and pragmatism from architects when it comes to project constraints and documents

#### CONTRACTORS

“Better understanding their client, finding their desires for their budget, designing to their needs and expectations, and not creating ‘art’ that costs money and is not functional to the operations of the owner”

“[I’d like to] work with architects who understand how construction happens and understand that everything works in CAD, but that doesn’t mean it can actually be built in the field.”

“Actually design a project within the restraints that are present, be that code, budget, or time, and relay that in a timely manner.”

“Improve listening skills on both sides of the table. Architects need to pay more attention to the budget and not always leave the contractor being the ‘bad guy’ telling the owner that they are over budget.”

“As an architect working for a GC, I’ve noticed that the details I used to draw (when I was a young architect) are no longer in the construction documents and are now required as ‘shop drawing’ submittals from my subcontractors. Scope definition that was part of my job as a young architect has unintentionally become the responsibility of the general contractor (me) and my subcontractors. The specifications for design-bid-build projects are incomplete, incorrect, or, at their worst, unedited. It has led to major disputes on the construction site. I spend most of my time correcting the design when we are in the middle of construction.”

### What would contractors most improve about working with architects?

## Contractors are keen to develop closer partnerships through earlier and more trusted collaboration rather than an “us-versus-them” mentality

CONTRACTORS	
“We are on the same team. If I sink, you sink. Leave your ego out of it.”	“Understanding the current supply chain and the numerous gyrations that contractors are handling in order to obtain product without following the ‘letter of the contract,’ but rather the ‘spirit of the contract.’ [In other words,] don’t insist upon a bunch of substitution requests, but rather work as part of the team and understand the challenges. Also, understand that RFIs are typically a vehicle the GCs use to communicate with our subcontractors to keep everyone on the same page. So clear and concise responses are crucial. Open-ended responses merely add more confusion. Most GCs have already vetted the issue with the AOR prior to issuing an RFI, so the appropriate response should be easy without adding yet another layer of questions.”
“Getting architects to understand what value a GC brings to the team when brought in during schematic design phase.”	
“Work with the GC/CM. We are a team and can get projects built better and faster if we work that way. If it is adversarial relationship, it makes it hard on both parties and puts the owner in the middle of the battle.”	
“Develop some industry-wide method to share experience (e.g., have new construction engineers/superintendents intern with architects for a year and vice versa).”	
	“Architects should be taking the lead in making sure the design documents are coordinated with those generated by their engineering consultants.”

### What would contractors most improve about working with architects?

## Clearer and more responsive communication would improve working relations between contractors and architects

#### CONTRACTORS

“Change their attitude toward contractors. We are all not out to get you; we are professionals, and when we ask a question, it is because something doesn’t seem right on the drawings. They also need to take responsibility for their subconsultants. Design coordination has gotten worse and worse.”

“Timely submittal, RFI, and change order processing is imperative for success. Delays with these items increases undue financial and scheduling burdens on the GCs.”

“To better understand A&E’s processes and workflows. Knowing that the design process is not as simple as SD, DD, CD, etc., yet our industry and myself don’t know a better way to describe this process. This becomes more difficult to communicate to an owner.”

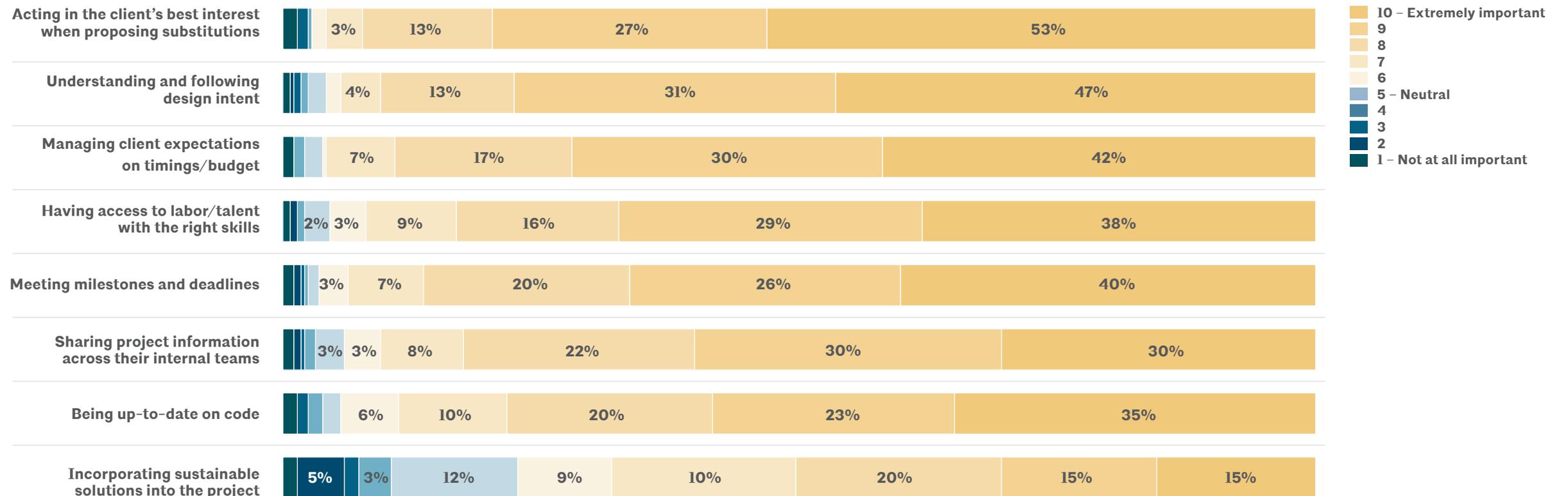
# Chapter 4

## What architects want from contractors

**What is most important to architects?**

# Architects want contractors to act in the client’s interests when proposing substitutions, follow design intent, and manage client expectations

While contractors are challenged by architects not relaying design intent clearly, architects focus on the contractor’s ability and willingness to follow design intent. This suggests that communicating design intent through documents is a significant area of improvement in the relationship. The most important needs architects have from contractors are consistent across different types of architects.



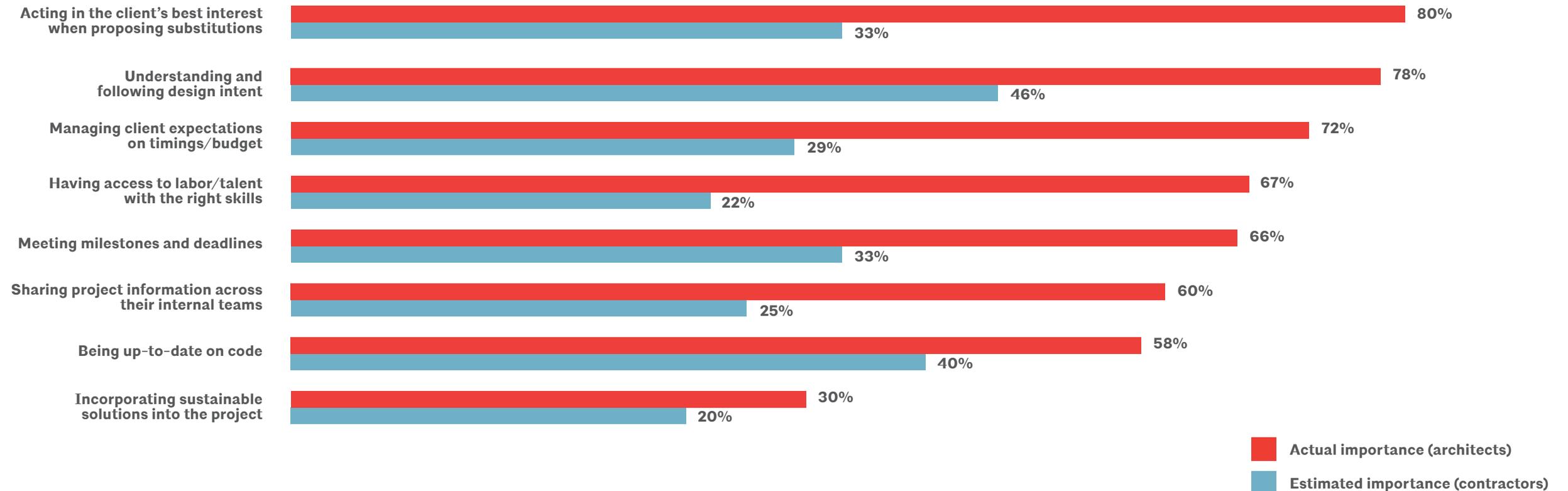
Base: n=286 (Architects)

Q11. When it comes to working with general contractors (GCs), how important are the following to you? Please answer on a scale from '1' meaning 'not at all important' to '10' meaning 'extremely important'

## What do contractors think architects want?

# Contractors underestimate the architect's focus on skilled labor availability and overestimate the focus on being up to date on code

Contractors had slightly less alignment on what is most important to architects but recognized the importance architects place on understanding and following design intent and acting in the client's best interests in proposing product substitutions. Contractors overestimated the importance of being up to date on codes and underestimated the importance of having access to labor with proper skills.



Q11. When it comes to working with general contractors, how important are the following to you?

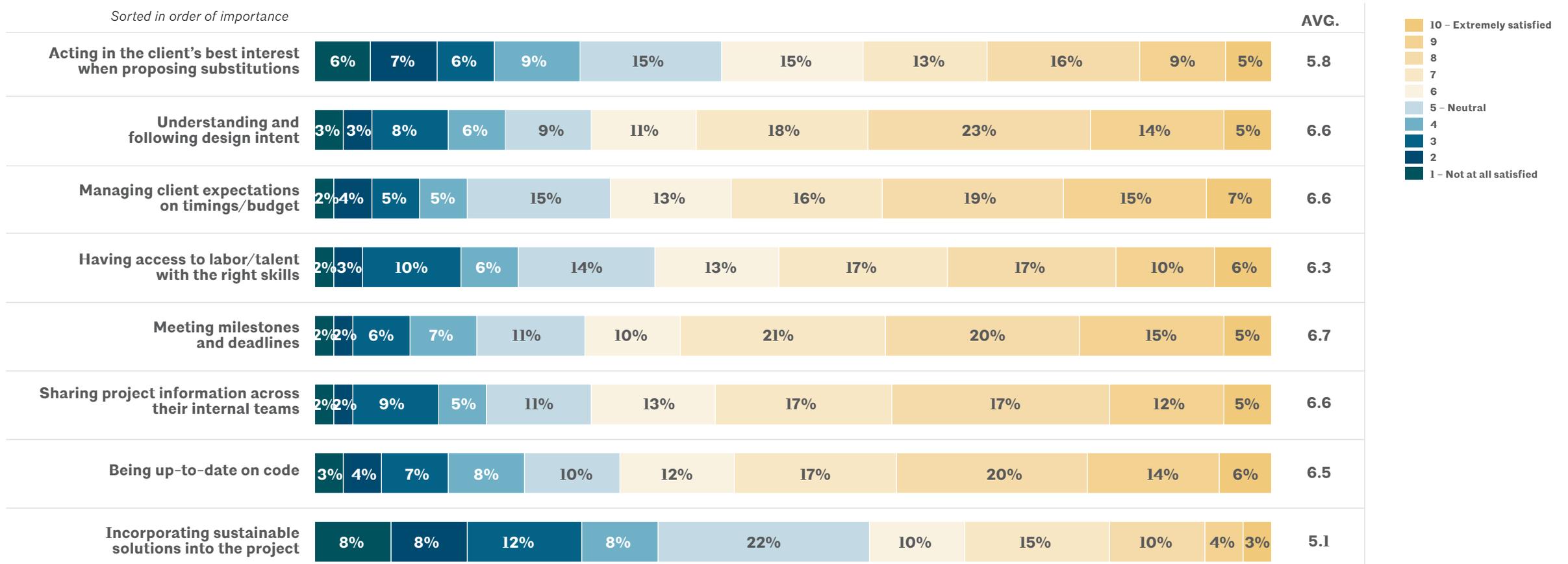
Q12. How important do you think architects consider the following when it comes to working with general contractors (GCs)?

**Architect satisfaction with contractors**

# Architects are not convinced that contractors propose substitutions with the client’s best interests in mind but are content with most other areas

The area in which architects place the most importance with contractors, acting in the client’s best interests when proposing product substitutions, is also one of the two areas in which they are least satisfied. Other areas of importance offered higher levels of satisfaction. Architects who do not work in an architecture firm are significantly more satisfied with contractors incorporating sustainable solutions into projects.

This reflects the value proposition that integrated project teams have been employing for years when collaborating on sustainably designed affordable projects. Partners/principals are significantly less satisfied with contractors meeting milestones and managing clients on timings/budget, likely because they have more exposure to those aspects of projects.



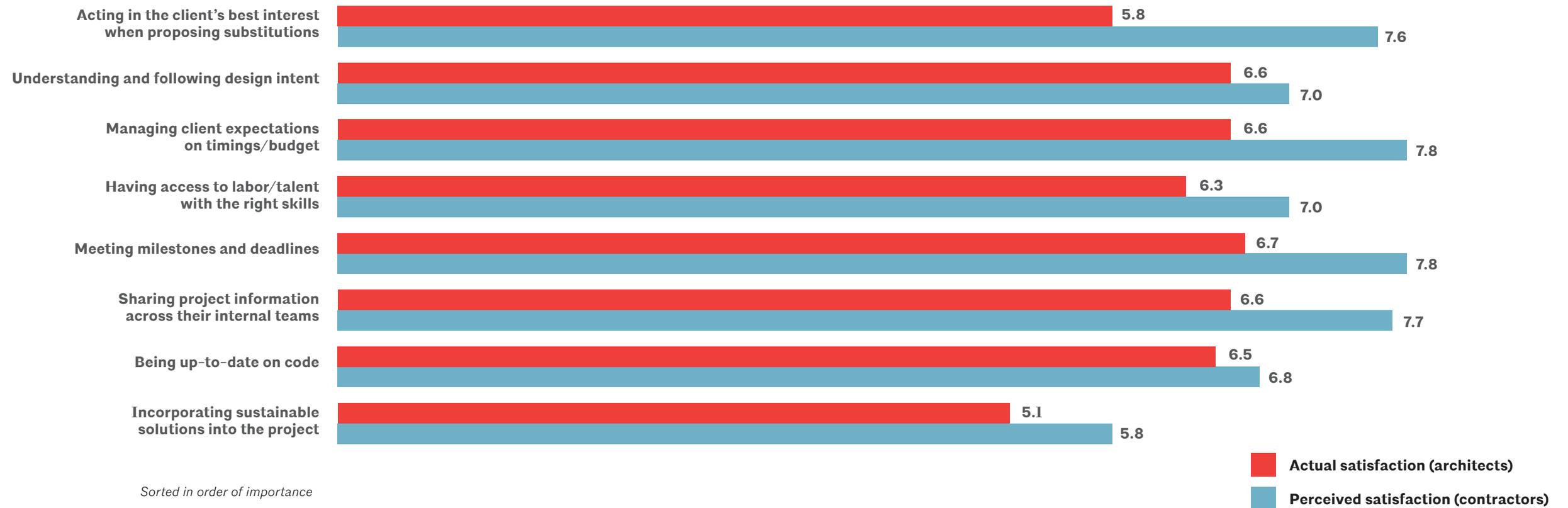
Base: n=286 (Architects)

Q13. And thinking about your experience working with general contractors (GCs) in the last 12 months, how satisfied are you with their performance in each of these areas? Please answer on a scale from '1' meaning 'not at all satisfied' to '10' meaning 'extremely satisfied'

**How do contractors perceive architect satisfaction?**

# Attitude toward product substitutions is the biggest gap between actual and perceived satisfaction with contractors

Like architects, contractors overestimated architects' satisfaction in all areas, with the largest discrepancy also in the area of most importance to architects: acting in the client's best interest when proposing product substitutions. This leaves room for improvement and indicates that more needs to be done to hit the mark for both audiences.

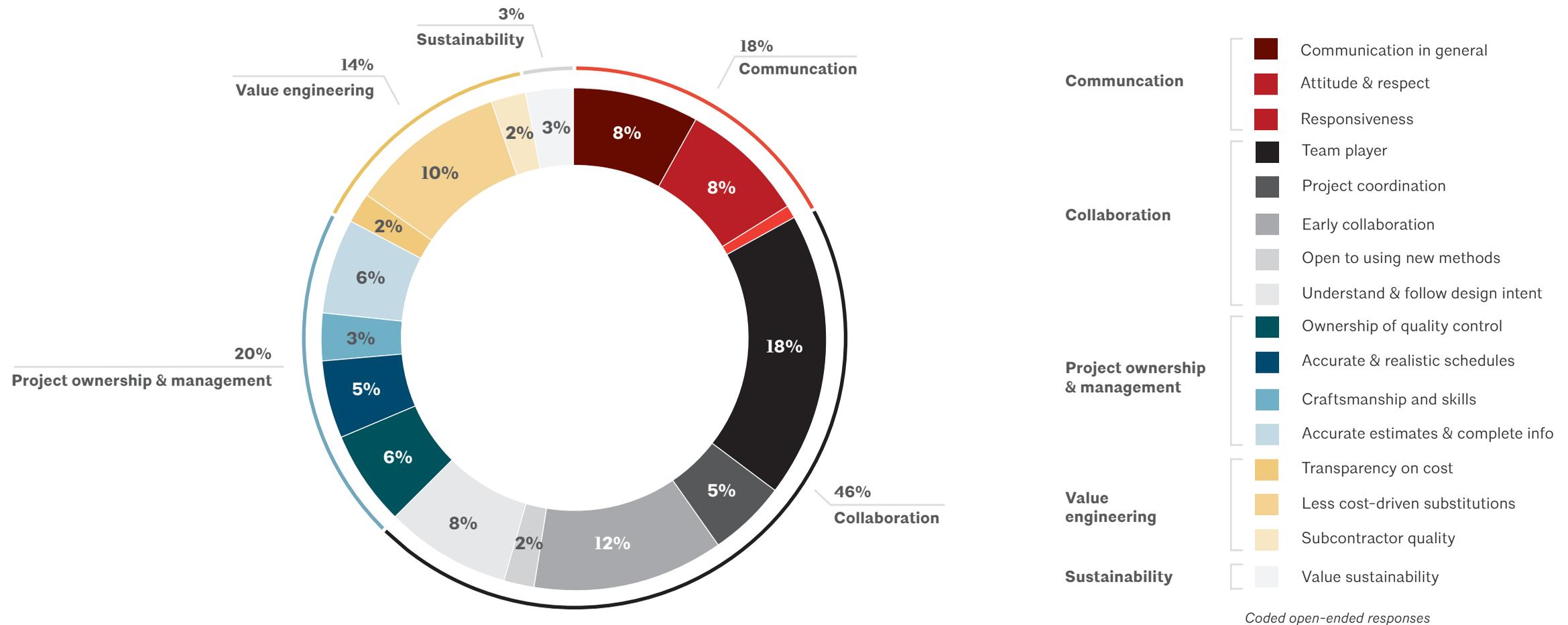


**What do architects want contractors to improve most?**

# Architects want to work as trusted teams with earlier collaboration and less of a “cost-first” mindset throughout the project

Like contractors, architects desire a more collaborative team-player mentality, with collaboration occurring earlier in the process. Contractors can fail to involve the architects in discussions with the client, especially concerning product substitutions. Many architects feel that contractors are too cost-focused, and most doubt that they have the client’s best interests at heart when proposing substitutions. Contractors

could do a better job of understanding documentation and following design intent. Some try to make changes without involving the architect or seem reluctant to change their ways of working. As with contractors, a number of architects mention an unproductive attitude between both parties. A large majority want to work more closely and as more of a team.



Base: n=220 (Architects)

Q15. If you could improve one thing about working with general contractors (GCs), what would that be?

## What would architects most improve about working with contractors?

# Architects want closer cooperation at earlier stages of the project and more alignment on the level of detail required from drawings and CDs

### ARCHITECTS

“Reading the drawings, especially the details. If they are not drawn in the way they will be constructed, then I would be more than happy to discuss. Too often, the contractors overlook small details, and the time to change/fix has passed.”

“Contractors and architects should share liability. Design-build projects offer the greatest potential for success on all fronts (full integration, provision of relevant skills when they are needed, etc.), provided all parties commit to the same degree of responsibility.”

“Not having to provide excessive detailing. Our CDs are twice as large today as they were 20 to 30 years ago.”

“Respect each other’s expertise and be a team with the client working in the best interest of a successful project.”

“The design-bid-build relationship between the architect and GC is a large obstacle between us. While the checks and balances are important, the tension created when one side doesn’t have the full picture is avoidable. Nobody likes asking valuable questions during a competitive bid. Getting an earlier start with your GCs has always resulted in a better product. Better conversations about constructability, materials, cost, and team capabilities are had. There are also fewer surprises and less tension when issues arise during the construction process.”

## What would architects most improve about working with contractors?

# Value-engineering can be a point of contention when project teams are less integrated or when communication breaks down

### ARCHITECTS

“Understanding that a collaborative approach is best between architect and contractor, and not worry so much about how much money they will make on a project.”

“Be honest and more interested in building the building we designed and not trying to ‘change order’ the project to death to increase their profit margin.

“Having clear communication when products are value-engineered down to something less expensive. Including the architect in the conversation rather than telling them after the fact what has been chosen. GCs being collaborative in finding solutions to conflicts when they choose a substitute product over what has been specified.”

“The project teams are unfamiliar with their responsibilities per the AIA contract, which causes a lot of problems during the execution of the project. RFIs usually don’t propose solutions; I get frequent product substitution requests for inferior products, which benefit only the GC and wastes my time; they don’t order materials in a timely manner and account for lead times (COVID delays aside); they don’t accept the responsibility of knowing the drawings inside and out, and coordinating between the trades, etc.”

“Figure out a way that we can stop using the open bidding process of multiple GCs as the best solution for clients. This may provide an initial low bid, but once the bid is awarded, the GCs think this is now the beginning of the fight. The line is drawn, and they are looking for every loophole to charge additional monies and provide poor quality that meets the bare minimum of the drawings and specifications. The owners believe they get the best value, but it really is a dogfight with the GCs to get the project done.”

# Chapter 5

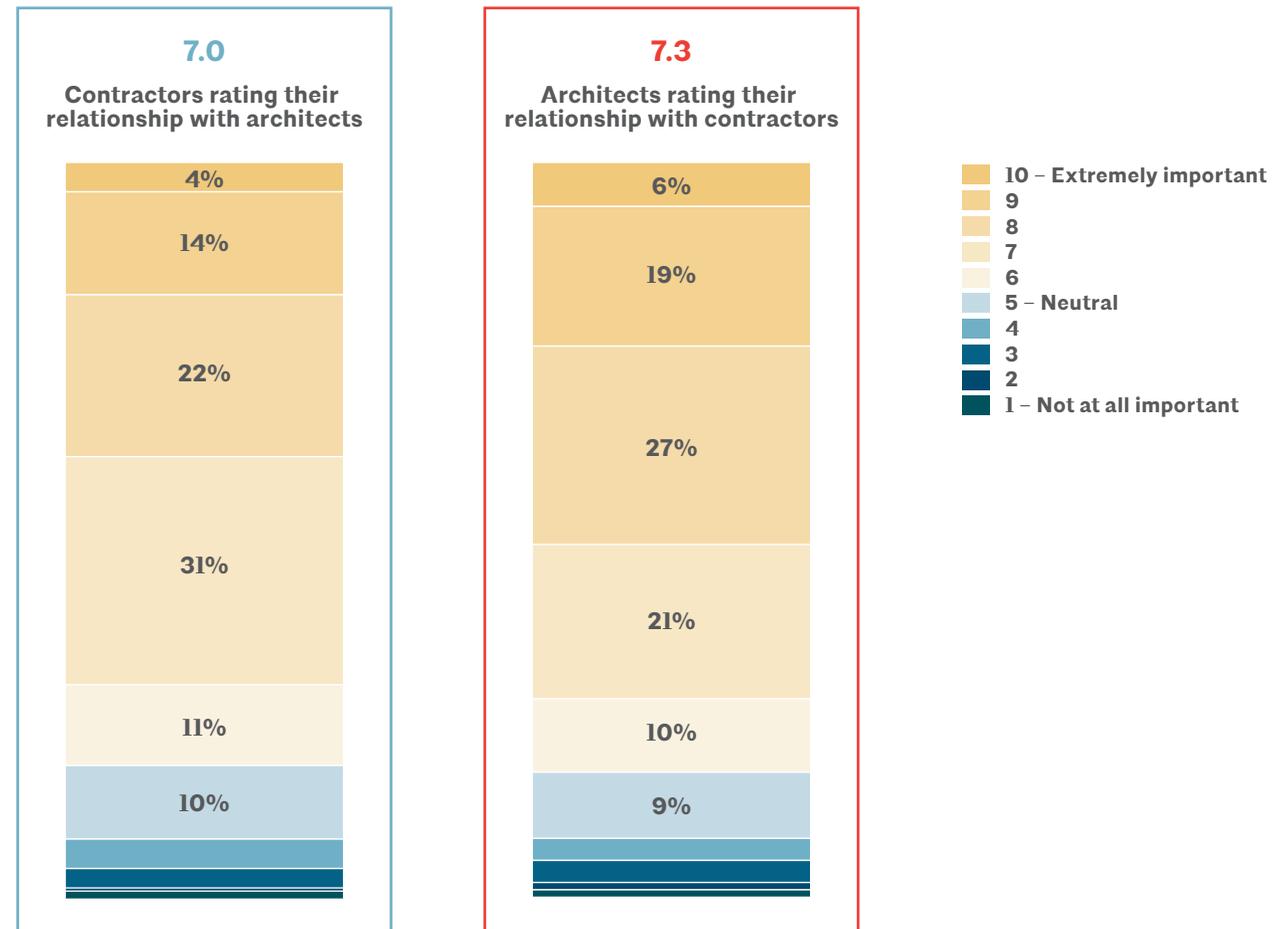
# The architect-contractor relationship

**How is the working relationship between architects and contractors?**

# Working relationship assessments reflect a market where both sides usually encounter both positive and negative project relationships

Contractors and architects both rated their relationships with the other as satisfactory. Contractors offering the strongest relationship scores were GCs or CMs (not subcontractors) and those 55 and older. Architects offering the

strongest relationship scores consider the task of selecting building projects a joint responsibility, consider advocating for the client a joint responsibility, and believe the contractor has the client’s best interests in mind when proposing substitutions.



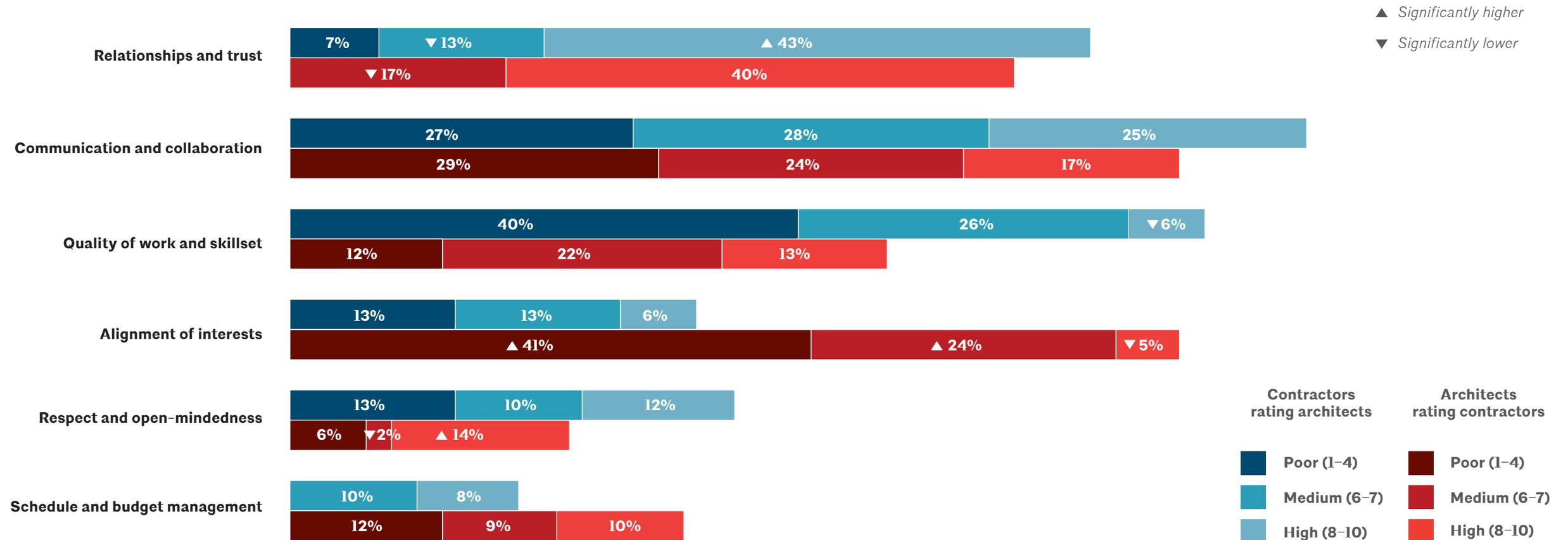
Q16. Overall how would you rate your working relationship with architects across all the projects you have worked on in the last 12 months?  
 Q17. Overall how would you rate your working relationship with general contractors (GCs) across all the projects you have worked on in the last 12 months?

**Why do contractors and architects view relationships a certain way?**

# Trust, communication, and approach to collaboration mostly determine how working relationships are viewed

Most participants rated in the middle of the scale because they often have both good and bad working relationships on different projects. Both architects and contractors are significantly more likely to cite long-term relationships and trust as reasons for high scores. Contractors rating “poor” are more likely to cite poor architect deliverables such

as erroneous or incomplete drawings and documentation. Architects scoring lower are most likely to cite misalignment of interests, with the contractor perceived to be looking out for their own interests and margins ahead of the client’s or wider project team’s.



Base: n=337  
(Coded answers) Q18. Why did you give that score? –Coded

## The importance of relationships and trust

# Long-term relationships are a source of revenue growth and client retention, but some project delivery types stress the relationship

ARCHITECTS	CONTRACTORS
<p>“We perform a mix of project delivery types (design-build, design-assist, design-bid-build). In general, we have very strong working relationships with architects on design-build projects. On other project delivery types, our experience has been mixed.”</p>	<p>“Our working relationship with GCs is very good. Our best projects are when the GCs are engaged as a part of the team early in the project design. When we have hard bid projects, we have to engage several (sometimes four or more) prime bidders and coordinate their work. This is where we end up being the earlier team leader to manage expectations.”</p>
<p>“We earn a very high percentage of our sales as a result of our successful team-based approach to working closely with architects and owners to achieve mutual success. Roughly 75% of our sales result from repeat clients, where often the architect/design team repeats as well.”</p>	<p>“When I can, I suggest contractors to clients that are good at what they do, and I enjoy working with them. I also set the tone of being professional, doing good work, and having fun at work.”</p>
<p>“We earn a very high percentage of our sales as a result of our successful team-based approach to working closely with architects and owners to achieve mutual success. Roughly 75% of our sales result from repeat clients, where often the architect/design team repeats as well.”</p>	<p>“On our publicly bid projects, some of the contractors we work with have really tight margins and find every change order opportunity. When we are able to prequalify contractors, we sometimes get a more seasoned contractor that is more of a team player within the owner-architect-contractor relationship.”</p>

## The importance of communication and collaboration

# Earlier collaboration and more clarity around design intent is likely to set projects up for success for all parties

ARCHITECTS	CONTRACTORS
<p>“The lack of communication and design intent caused issues. The saving grace was the cooperative attitude and amicability to keep with the owners’ satisfaction.”</p>	<p>“GCs generally have the right intention. The challenge becomes the interpretation of the client’s goals and the value placed on decisions made earlier in the process. Every decision has a cost implication, both upfront and over the life of the building. Too often, the decisions made early in the project are sacrificed for the value of savings later in the project, many times at the cost of long-term performance for the client.”</p>
<p>“Architects are designers, not managers. In general, they do a poor job of managing the process in an orderly fashion. If we built buildings the way they design projects, they would never get completed. They spend way too much time on the design aesthetic and not enough on details.”</p>	<p>“I tend to collaborate and work as a team with GCs. We avoid setting up adversarial dynamics.”</p>
<p>“For the most part, we collaborate well together but would benefit from having a meeting before the job to understand how everyone measures success of the project and what their goals are.”</p>	<p>“Design intent is sometimes sacrificed—either because the field crew doesn’t ever read the drawings, or they are just doing it the way they normally do.”</p>

## The importance of quality of work and skill set

# Architects are concerned about willingness to follow design intent, while contractors worry about lack of responsiveness and incomplete docs

ARCHITECTS	CONTRACTORS
<p>“Over the last 12 months, we have worked with architects who have had extremely poor drawings and have not had the ability to make decisions on corrections needed in the field. Some architects have excelled at this, but performance has been better on design-build project delivery models.”</p>	<p>“Some contractors have been exceptional, but most have not. The quality of workmanship isn’t as good as it should be with some of the contractors we have used.”</p>
<p>“Architectural plans and specs lack so much information. Most of the time there are so many RFIs due to a lack of information to build a project. This causes delays.”</p>	<p>“I work well with GCs. I understand where they are coming from and want to work with them to accomplish design intent in the most constructible, cost-efficient way.”</p>
<p>“Architect abilities and ownership for their work have declined over the past fifteen years.”</p>	<p>“The GCs I have worked with recently do not follow the drawings we have labored over accurately enough. They only refer to the drawings as they begin work on that particular trade. They call and say they cannot find information on a particular item that is well-detailed in the drawings, indicating that they have not studied the drawings.”</p>

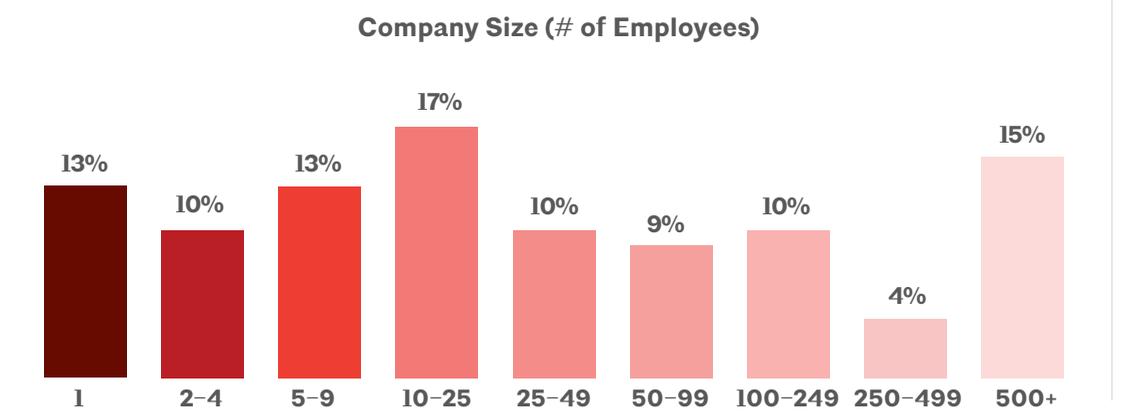
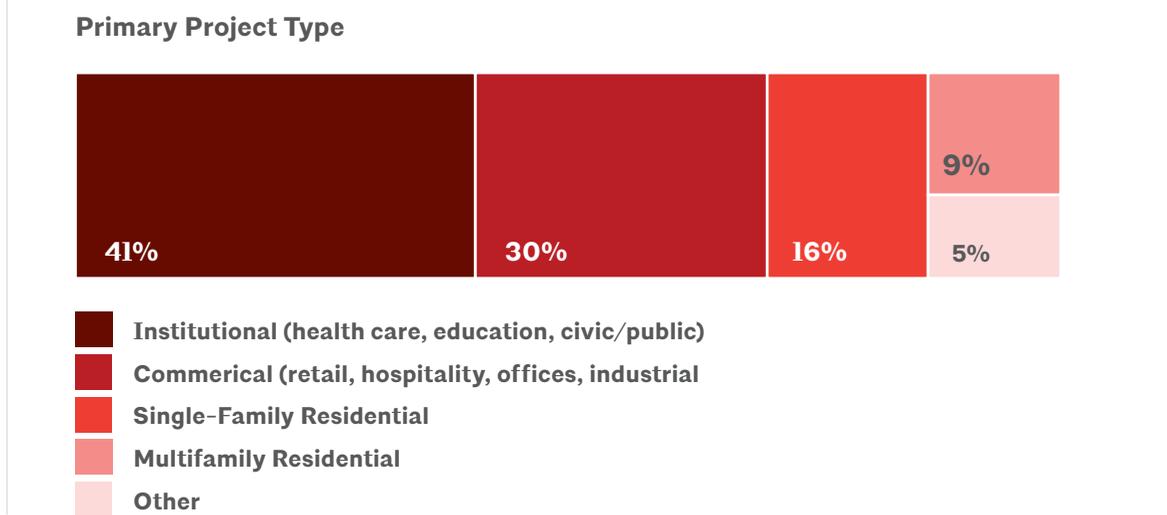
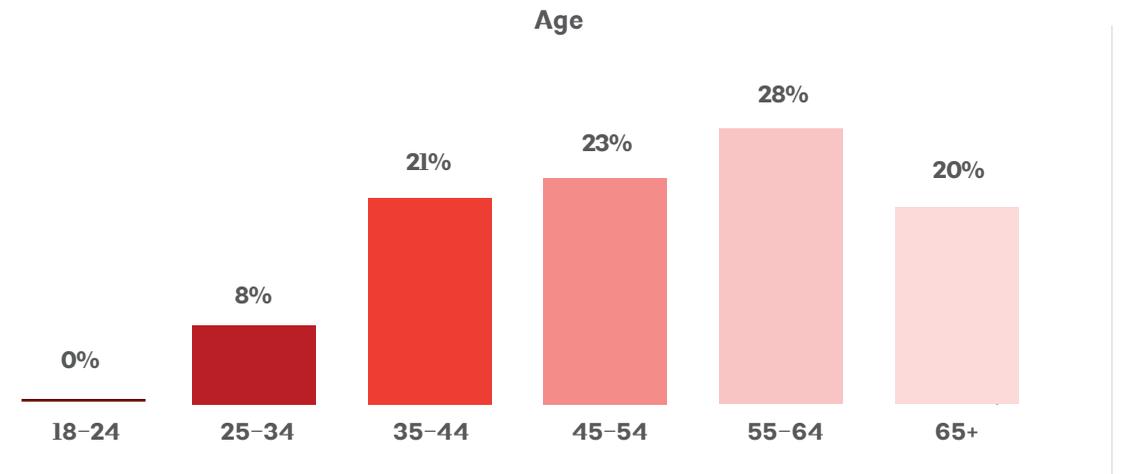
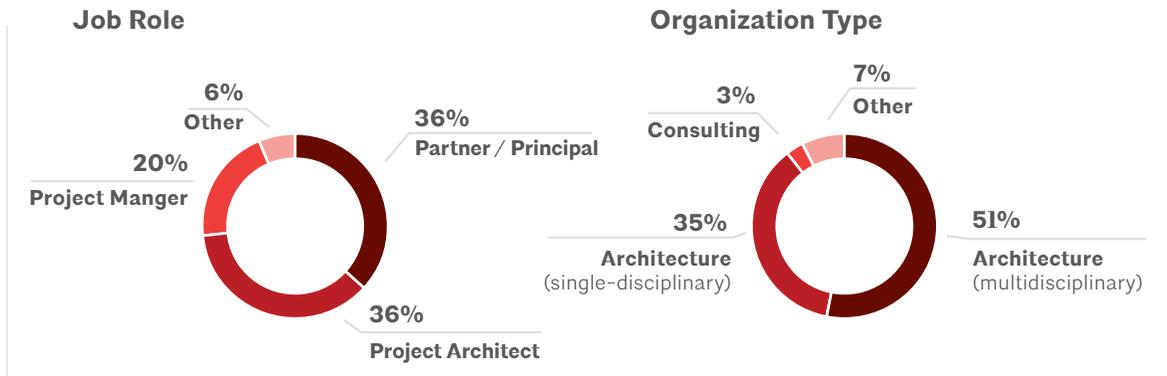
## The importance of alignment of interests

# Architects see product substitutions as self-interested, while contractors sometimes consider architects overly defensive of their design

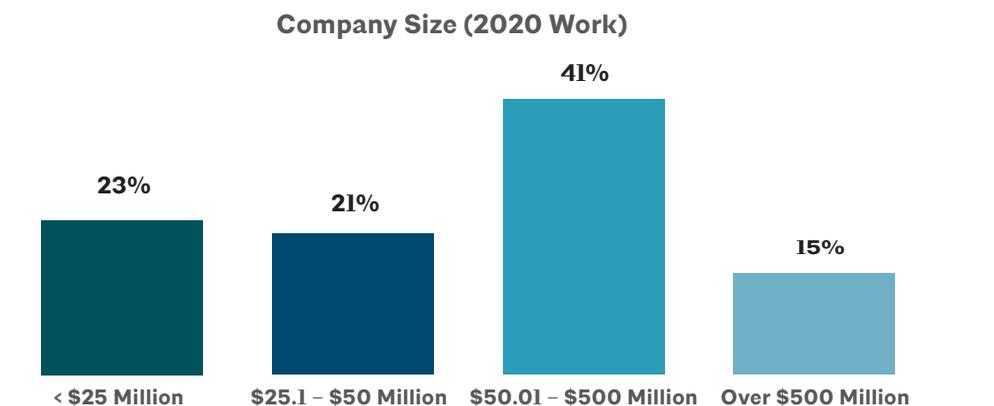
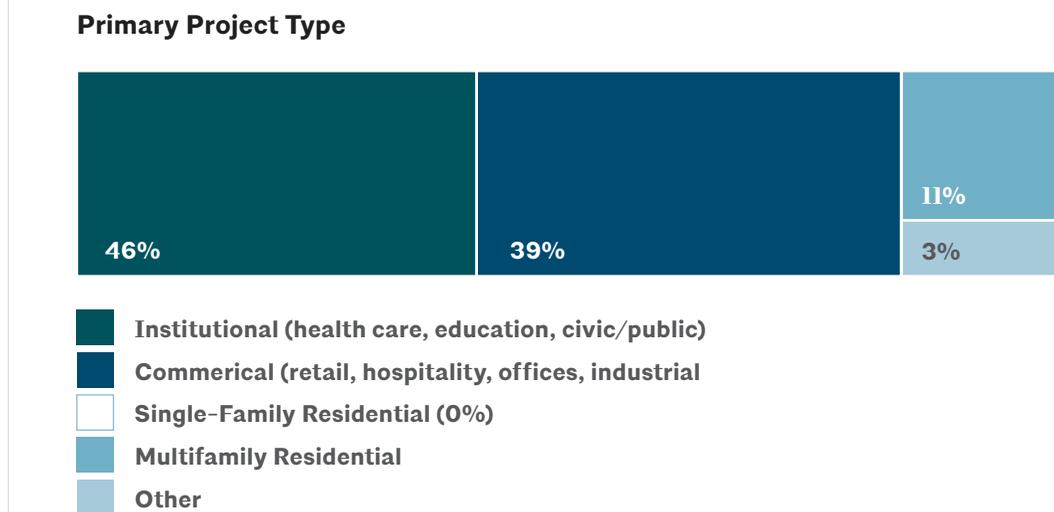
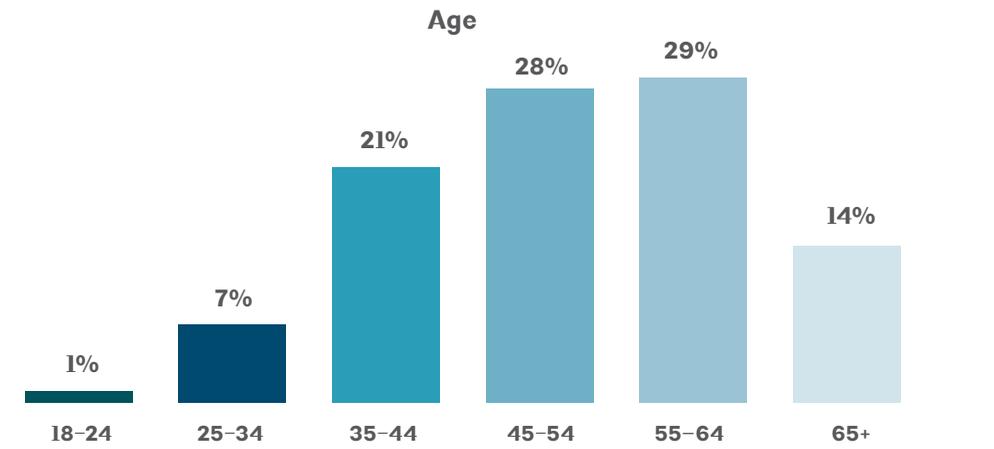
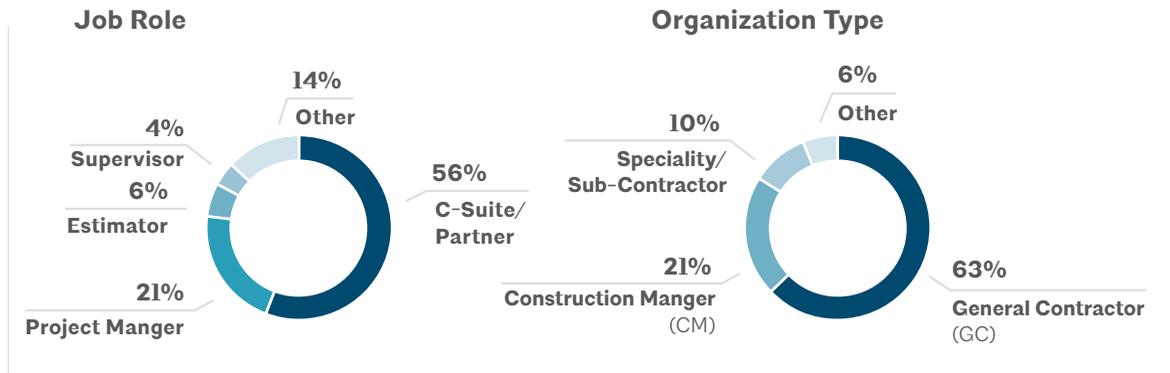
ARCHITECTS	CONTRACTORS
<p>“We have had many projects wherein we try to impress on the architect that their specifications are not in the best interest of the project. When trying to make substitutions or value-engineering, even in the face of overwhelming logic and reason, they will stick to their original, costly, unobtainable, or schedule-busting specifications.”</p>	<p>“The relationship is structured to be confrontational. The architect does not have time or fee to show their scope completely or to fully coordinate the project. The GC is required to bid low to get the project, then exploit information gaps in bid documents to improve profitability.”</p>
<p>“We try to work through all issues. However, poorly coordinated plans become the GC’s issue, and in many cases the architect/owner put the burden on the GC.”</p>	<p>“At times, I have felt that the GC is acting in their own best interest in the name of profit, rather than what’s best for the client and the project.”</p> <p>“Generally good experience with a few exceptions. Those exceptions are either the result of a lack of communication or trust. Or the result of putting self-interest over collaboration.”</p>

# Appendix: Respondent profile

# Respondent profile: Architects (286)



# Respondent profile: Contractors (209)



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