



Veterinary Employment Satisfaction Survey
2022
South Africa
Part 1: Veterinary Surgeons



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1. Background

The veterinary profession is facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining veterinary surgeons and nurses, not only in South Africa but also globally. Recent data published by the South African Veterinary Association (SAVA) indicate that filling veterinary positions can take up to seven months, if at all, with a mere 2% of positions in cities or towns being filled within one month. Conversely, between 63% and 72% of job-seeking veterinarians successfully secured a position within a month of looking.

To shed more light on this issue, this survey aimed to determine the level of employee engagement and job satisfaction within the veterinary profession, and how these factors impact the retention of veterinary talent. The survey specifically focused on factors within the workplace. External factors (as identified in the SAVA Emigration and Scarce Skills survey published in the December 2022 issue of Vet News) were not included in the survey.

Using SurveyMonkey, an online survey was created and distributed through various social media channels and direct email, leveraging the guavaAi Ltd database of veterinary professionals working in South Africa. Data collection commenced on 5 December 2022 and concluded on 31 January 2023.

This survey was specifically designed to collect data on demographics, such as years of experience, job location, title and employment, as well as to measure employee engagement and psychological safety. These variables were carefully selected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence employee retention and job satisfaction in the veterinary profession in South Africa.

2. Demographics

Based on the fact that Gauteng, the Western Cape, and Kwa-Zulu Natal are the most economically active provinces in South Africa on a per capita basis, it is unsurprising that the majority of the responses were received from these regions.

The survey results indicate that, similar to studies conducted in the UK, Ireland, and the US, the majority of veterinarians in South Africa work in full-time positions in small animal practices located in urban and suburban areas.

It's worth noting that our data seems to be somewhat skewed towards those who graduated more than 10 years ago. However, given the large sample size of 340 respondents, the results are statistically significant as a proportion of the estimated 2700 - 3000 veterinary surgeons practising in South Africa.

3. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a broad understanding of the level of employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention in the veterinary profession. To achieve this, we utilized both the Gallup Q12, a widely recognized employee engagement survey, and specific questions aimed at measuring employee psychological safety in the workplace and the employee net promoter score (eNPS).

Employee engagement is a critical factor in the success of any organization. Engaged employees are passionate about their work, have a positive attitude towards their job, and are willing to put in extra effort to achieve their goals. They are also more productive and more likely to provide high-quality patient care, which is essential in the veterinary profession.

Engaged employees tend to stay with their employer and contribute to a positive workplace culture. On the other hand, disengaged employees are less likely to be invested in their work, which can lead to lower productivity, decreased team morale, and increased likelihood of errors. Disengaged employees are also more likely to leave their employment, which can result in increased recruitment and training costs, as well as decreased organizational performance.

Thus, veterinary employers must identify and address factors that contribute to disengagement in the workplace. By promoting employee engagement, employers can create a more positive work environment, improve productivity, and ultimately provide better patient care.

Psychological safety at work refers to the degree to which employees feel safe to speak up, share their ideas and concerns, and take risks without fear of retribution or negative consequences. It is a critical component of a healthy work environment, as it fosters open communication, collaboration, and innovation.

In the veterinary profession, psychological safety matters because it can impact the quality of patient care. When employees feel safe to speak up and share their concerns, they are more likely to identify and address potential issues that could impact patient health and well-being. On the other hand, when employees do not feel psychologically safe, they may be hesitant to speak up or share their concerns, which can lead to missed opportunities to identify and address issues in patient care.

Moreover, psychological safety can impact employee retention and job satisfaction. When employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to feel valued and respected in the workplace, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and retention. On the other hand, when employees do not feel safe, they may feel anxious, stressed, or unsupported, which can lead to decreased job satisfaction and increased employee turnover.

Therefore, veterinary employers need to assess the level of psychological safety in their workplace and identify any barriers that may be preventing employees from feeling safe to speak up. By promoting a culture of psychological safety, veterinary employers can create a more positive work environment, improve communication and collaboration, and ultimately provide better patient care.

Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) is a metric that measures employee loyalty and advocacy. It is calculated by asking employees to rate on a scale of 0-10, how likely they are to recommend their employer to a friend or colleague. Employees who rate their likelihood of recommending their employer as a 9 or 10 are considered "promoters," while those who rate their likelihood as 6 or below are considered "detractors." The eNPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters.

Promoters are more likely to be engaged, committed, and productive employees, while detractors are more likely to be disengaged, unhappy, and may be considering leaving the organization. By tracking the eNPS over time, veterinary employers can identify trends in employee engagement and take action to improve employee loyalty and retention.

The eNPS can also serve as a predictor of customer loyalty and satisfaction. Engaged and loyal employees are more likely to provide high-quality patient care, which can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, by improving employee engagement and loyalty, veterinary employers can ultimately improve patient care and strengthen their practice's reputation.

4. Limitations

As is the case with any survey, it only provides a snapshot view of the profession at a specific moment in time.

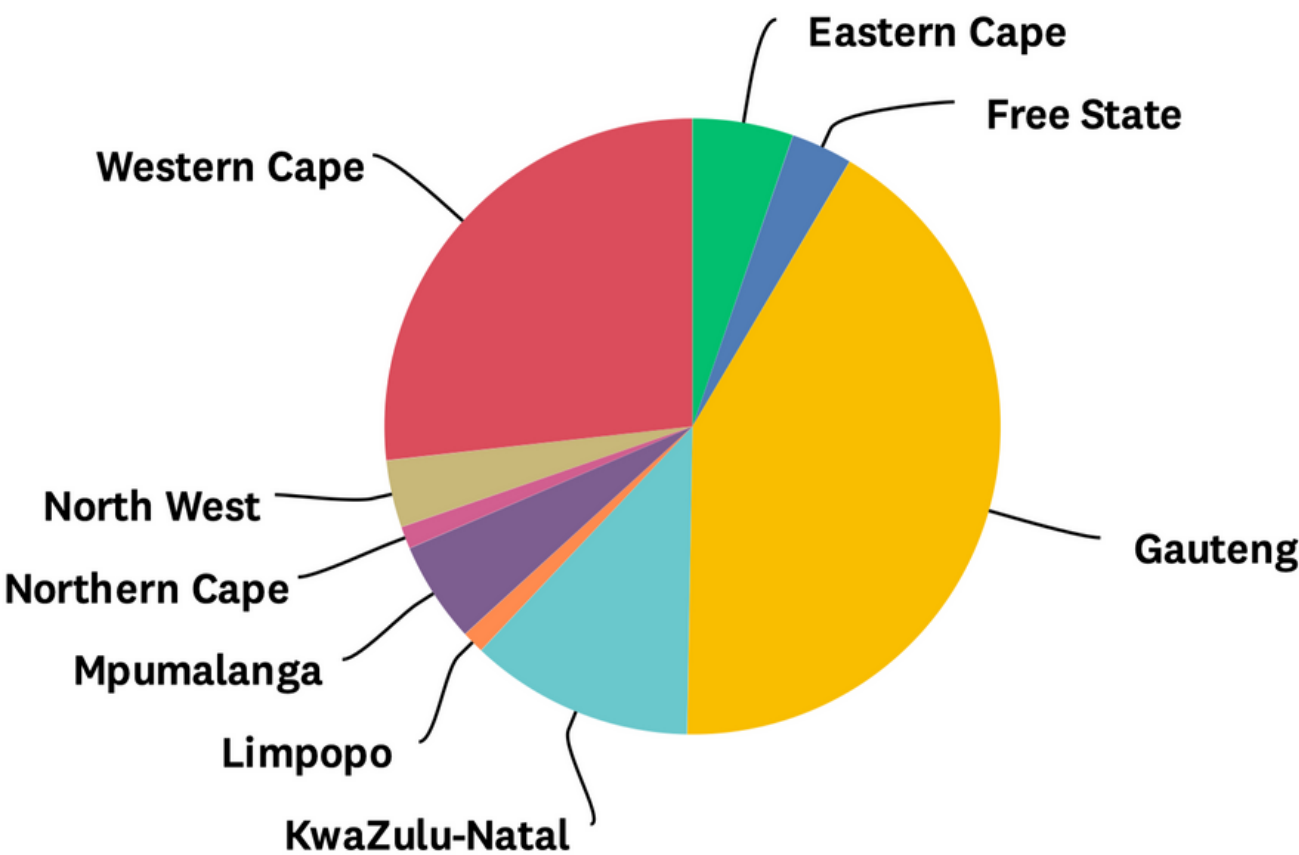
It's worth noting that our data are somewhat skewed toward veterinary surgeons in full-time employment who graduated before 2013 and work in small animal practices located in cities or towns in Gauteng, the Western Cape or Kwa-Zulu Natal.

However, given the large sample size of 340 respondents, the results are statistically significant as a proportion of the estimated 2700 - 3000 veterinary surgeons practising in South Africa.

5.1. Demographics

Q1 Please select the province where you are based

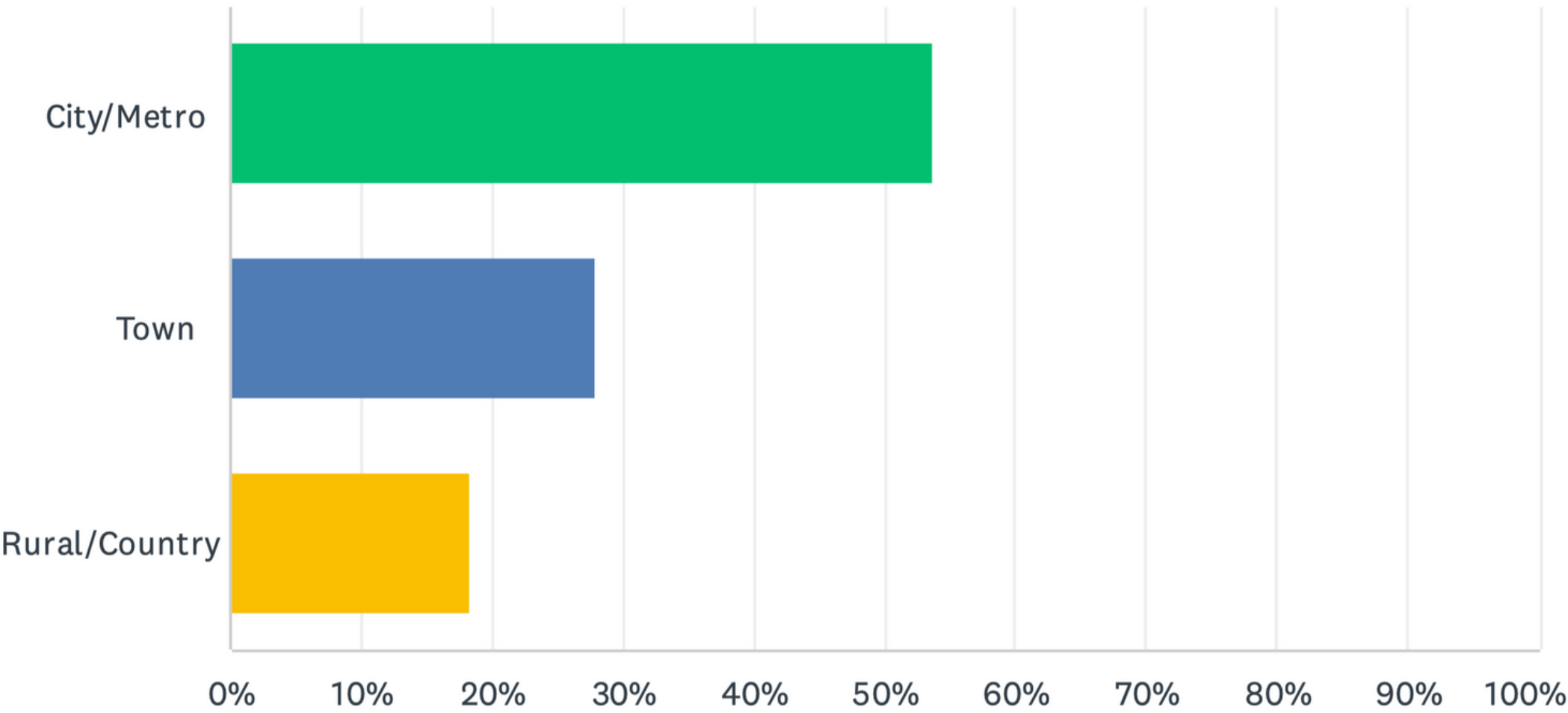
Answered: 340 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Eastern Cape	5.29%	18
Free State	3.24%	11
Gauteng	41.76%	142
KwaZulu-Natal	11.76%	40
Limpopo	1.18%	4
Mpumalanga	5.29%	18
Northern Cape	1.18%	4
North West	3.53%	12
Western Cape	26.76%	91
TOTAL		340

Q2 Please select the option that best describes your practice or company location

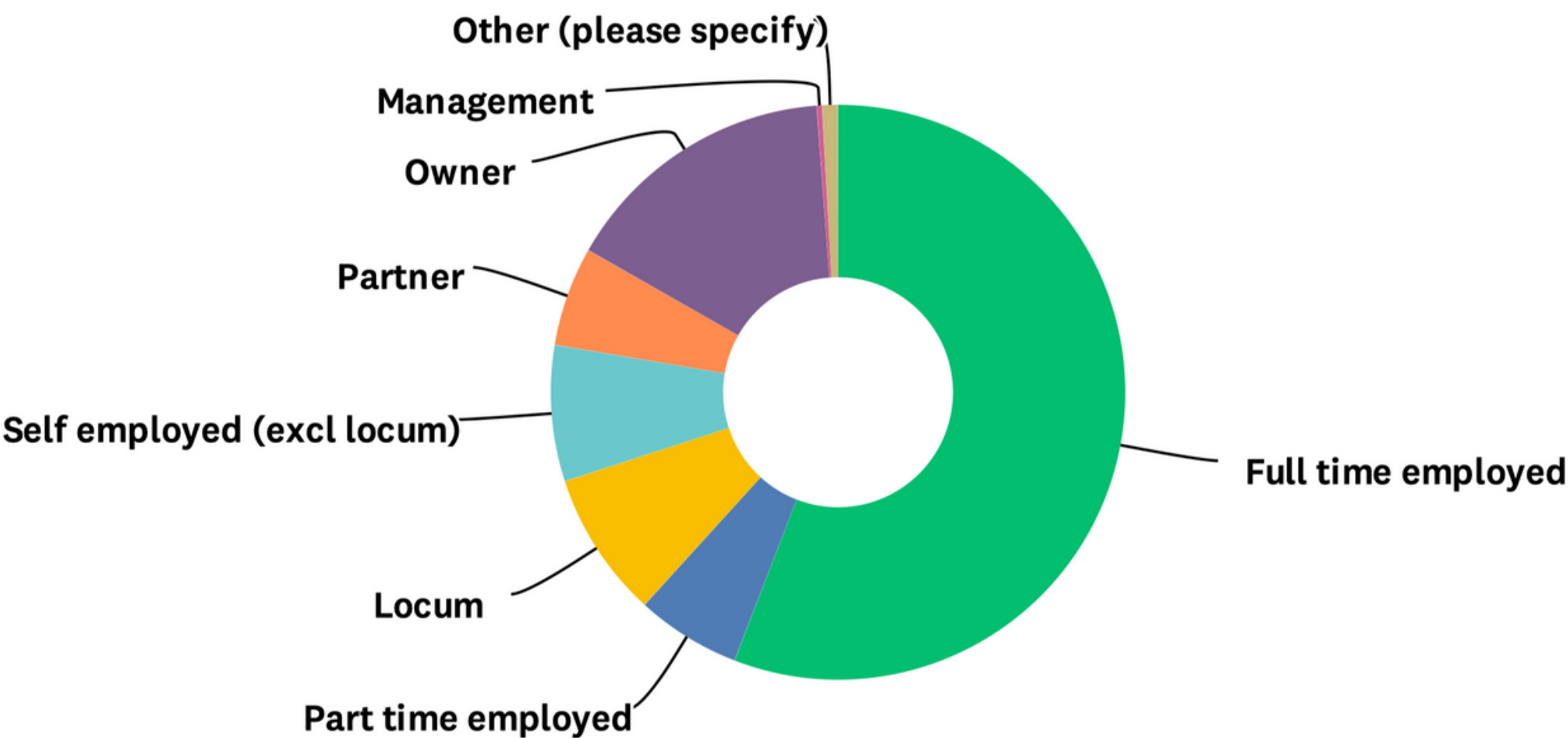
Answered: 340 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
City/Metro	53.82%	183
Town	27.94%	95
Rural/Country	18.24%	62
TOTAL		340

Q5 What is your employment status

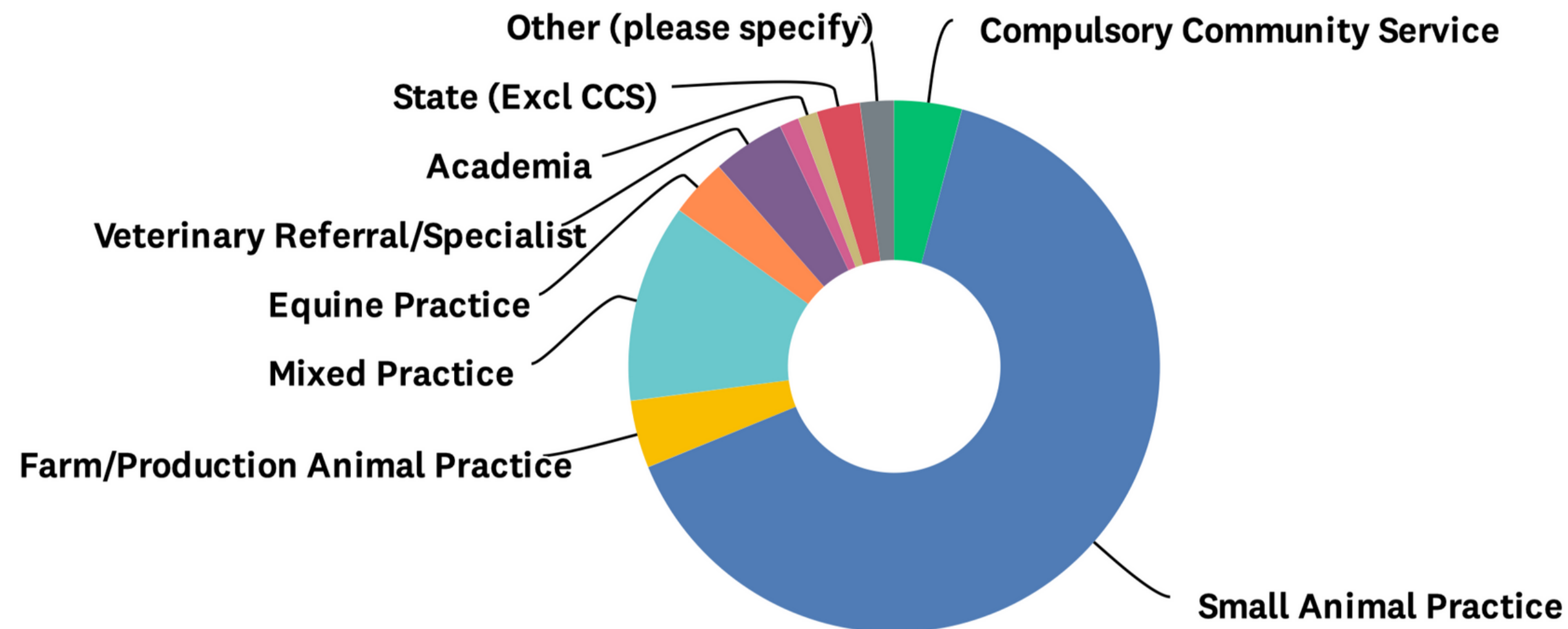
Answered: 340 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Full time employed	55.88%	190
Part time employed	5.88%	20
Locum	8.24%	28
Self employed (excl locum)	7.65%	26
Partner	5.59%	19
Owner	15.59%	53
Management	0.29%	1
Other (please specify)	0.88%	3
TOTAL		340

Q6 Please select your Employer type from the list below

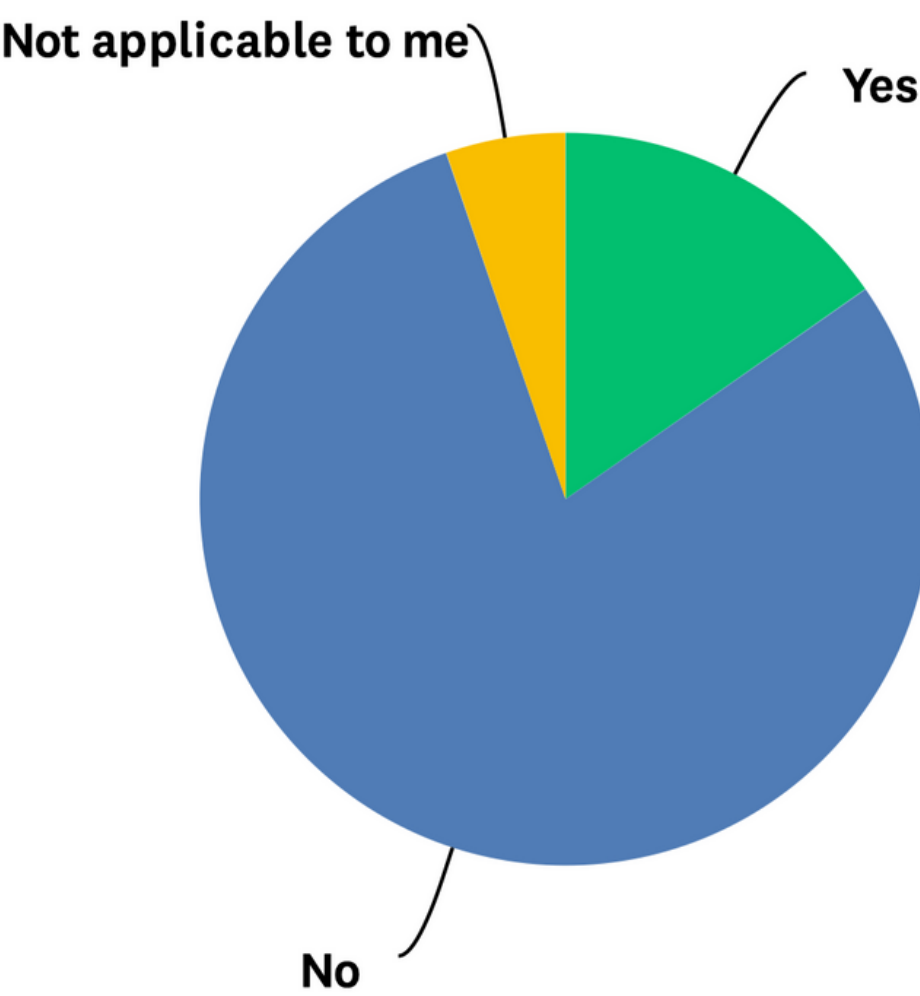
Answered: 340 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Compulsory Community Service	4.12%	14
Small Animal Practice	64.71%	220
Farm/Production Animal Practice	4.12%	14
Mixed Practice	12.06%	41
Equine Practice	3.53%	12
Veterinary Referral/Specialist	4.41%	15
Industry e.g. Pharmaceutical Company	1.18%	4
Academia	1.18%	4
State (Excl CCS)	2.65%	9
Other (please specify)	2.06%	7
TOTAL		340

Q7 Is the practice you work at part of a group?

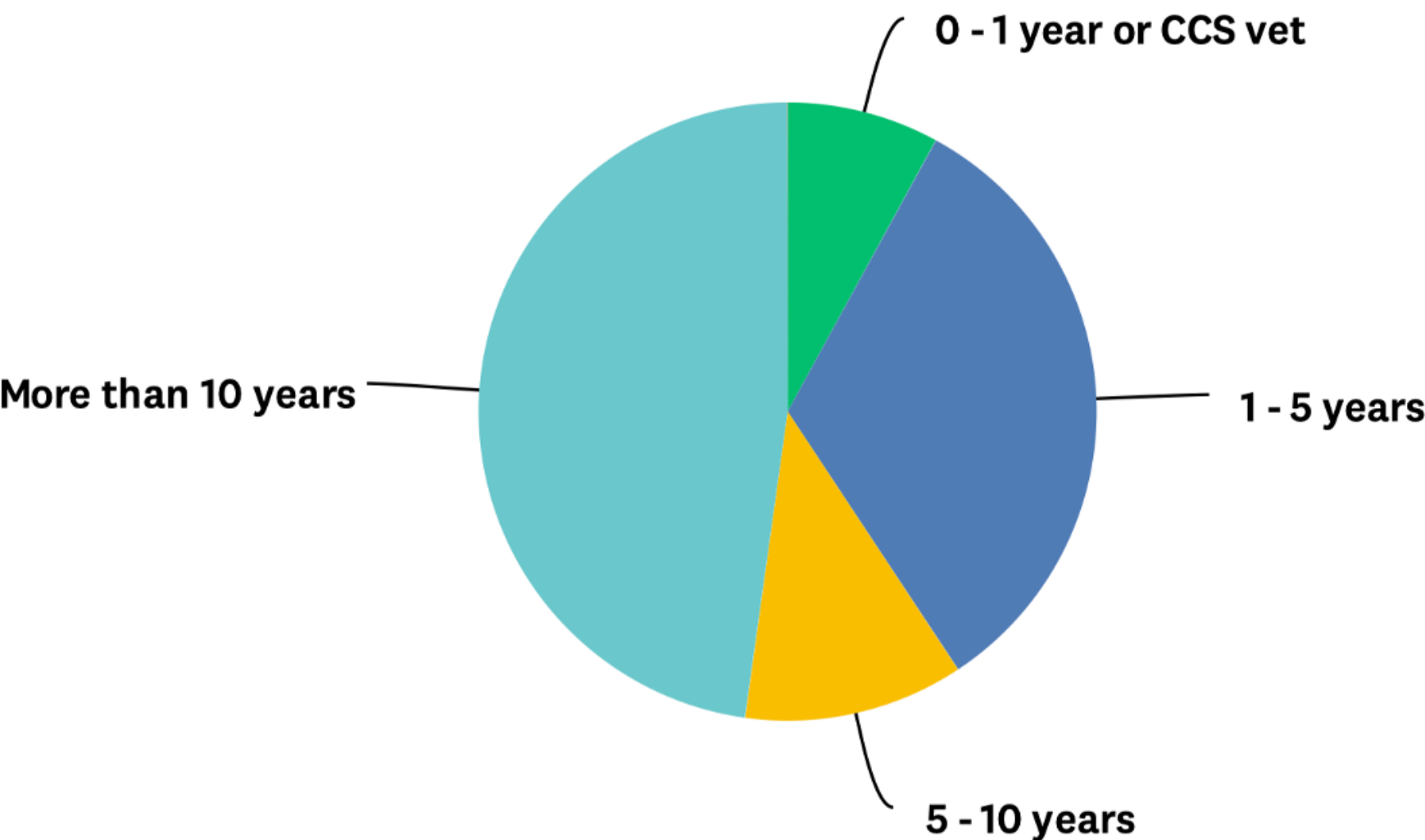
Answered: 340 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	15.29%	52
No	79.41%	270
Not applicable to me	5.29%	18
TOTAL		340

Q8: How long have you been qualified as a veterinary surgeon, vet nurse or AHT?

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



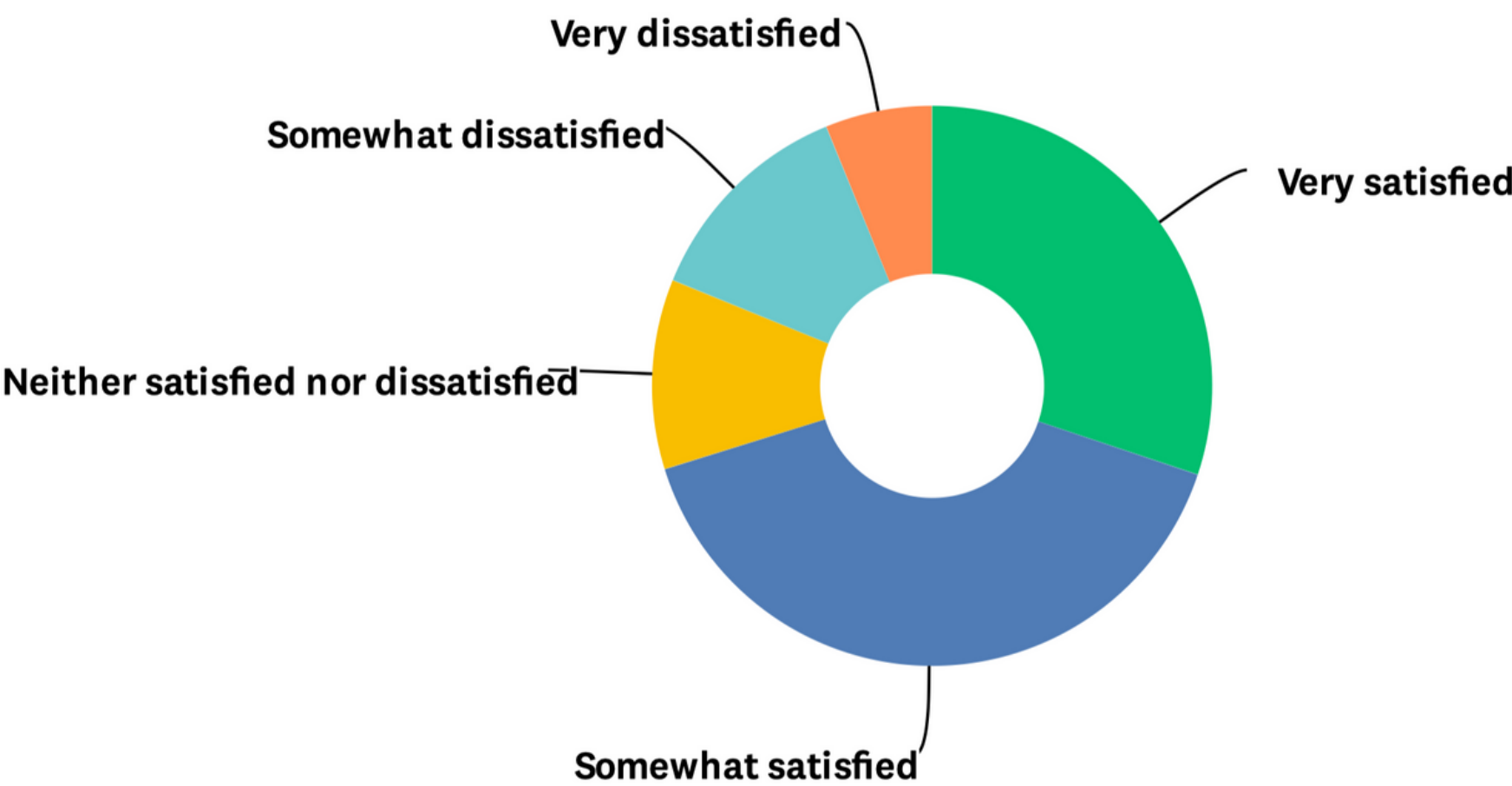
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0 - 1 year or CCS vet	7.53%	22
1 - 5 years	32.88%	96
5 - 10 years	11.99%	35
More than 10 years	47.6%	139
I'm not a veterinary surgeon, vet nurse or AHT?	0%	0
TOTAL		292

5.2. Employee Engagement

- Questions 9 - 22 (excl Q21) survey the level of employee engagement
- A score of above 4/5 indicates engagement and scores below 4/5 suggest employees are disengaged
- Disappointingly, only 58% of 292 respondents are engaged in their job
- This matters because engaged individuals have 37% lower absenteeism and 21% greater productivity. Engaged teams perform better too. Team turnover is 25% less, engaged teams are 22% more profitable with 41% fewer patient safety incidents and 10% higher customer metrics, delivering a superior client experience
- Recruiting and retaining team members are among the most significant challenges faced by the veterinary profession in SA. Finding qualified and dedicated individuals requires a significant investment of time, resources, and finances. To ensure the long-term success of the team, it is crucial that members feel connected, engaged, and motivated to perform their best.

Q9 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your practice/company as a place to work?

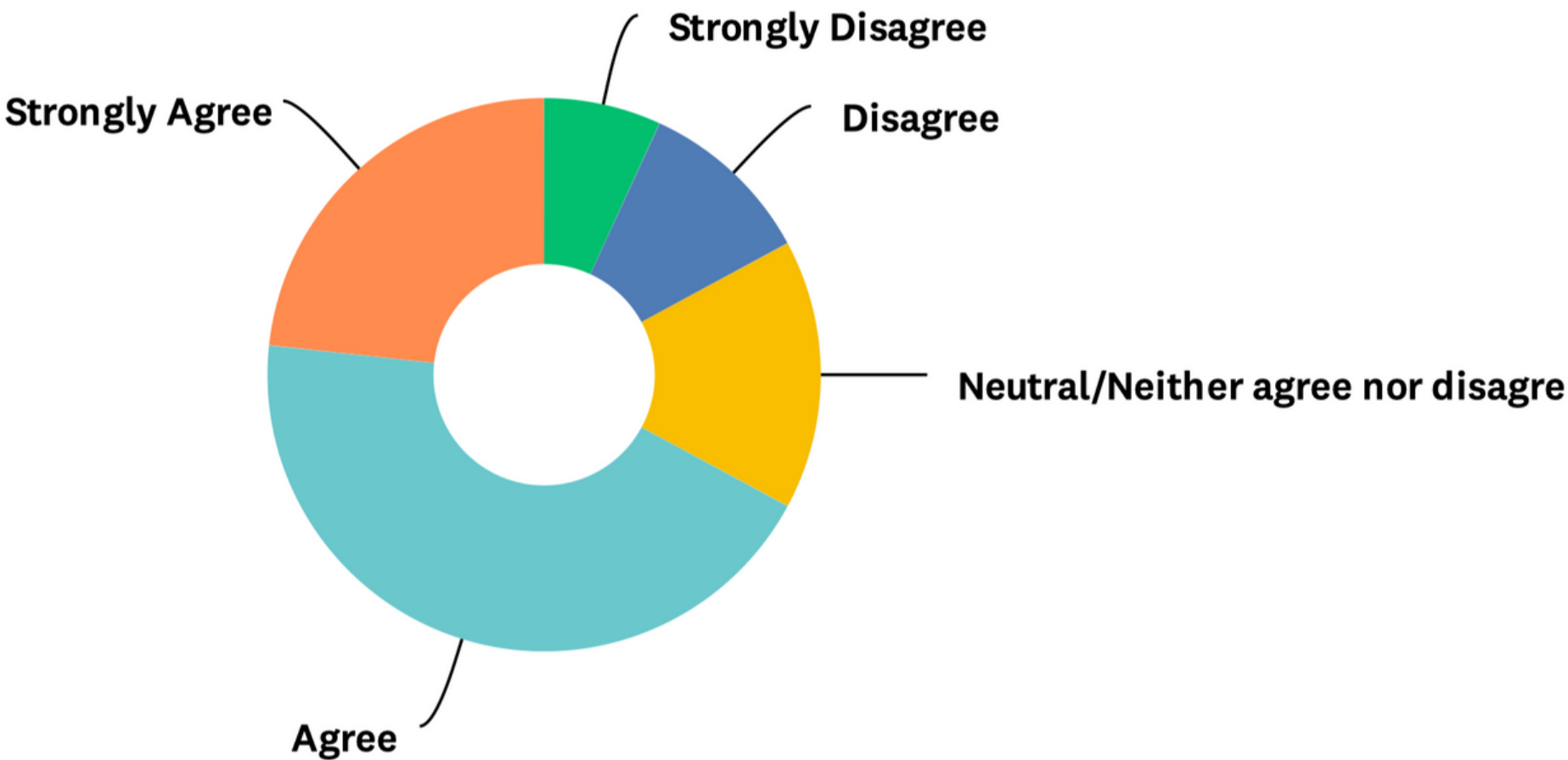
Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
26%	3.8/5.0 (75%)	1.19	16/18
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
✔ Very satisfied	5/5	30.14%	88
Somewhat satisfied	4/5	40.07%	117
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3/5	10.96%	32
Somewhat dissatisfied	2/5	12.67%	37
Very dissatisfied	1/5	6.16%	18
TOTAL			292

Q10 Your employer or someone at work cares about you as a person.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48

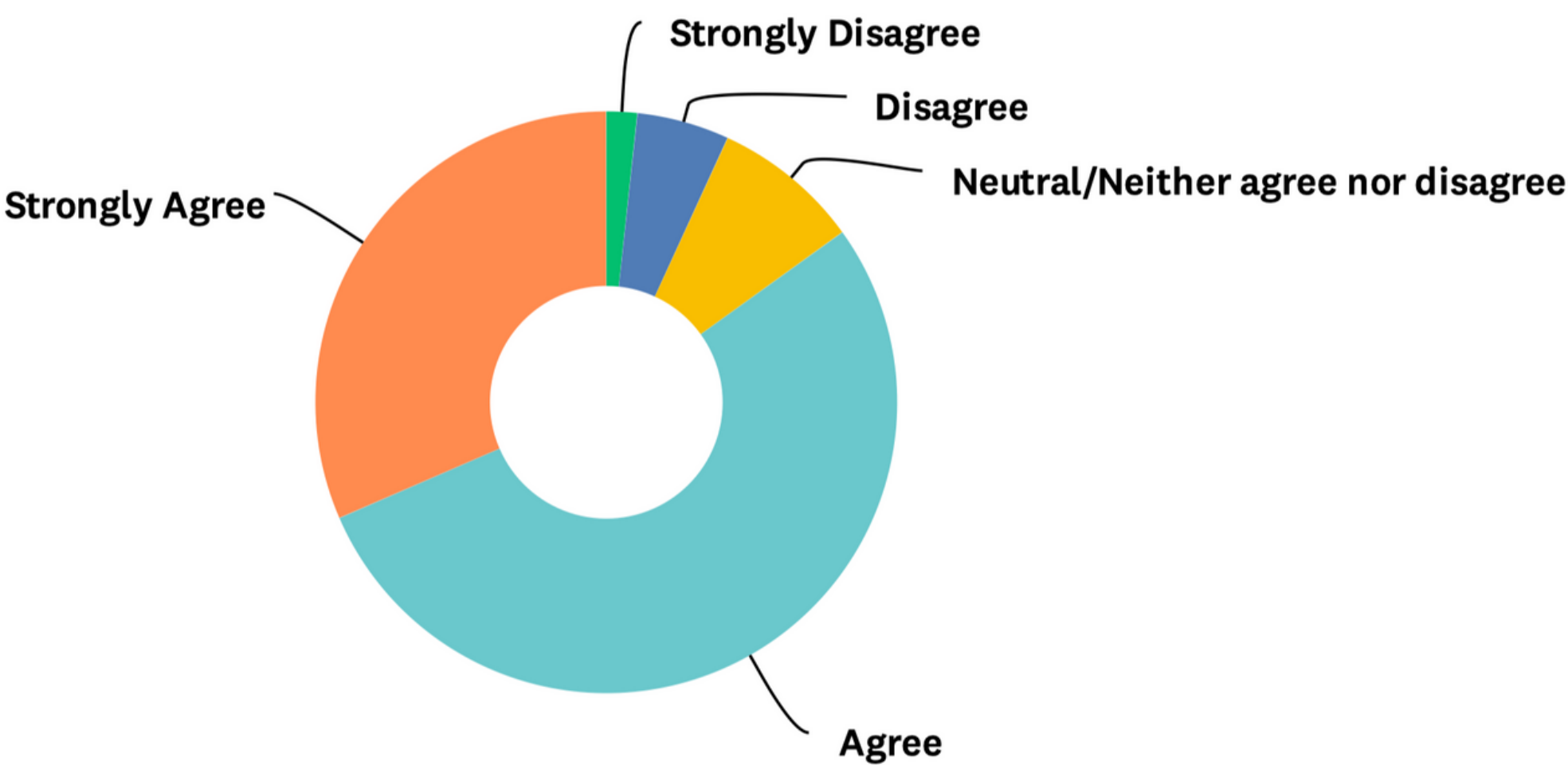


QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
20%	3.7/5.0 (73%)	1.14	14/18

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	1/5	6.85%	20
Disagree	2/5	10.27%	30
Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	15.75%	46
Agree	4/5	43.84%	128
✔ Strongly Agree	5/5	23.29%	68
TOTAL			292

Q11 You know what is expected of you at work.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



QUIZ STATISTICS

Percent Correct
27%

Average Score
4.1/5.0 (82%)

Standard Deviation
0.87

Difficulty
18/18

ANSWER CHOICES

SCORE

RESPONSES

Strongly Disagree

1/5

1.71%

5

Disagree

2/5

5.14%

15

Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

3/5

8.22%

24

Agree

4/5

53.42%

156

✓ Strongly Agree

5/5

31.51%

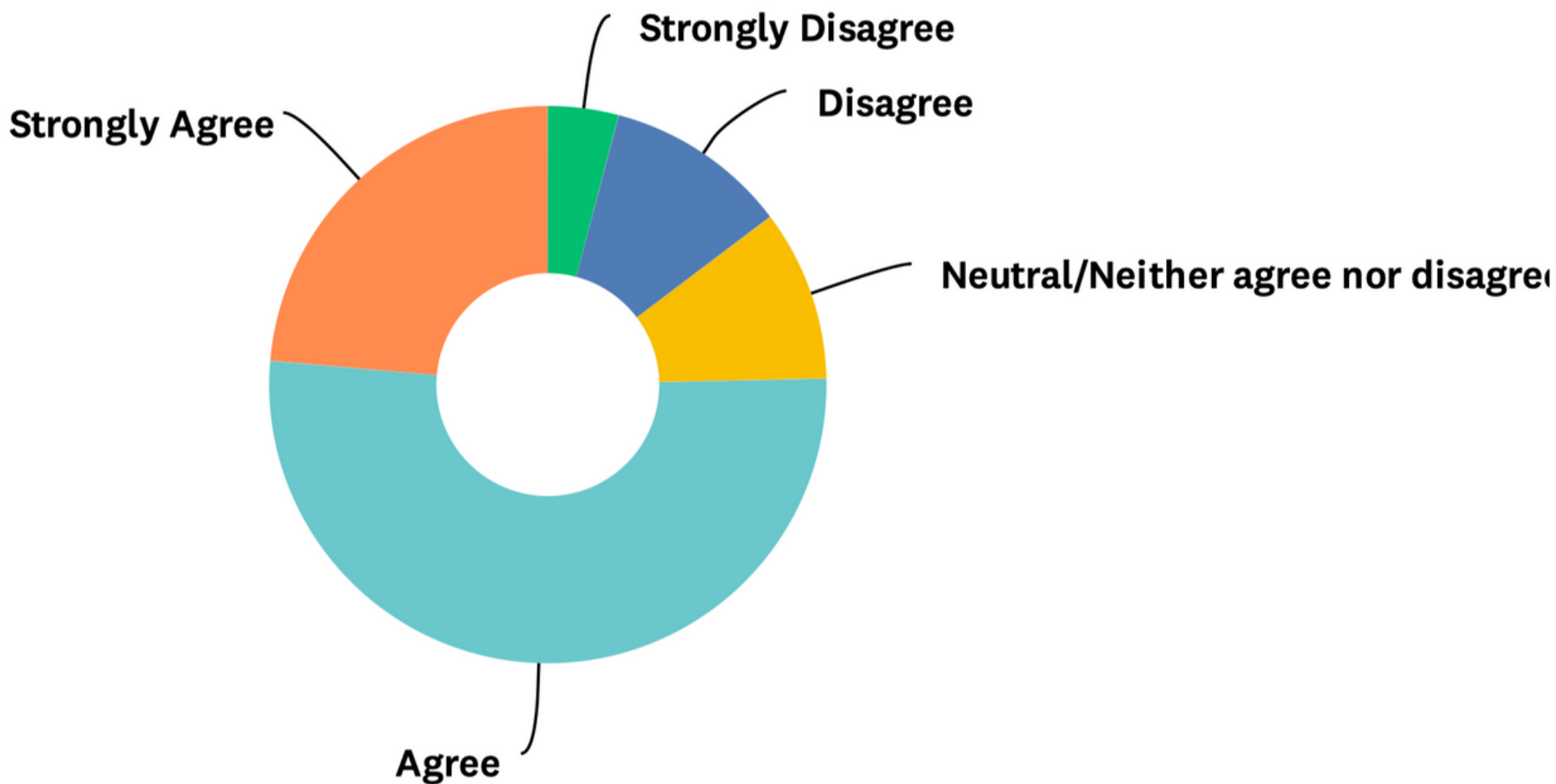
92

TOTAL

292

Q12 You have the materials and equipment you need to do your work right.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



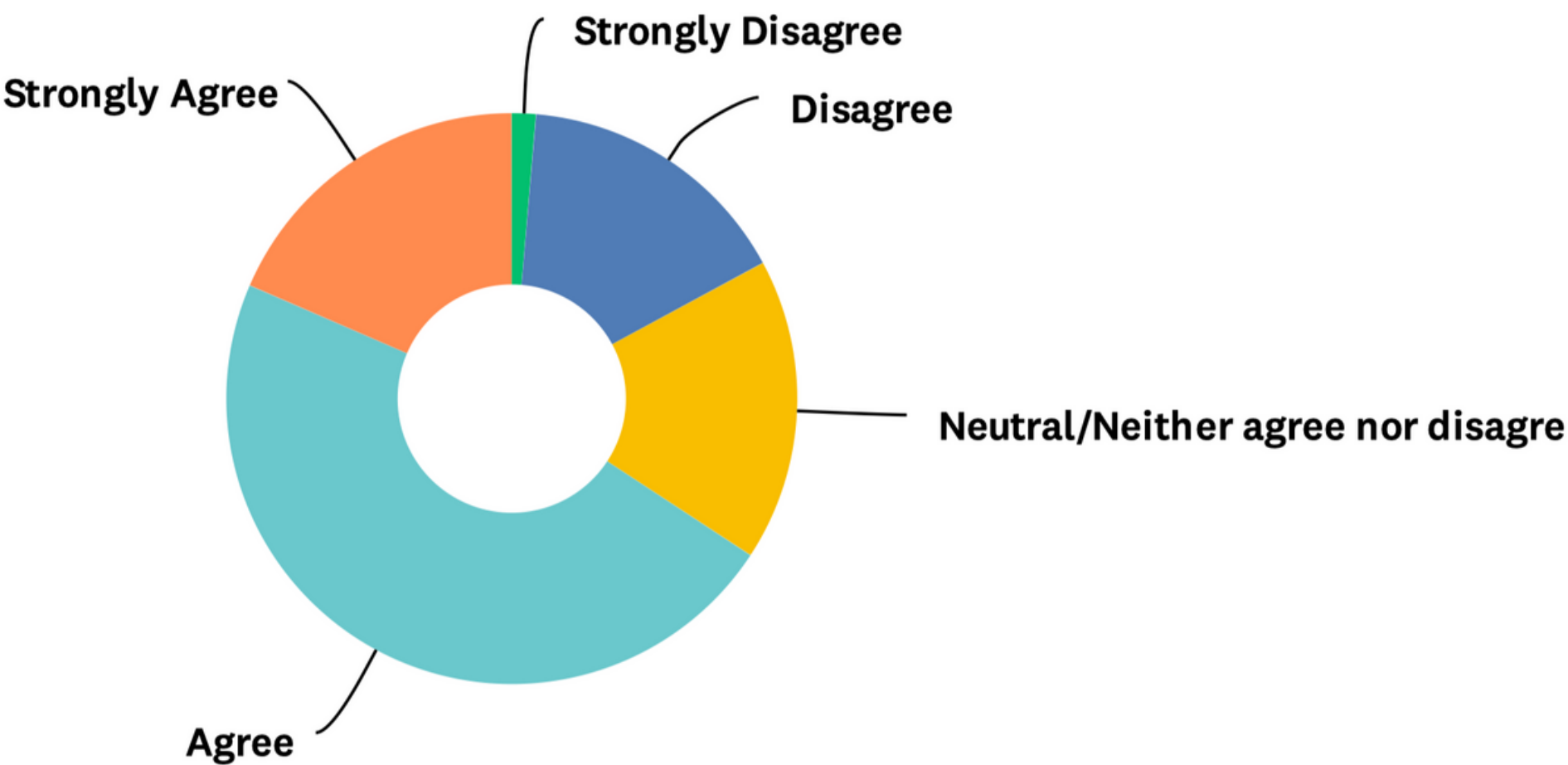
QUIZ STATISTICS

Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
20%	3.8/5.0 (76%)	1.05	17/18

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	1/5	4.11%	12
Disagree	2/5	10.62%	31
Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	9.93%	29
Agree	4/5	51.71%	151
✔ Strongly Agree	5/5	23.63%	69
TOTAL			292

Q13 At work, you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



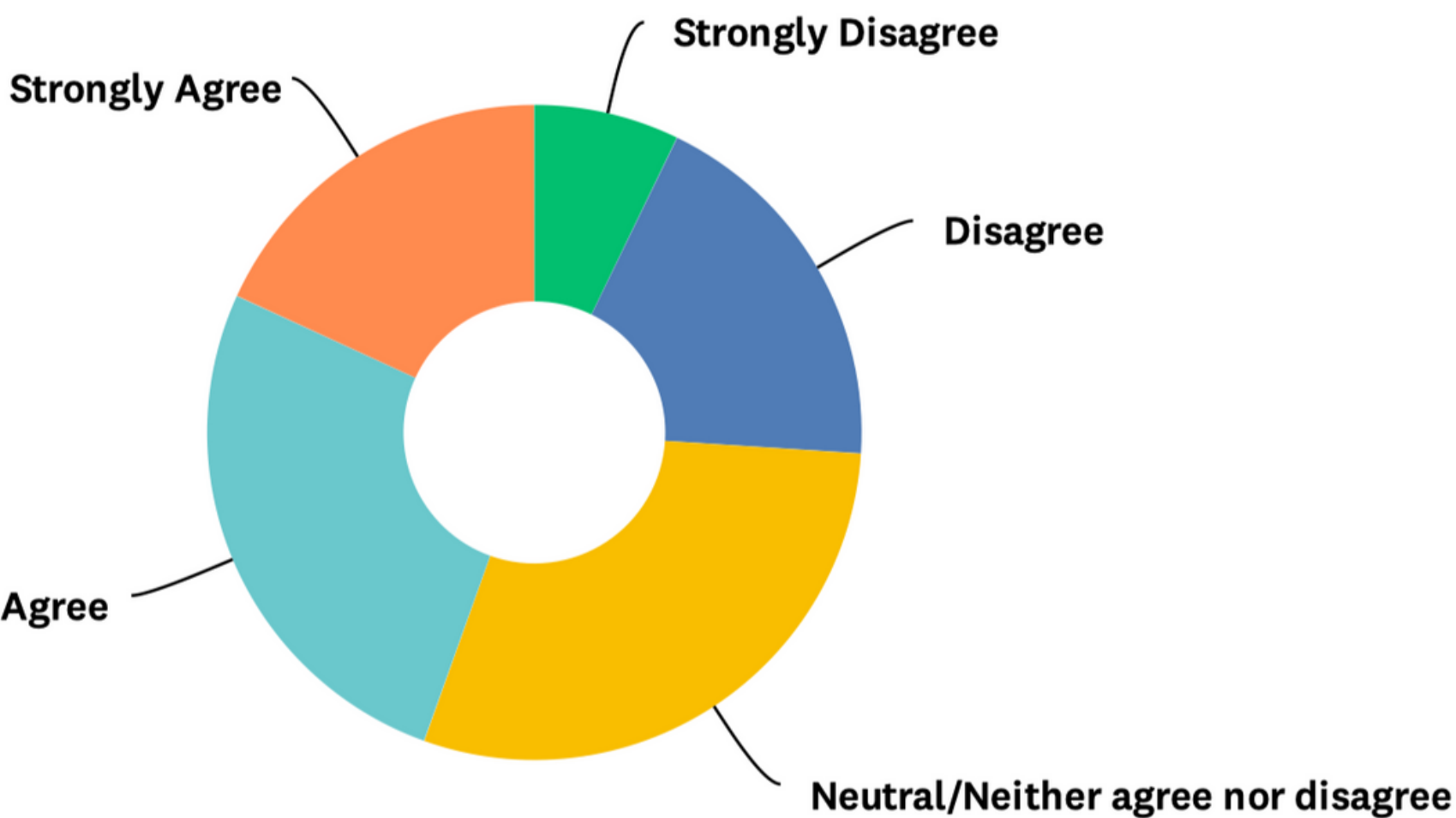
QUIZ STATISTICS

Percent Correct 16%	Average Score 3.7/5.0 (73%)	Standard Deviation 1.00	Difficulty 13/18
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ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	1/5	1.37%	4
Disagree	2/5	15.75%	46
Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	17.12%	50
Agree	4/5	47.26%	138
✓ Strongly Agree	5/5	18.49%	54
TOTAL			292

Q14 There is someone at work who encourages your development.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



QUIZ STATISTICS

Percent Correct
16%

Average Score
3.3/5.0 (66%)

Standard Deviation
1.18

Difficulty
5/18

ANSWER CHOICES

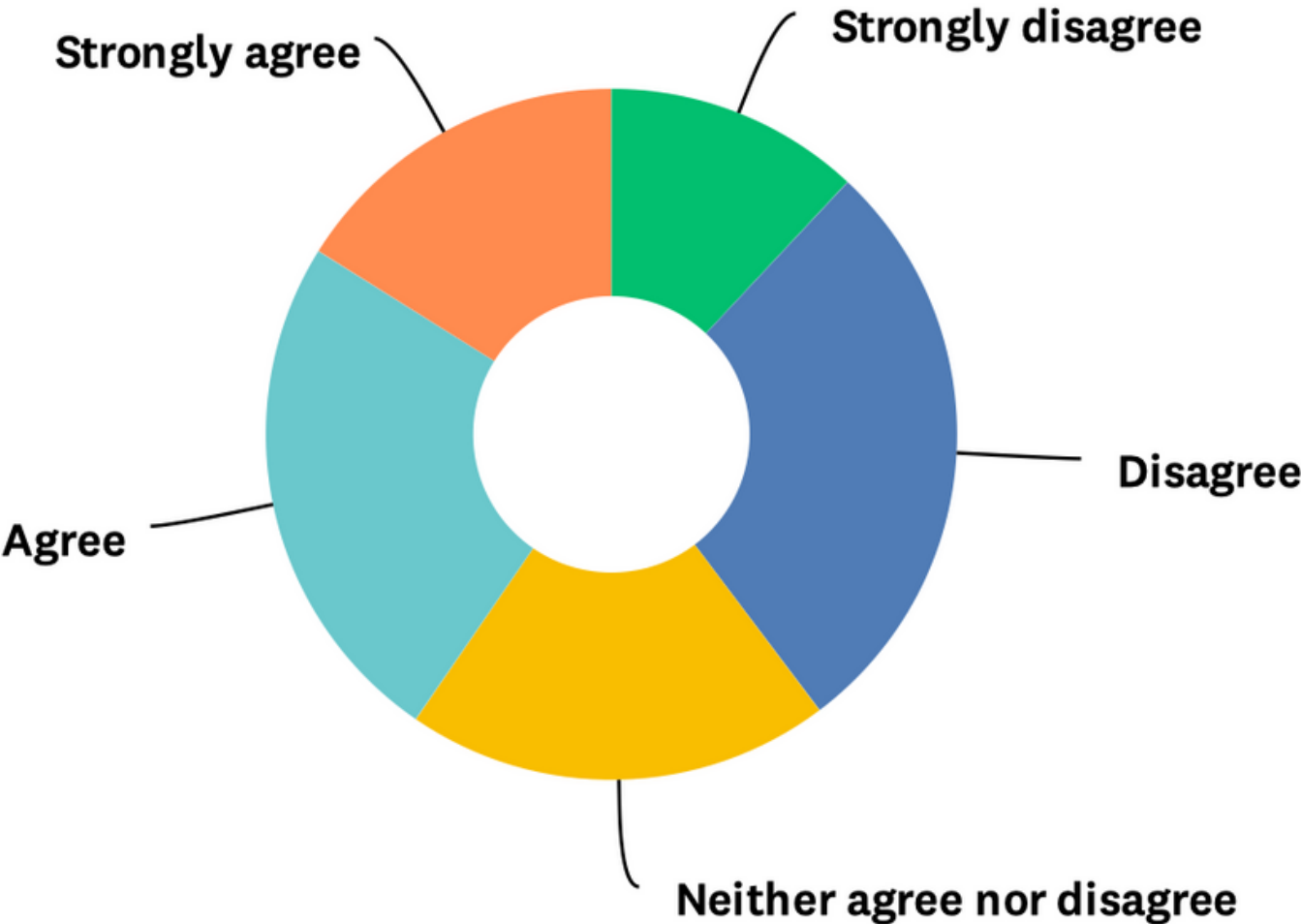
SCORE

RESPONSES

Strongly Disagree	1/5	7.19%	21
Disagree	2/5	18.84%	55
Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	29.45%	86
Agree	4/5	26.37%	77
✔ Strongly Agree	5/5	18.15%	53
TOTAL			292

Q15 You have received recognition or praise for doing good work in the last seven days.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



QUIZ STATISTICS

Percent Correct
14%

Average Score
3.0/5.0 (61%)

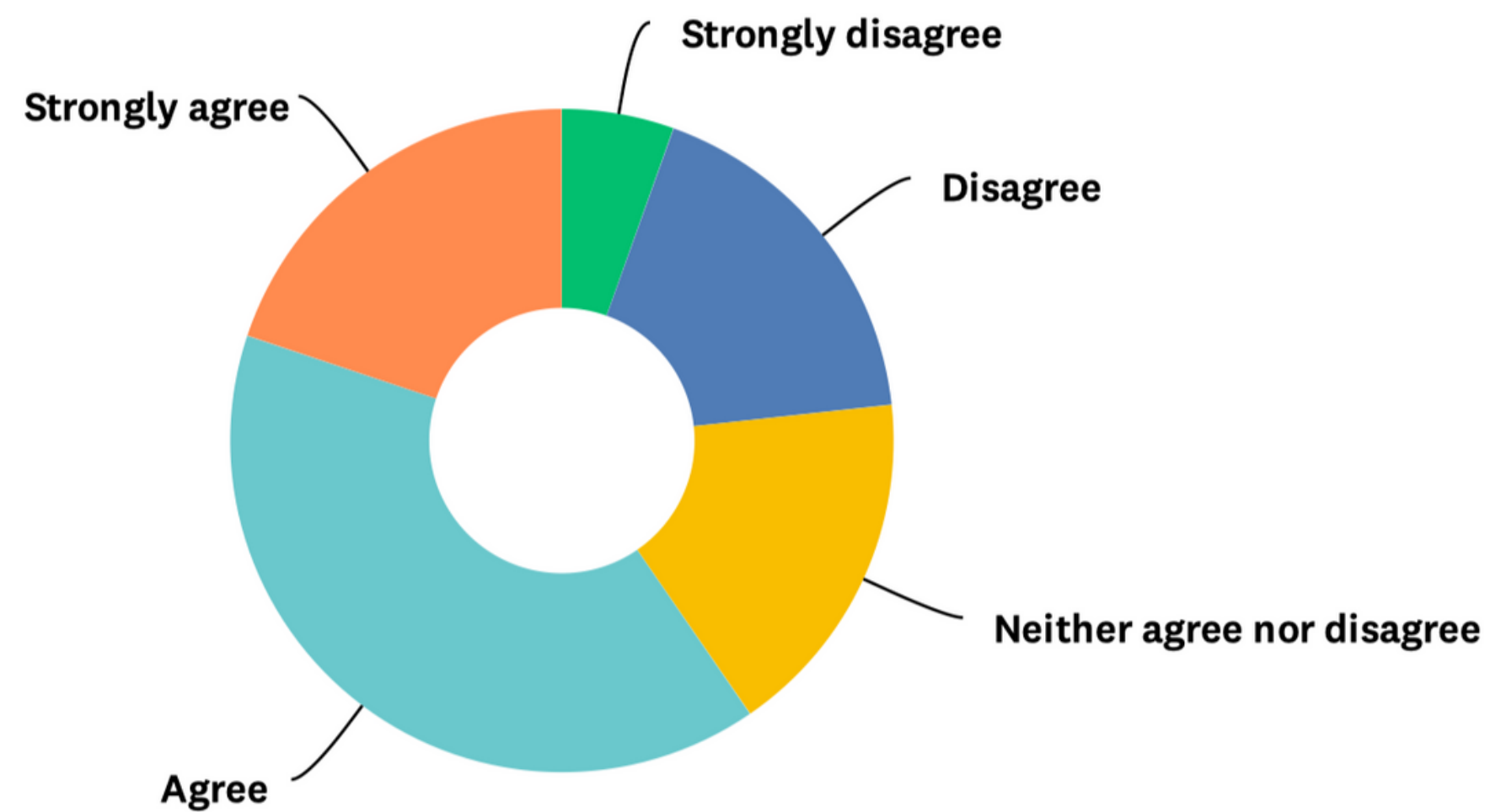
Standard Deviation
1.28

Difficulty
3/18

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	1/5	11.99%	35
Disagree	2/5	27.74%	81
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	19.86%	58
Agree	4/5	24.32%	71
✔ Strongly agree	5/5	16.10%	47
TOTAL			292

Q16 At work, your opinions seem to count.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



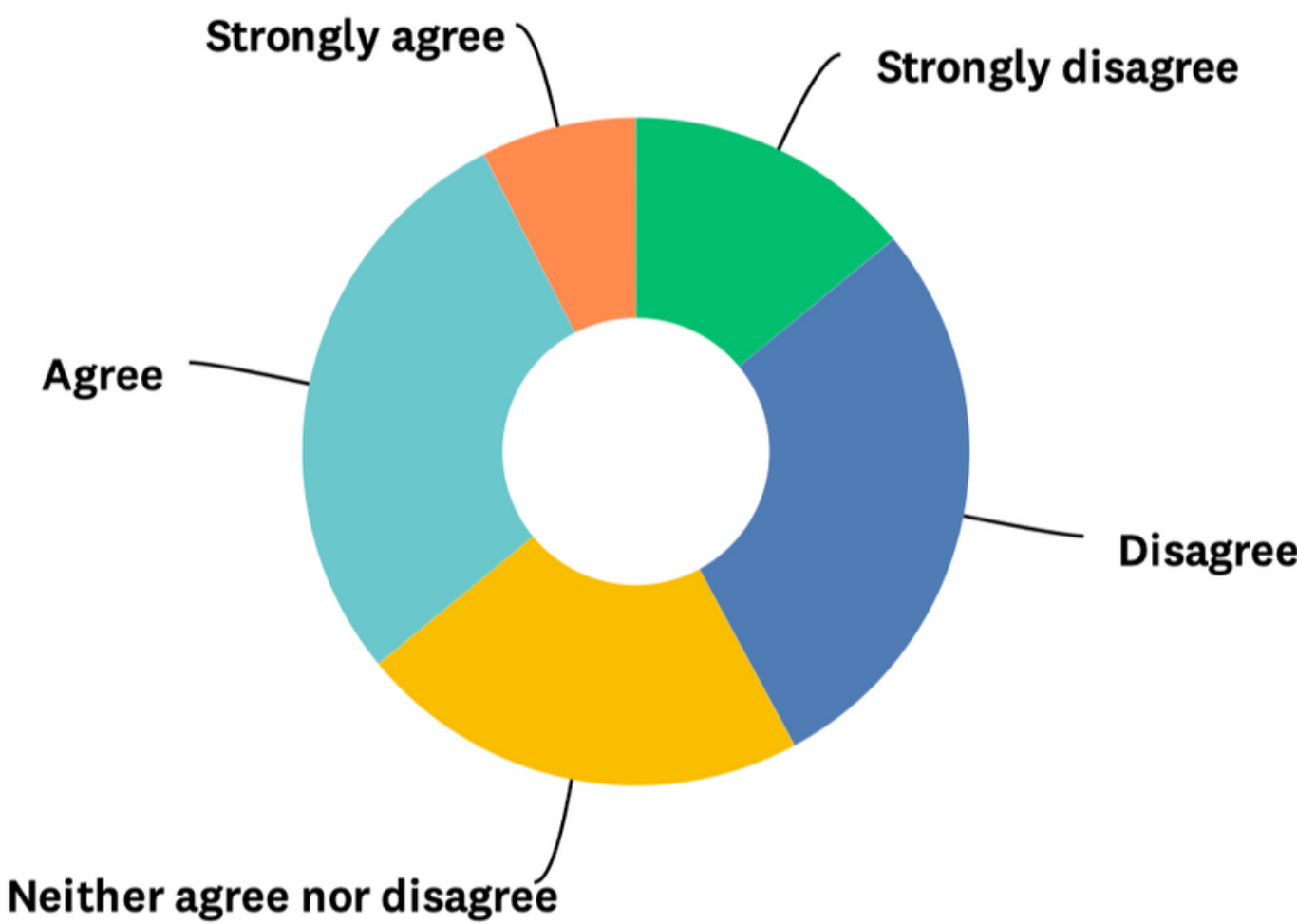
QUIZ STATISTICS

Percent Correct 17%	Average Score 3.5/5.0 (70%)	Standard Deviation 1.16	Difficulty 10/18
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ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	1/5	5.48%	16
Disagree	2/5	17.81%	52
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	17.12%	50
Agree	4/5	39.73%	116
✔ Strongly agree	5/5	19.86%	58
TOTAL			292

Q17 In the last six months, someone at work talked to you about your progress.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48

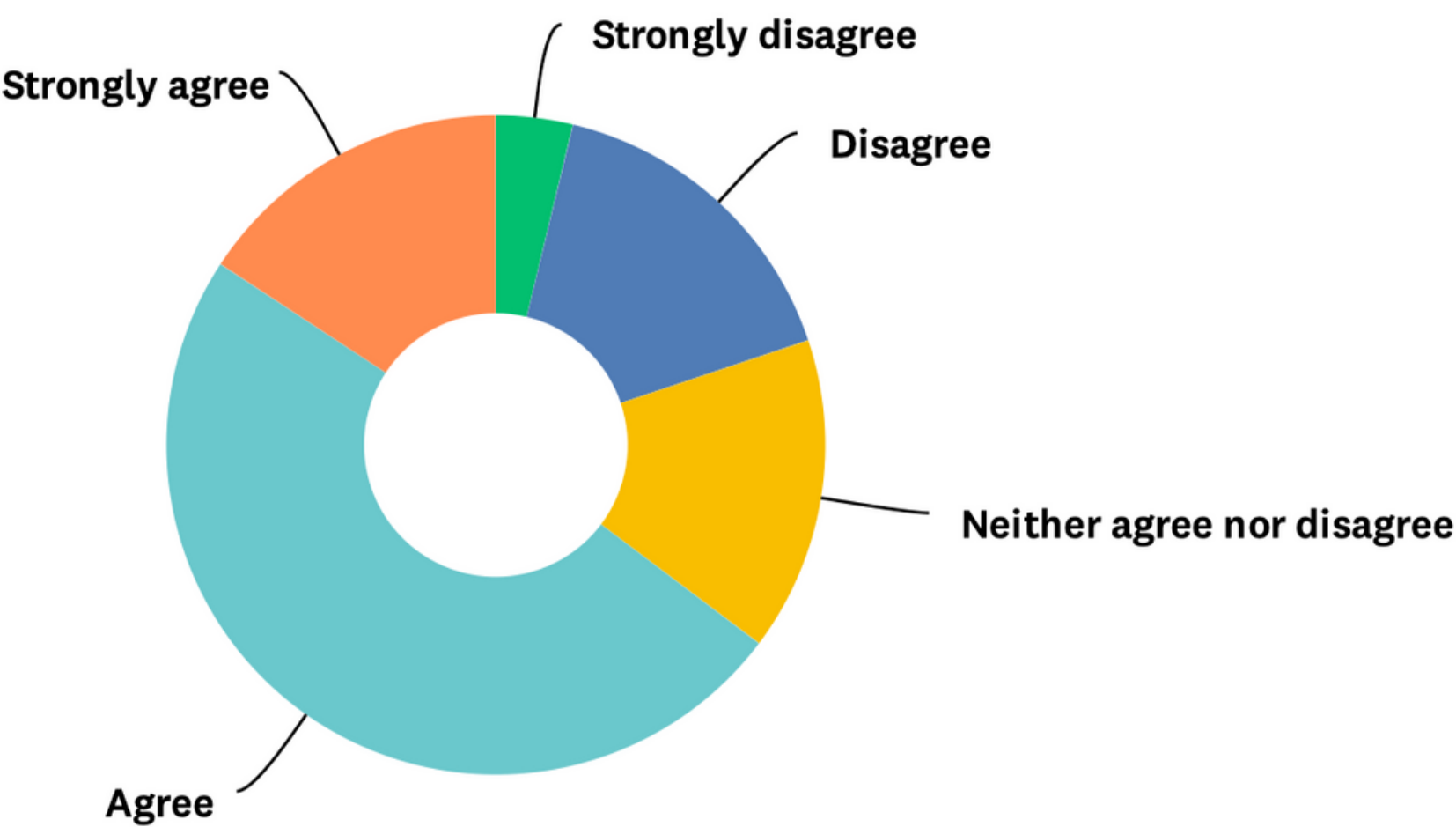


QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
6%	2.9/5.0 (57%)	1.19	2/18

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	1/5	14.04%	41
Disagree	2/5	28.08%	82
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	21.92%	64
Agree	4/5	28.42%	83
✔ Strongly agree	5/5	7.53%	22
TOTAL			292

Q18 In the past year, you've had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

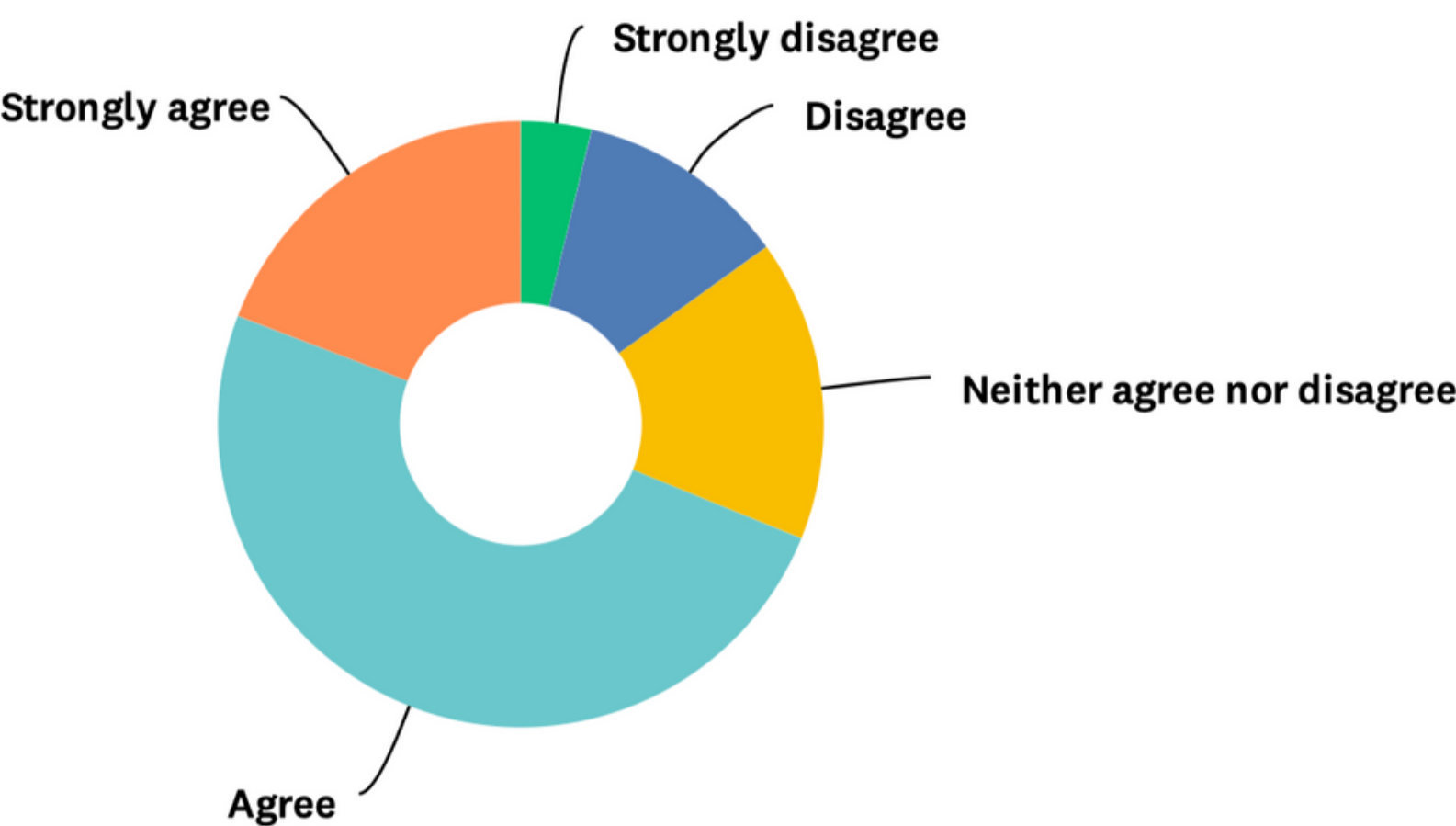
Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 14%	Average Score 3.6/5.0 (71%)	Standard Deviation 1.05	Difficulty 11/18
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	1/5	3.77%	11
Disagree	2/5	16.10%	47
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	15.41%	45
Agree	4/5	48.97%	143
✔ Strongly agree	5/5	15.75%	46
TOTAL			292

Q19 Your colleagues are committed to doing quality work

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48

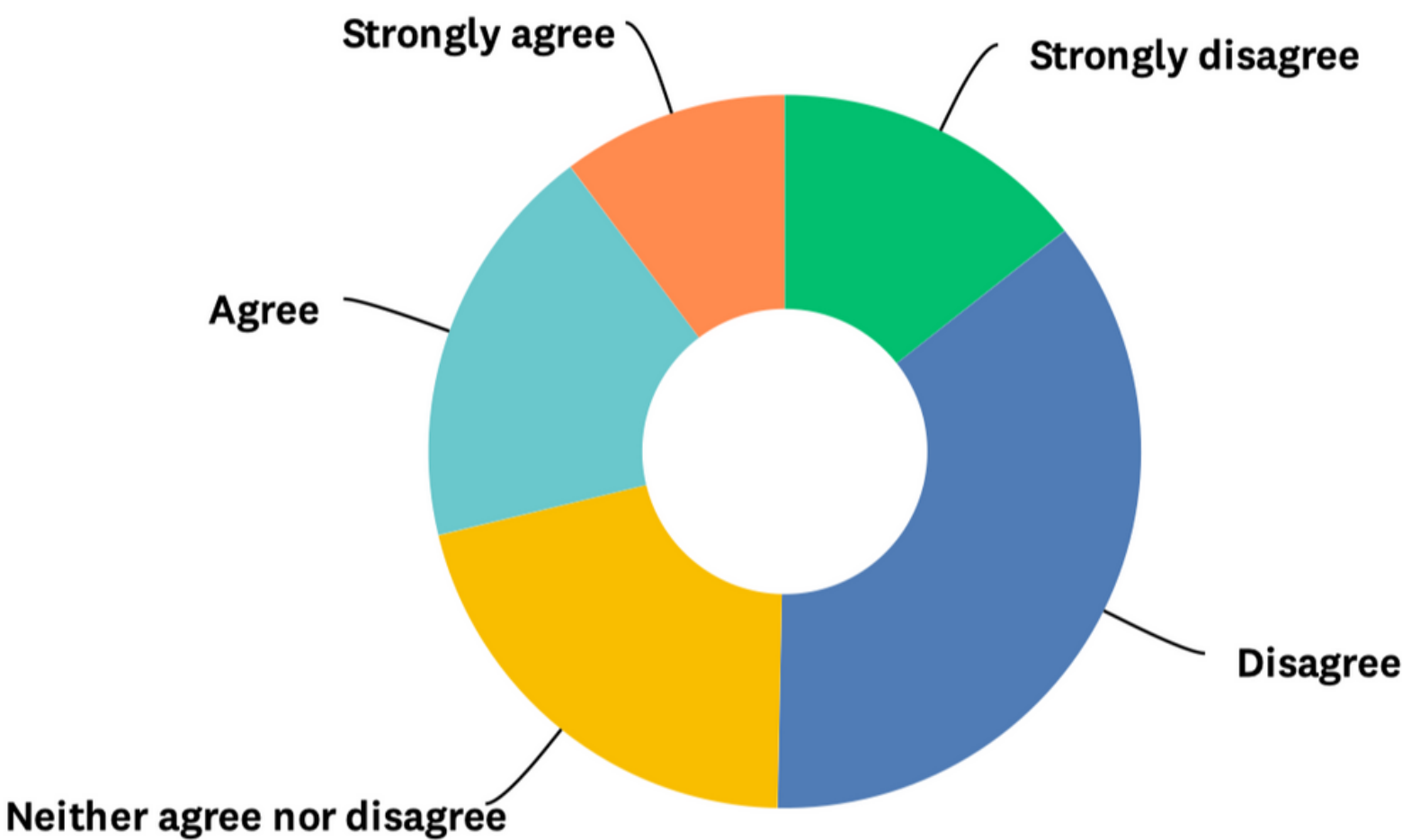


QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
16%	3.7/5.0 (74%)	1.03	15/18

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	1/5	3.77%	11
Disagree	2/5	11.30%	33
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	16.10%	47
Agree	4/5	49.66%	145
✔ Strongly agree	5/5	19.18%	56
TOTAL			292

Q20 You have a best friend at work.

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



QUIZ STATISTICS

Percent Correct
9%

Average Score
2.7/5.0 (55%)

Standard Deviation
1.21

Difficulty
1/18

ANSWER CHOICES

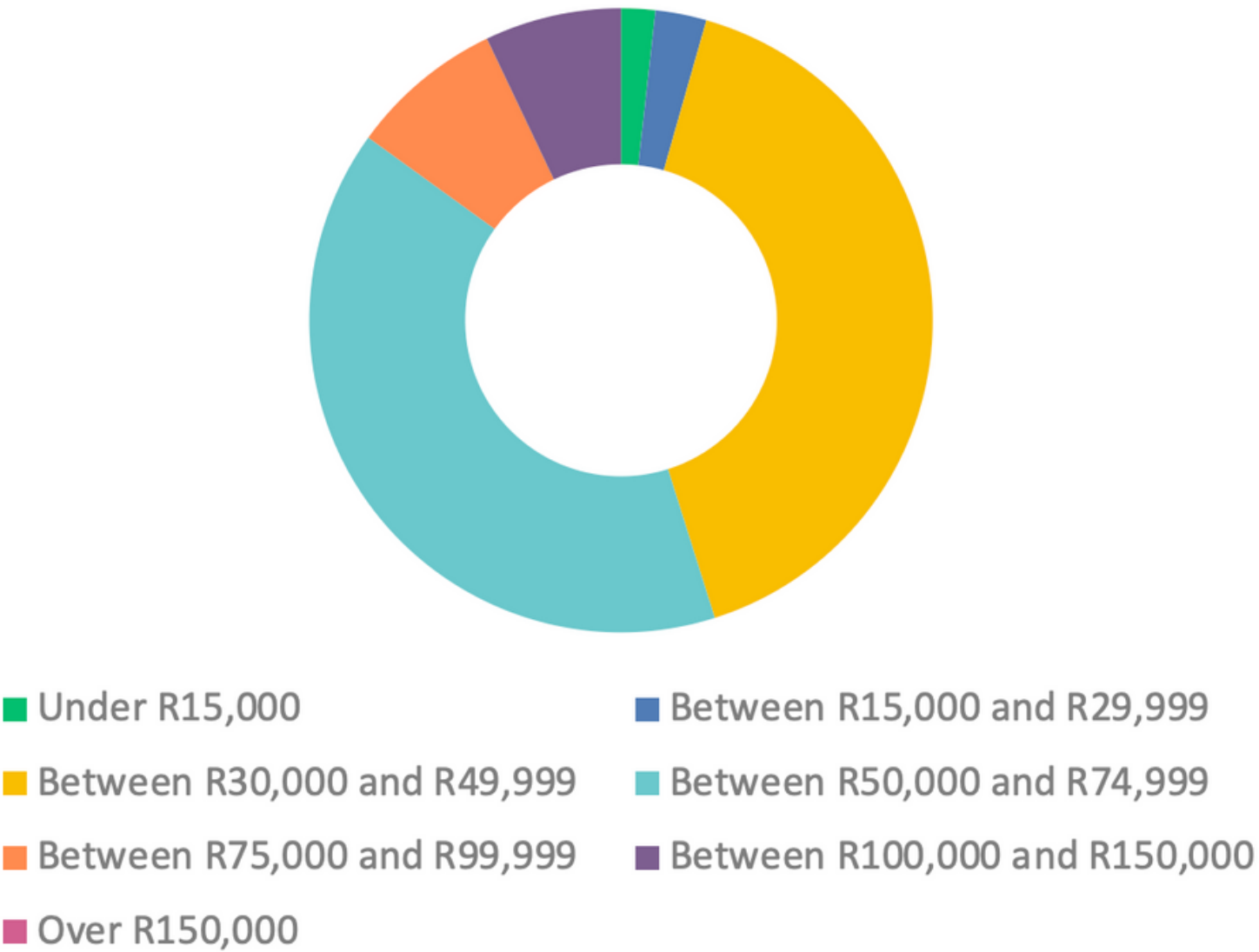
SCORE

RESPONSES

Strongly disagree	1/5	14.38%	42
Disagree	2/5	35.96%	105
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	20.89%	61
Agree	4/5	18.49%	54
✔ Strongly agree	5/5	10.27%	30
TOTAL			292

Q21: What is your monthly salary before tax?

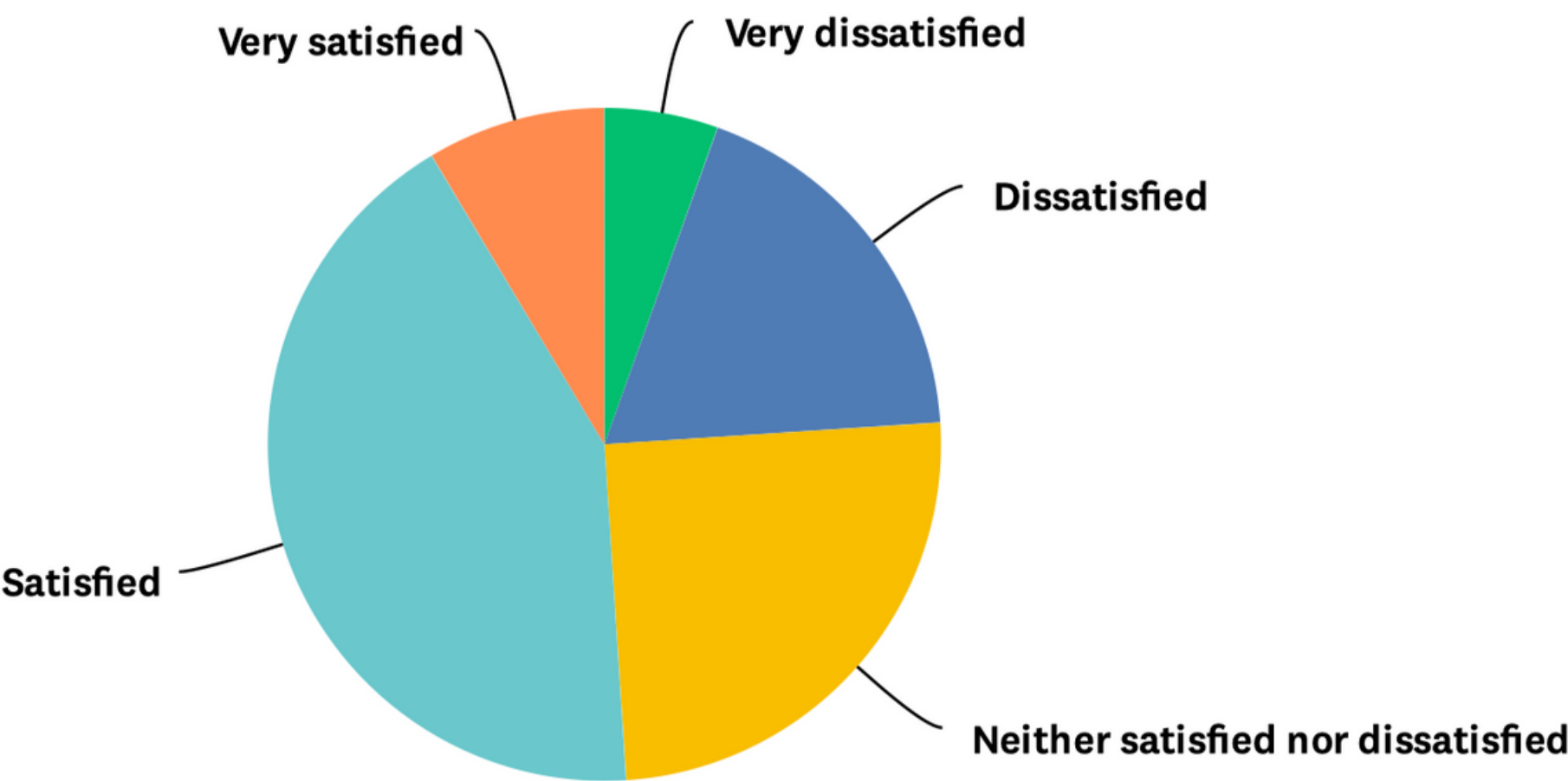
Answered: 290 Skipped: 50



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under R15,000	1.72%	5
Between R15,000 and R29,999	2.65%	8
Between R30,000 and R49,999	40.71%	118
Between R50,000 and R74,999	39.88%	116
Between R75,000 and R99,999	7.96%	23
Between R100,000 and R150,000	7.08%	20
Over R150,000	0%	0
TOTAL		290

Q22 How satisfied are you with your overall compensation?

Answered: 292 Skipped: 48



QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
7%	3.3/5.0 (66%)	1.04	6/18

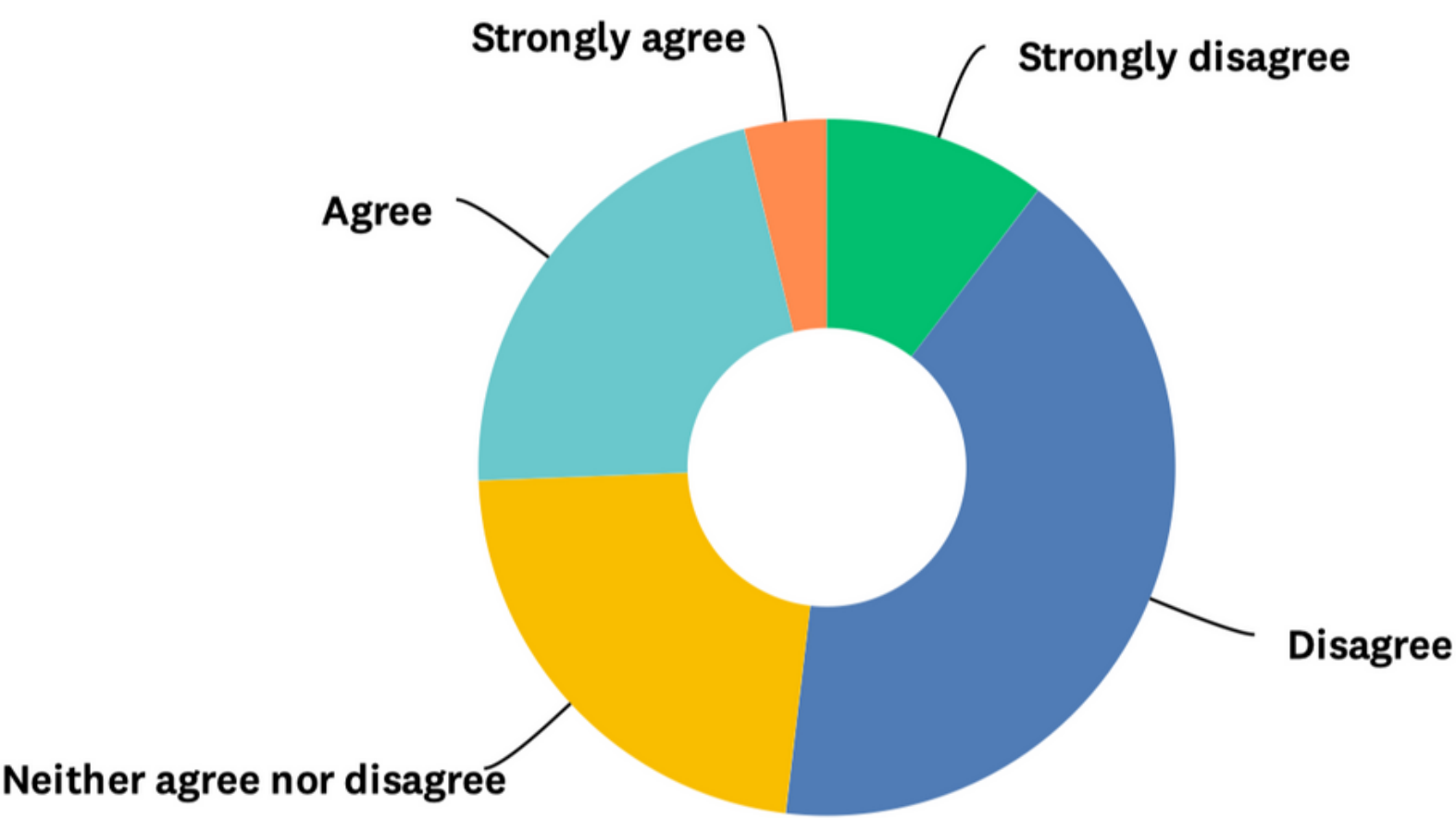
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Very dissatisfied	1/5	5.48%	16
Dissatisfied	2/5	18.49%	54
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3/5	25.00%	73
Satisfied	4/5	42.47%	124
✔ Very satisfied	5/5	8.56%	25
TOTAL			292

5.3. Psychological Safety

- Questions 23 - 26 survey the level of employee psychological safety
- A score of above 4/5 indicates employees feel psychologically safe whereas scores below 4/5 suggest employees do not feel psychologically safe
- Disappointingly, only 56% of 289 respondents feel psychologically safe at work
- This matters because workplaces that prioritise psychological safety experience a 27% reduction in employee turnover, a 76% increase in employee engagement, and a 50% increase in productivity. Creating a psychologically safe workplace can also lead to 74% less stress, 29% more life satisfaction, and a 57% increase in collaboration among team members
- A psychologically unsafe work environment translates into a poor employer brand and a sustained competitive disadvantage

Q23 If I make a mistake in this team, it is held against me.

Answered: 289 Skipped: 51

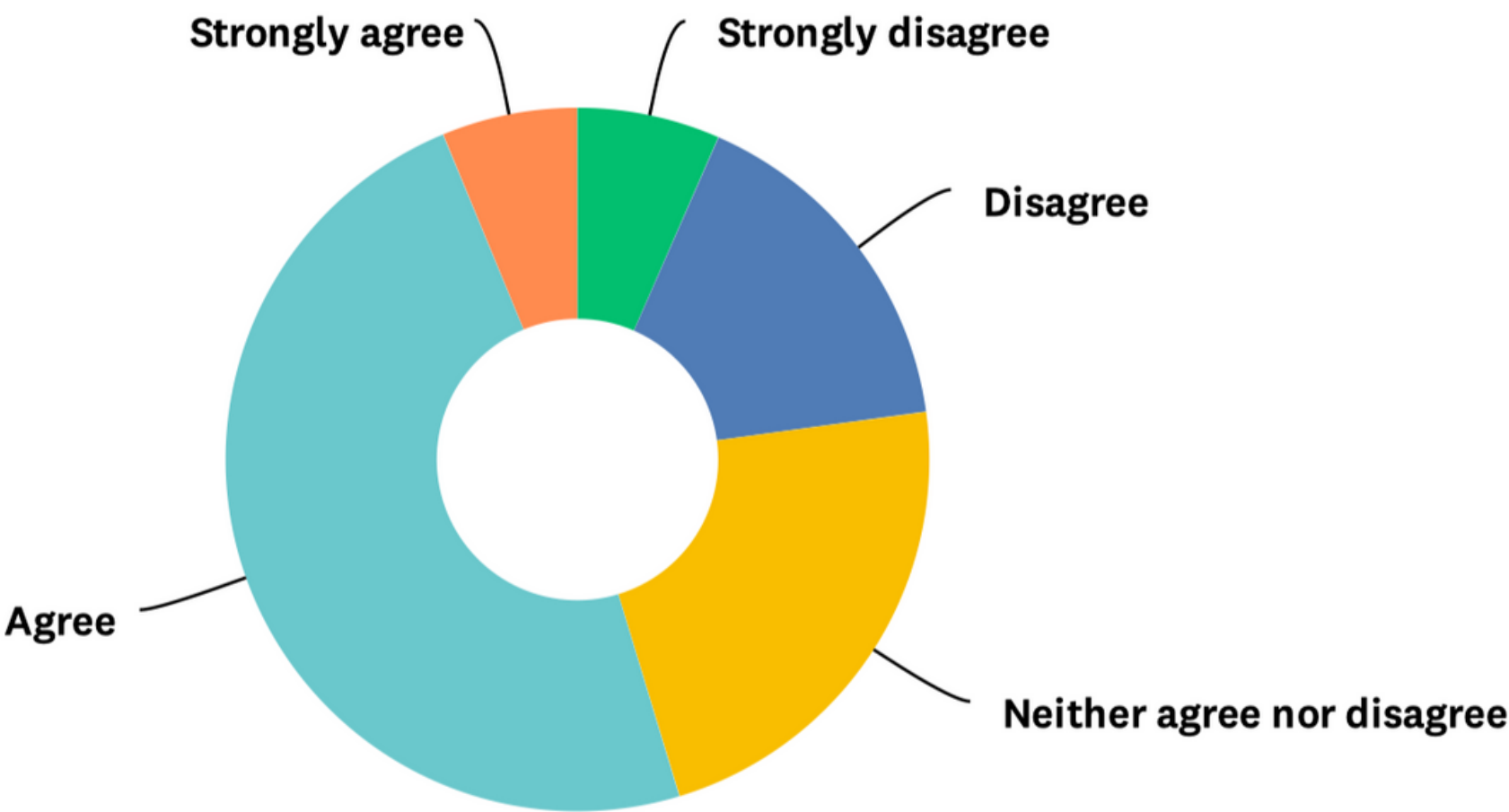


QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
9%	3.3/5.0 (67%)	1.05	8/18

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
✔ Strongly disagree	5/5	10.38%	30
Disagree	4/5	41.52%	120
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	22.49%	65
Agree	2/5	21.80%	63
Strongly agree	1/5	3.81%	11
TOTAL			289

Q24 Members of this team ARE able to bring up problems and tough issues

Answered: 289 Skipped: 51

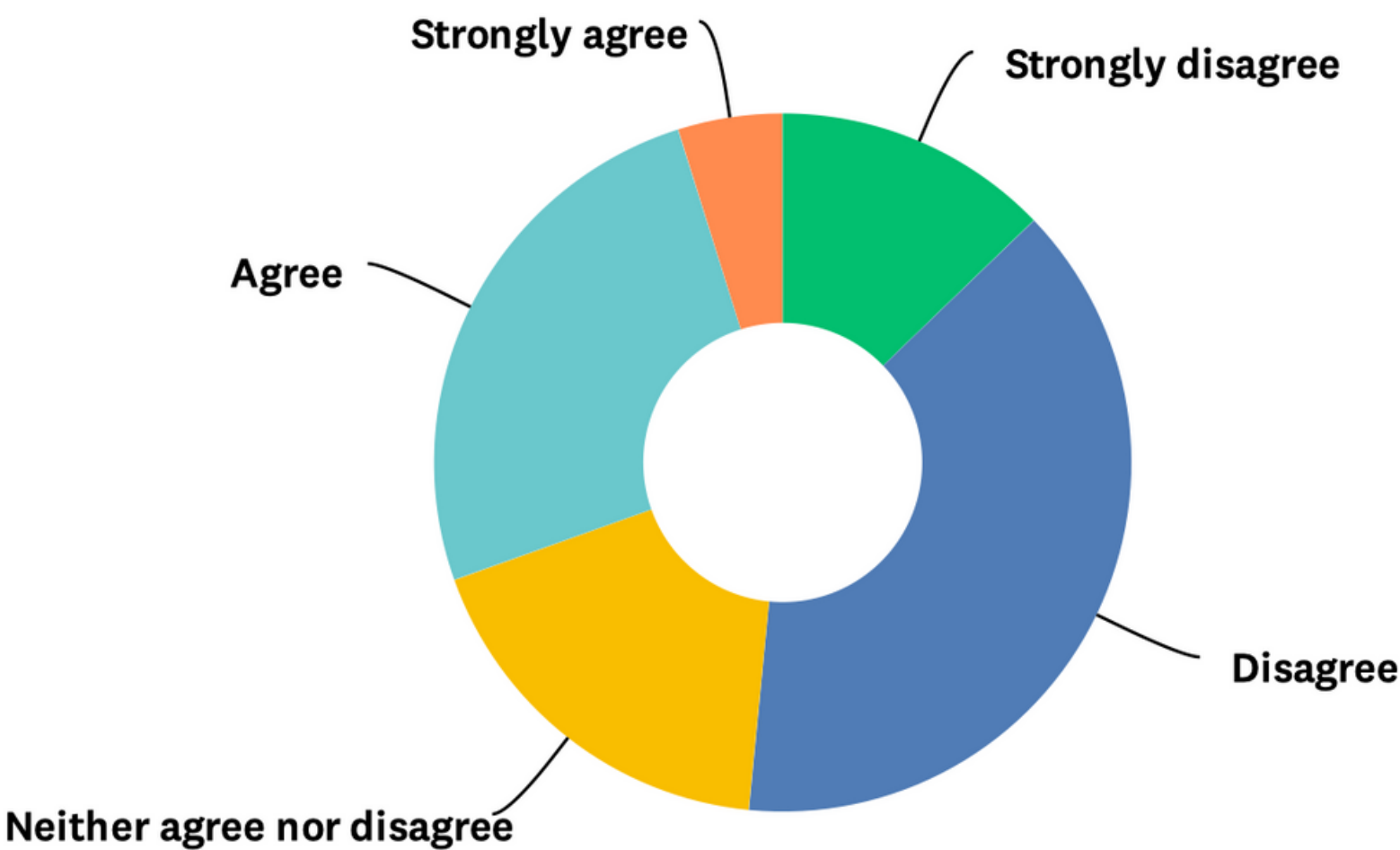


QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
5%	3.3/5.0 (66%)	1.03	7/18

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	1/5	6.57%	19
Disagree	2/5	16.26%	47
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	22.49%	65
Agree	4/5	48.44%	140
✔ Strongly agree	5/5	6.23%	18
TOTAL			289

Q25 People on this team sometimes reject others for being different

Answered: 289 Skipped: 51

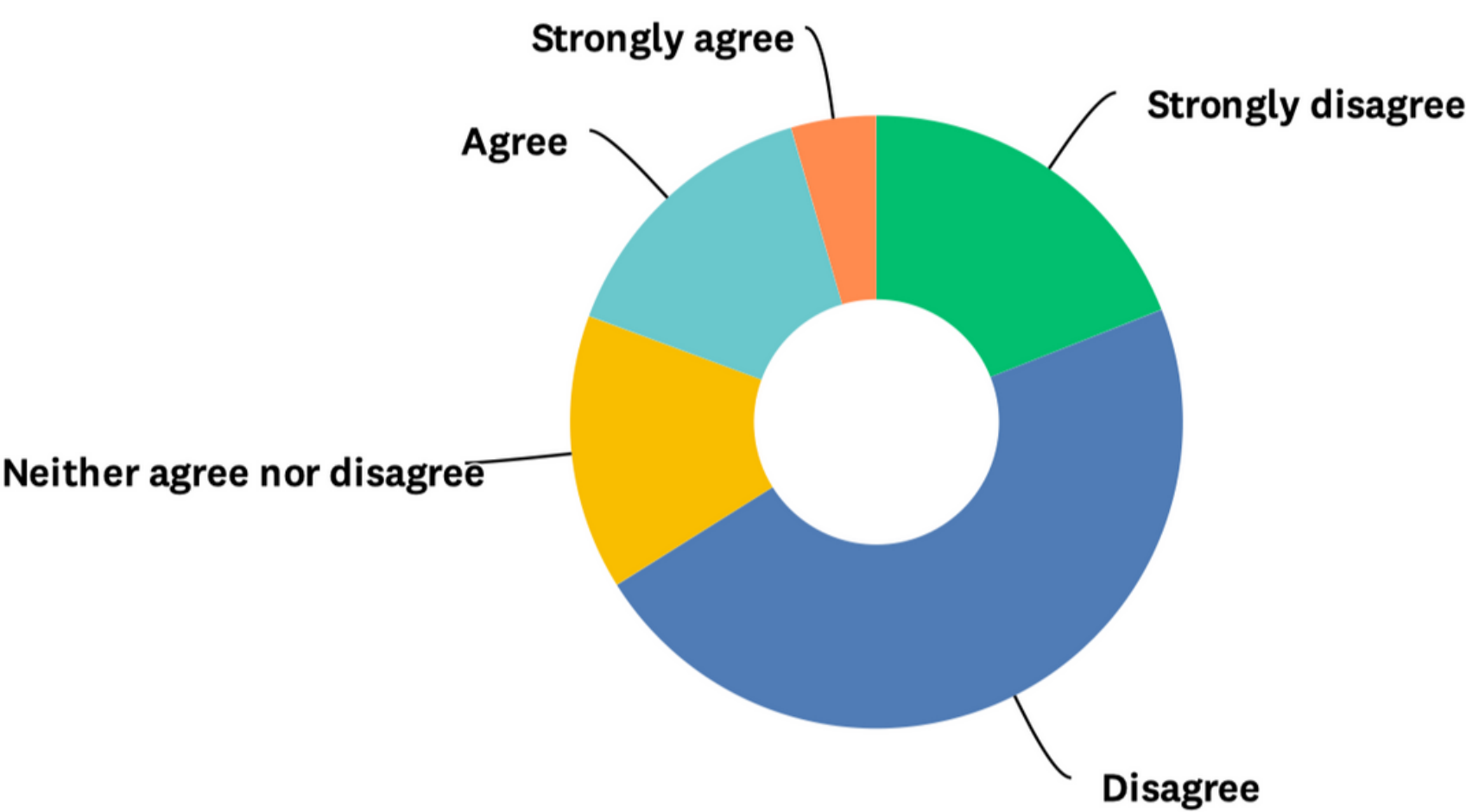


QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Difficulty
11%	3.3/5.0 (66%)	1.13	4/18

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
✔ Strongly disagree	5/5	12.80%	37
Disagree	4/5	38.75%	112
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	17.99%	52
Agree	2/5	25.61%	74
Strongly agree	1/5	4.84%	14
TOTAL			289

Q26 It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help

Answered: 289 Skipped: 51



QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 16%	Average Score 3.6/5.0 (72%)	Standard Deviation 1.09	Difficulty 12/18
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
✔ Strongly disagree	5/5	19.03%	55
Disagree	4/5	47.06%	136
Neither agree nor disagree	3/5	14.53%	42
Agree	2/5	14.88%	43
Strongly agree	1/5	4.50%	13
TOTAL			289

5.4. Employee Loyalty Advocacy

- Questions 27 - 30 survey employee loyalty and advocacy
- The eNPS score is measured on a scale of -100 to 100, where a higher score indicates greater employee loyalty and advocacy
- An eNPS score above 0 is considered positive, while a score below 0 indicates a need for improvement.
- However, the eNPS of 2 in this survey is disappointing given that the average eNPS score across all industries is around 10-15. A score above 30 is regarded as very good, and above 50 is excellent
- This matters because high eNPS scores indicate that employees are highly satisfied with their work and the company, and are more likely to recommend the company to others. This can lead to improved recruitment and retention, as well as a positive reputation for the company.
- 48.5% of respondents are more likely than not to resign from their current employment
- Thematic analysis of qualitative data (Q28 & Q30): see next page

Thematic analysis: Detractors and likely to leave

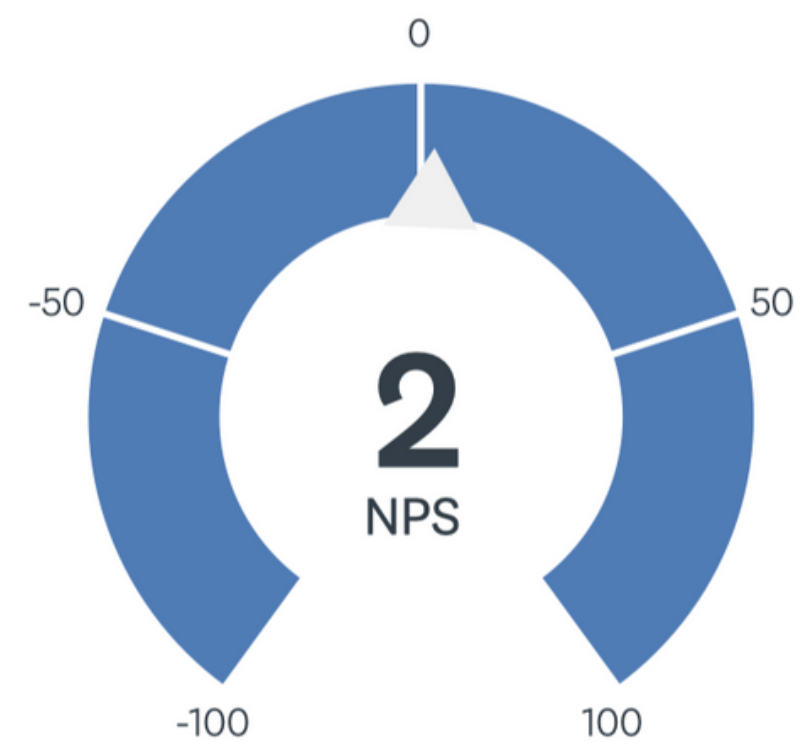
- **Lack of support from management:** Many of the respondents felt that management was not supportive enough, and in some cases, it was even described as toxic. Some of the specific reasons given include bad management and leadership, unrealistic expectations, a lack of feedback, and dismissive and rude treatment of staff.
- **Lack of support from colleagues:** Another common theme was a lack of support from colleagues. This could be due to personality clashes or the absence of a team environment. Some respondents felt that there was no teamwork or that their boss was not a team player.
- **Insufficient support for mental health:** Some respondents felt that while outsourcing help for mental health wellbeing was a good thing, more could be done to nurture team spirit and a supportive environment. Others described the workplace as emotionally disheartening or stressful.
- **Lack of support for career advancement:** A few respondents mentioned a lack of support for career advancement, mentoring, or improving their skill set.
- **Lack of support for personal needs:** Some respondents mentioned a lack of support for personal needs such as proper equipment, shorter hours, or time off.

Thematic analysis: Promoters and likely to stay

- **Teamwork** and collaboration among colleagues.
- A positive **culture** with a good work-life balance.
- Opportunities for personal and professional **growth**.
- Good **support** network and mentoring for new employees.
- **Ethical** and compassionate staff.
- Focus on best practices and excellence.
- **Positive work environment** and job satisfaction.
- **Fair compensation** and benefits.
- **Inclusivity and respect** for individual strengths and contributions.

Q27 How likely is it that you would recommend your practice or company to a friend or colleague?

Answered: 272 Skipped: 68



DETRACTORS (0-6)	PASSIVES (7-8)	PROMOTERS (9-10)	NET PROMOTER® SCORE
32% 88	33% 91	34% 93	2

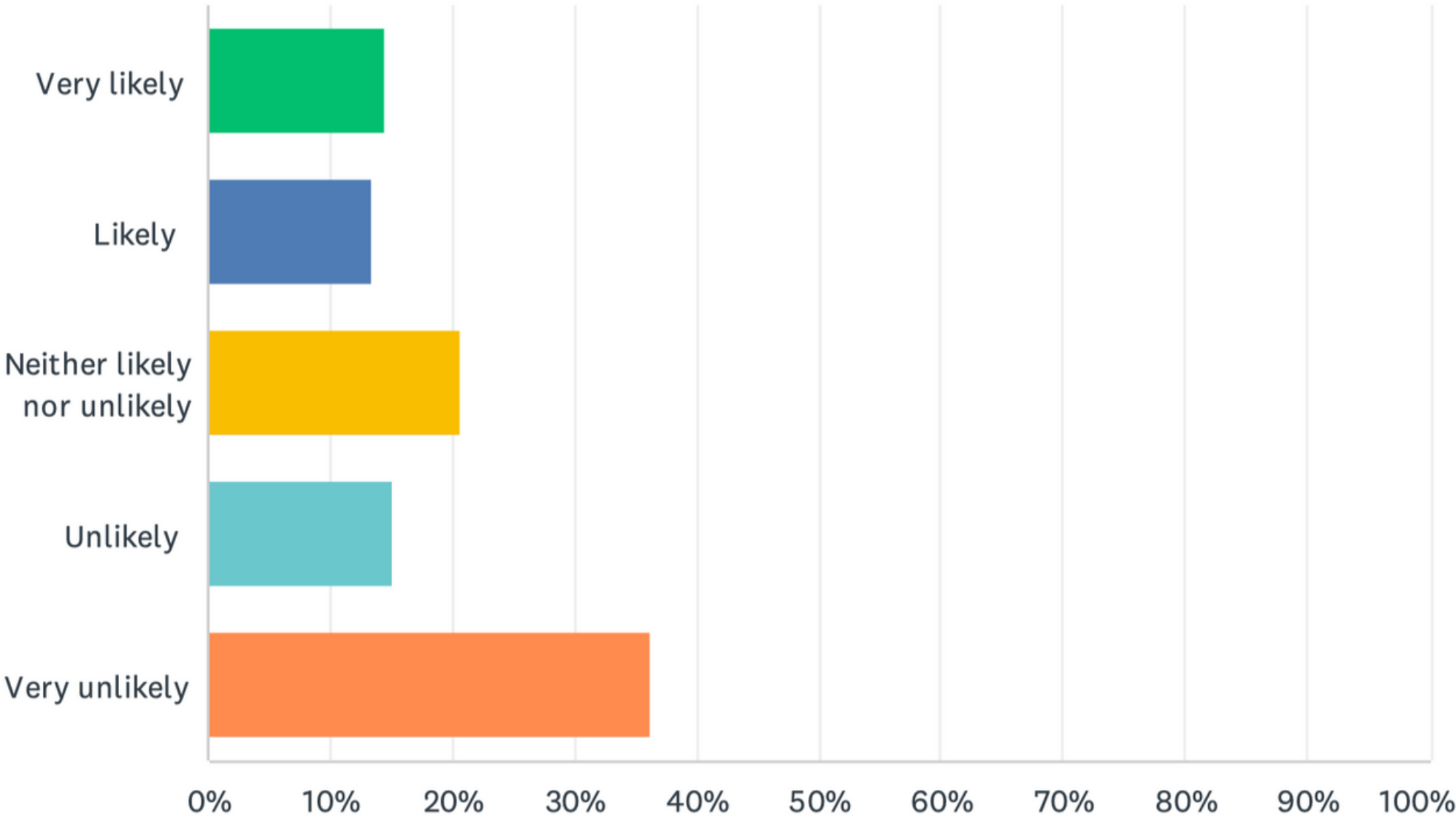
Q28: Which 3 words would you use to describe this practice as a workplace to professional colleagues?

Answered: 289 Skipped: 51 Tag: Negative vs Tag: Positive



Q29 How likely are you to resign within the next 12 months?

Answered: 270 Skipped: 70



ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Very likely	1/5	14.44%	39
Likely	2/5	13.33%	36
Neither likely nor unlikely	3/5	20.74%	56
Unlikely	4/5	15.19%	41
✓ Very unlikely	5/5	36.30%	98
TOTAL			270

Q30: Using as few words as possible, what is the main reason for the answer you gave to the previous question (Q29)

Answered: 289 Skipped: 51 Tag: Negative (Very Likely and Likely) vs Tag: Positive (Unlikely and Very Unlikely)



6. Takeaway

Employee turnover can be costly for veterinary practices, both in terms of recruitment and training costs, as well as lost revenue from decreased productivity and potential loss of clients. Understanding the reasons why employees leave and addressing any underlying issues can help reduce turnover rates and ultimately save the practice money in the long run. Therefore, prioritizing employee engagement and creating a positive work environment should be a top priority for veterinary practice owners.



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