Couchbase NoEQUAL

2020 Tech Lead Survey Looks at Developers – A Stressful Year and Hints Into 2021

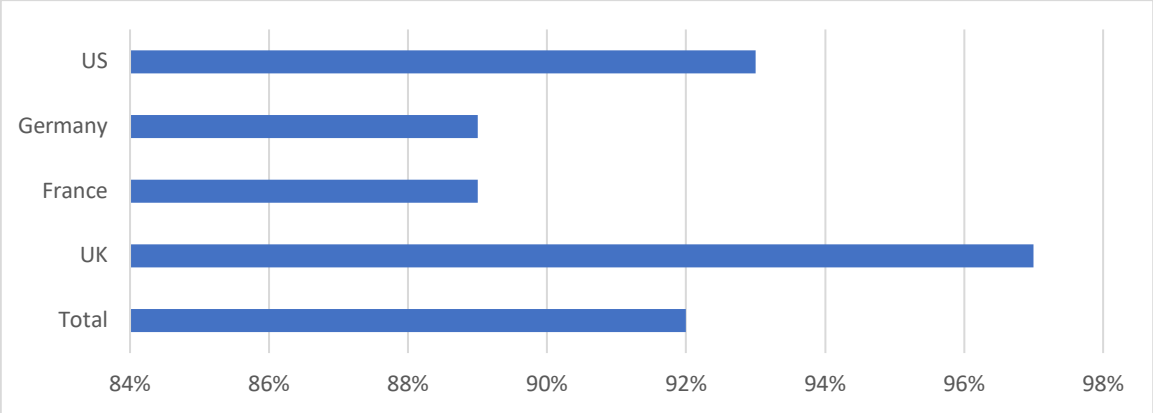
Since 2017, Couchbase has surveyed IT decision makers annually to find out the challenges they face in executing their digital transformation strategies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 2020 was different from previous years. However, it may come as a surprise to find out how attuned CIOs are to the plight of developers.

In 2020 we asked 450 Senior IT decision makers in the US, UK, France and Germany to tell us what challenges they are facing in their digital transformation and how developers are being affected.

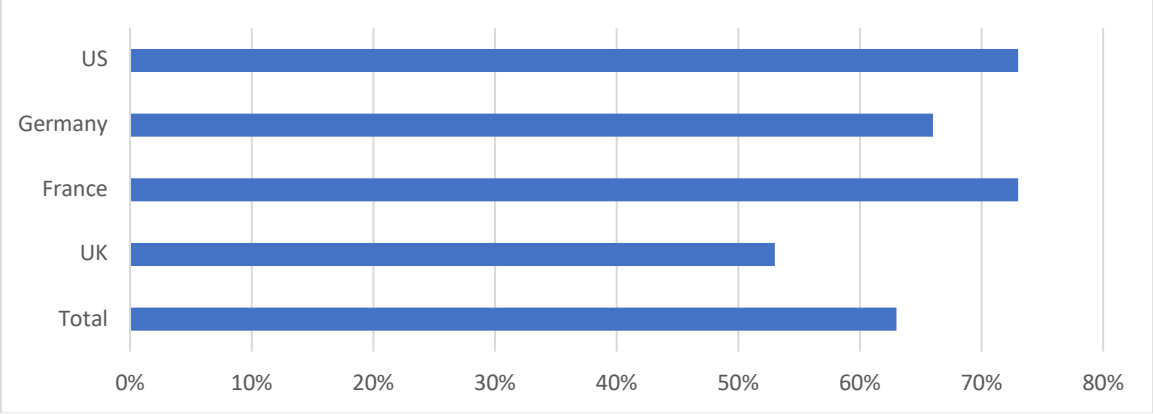
A helping hand

Many organizations were forced into implementing their five-year digital transformation plans in a matter of months so as to adapt to new methods of working and adjust to rapid changes in markets. It is unsurprising that developers have been the heroes of this effort (**92 percent** of respondents agree). And **63 percent** said that the flexibility to change their goals when needed has been significantly helpful or even indispensable in meeting their digital transformation goals. Both of these factors naturally need a strong development team to succeed.

Have developers been the heroes of this effort – by country:



Has the flexibility to change goals when needed been significantly helpful or indispensable in meeting digital transformation goals – by country:



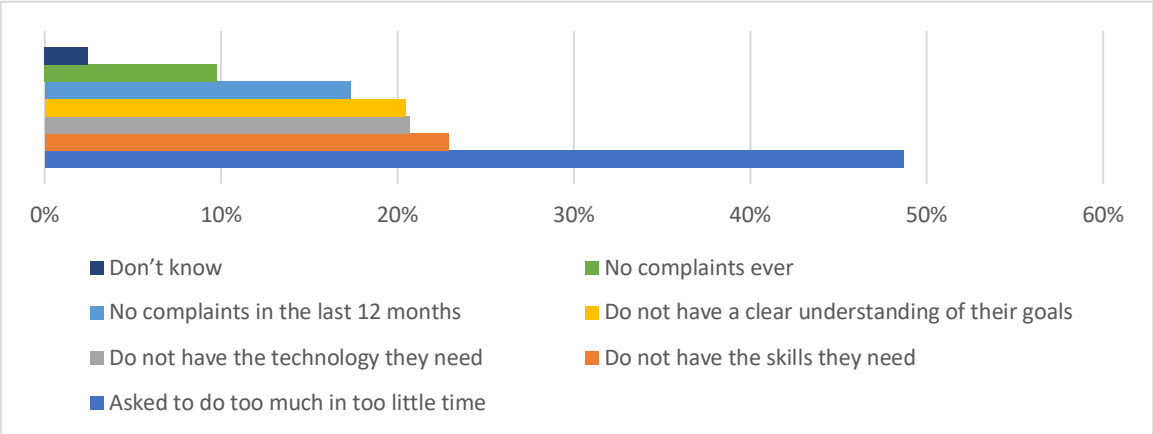
Most notably, respondents were reluctant to accuse developers of slowing them down. Asked what factors had prevented them from pursuing new digital transformation projects the organization wanted, only 11 percent identified the development team's inability to meet its goals – a fraction of those citing, for instance, a lack of skills or the complexity of implementing technologies.

Cause for complaint?

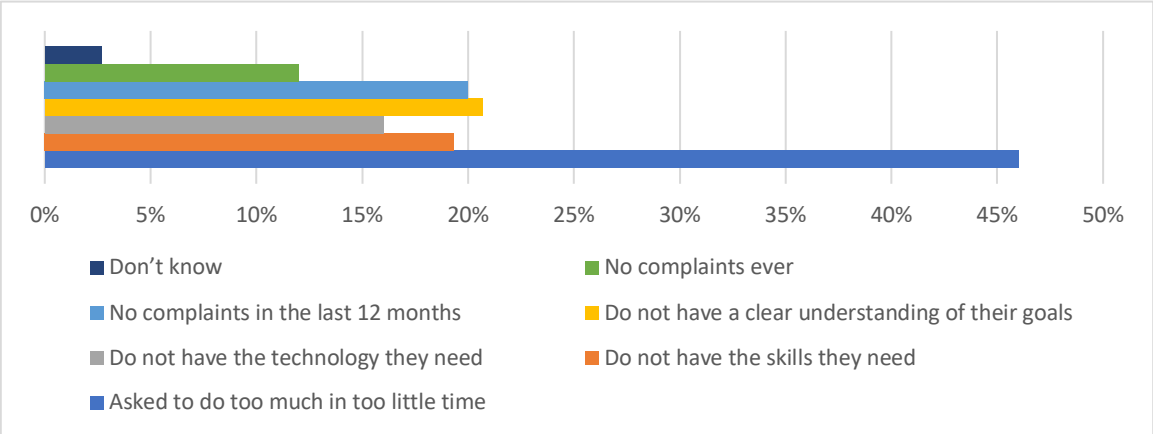
As we can see, developers are a vital part of enterprises' digital transformation strategies. However, like any other part of the business at present, they are also under pressure. Asked what complaints their development teams have, **49 percent** of organizations reported that developers were being asked to do too much in too little time – a situation that could easily end in stress, fatigue and burn-out.

Complaints reported by development teams – by country:

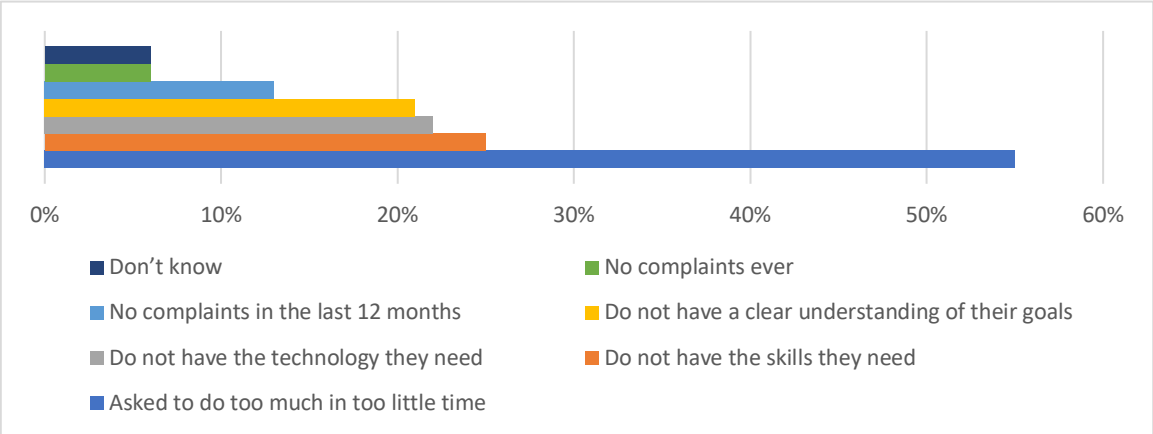
Total:



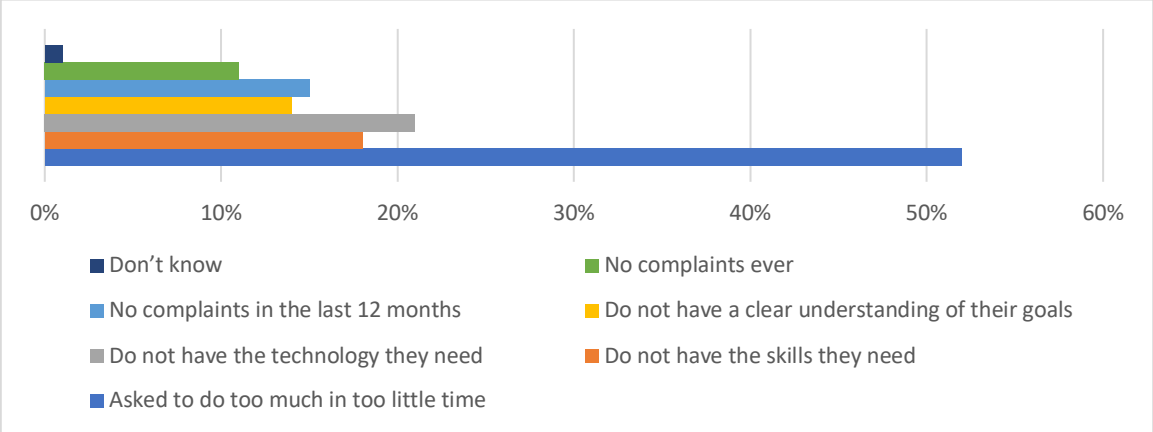
USA:



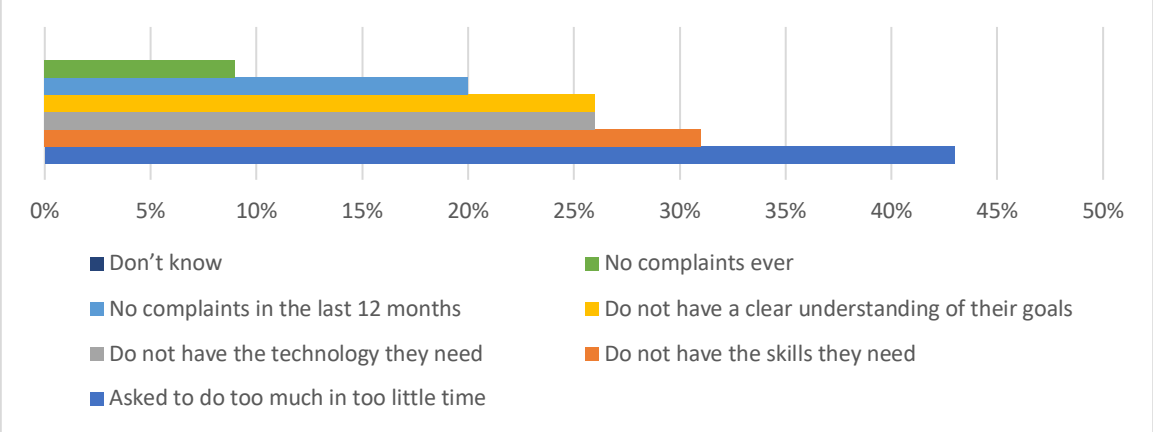
UK:



France:

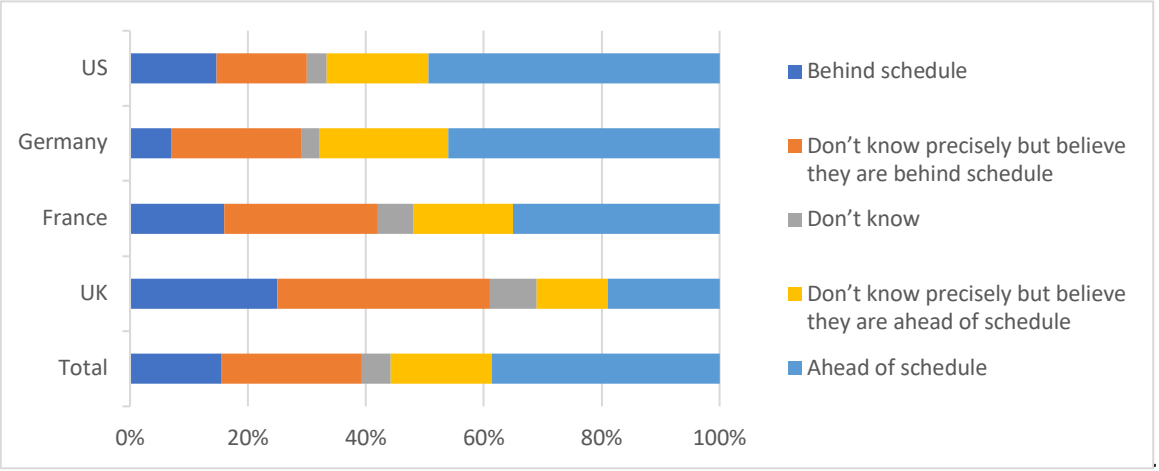


Germany:



Ultimately, having to do too much in too little time will lead to delays – especially if the organization's goals are ambitious to begin with. In a year where rapid reaction to unforeseen events was the norm, it is perhaps inevitable that **40 percent** of respondents said their development teams were behind schedule with their current projects. Yet this may be an issue of management as much as capability. After all, 46 percent of respondents couldn't give a precise answer.

Are development teams ahead or behind schedule? By country:

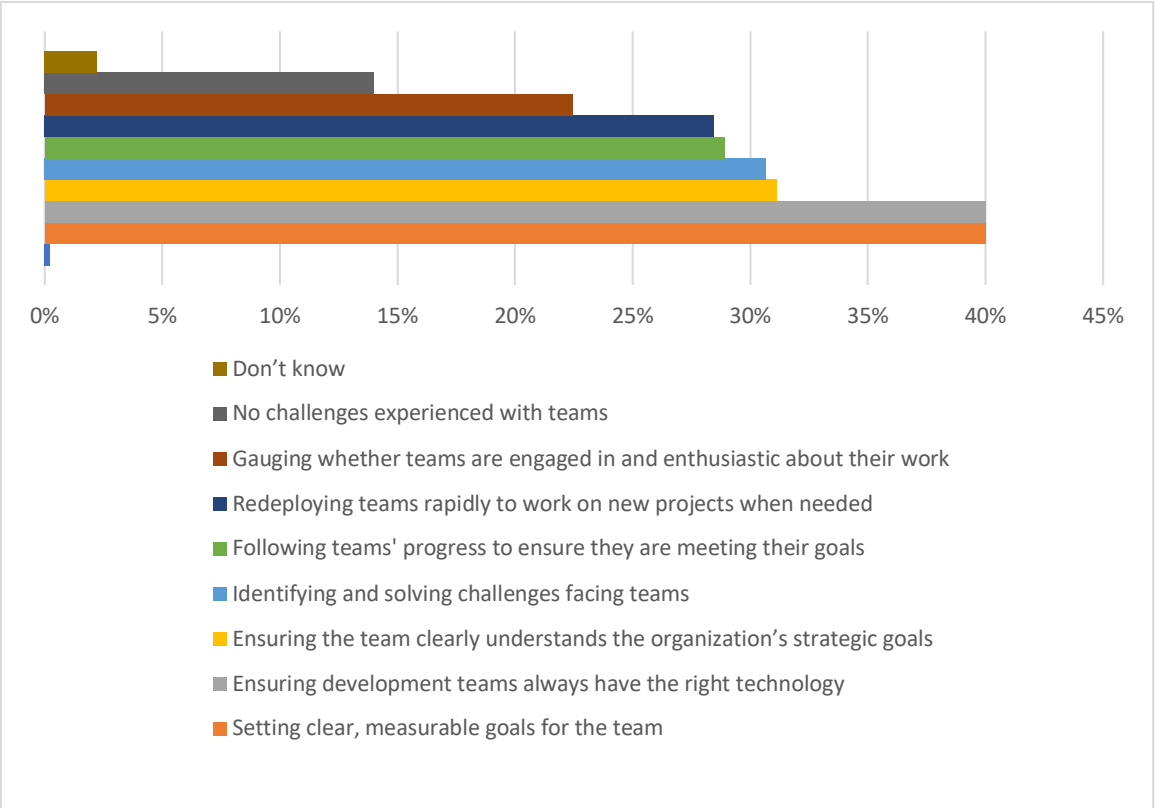


Clear goals?

There is a definite issue in that the majority of organizations cannot get the best out of their developers. **86 percent** of respondents experienced challenges with their development teams. **40 percent** struggle to set clear, measurable goals for development teams, and the same number find it hard to ensure teams always have the right technology. Communication is clearly an issue: almost a third (**31 percent**) are struggling to ensure development teams clearly understand the organization's strategic objectives and goals. Even solving issues is a struggle in itself: **31 percent** had difficulty identifying and solving the challenges they face.

Development team challenges experienced by organizations – by country:

Total:



USA:

0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%
35%
40%
45%
50%
Don’t know
No challenges experienced with teams
Gauging whether teams are engaged in and enthusiastic about their work
Redeploying teams rapidly to work on new projects when needed
Following teams' progress to ensure they are meeting their goals
Identifying and solving challenges facing teams
Ensuring the team clearly understands the organization’s strategic goals
Ensuring development teams always have the right technology
Setting clear, measurable goals for the team

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0%
5%
10%
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25%
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35%
40%
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No challenges experienced with teams
Gauging whether teams are engaged in and enthusiastic about their work
Redeploying teams rapidly to work on new projects when needed
Following teams' progress to ensure they are meeting their goals
Identifying and solving challenges facing teams
Ensuring the team clearly understands the organization’s strategic goals
Ensuring development teams always have the right technology
Setting clear, measurable goals for the team

France:

Germany:

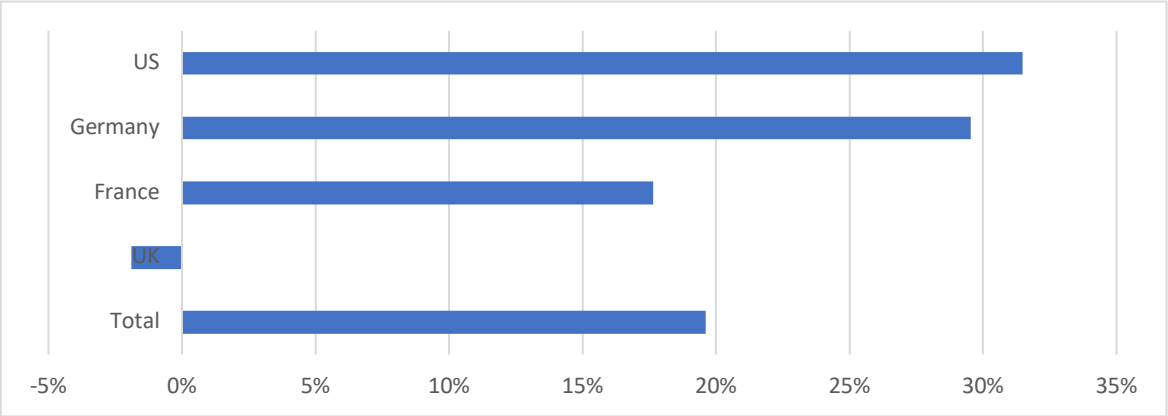
It’s clear that resolving these challenges would help address many of developers’ own complaints, and help organizations make the most out of their teams.

Looking to 2021

The key to solving these issues is first giving teams the communication, guidance, and technology they need to succeed. For instance, teams shouldn't be struggling to create innovative services with legacy technology that isn't suited to the task, or be expected to adapt immediately to new technology that requires a completely new skillset. At the same time, organizations need to remember that more haste equals less speed. Taking the time to communicate clearly with developers and understand exactly what they contribute to the business, and the obstacles in their way, will result in a more efficient, more effective team.

This is especially important since, if anything, investment in – and likely expectations for – developers is increasing. During 2020, we saw development teams grow on average by **20 percent**: from 51 to 61 members. Making this investment count will be crucial. While we may be more aware of the challenges ahead, 2021 isn't likely to be any easier than 2020, so doing everything to help developers now will make the year ahead a lot smoother.

Average change in development team size – by country:



If you would like to know more about how Couchbase can help, check out https://developer.couchbase.com/