

# Administrator's Digest



Al Vanderberg, County Administrator

April 30, 2020

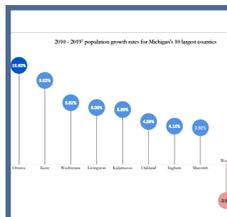
## Top stories in this digest



[Blue Swan Future](#)



[Ottawa County Parks Update](#)



[Planning & Performance Update](#)



[DEI - Racial Equity Guidebook](#)



[Distinguished Service Award](#)

Today we launch the latest iteration of the County Administrator's Digest. I began the Digest shortly after assuming my duties in December 2003. It initially took the same form as the City Manager's Digest that I used in South Haven to keep the City Council apprised of important events and happenings in between meetings.

I started distributing the Digest to the County Board of Commissioners and soon added all elected officials and department heads. Before long we were sending to elected and appointed city, township and village leaders, our state and federal legislative delegations, media and to all County employees. The Digest is now posted on [miOttawa.org](http://miOttawa.org) and is available through Gov Delivery.

The Digest is opened by over 800 recipients within an hour of posting it so it remains a viable communication method in a day where we have many traditional (newspaper, television, radio) and modern (social media, GovDelivery) methods of communicating.

Please let me know if you have questions or have topics that you are interested in seeing covered in the County Administrator's Digest. - Al

Many thanks to Sarah Allen for her work on the employee COVID-19 surveys, so we stay in better touch with all employees.

Follow the link to view the latest results: [Employee COVID-19 Survey](#)

## COVID -19 AND OUR BLUE SWAN FUTURE (by Al Vanderberg)

An ancient saying presumed that Black Swans did not exist and once they were discovered, took on a different meaning. I read an intriguing article shortly after the advent of COVID-19 which informed readers about Black Swan Events, which are defined as major, unpredictable events that present a short-term crisis, but are coupled with long-term opportunity. Many times financial crises such as the 1929 stock market crash which served as a harbinger for the Great Depression, the 1987 Black Monday stock market crash, and more recently the Great Recession of 2008 and beyond. ***The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*** is a book about rare and unpredictable events by Nassim Nicholas Taleb.

Other takes on this include the ***Grey Swan*** which is based on the thinking that most disasters that happen in the world today are somewhere between probable and highly improbable and as such probably should be anticipated. There is even ***Green Swan*** thinking now too. Author John Elkington built on the thinking of Taleb when he authored ***Green Swans: The Coming Boom In Regenerative Capitalism***. Others have likened ***Green Swans*** to major environmental crises and the opportunities that exist to think differently and emerge in a better place. A local example that comes to mind is the groundwater quantity and quality issues facing the County.

My favorite is the ***Blue Swan***. Another author, also responding to Taleb's Black Swan theory, defines the ***Blue Swan*** as the super helpers, sometimes known, sometimes unknown, who converge and contribute in times of crisis and make a huge difference in helping meet the needs generated by the crisis successful and ultimately creating a transformative effect for the organization. One thinks of first responders, nurses, doctors, social workers and others who work directly with those infected with COVID-19, many times around the clock.

I also think of our Ottawa County employees, many of whom are dealing with the crisis firsthand and also those working from home. IT set up over 300 VPNs, so employees would have connectivity to the network. IT also helped employees get set up with County equipment at home where necessary. HR rolled out many online training opportunities. The response was overwhelming. One of the characteristics of Ottawa County employees, that I highly value, is our drive and eagerness to learn. Consider the following statistics (through yesterday) that show training participation as HR has rolled out more and more opportunities:

-Live, virtual Ottawa County hosted trainings:	9 different courses with 201 participants
-Knowledge City e-learning courses:	58 different courses with 251 participants
-Ottawa County custom e-learning courses:	10 different courses with 74 participants
-Pine Rest EAP trainings:	8 different courses with 367 participants

**Total: 85 different courses with 893 participants**

Some of the early statistics on what employees are accomplishing from home are amazing as well. Clerk-Register Justin Roebuck informed me that 3,577 deeds were recorded from April 1 through April 27. Not only were employees productive from home, but revenue from deed recording activity kept coming in. Justin further revealed that Court Records staff processed 10,000 records in March alone after employees started working from home. The Sheriff's Office reported that their records division merged nearly 5,000 field reports between March 23 and April 26 and even scanned 14 boxes of Jail records that were damaged by a water leak and restored in 2019. These stats were obtained in casual conversation and we will provide other success stories as we learn of them.

Major unplanned, unpredictable events not only cause disruption and pain, but also create future opportunity. I believe that each of us will experience *Blue Swans* in both our County employment and personal experience. Our ability to rapidly mobilize employees working from home, rapid employment of WebEx, ZOOM and other meeting technologies including the hosting of Tuesday's Board of Commissioners meeting on Zoom, expert mobilization, operation and crisis management capability of the Public Health Department and Emergency Management Division of the Sheriff's Office, and high productivity experienced by at home workers speaks well of our resiliency as an organization. This has also allowed the County to keep all employees fully paid and benefited thus far through this pandemic.



I am interested in learning what employees see as ongoing opportunities that Ottawa County will experience because of COVID-19. I am also interested in any personal/family experiences that have been positive because of the pandemic. My wife Leslie and daughters Anna (recent college grad) and Amy (Sophomore at NMU), have had many more quality conversations, new recipes have been successfully completed, and we have even played more games recently such as Dutch Blitz, a family favorite. Please email me anything you don't mind me sharing in future editions of the Digest, either with your name attached or anonymously.

It is important to remember, through this generation defining crisis, that we are tremendously blessed as a people and as the Ottawa County Government!!!

## Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission COVID-19 Response

(by Jessica VanGinhoven)



Local, state, and federal officials have repeatedly emphasized the health benefits of physical activity while spending time in nature and the outdoors, especially while many are feeling anxious by the recent implications of this pandemic. Ottawa County's parks and open spaces remain open to the public, but we are asking citizens to enjoy the outdoors responsibly and safely, whether on a beach, in a forest, on a trail or in a parking lot.

The Parks & Recreation Commission has created this list to help keep our community safe:

- Do not visit parks if you are feeling ill
- If the park you normally visit is busy (lot more than half full), consider visiting another location or visiting that park at another time
- Only visit parks on your own or with members of your household
- Stay 6-10' from others who are not in your household, on trails and in parking lots
- Do not congregate
- Wash your hands before and after your visit
- Pack out what you pack in
- All restrooms and facilities, including playgrounds, are closed – please plan ahead



**COVID signage and limited parking at Rosy Mound Natural Area**

Parks & Recreation officials are working alongside the Sheriff's Department and the Public Health Emergency Response Team to monitor traffic at busier parks and proactively reduce overcrowding. At busier locations, overflow parking has been restricted and some designated parking spots have been eliminated. Large format signage with trail guidelines have been posted.

Ottawa County Parks & Recreation staff have developed online and virtual programs to replace some of the cancelled spring programming. Interpretive staff is also working to create and curate grade-level appropriate resources for parents and teachers who are looking for fun and educational nature programs and activities for students.

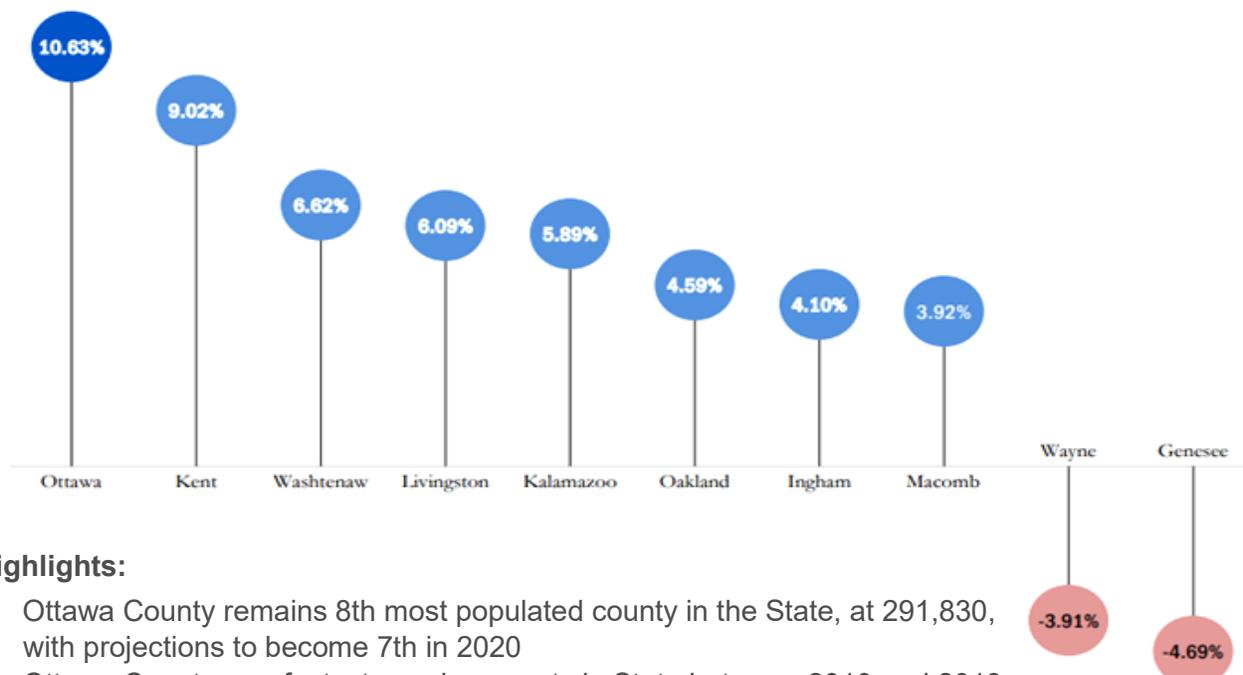
The goal of the Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission is to keep all of the 7,000 acres of park land open and available to citizens, but if these measures to mitigate overcrowding are not successful, we will consider park closure for the safety of our community. Please continue to enjoy parks safely, and don't forget to tune into a spring program.

## Planning & Performance Improvement Update (by Paul Sachs)

### County Population Estimates Released

The 2019 County population estimates were released by the Census Bureau on Thursday, March 26, 2020. The estimates for local units are typically released in May. Some of the Ottawa County highlights are provided below. Also provided is a link to the County's website where these new data are available for view, including downloadable document of the 10 largest and 10 fastest growing counties in Michigan based on the 2019 estimates.

2010 - 2019<sup>1</sup> population growth rates for Michigan's 10 largest counties



#### Highlights:

- Ottawa County remains 8th most populated county in the State, at 291,830, with projections to become 7th in 2020
- Ottawa County was fastest growing county in State between 2010 and 2019 (10.6% growth)
- 49% of Ottawa's population growth between 2010 and 2019 was the result of a natural increase, meaning there were more births than deaths in the county
- 51% of Ottawa's population growth between 2010 and 2019 was the result of a positive net migration, meaning more people moved into the county than moved out of the county

[https://www.miottawa.org/Departments/Planning/county\\_statistics.htm](https://www.miottawa.org/Departments/Planning/county_statistics.htm)

[https://www.miottawa.org/Departments/Planning/pdf/Databooks/Top\\_Counties\\_MI.pdf](https://www.miottawa.org/Departments/Planning/pdf/Databooks/Top_Counties_MI.pdf)

### 2020 Census – Be Counted Initiative

The PPID recently applied for and received a \$75,000 grant through the Michigan Municipal League to assist with census promotion efforts and reaching the hard-to-count populations within Ottawa County. PPID staff have been collaborating with Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance (LNA) throughout the grant application process and LNA will head up this project moving forward. The funds will be utilized to hire a 'Census Captain' to

**BE COUNTED** fill the County's action plan, which consists of utilizing funds to collaborate with key local nonprofits with the completion of the census and other promotional efforts (i.e. social media blasts, printed brochures/flyers, billboards, etc.).

### Spoonville Trail – Phase II

Following the County Board of Commissioner's recent commitment of \$440,000 to complete Phase II of the Spoonville Trail, the PPID further reduced the County's financial obligation by partnering with a regional Foundation. The major Foundation – which requested to remain anonymous until details of the award are finalized – generously committed \$221,000 towards the project, a crucial contribution that ensures the project is completed during the Summer of 2020. The PPID continues to pursue grant funding opportunities and is grateful for the "all-hands-on-deck" approach local organizations, stakeholders, and the County exhibited in bringing this project to fruition.



## The Future of ACRE AgTech



ACRE AgTech, a 501c6 non-profit agency created by Ottawa County, has had a tremendous run over the past five years, helping to catalyze a brand new economic development eco-system in Michigan that bridges technology with agriculture. ACRE proved that there is an interest and a need to support the development of new ag-technology in Michigan, having had over 100 individuals and companies inquire about support from ACRE as well as its successful launch of Michigan's only business accelerator program dedicated to ag-technology. However, despite these successes, the State's private sector businesses have not

yet seen fit to invest in the organization at a level sufficient to provide base operational funding. Therefore, the 11 member Board of Directors of ACRE AgTech made the tough decision to put the organization into hibernation until further notice, effective March 20, 2020.

During its stages of operation, ACRE successfully secured \$760,000 in two-rounds of State funding (2015 and 2018 respectively), \$55,000 in federal grants, \$97,000 in cash for sponsorships, and \$162,793 in in-kind support services from local businesses. The original business model for ACRE was designed to capture a small percentage of "fees" from entrepreneurs that were receiving business start-up support services from the organization. ACRE was successful in securing fee revenue, however, it was determined quickly that not enough fees could be generated fast enough through its unique and first-of-its-kind business model before the initial round of State operational funding was depleted. Subsequently, with the support of Senator Roger Victory, a second round of funding from the legislature was granted to ACRE in 2018. This funding was specifically used, in conjunction with continued private-sector support, to launch ACRE's new, modified business model that involved creation of the entrepreneurial Accelerator Program.

The ACRE AgTech Accelerator was launched on August 26, 2019 with a cohort of four start-up technology companies. These unique companies completed the program and are now experiencing greater success in their businesses as a result. It was the hope of the ACRE Board and staff that the success of this first cohort would attract private sector businesses to invest in ACRE. However, despite the success of the Accelerator Program and the unparalleled efforts of ACRE Chief Operating Office Doug Huesdash, adequate private sector investment has not materialized as of the date of this letter. Consequently, operational funding has now been exhausted and Doug has been laid off.

Doug, who was a County employee under contract with ACRE, worked tirelessly for the organization and was instrumental in helping to launch the successful 2019 Accelerator. While Doug's vibrant and energizing presence in the Planning and Performance Improvement Department will be missed, his impact on congealing advanced technologies with agricultural needs in Michigan will be lasting.

It is our hope that by hibernating ACRE through 2020, as opposed to permanently shutting-down the organization, will offer additional time for new funding and/or partnerships to materialize to help relaunch the organization in one form or another. The work of ACRE over the years was continuously validated as important for Michigan farmers. One day, hopefully sooner rather than later, another agency/entity/conglomerate will build upon the work and successes of ACRE AgTech to help Michigan agriculture flourish into the future with necessary technological advancements.

## Ottawa County Partners on Racial Equity Guidebook for COVID-19 Response

(by Robyn Afrik)

The Ottawa County Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Office has partnered with the Government for Alliance on Race & Equity's COVID-19 Racial Equity Rapid Response Team and DEI Directors across the nation to publish a public resource called, [Covid-19 Racial Equity Rapid Response Guidebook for Government](#). The guidebook, available for anyone in the community, is a collection of strategies, practices, policies and processes, using a racial equity lens and developed by cities, counties and other municipalities across the US.



"The guidebook is intended to be a resource during a time when there isn't a playbook for such a pandemic. It's also ensuring that racial equity remains centered whereas often times, it becomes a secondary afterthought," said Robyn Afrik, Ottawa County DEI Director.

Areas included in the guidebook are healthcare, housing, immigration, environment, education, transportation, communications, incarceration and more. The link to the guidebook will update as new contributions are made. For those interested in more information, please reach out to the [DEI Office](#).

Ottawa County Water Resources Commissioner Joe Bush was featured in the linked M-Live Article about high Great Lakes water levels.

<https://www.mlive.com/news/2020/03/great-lakes-high-water-is-going-to-affect-everyone-in-michigan.html>

## Kevin Bowling to Receive National Center for State Courts 2019 Distinguished Service Award



Kevin J. Bowling, JD, MSJA, Court Administrator for the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts, has been known for his passion for the courts and for court administration. Since the beginning of his career with the judiciary over forty years ago, he has worked with relentless dedication to improve the administration of justice and the knowledge, skills, and abilities of judges, court leaders, and staff. For over twenty years of his career, he served in a variety of positions with the Michigan Supreme Court including State Judicial Educator and Regional Court Administrator. His passion for quality leadership and administration of the courts is reflected in his contributions as adjunct faculty for the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada; the National Center for State Courts, Institute for Court Management; and the Leadership Institute in Judicial Education. Kevin also served as Deputy Chief of Party for the Nigeria Justice Sector Assistance Project during his career. He is a well-respected court leader in Michigan and always brings his international, national, and statewide experiences and knowledge back to Ottawa County's 20th Circuit and Probate Courts in an effort to keep the courts true to their mission, "To administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspire public trust".

On December 9, 2019, Kevin was informed he is the recipient of the 2019 National Center for State Courts' Distinguished Service Award. The letter informing him of this award states, "This award honors those who have made substantial contributions to the field of courts administration and to the work of the National Center. We are grateful for the contributions you have made to improve the operation of the courts nationally, and to enhance the work of the National Center for State Courts."

Kevin will receive this award at the 2020 National Association for Court Management annual conference in New Orleans.

-20th Judicial Circuit and Probate Courts, Ottawa County – Annual Report 2019

## Lack of Agility—Thoughts from Paul Klimas, IT Director

Organizations that aim to incorporate agile methods sometimes end up limping along in a sort of hybrid model that incorporates agile practices, but also more linear "waterfall" methods. In short, the worst of both worlds.

### What are we talking about?

To me this means Organizational Development (OD) and Change Management. We cannot separate technology advancements from user engagement. There are approaches to change; in short Ottawa County needs to become comfortable with change – have a plan.

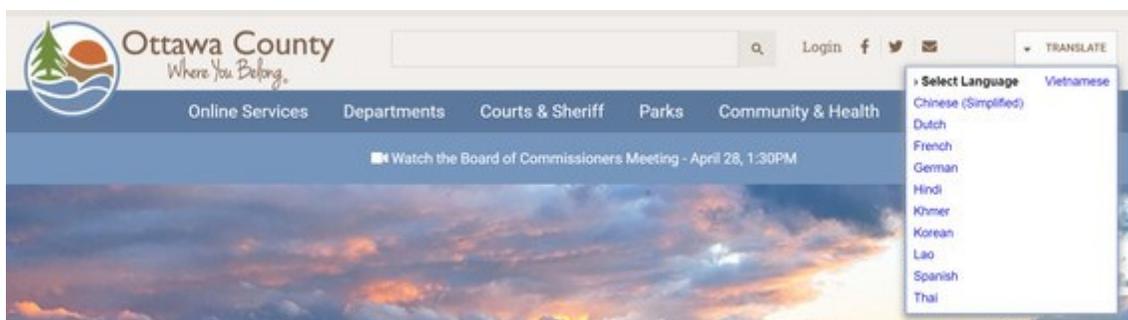
### What are we doing?

I am encouraging every department to have an IT Plan – and am happy to assist. It is critical that County operations know their cost of service delivery, how that service delivery is performed, and the automation and management (tools used) in performance of that service delivery. IT can provide the standard frameworks for automation and data management/analysis/collaboration, assessing and mitigating risk, but we also have experience in constant-chronic change and OD.

## MiOttawa.org users and now experience the website in multiple languages

In a continued effort to provide equity in customer service, the following languages have been added to the current English/Spanish translation application tool on [miOttawa.org](http://miOttawa.org): *Chinese (Simplified), French, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Vietnamese, Thai, German, Dutch and Hindi*.

These languages are either spoken or represented in Ottawa County, as reported by the Migration Policy Institute tabulations from the U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, local residents and current demographics. The language translation application tool is located at the top right-hand corner of each webpage. A drop-down menu allows for users to choose which language they prefer.



### Alan G. Vanderberg | County Administrator

12220 Fillmore St. | West Olive, Michigan 49460 | 616-738-4068  
[avanderberg@miOttawa.org](mailto:avanderberg@miOttawa.org) | [www.miOttawa.org](http://www.miOttawa.org)





## Employee Survey #2 Regarding COVID19

Thank you for completing the second employee survey during the COVID-19 situation.

The purpose of the survey is to gain insights into your experiences and understand what else Ottawa County can do to support people through this challenging time.

It is our intention to closely monitor and make meaningful adjustments in our efforts to support you. Therefore, we will send out another survey next month.

The survey was very helpful to better understand what Ottawa County can do to continue supporting our employees during this time.

A few key insights are below.

**Although there is still wide variety in how employees are feeling, this month employees reported feeling slightly more calm.**

Some employees are feeling very unsettled. Some are feeling very calm. However, there is a clear increase in employees feeling slightly more calm this month.

As part of our Employee Assistance Program, Pine Rest is offering weekly live, virtual training sessions on mental health and wellness topics. So far, 8 different courses have been given and 367 Ottawa County employees have participated. Making an intentional effort to focus on your health and well-being is critical during this challenging time. Look for communications from Human Resources on how to participate.

We would like to remind you that all Ottawa County employees are eligible to receive 5 free, confidential counseling sessions, [as part of our Employee Assistance Program.](#)

**Immediate supervisors continue to play a vital role.**

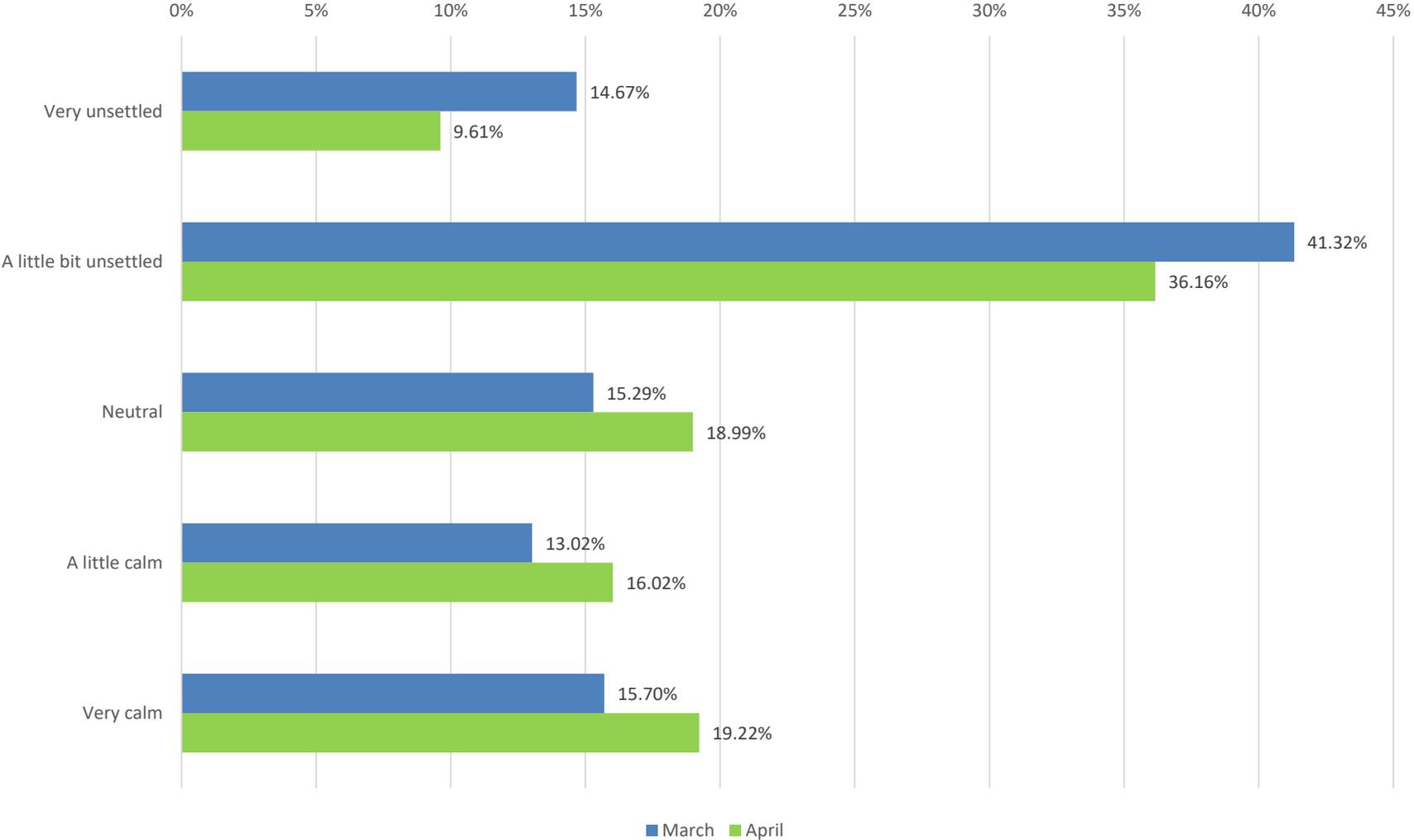
Immediate supervisors continue to provide much needed front-line support to employees during this time. Overall, most employees report that changes are discussed and they are able to voice their opinions, even when working remotely.

**Confidence in senior leadership remains strong.**

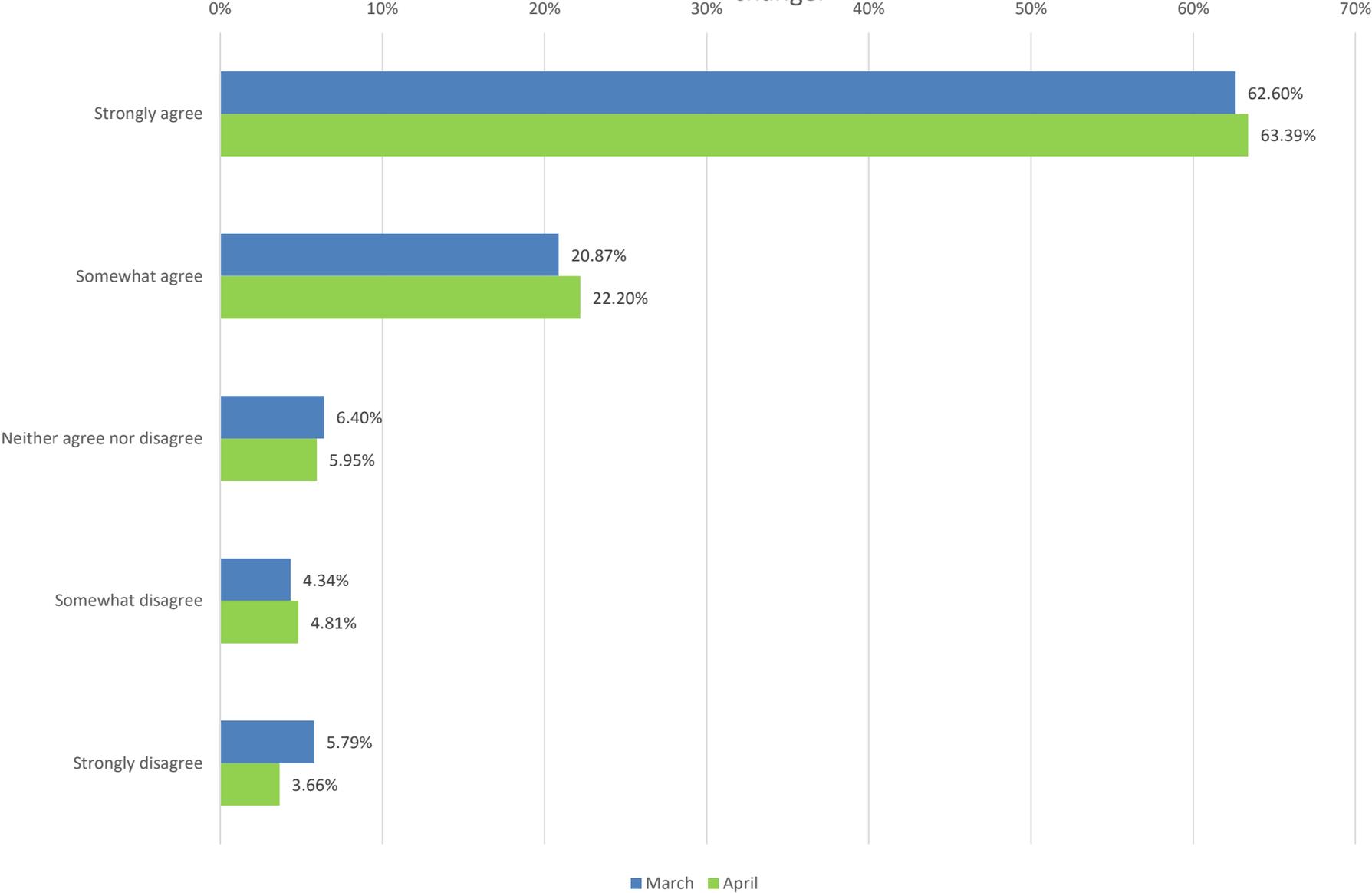
During these difficult times, it is critical that employees have faith in their leadership. These results indicate that the majority of employees still feel a sense of confidence in senior level leaders. Survey results indicate that the majority of employees perceive

	March	April
Response rate	55%	44%
Total responses	548	437

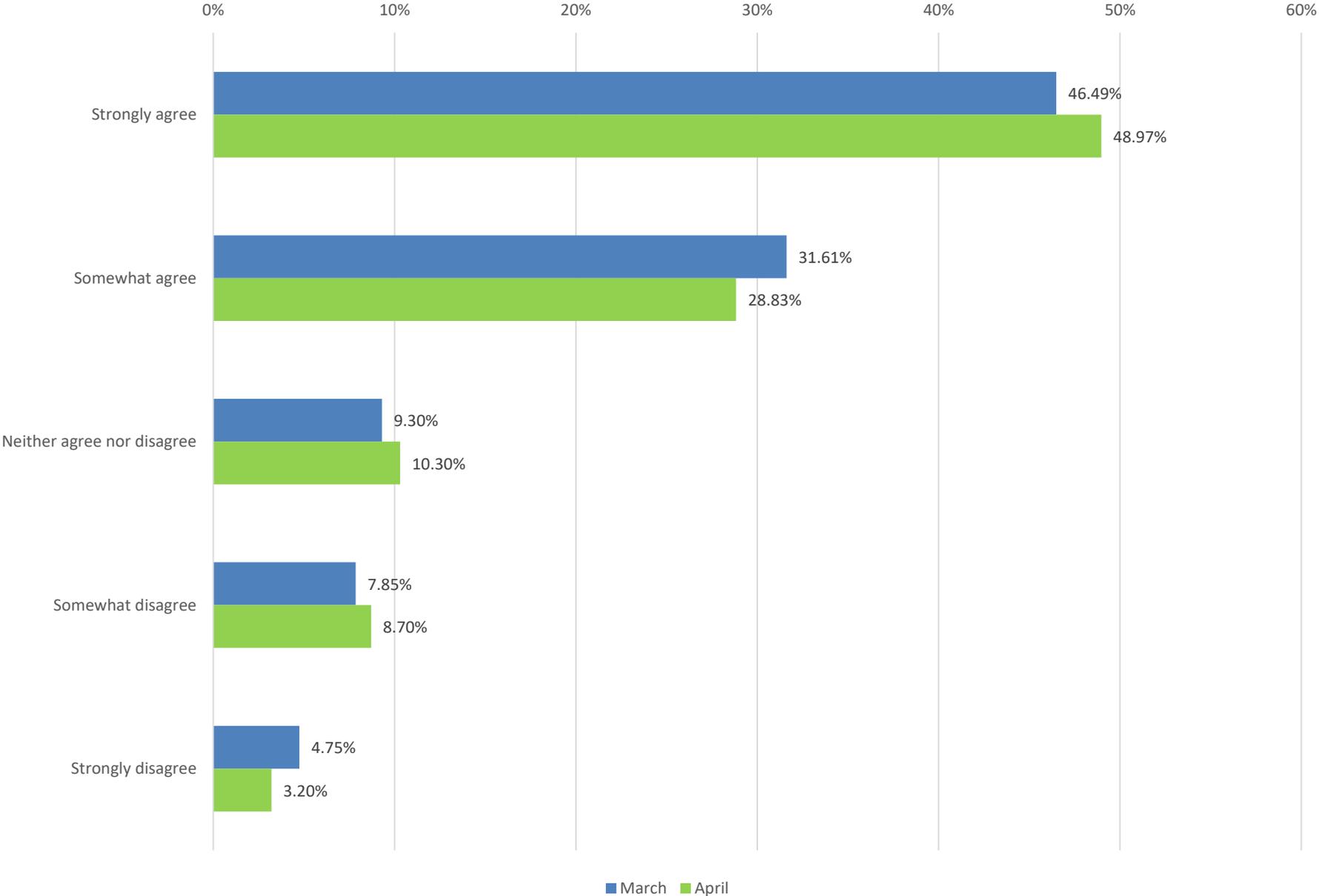
# How are you feeling?



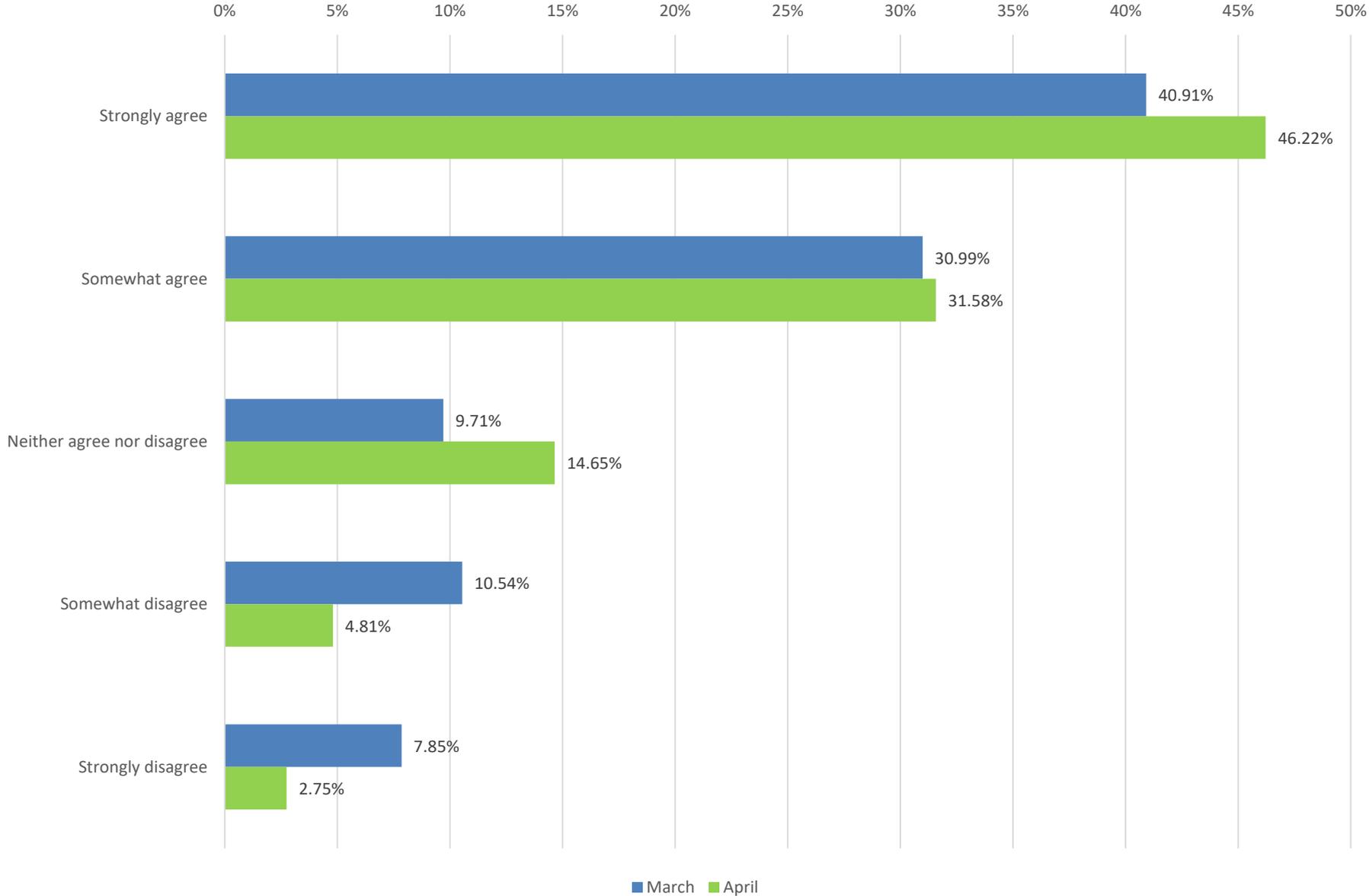
# I feel supported by my immediate supervisor/manager in my efforts to adapt to organizational change.



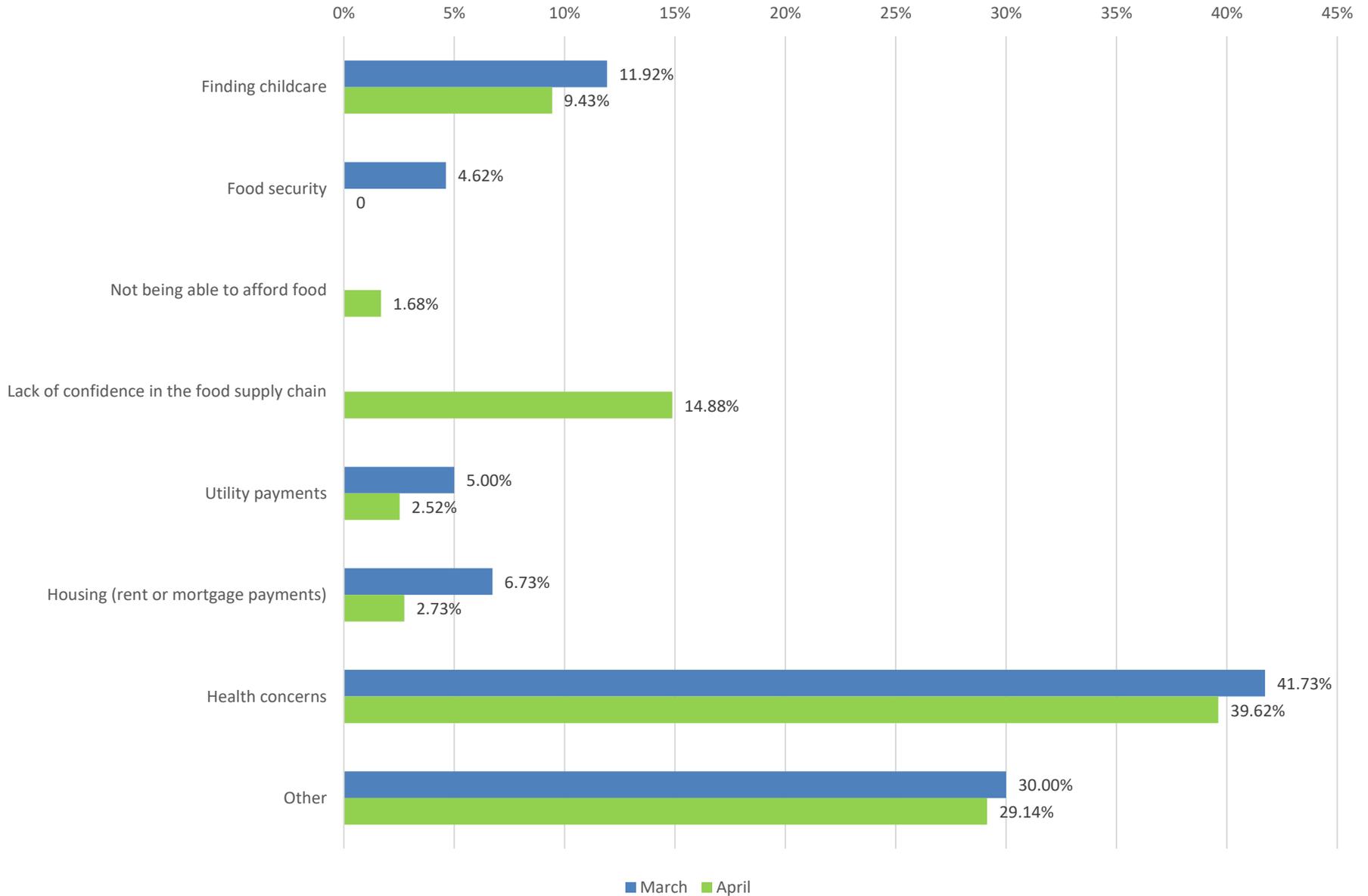
# When changes occur, my team is good at discussing the impact that it will have on us.



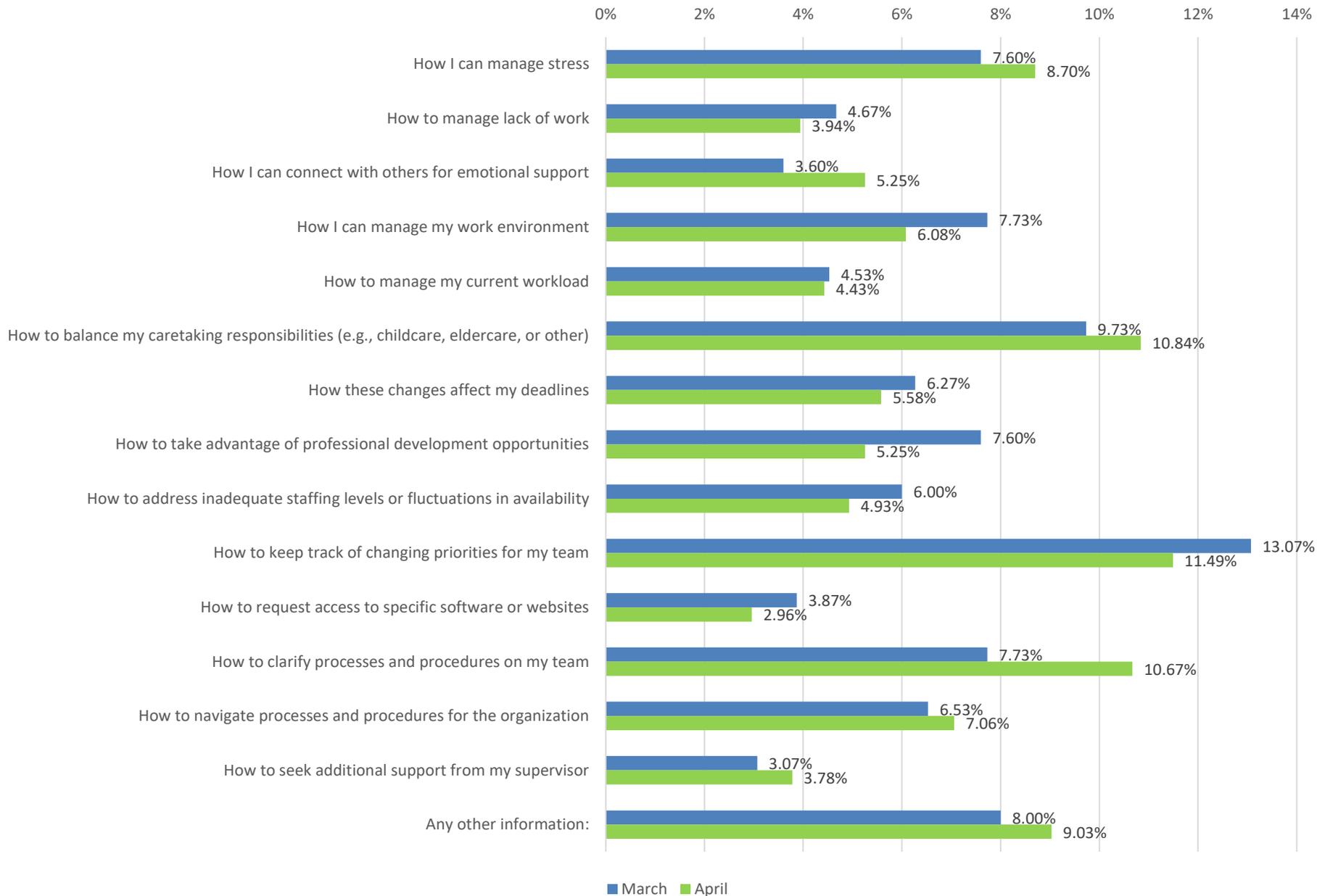
# I have confidence in the senior leadership to make the right decisions for Ottawa County at this time.



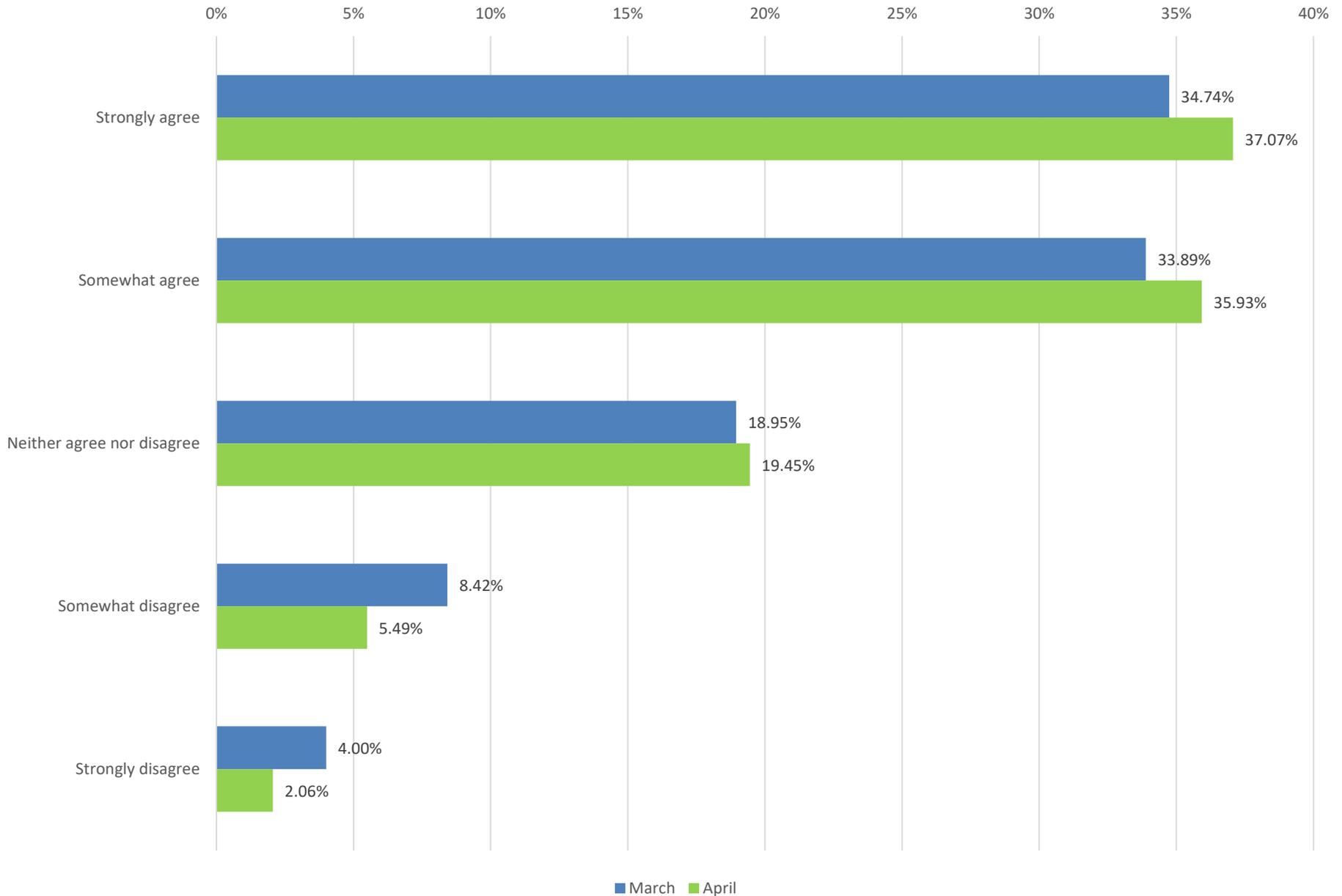
We realize this is a high-stress time for many. What are the challenges you're currently facing as a result of COVID-19?



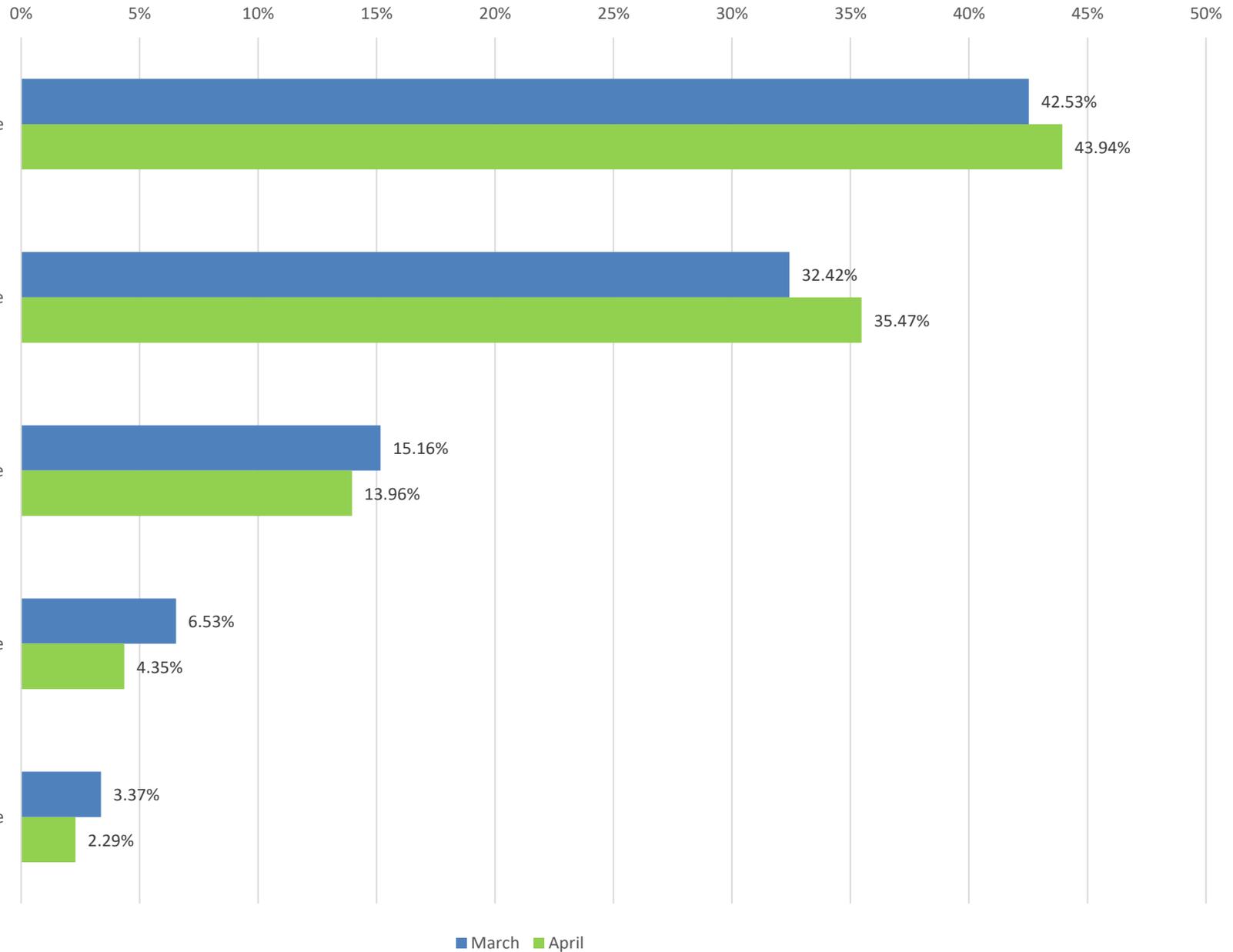
It's important to us that the information we provide gives the details you need to continue your role. What information do you feel you need that you don't currently have?



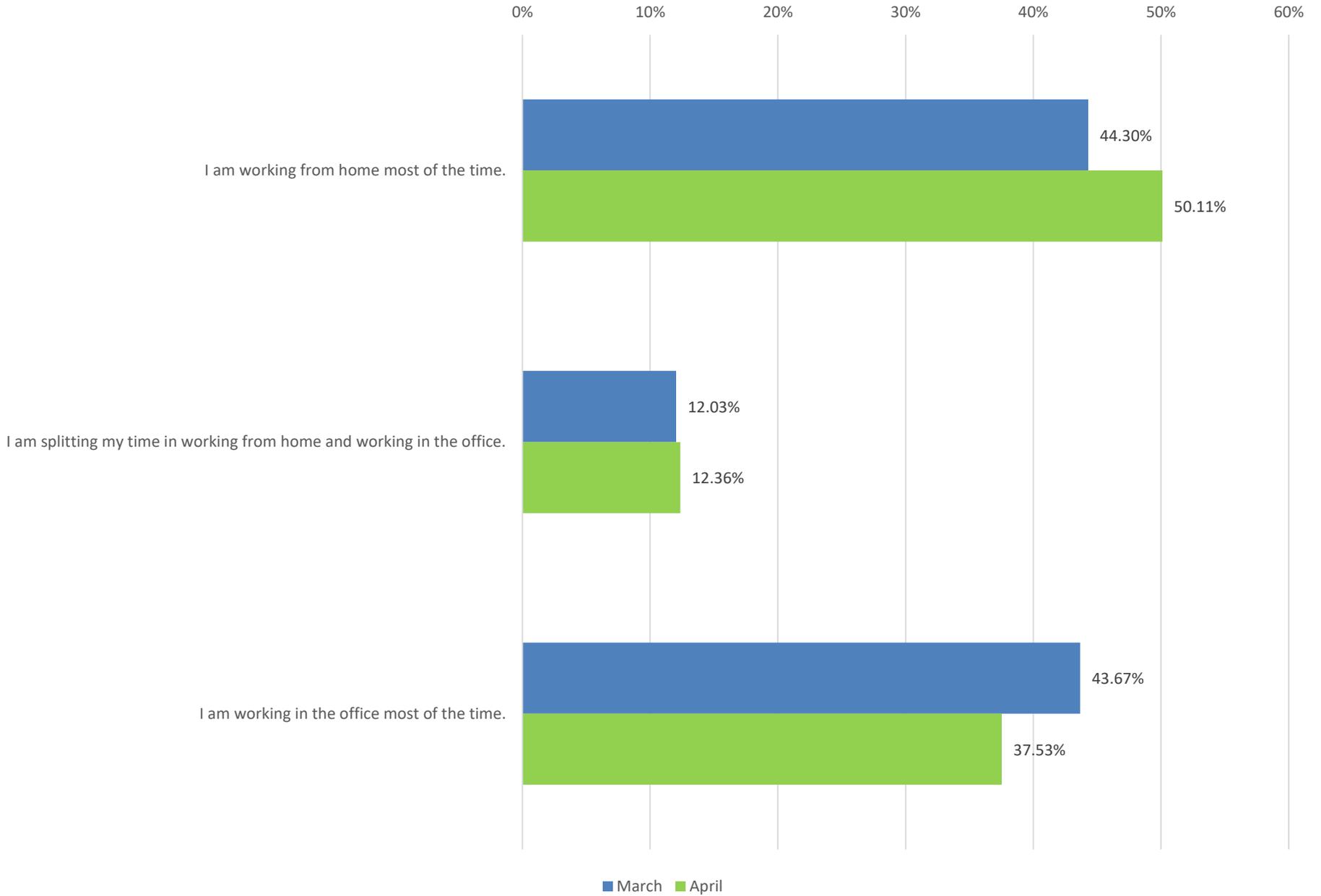
# The communication from the organization helps me feel more confident in the actions I can take for my own well-being during this time.



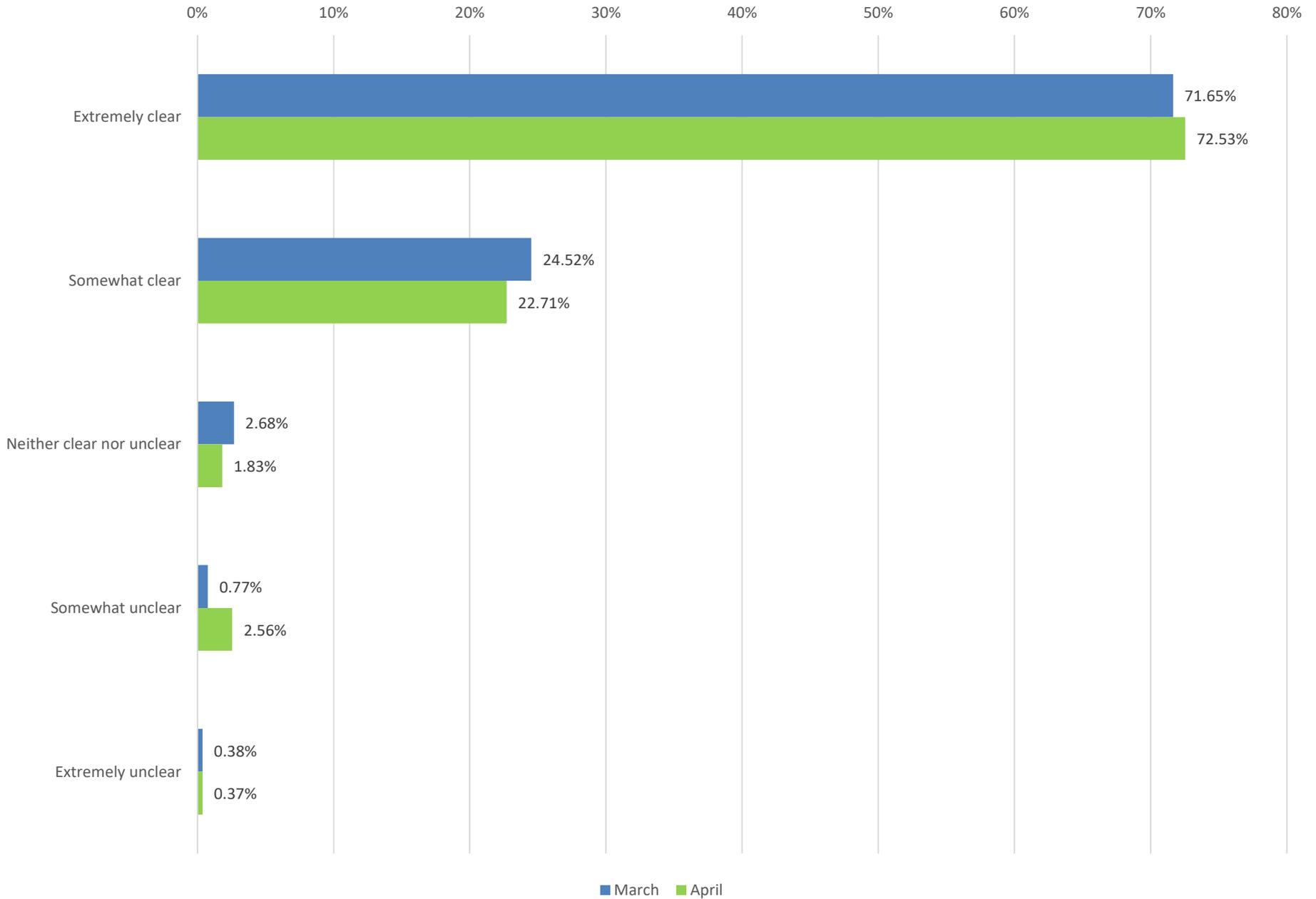
The communication from the organization provides me with the information that I need to continue in my role at the moment.



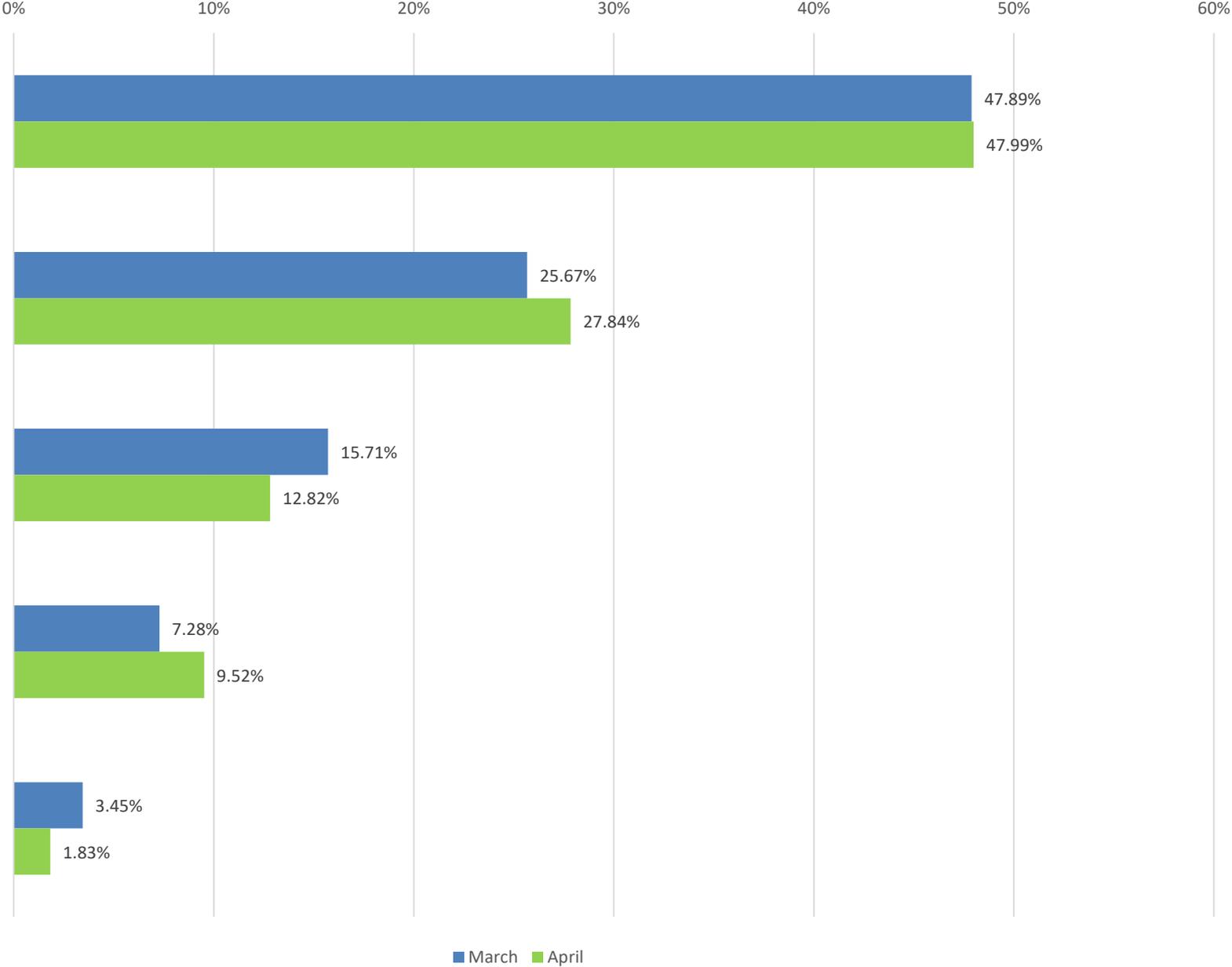
# At this moment, which best describes your work situation:



# How clear is your understanding of what is expected of you when working remotely?



When working from home, my team is good at keeping up with informal connections (e.g., making time to talk about non-work related topics, chatting via instant messaging, or scheduling virtual touchpoints).



# When working from home, I am comfortable voicing my ideas and opinions, even if they are different from others.

