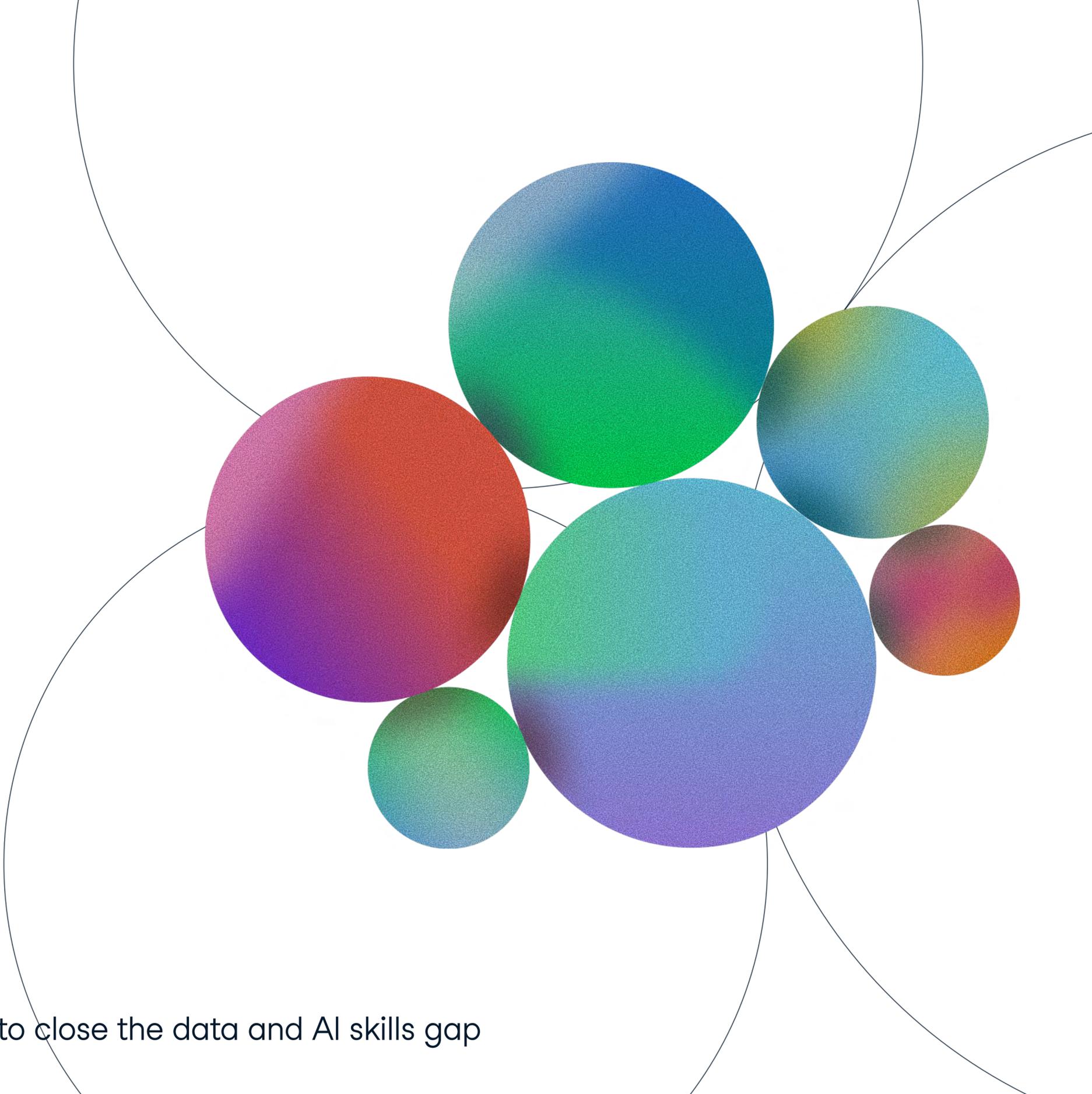


2026 | 4TH EDITION

# The State of Data & AI Literacy

Survey results from 500+ US and UK leaders

High expectations, low readiness—and what it will take to close the data and AI skills gap



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## FOREWORD

# Expectation is clear; time to deliver

Data and AI skills are now as fundamental to modern work as the ability to write. That's according to the 500+ US and UK leaders we surveyed in our fourth edition of the State of Data and AI Literacy report.

Let that sink in.

We don't treat writing as optional; we expect it from everyone. We practice it constantly, because it's simply built into how we work.

Leaders see the ROI of data and AI skills. They expect AI-human collaboration across every function (not just technical teams), and they know the competitive stakes. Yet, the data and AI skills gap persists. Not because leaders don't value their importance, but because we haven't redesigned how we build them.

Let's face it: Traditional training is passive, generic, and disconnected from real workflows. It was never built for skills that evolve as quickly as AI or need to scale broadly across organizations.

The good news is, we're entering a new era of learning—one where AI itself can personalize, adapt, and support people in real time. Combined with a learn-by-doing approach, this is how training meets the scale and speed of today's demands.

At DataCamp, we're rising to meet this moment. We're constantly evolving and challenging our own ability to adopt AI to improve the way people learn in 2026 and beyond.

Our unique AI-native learning experience, for example, knows who a learner is, what they do for work, what they're trying to accomplish, and what their baseline level of knowledge is on a topic, producing dynamic content in real time to reach a specific learning goal.

If you are leading an organization that's trying to do the same, let's talk. [\*\*Connect with me on LinkedIn\*\*](#), I'd love to hear what you're working on and get your feedback on the insights in this report.



Jonathan Cornelissen, Ph.D.  
DataCamp CEO

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Jonathan Cornelissen.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# The data and AI skills paradox

Insights from 500+ enterprise leaders across the United States and United Kingdom<sup>1</sup> reveal a persistent disconnect between rising expectations for data and AI skills and actual readiness at scale.

## Expectations are high because leaders see the impact...

Leaders overwhelmingly agree that data and AI skills are no longer optional. They see—and expect—tangible performance and productivity gains when these skills are present.

- 88% of leaders say basic data literacy is “important” or “very important” for day-to-day work; 72% say the same for basic AI literacy
- 57% of leaders say that AI literacy skills have become more important in the last year
- 3 out of 4 leaders say employees with strong data literacy skills outperform their peers
- The most common expected productivity uplift from AI adoption falls in the 10–20% range, consistent with external academic research

## ...yet readiness remains low,

Despite high expectations and clear benefits, leaders report persistent capability gaps. The challenge is less about advanced specialization and more foundational fluency at scale.

- Nearly 2 out of 3 leaders see data and AI skills gaps in their organization
- Gaps are most pronounced in foundational areas across data and AI, including:
  - Interpreting information and turning insight into decisions
  - Data quality, governance, and trust in the data ecosystem
  - Applying AI practically to real work and business problems
  - Confidence, culture, and readiness to adopt AI

## and learning has not translated into capability at scale.

Despite high expectations for data and AI capabilities, upskilling efforts have struggled to reach the workforce in a meaningful way.

The data and AI skills gap is not driven by lack of interest or awareness. Rather, it reflects a failure of learning design and delivery to build practical capability at the scale organizations now require.

- Less than half of leaders say their organizations provide basic data or AI literacy training
- Only around 1 in 3 leaders report having mature, organization-wide data and AI upskilling programs
- 29% of leaders say that only employees in some technical roles receive AI training

## Closing the skills gap requires rethinking how data and AI capability is built

Addressing the data and AI skills gap will require more than urgency or incremental investment:

- Learning must shift from content consumption to applied practice
- Programs must be role-relevant, not one-size-fits-all
- Capability must be built and reinforced over time, not through one-off interventions

This report takes an in-depth look at where data and AI capability gaps persist and what it will take to build data and AI literacy that reaches the workforce at enterprise scale.

PART I

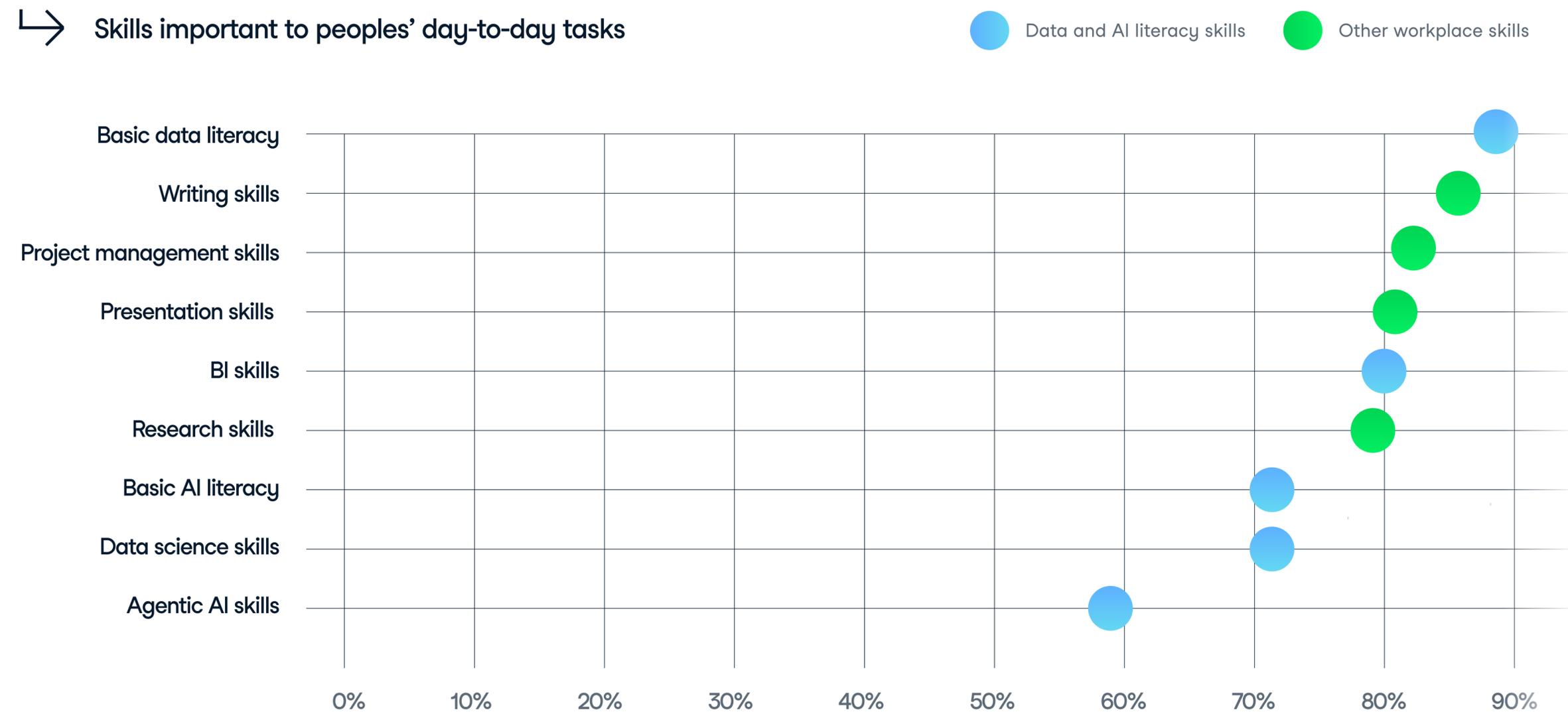
# The state of data and AI skills

Data and AI literacy have crossed a critical threshold. What were once considered specialized capabilities are now widely expected across the enterprise.

The proof? In 2026, 88% of leaders say basic data literacy is “important” or “very important” for employees’ day-to-day work, while 72% say the same for basic AI literacy. These figures place data and AI skills firmly alongside long-established workplace fundamentals.

AI literacy is also the fastest-rising skill over the past year. Leaders report that AI fluency expectations are outpacing data literacy and other core workplace skills.

Also of note are project management skills, which were the third most important for leaders and second fastest growing in importance. While not a data or AI skill per se, we can assume that as AI makes employees more productive, they need the skills to manage more and bigger projects.



% of leaders who ranked skill “important” and “very important”

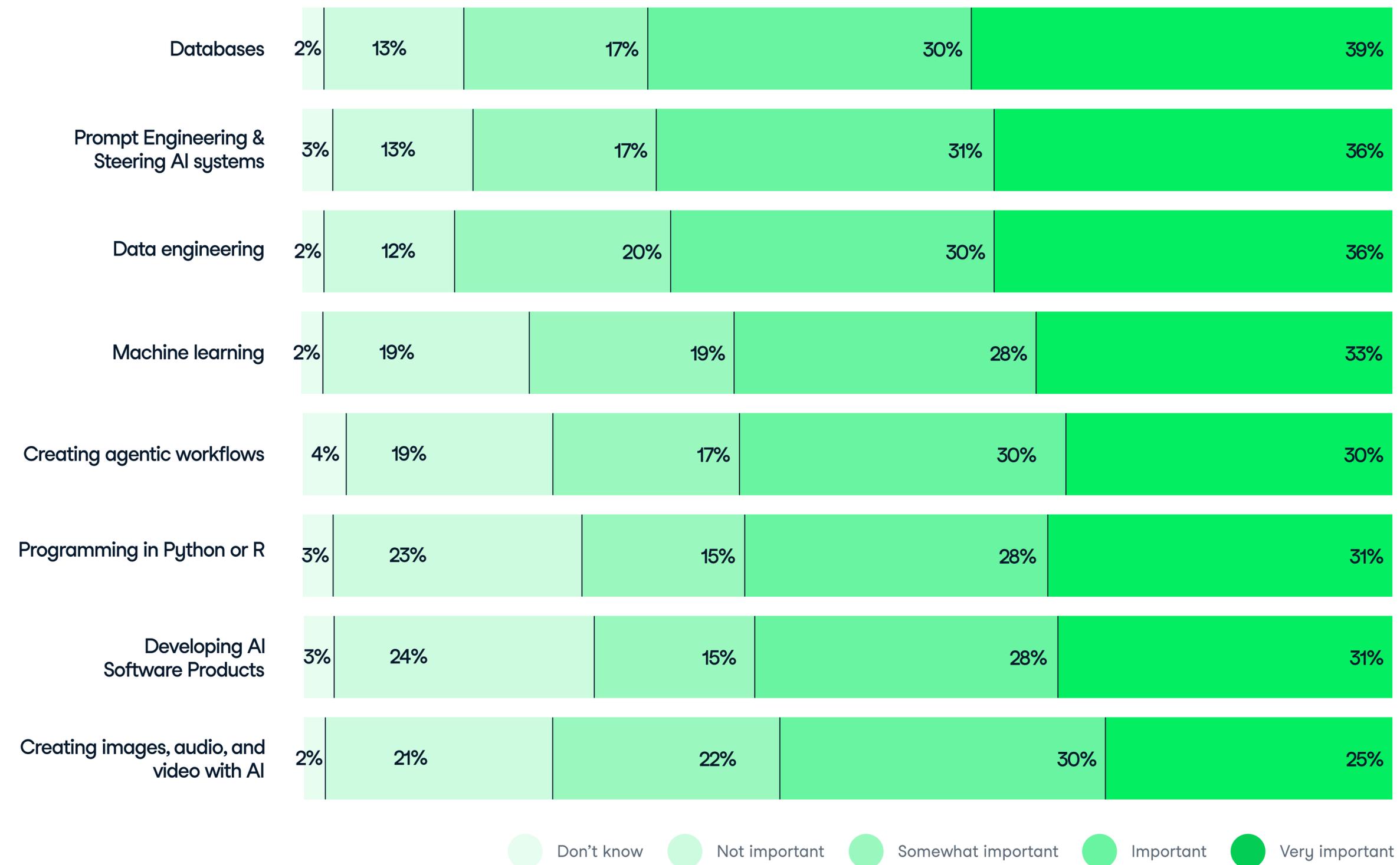
# The data and AI skills that matter

Exactly which data and AI skills do leaders think matter most for day-to-day work?

- Newer AI skills areas are quickly jumping to the forefront as the field evolves. For example, AI copilots and deep-reasoning AI tools were added as skills in this year's survey and have immediately emerged as "important" or "very important" to 70% and 69% of leaders, respectively
- As in previous years, leaders continue to prioritize basic AI understanding, responsible AI use, and business application of AI
- Compared to the 2025 report<sup>2</sup>, the top data skills remain unchanged: data-driven decision-making, data analysis, and the ability to interpret dashboards and visualizations

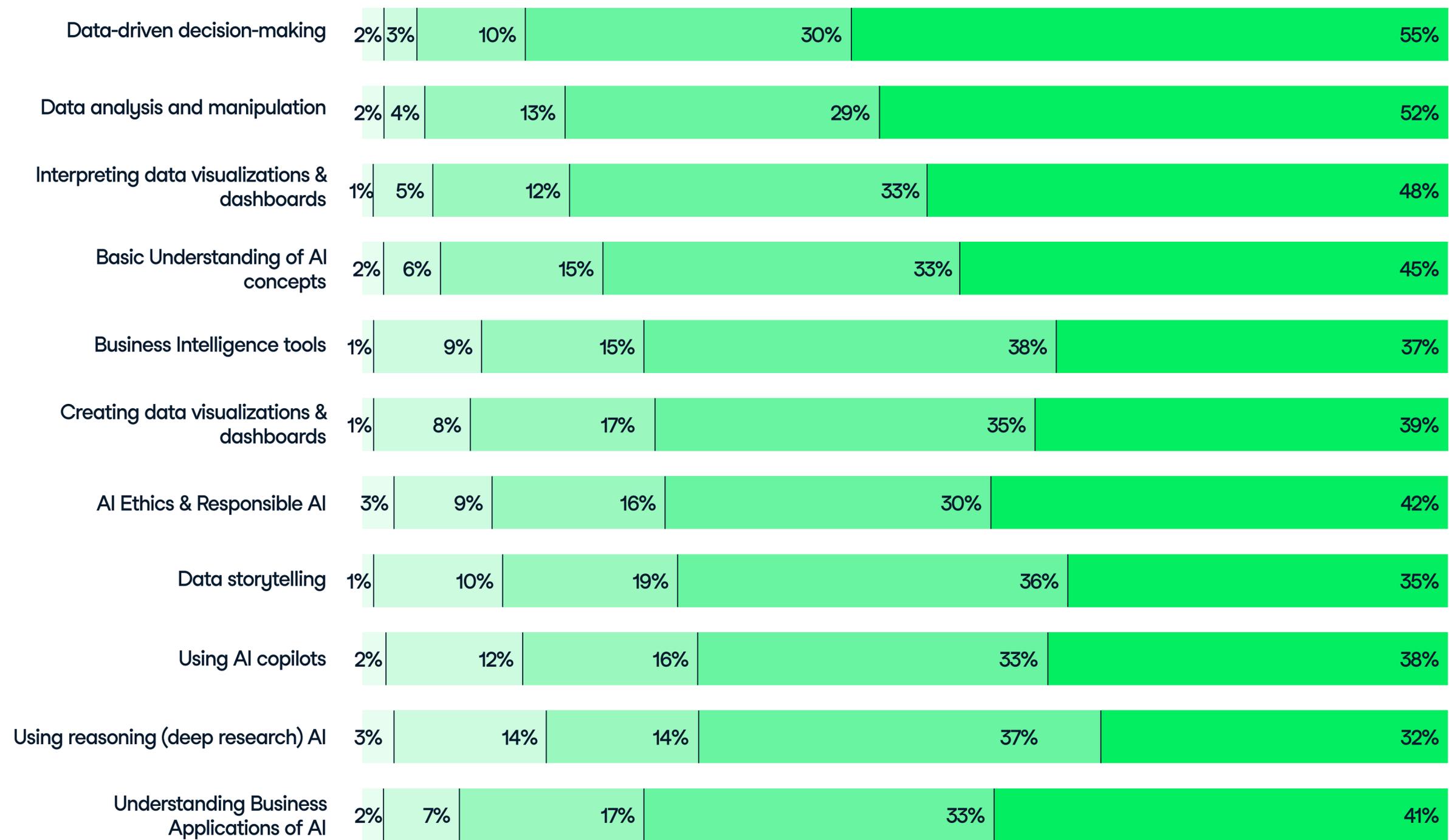
The most important skills for leaders reflect fluency and judgment, not necessarily deep specialization. This does not mean technical skills don't matter. Rather, technical skills are critical only for specific roles, while foundational data and AI fluency is expected—and critical—across the entire workforce.

↳ More advanced, build-level skills rank lower in importance for day-to-day work



The most important skills for leaders reflect fluency and judgment, not necessarily deep specialization. This does not mean technical skills don't matter. Rather, technical skills are critical only for specific roles, while foundational data and AI fluency is expected—and critical—across the entire workforce.

↳ Foundational, interpretive, and application-oriented skills dominate



1

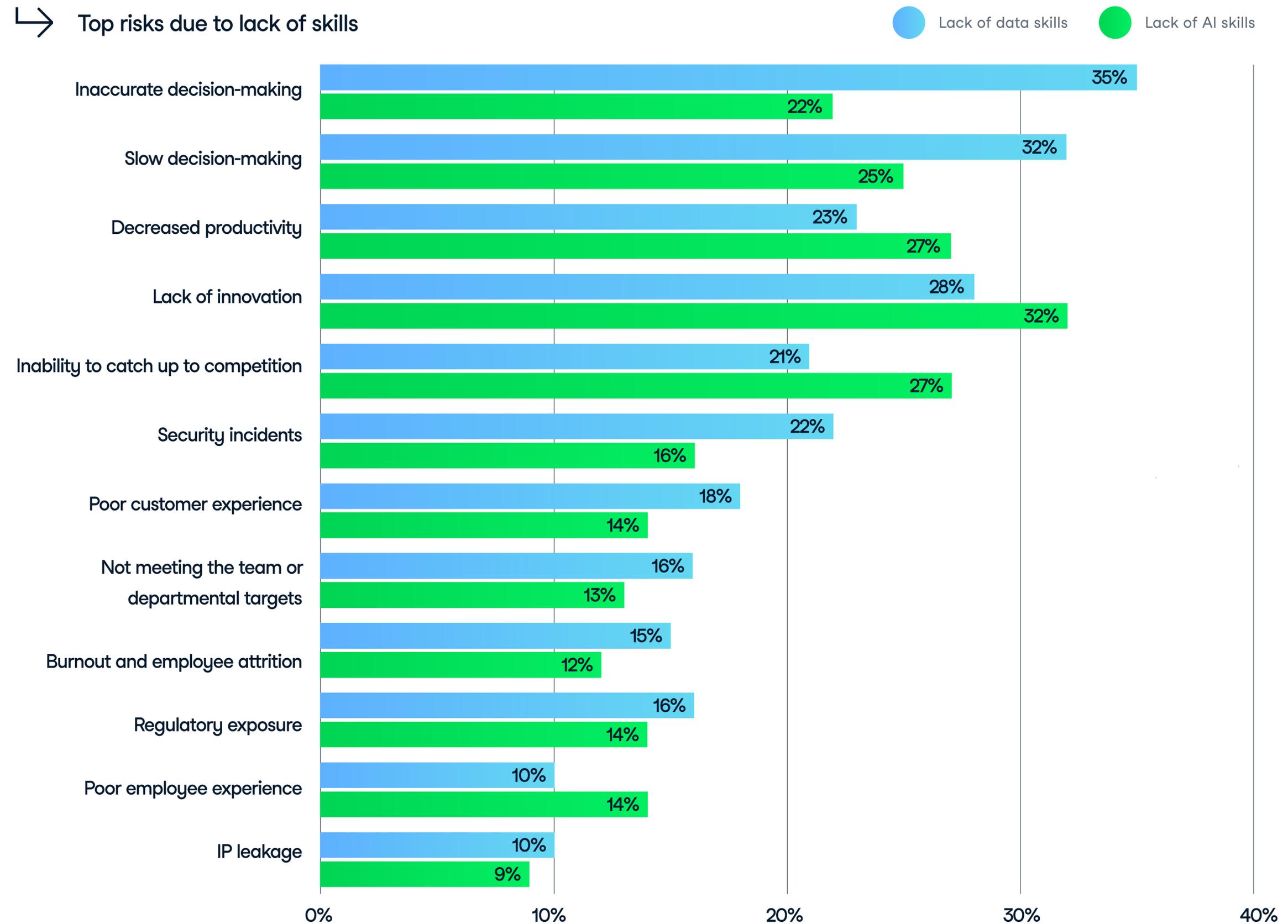
# The value of data and AI skills

When asked about the risks of inadequate data and AI skills, leaders cite a wide range of concerns. The distribution suggests costs of low literacy show up differently depending on role, function, and organizational context.

By contrast, leaders are far more aligned on the upside. Across both data and AI literacy, leaders associate stronger skills with faster, higher-quality decisions and innovation. In fact, 76% report that data-literate employees outperform those who are not. AI expectations are similar: leaders anticipate productivity gains as AI becomes embedded in everyday workflows.

Leaders may disagree on where the risks of low literacy emerge first, but they strongly agree on what success looks like. Data and AI literacy are seen as performance accelerators, enabling organizations to move faster, decide better, and innovate more effectively.

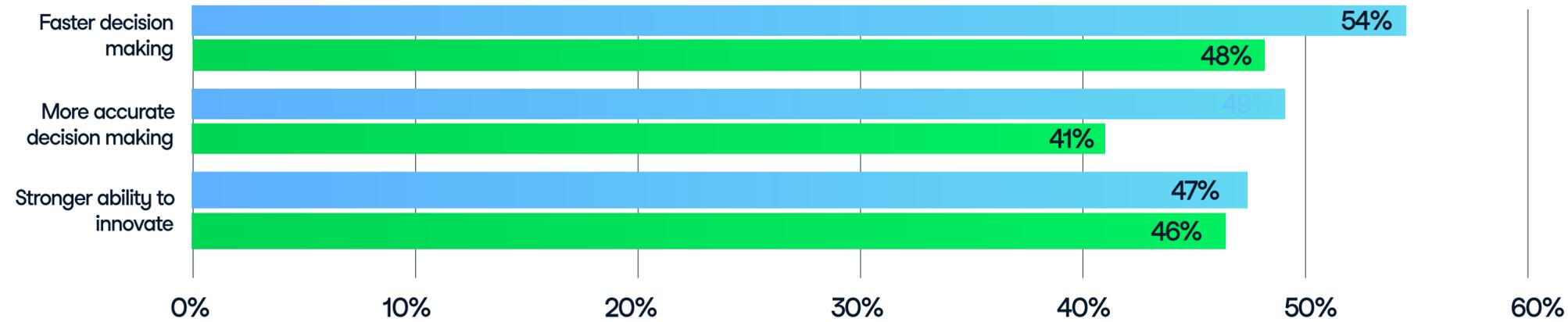
## ↳ Top risks due to lack of skills



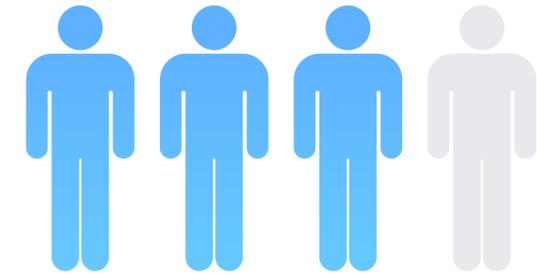
## Top benefits of data and AI literacy

Note: Respondents were asked to select their top three choices from a list of risks and benefits

● Data skills ● AI skills



3 out of 4 leaders say employees with data literacy skills outperform those without



## Estimated performance uplift from AI literacy skills

These results are in line with the [2025 Generative AI at Work Brynjolfsson paper](#) showing customer service workers with gen AI access get a 15% uplift in productivity and [research from Kevin Cui at Princeton](#) showing a 26% uplift in PRs for software developers from using Copilot



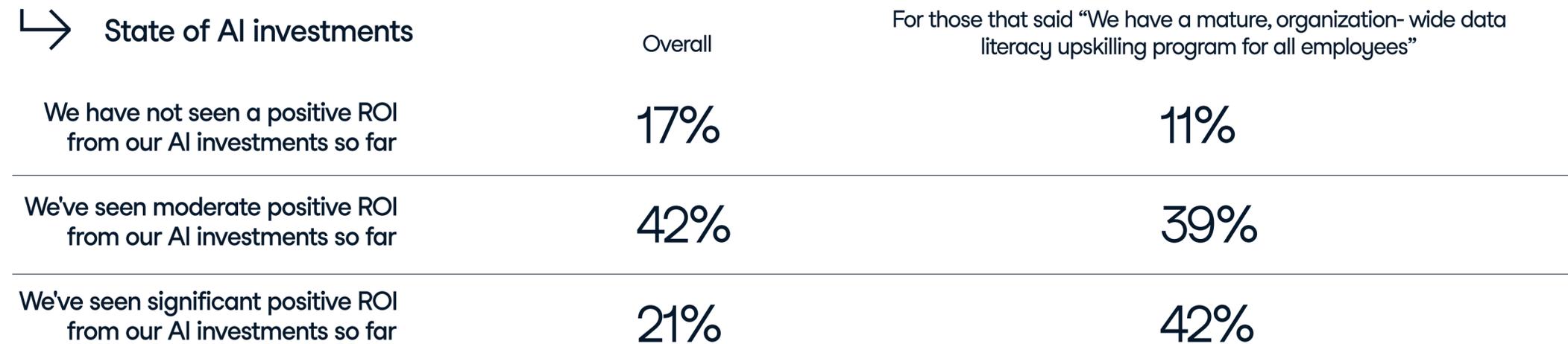
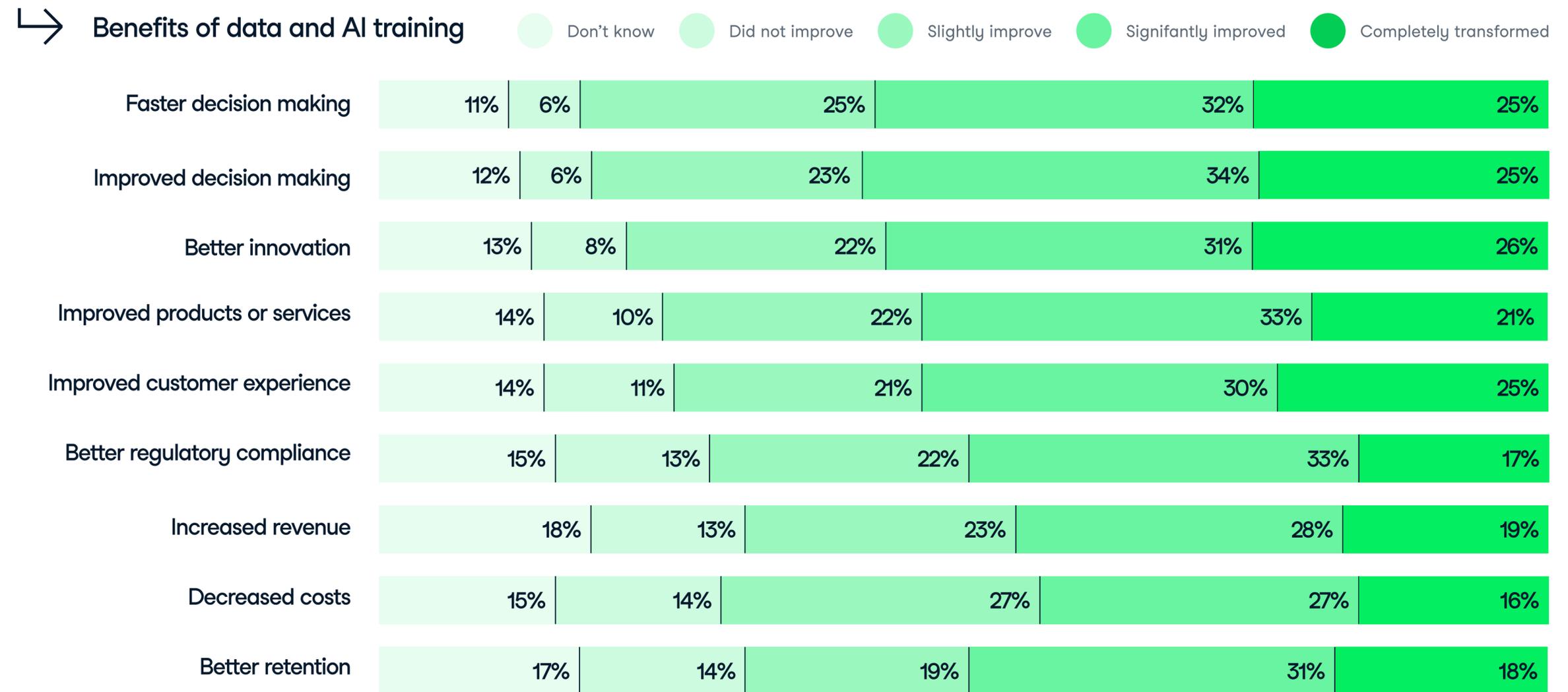
# Skill gaps leave ROI on the table

Across organizations, training is linked to stronger decision making, faster execution, improved innovation, and better business outcomes. But the more telling signal comes from how leaders describe the return on their AI investments.

A meaningful share of leaders overall say they have yet to see positive returns from AI. However, among leaders who report having a mature data literacy upskilling program for all employees:

- Reports of significant positive ROI from AI investments nearly doubles, from 21% to 42%
- The share reporting “no positive ROI” declines from 17% to 11%

Organizations that pair AI investment with structured, workforce-wide skill development are far more likely to see meaningful returns. We’ll dig more into skill and capability development programs, including what makes them successful, later in this report.



%s for “I don't know” and “Not applicable” make up the rest, and have been excluded here.

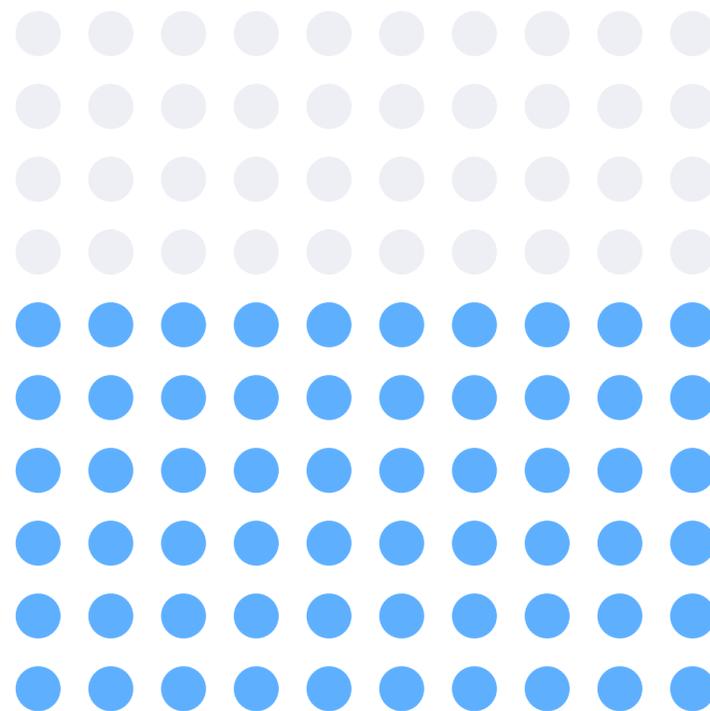
## PART II

# Exposing the data and AI skills gap

Despite high expectations, perceived importance, and clear evidence of performance impact, roughly half of leaders still report gaps in data and AI capability across their organizations.

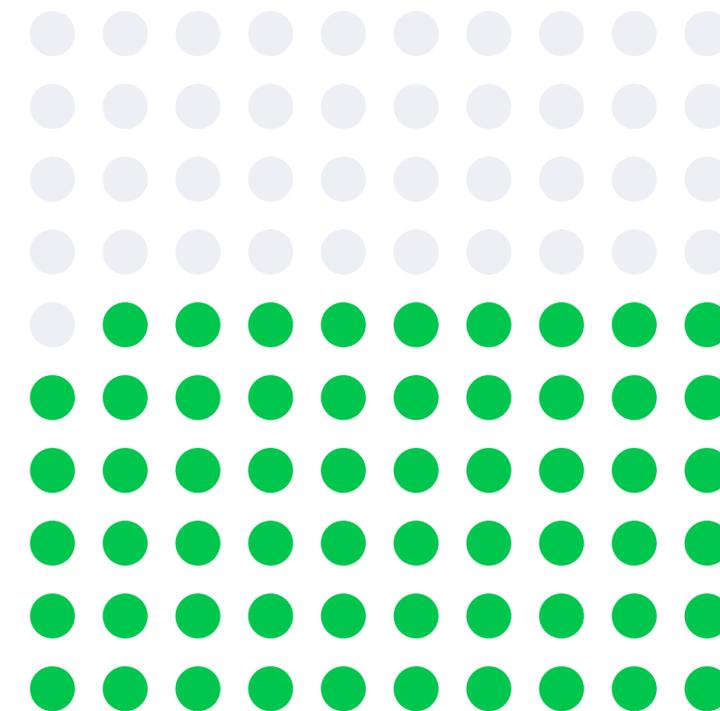
In this section, we explore the recurring themes leaders identified when describing exactly where data and AI skills break down. The insights come from a qualitative analysis of free-form answers accompanied by actual (anonymous) quotes from the leaders surveyed.

While no single course or intervention can close these gaps on its own, many organizations begin by strengthening core capabilities through targeted assessments, learning, and practice. Where relevant, we have included examples of DataCamp curriculum areas in this section that teams often use as starting points to address these challenges.



## 60%

of leaders believe there is a data skills gap



## 59%

of leaders believe there is an AI skills gap

“The biggest gap is understanding what AI can and cannot do.”

# Skill gap #1: Turning information into (good) decisions

Across both data and AI, the most persistent gap leaders identified was not access to information, but the ability for their people to interpret it, judge its reliability, and turn it into confident decisions. Employees can often generate reports, dashboards, or AI responses, but struggle to judge accuracy, spot limitations, or answer the “so what?” question.

A fragile baseline in numeracy, statistics, and reasoning that many leaders identified doesn't help, resulting in lack of confidence, or worse, false confidence. This includes difficulty distinguishing correlation from causation, understanding limitations, and applying healthy skepticism to both data and AI outputs.

Without strong foundations, advanced tools (from dashboards and BI to AI systems) increase confidence without increasing correctness, which amplifies risk rather than reducing it.

This breakdown shows up in two closely related ways:

1. Difficulty validating outputs (from data or AI), and
2. Difficulty translating those outputs into action.

In practice, these are inseparable.

DataCamp helps close this gap with structured practice in interpreting data, evaluating outputs, and translating insight into decisions. Examples of common starting points include:

COURSE

## Data-Driven Decision Making for Business

Basic 2 hrs

Start Course

TRACK

## Decision Science Fundamentals

Basic 4 hrs

Start Track

SKILL TRACK

## AI Fundamentals

Basic 10 hrs

Start Track

“The biggest skill gap has got to be judgment of what the data really means; what’s relevant, what’s misleading, and how much confidence to place in the numbers.”

“Many employees can collect or access data but struggle to interpret it correctly. They may know how to run a report but cannot extract actionable insights or spot anomalies.”

“Understanding that AI is like any other programming—its results are only as good as the data it’s trained on, and nothing should be taken at face value.”

“Employees find it difficult to assess the quality and reliability of artificial intelligence models and their outputs.”

## Skill gap #2: Communicating, storytelling, and influencing with data and AI

Even when insights exist, many employees struggle to explain them clearly or use them to tell a compelling story that drives action, especially to non-technical audiences. While overall 35% of leaders deemed data storytelling a “very important” skill for day-to-day work, this percentage increases with certain leaders, including digital transformation and change management leaders (47% of whom said it was “very important”), IT leaders (41%), and sales and marketing leaders (41%).

Improving communication with data and AI is less about presentation polish and more about learning how to frame insights for different audiences. Organizations often start by strengthening data storytelling and business communication skills, helping teams practice explaining insights clearly and persuasively in real-world contexts.

DataCamp offers applied learning in data storytelling and communication, designed to help teams move from analysis to influence. Examples of common starting points include:

### ASSESSMENT

**Data Storytelling** and **Data Visualization Theory** assessments measure baseline skills across the organization

### SKILL TRACK

**Data Storytelling**

Basic 6 hrs

Start Track

### COURSE

**Understanding Data Visualization**

Basic 2 hrs

Start Course

“Many data professionals are skilled at analyzing data but struggle to present complex concepts in a clear, actionable way that resonates with business leaders.”

“Honestly, it’s the ability to effectively communicate insights and tell a story with data. It’s not just about numbers—it’s about crafting a narrative that drives decisions.”

“The most pressing gap is data storytelling, where people can manipulate a spreadsheet but struggle to explain what the results mean for our bottom line.”

## Skill gap #3: Applying data and AI practically to real work

Many employees understand concepts in theory but struggle to apply data and AI meaningfully to their actual workflows, roles, and business problems.

This gap often shows up when teams experiment with new tools but fail to integrate them into routine activities. Employees may generate analyses or AI outputs that remain disconnected from how work is actually done, or struggle to identify relevant use cases beyond generic examples. As a result, data and AI initiatives remain siloed, experimental, or short-lived.

Without practical application, data and AI remain abstract or experimental rather than drivers of productivity and innovation.

DataCamp supports this with role-based learning paths and projects designed to mirror real business scenarios. Examples of common starting points include:

COURSE

### Implementing AI Solutions in Business

Basic 2 hrs

Start Course

COURSE

### AI for Finance

Basic 3 hrs

Start Course

CAREER TRACK

### Associate AI Engineer for Developers

Intermediate 26 hrs

Start Track

“The biggest skill gap is understanding how to practically apply AI tools to everyday business processes, rather than just knowing the theory or buzzwords.”

“Many professionals are familiar with AI concepts, but struggle to identify opportunities for implementation, integrate AI into workflows, and measure impact.”

“Nobody actually knows a use for it.”

## Skill gap #4: Data quality, governance, and responsible use

Leaders consistently point to data quality and governance issues as a critical barrier to effective data and AI use. In our survey, nearly a quarter (22%) of leaders pointed to “security incidents” as a top risk associated with data use, with 16% identifying it as a risk for AI use. Problems such as dirty or inconsistent data, unclear ownership, and conflicting definitions make it difficult for employees to trust dashboards, analyses, or AI outputs, even when the tools themselves are available.

This gap becomes more pronounced as AI use expands. AI systems amplify underlying data issues, increasing the speed and scale at which errors, bias, or inconsistencies can spread. When employees are unsure how data is sourced, governed, or protected—or where ethical and policy boundaries lie—they either over-rely on outputs or avoid using tools altogether.

DataCamp supports governance and responsible use through applied learning that helps employees understand how data and AI are managed in practice and how to work confidently within those constraints. Examples of common starting points include:

SKILL TRACK **CERTIFICATION AVAILABLE**

**Data Governance Fundamentals**

Basic 10 hrs [Start Track](#)

SKILL TRACK

**Responsible AI Foundations**

Basic 6 hrs [Start Track](#)

“Poor data quality leading to inability to properly use data to gather insights.”

“Understanding data governance and responsible data use is missing when turning data into business-ready insight.”

“Many people lack sufficient awareness of the ethical issues and potential risks associated with AI.”

“There is confusion regarding the ethical implications of employing artificial intelligence within the commercial sphere.”

“We are restricted in the use of AI for security reasons.”

## BONUS: Confidence and culture

Several leaders pointed to barriers that extend beyond skills alone. Fear of getting it wrong, lack of confidence, uneven adoption across teams, and generational divides all surfaced as factors that slow progress even when tools and training are available.

These challenges often arise when expectations rise faster than support. Employees may be encouraged to use data or AI without enough opportunity to practice, ask questions, or experiment safely. As a result, adoption becomes uneven: some over-rely on tools, others avoid them, and many hesitate to apply what they've learned in real work.

Confidence is built through repeated use, feedback, and learning in context, not through one-off training. As we'll see in the next sections, closing the data and AI skills gap requires learning environments that support people when they need it and give them a safe place to practice. Without this foundation, even well-designed training programs struggle to translate into sustained adoption.

“Fear of AI and lack of courage and confidence to actually use AI solutions.”

“Everyone hates it, so refuses to discuss it as anything other than bad.”

“The biggest skill gap is staying current with AI and being able to accept changes in the way we do things.”

# The state of data and AI training

Leaders are aware of the data and AI skills gap. As shown in the previous section, they can clearly articulate where capability breaks down and why it matters for performance. Yet when it comes to how organizations are addressing the gap, a more nuanced picture emerges.

## When informal learning stops being enough

Organizations have long expected skills such as writing, presentation, and project management without necessarily providing formal training at scale. And that makes sense—these gaps, while real, rarely create immediate, systemic risk. In addition, these skills often develop gradually through experience, mentoring, and role-specific practice.

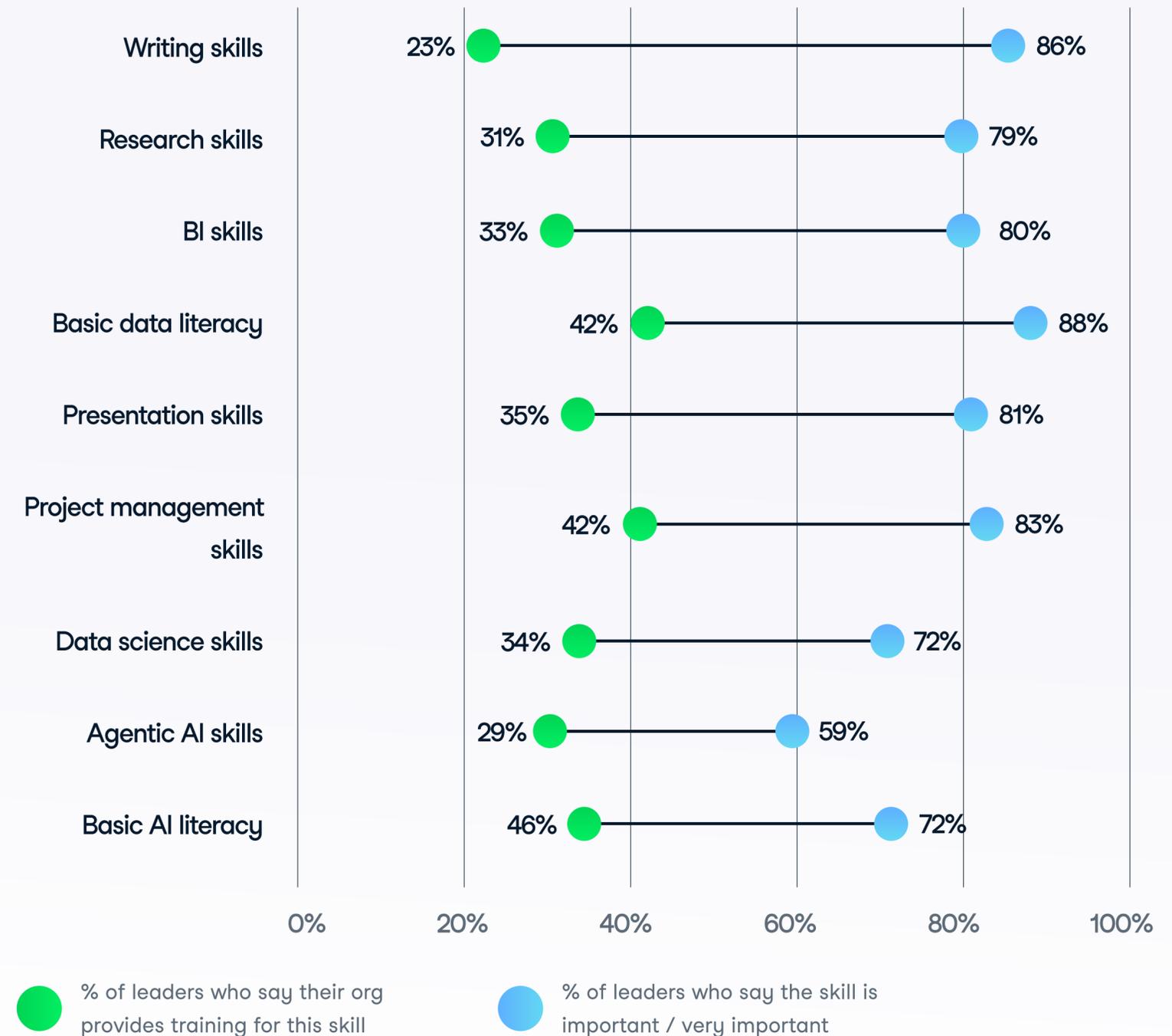
Data and AI skills introduce a fundamentally different challenge, as they:

- Are new, evolving rapidly, and increasingly embedded in everyday work across nearly every role
- Get applied in very different ways depending on function, seniority, and context, making informal, one-size-fits-all learning insufficient
- Cannot be reliably acquired through exposure alone, unlike traditional workplace skills

The pace of change, the complexity of tools, and the consequences of misuse mean that organizations are now asking for broad, foundational capability without having historically built systems to develop it at scale.

The good news is that data and AI literacy now rank among the most common areas where organizations do provide training, on par with traditional workplace skills in many cases. However, fewer than half of organizations report offering training in these areas (46% provide training on basic AI literacy, and 42% for basic data literacy).

## ↳ A large training gap exists for many core workplace skills

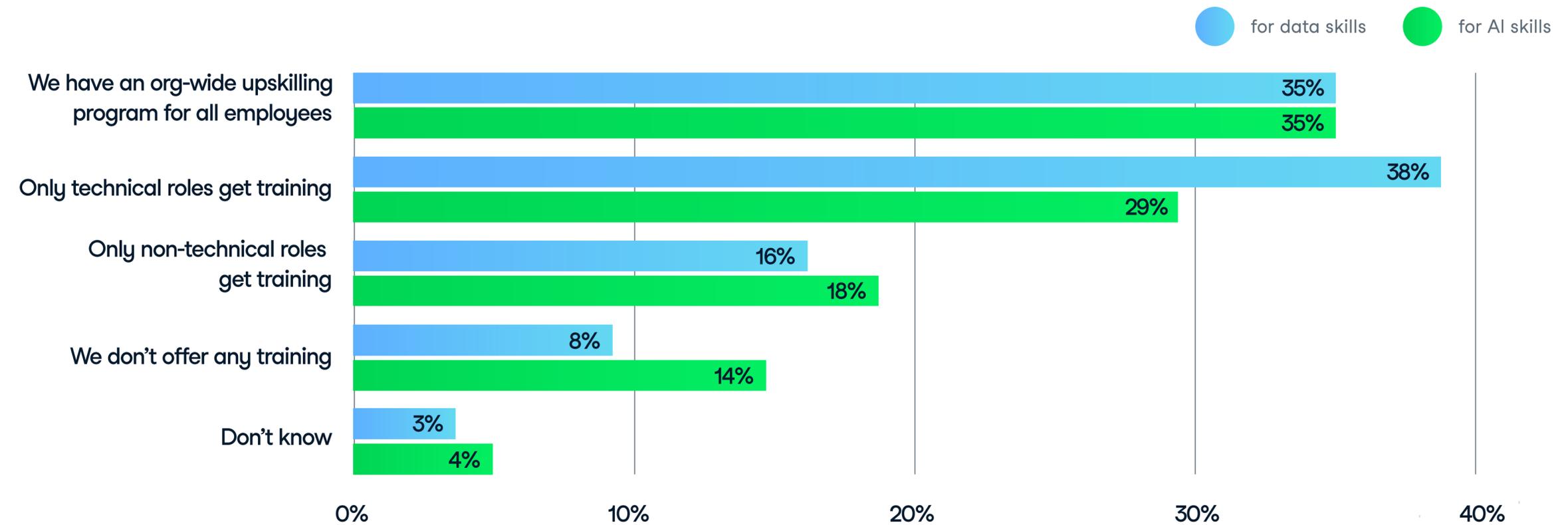


# The data and AI training gap

While leaders report relatively low levels of structured training for basic data and AI literacy, this does not reflect a lack of activity or intent:

- Most leaders say employees have access to learning resources for data (76%) and AI (68%), and
- A large majority (89% for data and 82% for AI) report offering some form of training, particularly when including role-specific, technical, or ad hoc initiatives. In that sense, data and AI training is already widespread

## ↳ The state of data and AI training



# 77%

of leaders offer some kind of training on AI, but far fewer are providing structured, foundational AI literacy training at scale.

# 76%

of leaders agreed their employees have resources to learn about data.

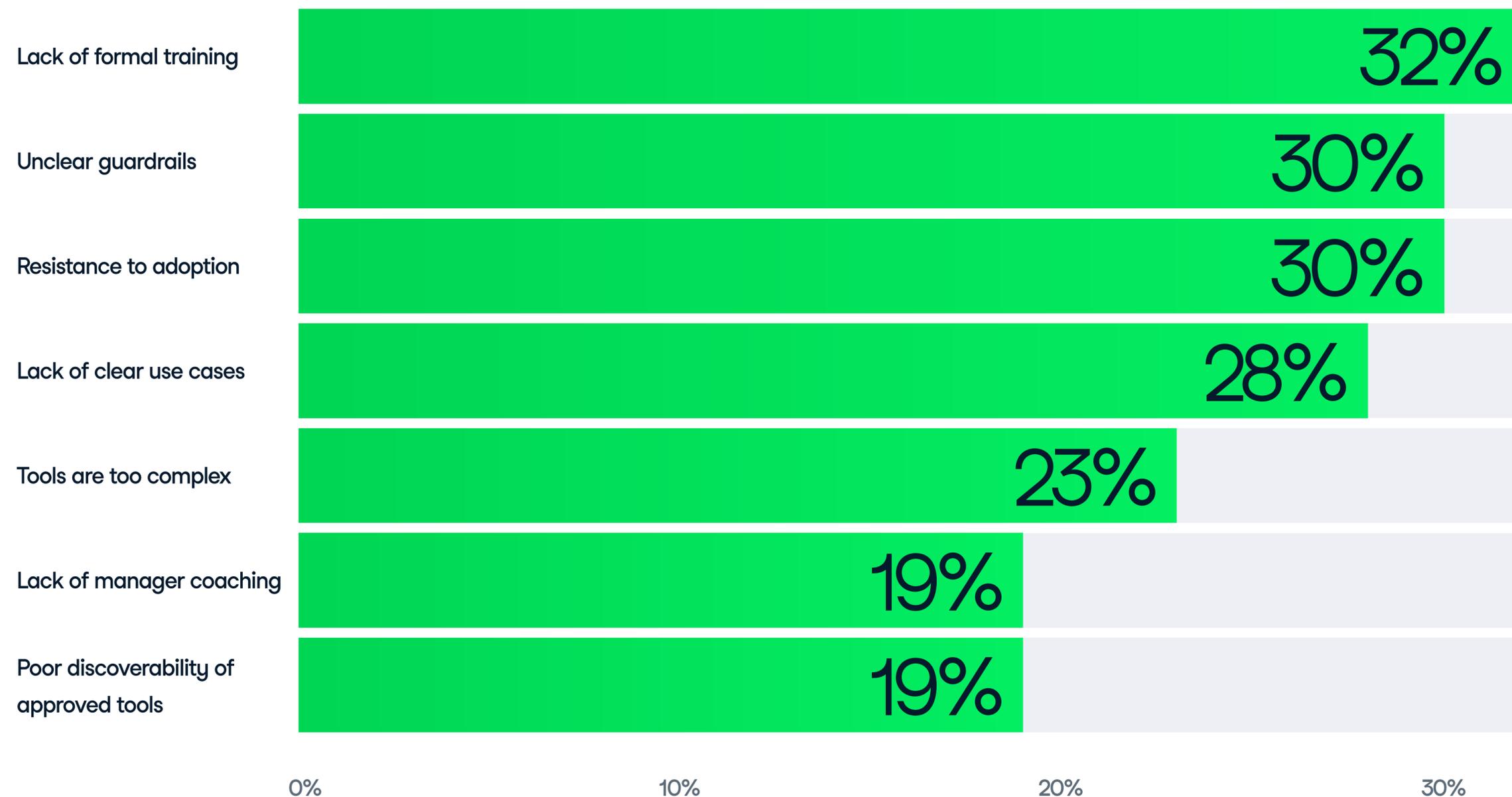
# 68%

of leaders agreed their employees have resources to learn about AI.

However, this activity has not translated into workforce-wide capability. Leaders identify lack of formal training as the biggest challenge employees face when learning to use AI. This points to a gap between availability and effectiveness of training.

In practice, much of today's training remains fragmented—limited to certain roles, teams, or use cases—and not designed to build shared, foundational capability at scale. Employees may have access to content, but lack the structure, progression, and reinforcement needed to apply skills confidently in real work.

## ↳ Challenges when learning to use AI



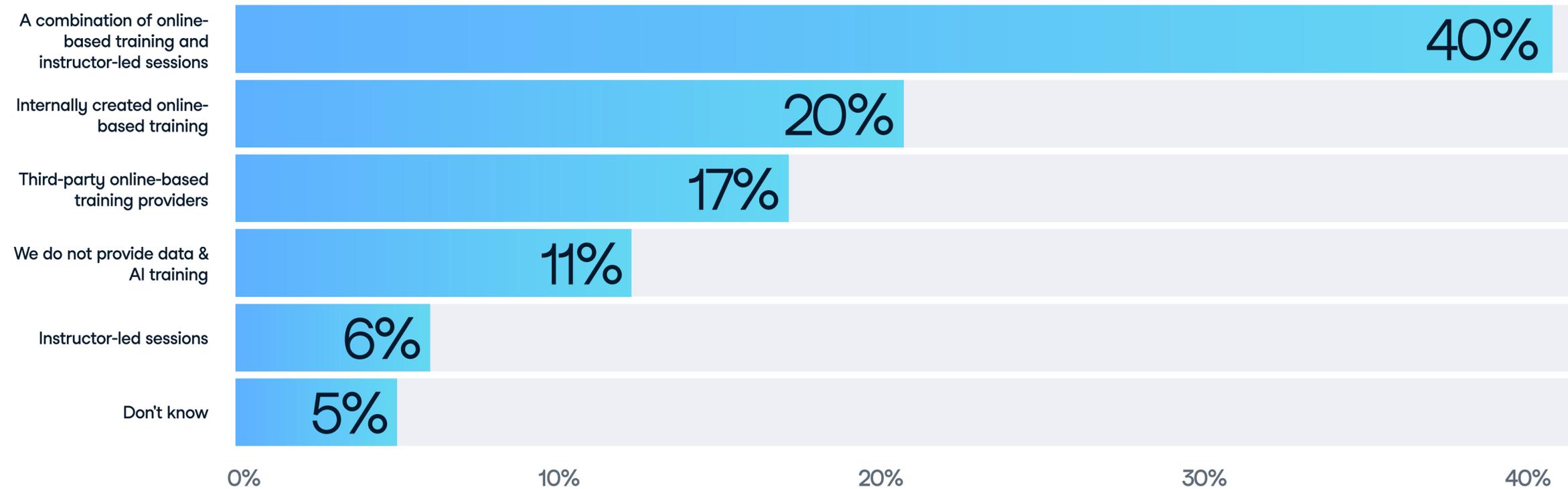
# Why most data and AI learning hasn't delivered

Organizations are investing in data and AI learning, but the results are falling short of expectations. Taken together, the patterns in how training is delivered and where it breaks down point to a set of structural issues with how learning has traditionally been designed.

The most popular format organizations report is online learning combined with occasional instructor-led sessions (40%). This approach makes sense at scale, but leaders report persistent challenges with how these programs actually work in practice.

The most common problems are not about motivation or interest. Leaders point instead to learning experiences that are too passive, difficult to apply, and insufficiently connected to real roles and workflows. Video-based courses without hands-on practice, generic content that doesn't map to day-to-day work, and unclear learning paths all limit the transfer of skills from training to performance.

## ↳ What training format is used to upskill people on data and AI?



<p><b>1 Passive learning</b></p> <p>Video-based courses make it difficult to apply learned skills in the real world <span style="float: right;">23%</span></p> <p>Not enough hands-on projects or labs <span style="float: right;">24%</span></p>	<p><b>2 Poor relevance</b></p> <p>The skills people learn are not relevant to their roles <span style="float: right;">21%</span></p> <p>Lack of role-tailored paths <span style="float: right;">23%</span></p> <p>Out of date content <span style="float: right;">13%</span></p>
<p><b>3 Lack of guidance</b></p> <p>Inability for employees to understand where to start learning <span style="float: right;">21%</span></p>	<p><b>4 No proof of impact</b></p> <p>Lack of certifications for learners <span style="float: right;">15%</span></p> <p>Difficulty reporting on the return on investment from training <span style="float: right;">26%</span></p>

## Why building data and AI skills still feels hard

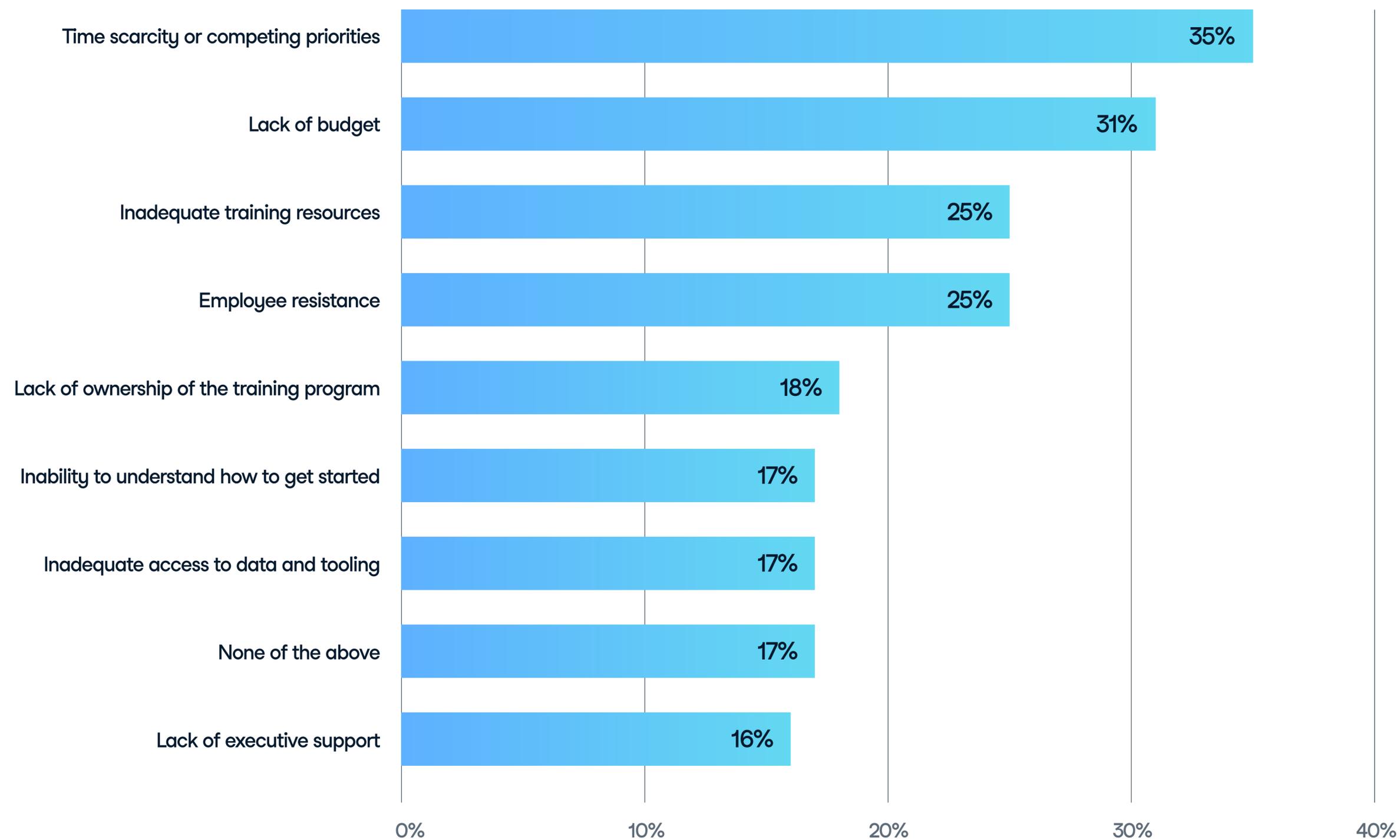
More than one in three leaders pointed to time constraints and competing priorities as barriers to improving their workforce's data and AI skills—the most frequently cited challenge overall.

At first glance, this is difficult to reconcile. In this same survey, 62% of leaders described basic data literacy as not just important but “very important” to employees' day-to-day work. It is hard to identify a capability more foundational to decision-making, performance, and competitiveness of the organization.

That's why we believe “time constraints and competing priorities” is not a question of whether the skills matter, but rather, a reflection of just how difficult it is to build data and AI capabilities at scale.

The reality is that leaders recognize the importance of data and AI skills yet struggle to create learning systems that fit the pace, complexity, and scale of modern work. This makes data and AI capability building feel perpetually time consuming and hard, even when urgency is high.

### ↳ Challenges in improving the workforce's data and AI skills



Note: Respondents could select up to three responses

# Closing the data and AI training gap

The data and AI skills gap persists not because leaders underestimate its importance, but because the way organizations have traditionally built skills no longer matches the nature of the challenge. Expectations have risen faster than learning models have evolved.

Data and AI literacy are now foundational capabilities, expected across roles and functions, yet they are still being developed through approaches designed for slower-moving, more specialized skills. The result is a growing mismatch between what leaders expect and what their organizations are able to deliver at scale.

## What effective data and AI fluency building looks like

Closing the gap requires shifting from content delivery to capability building. Effective literacy is not defined by exposure to concepts, but by the ability to apply them confidently in real work. This means learning experiences that are:

- 1 Scalable, going beyond specialist teams to reach everyone at the organization
- 2 Flexible, adapting as tools, use cases, and the data and AI space at large evolve
- 3 Embedded, fitting how work actually gets done with learning that is just-in-time, bite sized, and hands on
- 4 Reinforced over time, not delivered as one-off interventions

# How DataCamp supports this shift

DataCamp is designed for this new reality, helping organizations move beyond awareness toward sustained capability with:

## Learning for everyone

From analyst to executive, casual explorer to seasoned pro, everyone builds the data and AI skills they need with DataCamp's AI-powered learning.

## Expert-curated coverage of every data and AI skill

Where open marketplaces leave you to sift through noise, DataCamp delivers focus. Get curated curriculum built by experts and continuously updated for real-world relevance.

[Request a Demo](#)

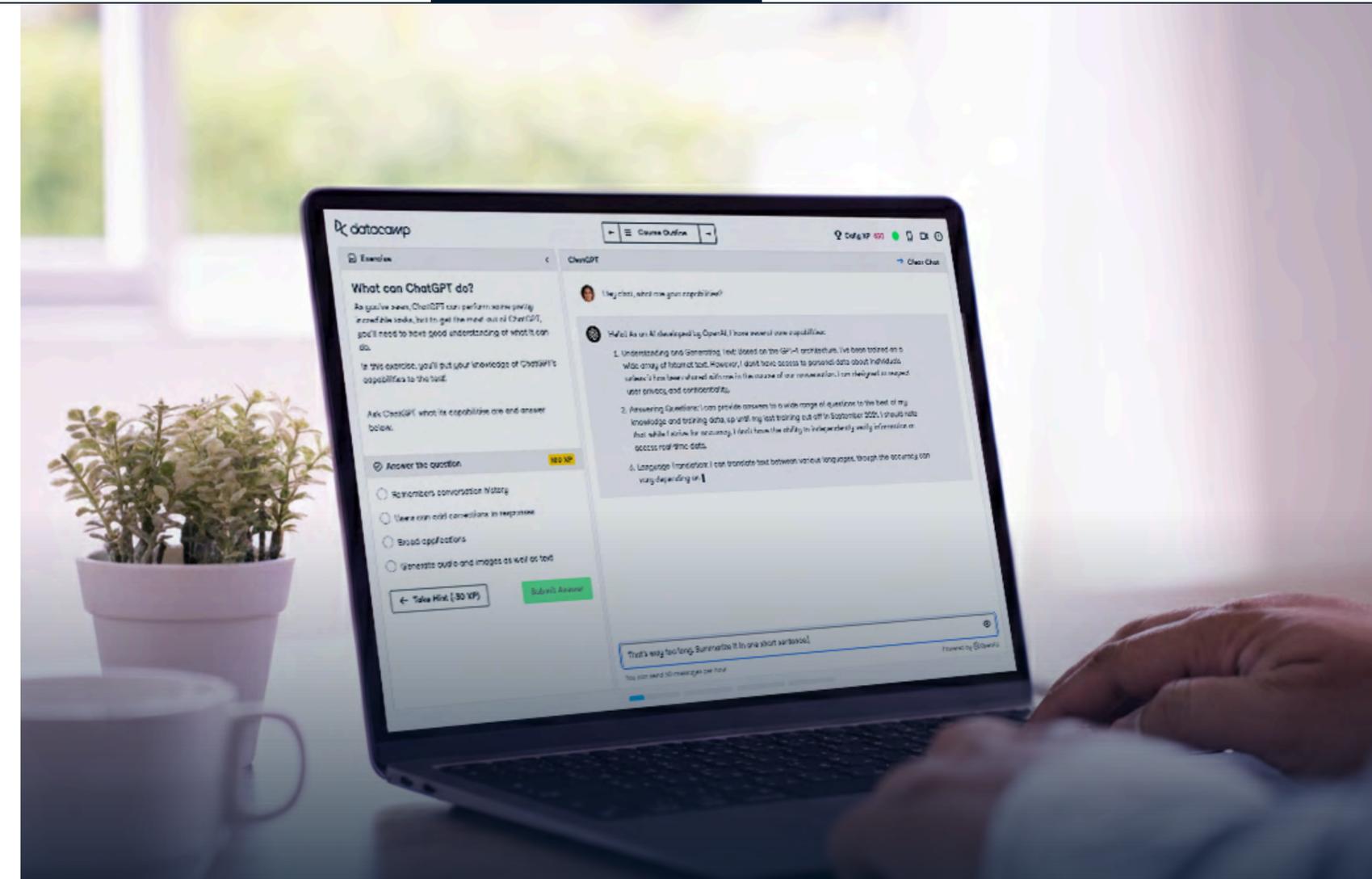
Upskilling a small team? [Get started today](#) →

## Engaging, hands-on learning that works

Every course, challenge, and project builds real skills for confidence (not just comprehension), designed to move learners from knowledge to application, fast.

## An all-in-one learning experience

DataCamp isn't a course library; it's a full learning engine. From skill discovery and structured practice to real-world application and certification—all in one place.



TOP GLOBAL ORGANIZATIONS RELY ON DATACAMP



TO TEACH THE TECHNOLOGIES THAT MATTER



4.7/5 [See all reviews](#)



## Case study

### Life sciences

Industry

### Data Academy powered by DataCamp

Program

3.6 hours/week

average productivity gain per learner

90%+

of learners report developing innovative ideas, processes, or solutions after learning

## Background and challenge

Bayer, a global leader in life sciences, relies on data and AI across research, agriculture, manufacturing, and business operations. With rapid technological growth and rising demand for digital fluency across diverse roles, Bayer identified an urgent need to build relevant skills at enterprise scale.

## Solution: A scalable, role-tailored learning framework

To address this challenge, Bayer created its Data Academy with DataCamp, building structured learning into three tiers reflecting real work needs:

- 1. General Digital Acumen:** Designed for all employees to build foundational fluency, including generative AI tools and prompt engineering.
- 2. Data Practitioners:** For scientists and analysts to gain analytics, SQL, visualization, and machine learning skills.
- 3. Advanced Practitioners:** For data and AI specialists focusing on predictive modeling, computer vision, and advanced analytics.

## Why DataCamp?

Bayer chose DataCamp to power its Data Academy due to its:

- **Extensive catalog**, including a mix of video tutorials, interactive exercises, and modular chapters for learners to progress at their own pace and integrate learning into daily work.
- **Customization possibilities**, including embedding capstone projects directly tied to business use cases, ensuring that new skills translated into real impact rather than theoretical knowledge.
- **Relevance to multiple learner personas**, from people needing foundations to technical audiences.

"The overwhelming positive feedback that we receive for DataCamp is how accessible and digestible the content is."



Colleen Young

Ph.D., Data Modernization and Digital Fluency Strategist at Bayer

"My learning on DataCamp has been instrumental in helping me visualize and understand the practical applications of AI, particularly in the context of Bayer's business operations."

Karu Karunananda

Quality Assurance Specialist at Bayer



## Case study

### Manufacturing

Industry

Just-in-time upskilling for PowerBI and Python, plus general data literacy

Program

The civil aerospace business unit

Scope

100x the speed of data handling processes

Key Outcomes

## Background and challenge

Rolls-Royce is always looking for new ways to increase its ability to analyze data more quickly to improve performance. The civil aerospace business unit uses data every day to track its engines by monitoring atmospheric contaminants and performance data, thus maintaining its competitive advantage.

However, manual data handling processes were not moving fast enough to keep up with demands. Rolls-Royce had individuals going out and trying to learn new skills to help with the problem, but there was a lack of clarity on what they were learning, and it wasn't translating to an end solution.

## Solution: Accessible, on-demand training across roles

Rolls-Royce partnered with DataCamp to create custom tracks tailored to each role within the organization, including a Python upskilling program for its engineers and a Power BI and data literacy track for their non-technical employees. DataCamp gave Rolls-Royce employees the flexibility they needed to learn either in the office or remotely.

“At Rolls-Royce, we’re dealing with complex data sets related to airlines and engines. Through DataCamp, our engineers gained valuable experience and learned how to automate multiple data handling processes that previously had to be completed manually.”



Akin Keskin  
Chief of Design Systems at Rolls-Royce

“DataCamp ... helps us solve engineering problems in a more efficient way. We don't have to go through the basics, which can slow us down. Instead, we dive right into the details and it helps us develop skills quickly.”



Ricardo Paiva  
Design Systems Specialist at Rolls-Royce



# How to Stand Out in the 2026 Job Market with Data & AI Skills



Insights from **500+** hiring and workforce  
leaders in the US & UK

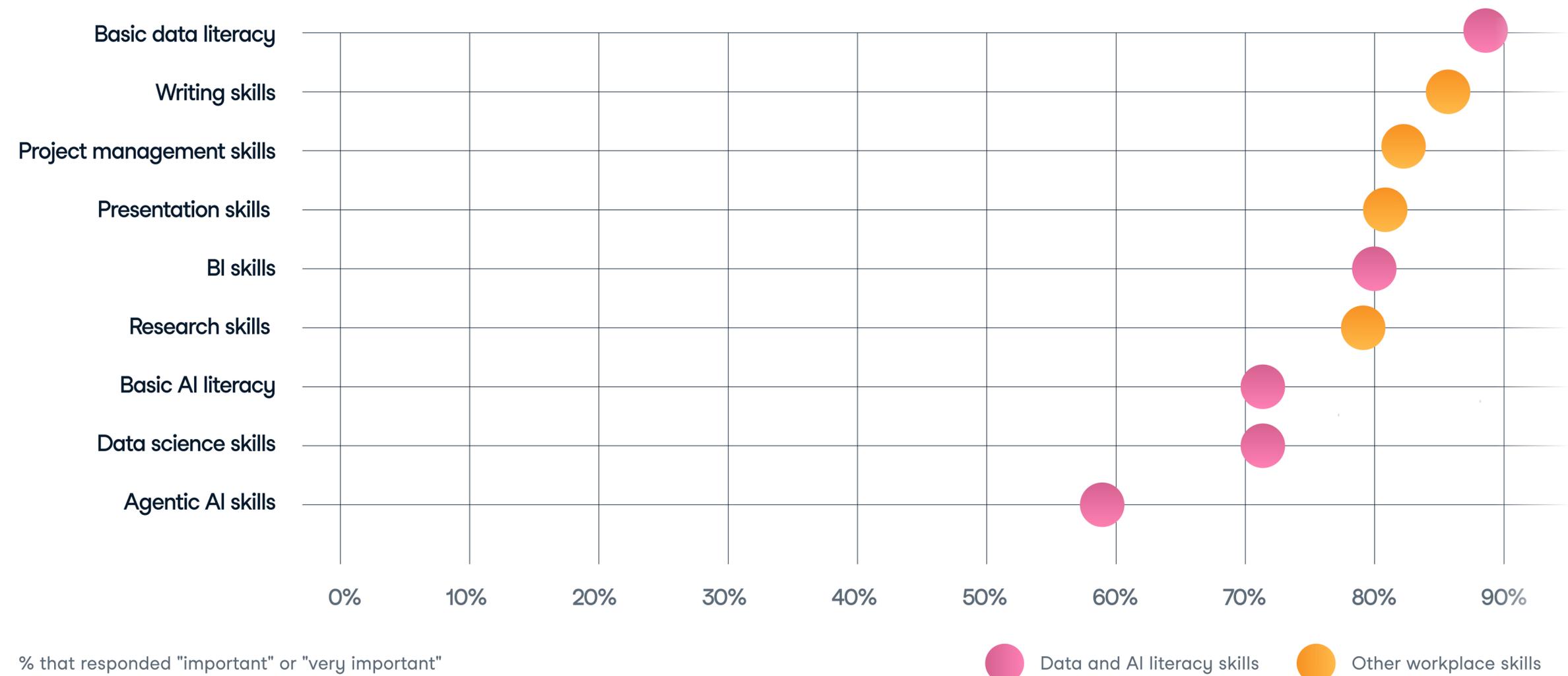
See pages 34-35 for survey details, including demographics, methodology, etc.

# Data and AI skills have become workplace basics

Once considered specialized, data and AI skills are now widely expected across roles.

Employers increasingly view them as core workplace capabilities, on par with writing, presentation, and research skills.

↳ How important are the following skills for your people's day-to-day tasks?



# Strong data and AI skills still command real salary premiums

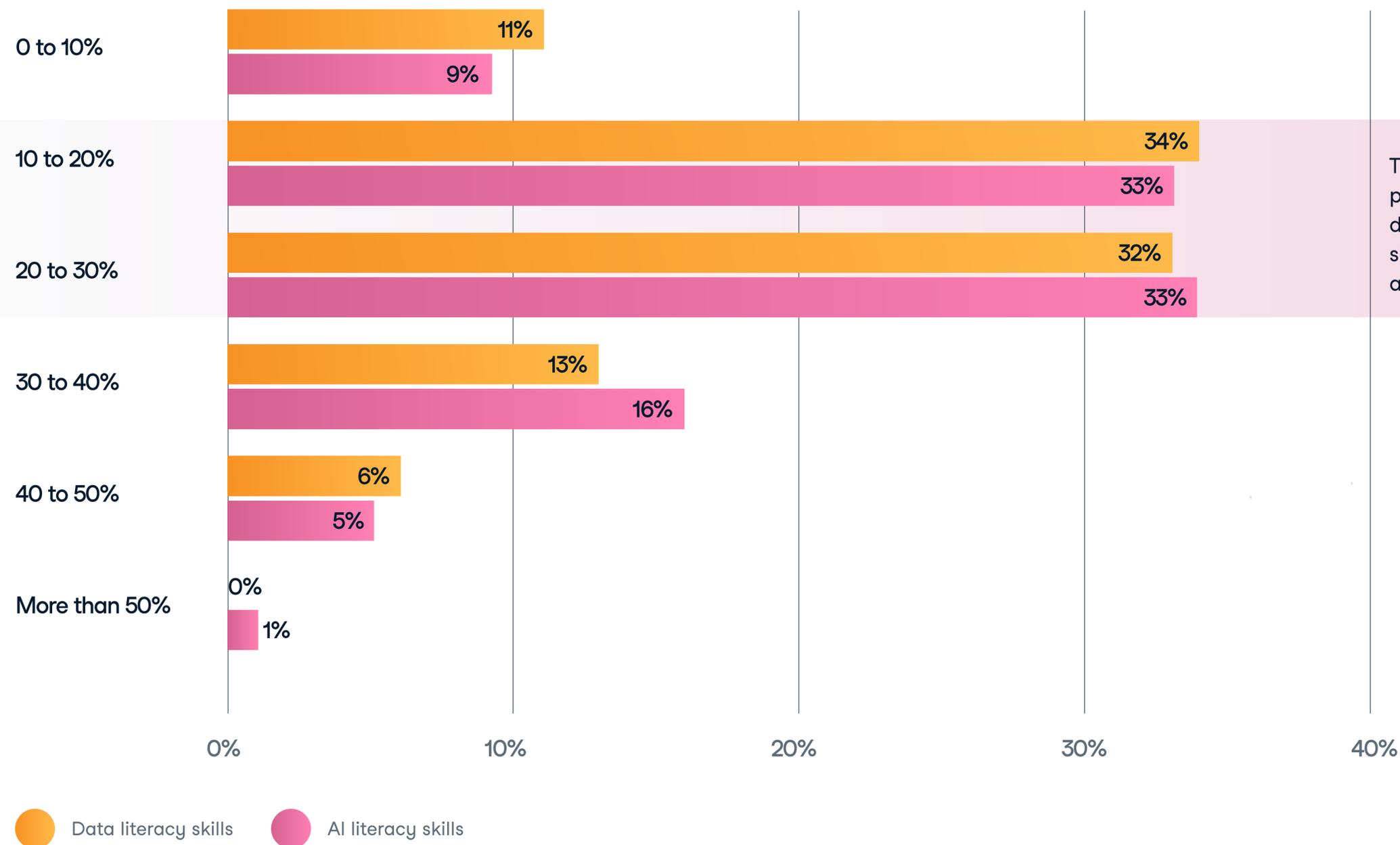
Data and AI skills may be expected, but strong ones are still rewarded.

Employers continue to pay premiums for candidates who demonstrate depth, judgment, and impact in these areas.

**74%** of leaders are willing to pay a higher salary to a candidate with good data literacy skills

**69%** of leaders are willing to pay a higher salary to a candidate with good AI literacy skills

↳ Salary premiums leaders say they're willing to pay for candidates with high data and AI literacy skills



The majority of salary premiums for strong data and AI literacy skills are between 10% and 30%

# If data and AI skills are expected, how can you stand out?

As data and AI skills become baseline expectations, employers increasingly differentiate based on how those skills are applied.

The data highlights four consistent ways candidates rise above the average:

## #1 Combine technical with “soft” data and AI skills

Leaders place the highest value on professionals who pair technical skills with the ability to interpret information and apply it in context. Strong candidates don't just produce analyses or outputs, they translate them into clear decisions and actions that others can understand and trust.



### Data and AI skill importance for leaders

% of leaders who ranked skill “important” and “very important”

#### Foundational decision & interpretation skills

*Universally expected; highest day-to-day value.*



#### Core data infrastructure & technical foundations

*Important, but role-dependent.*



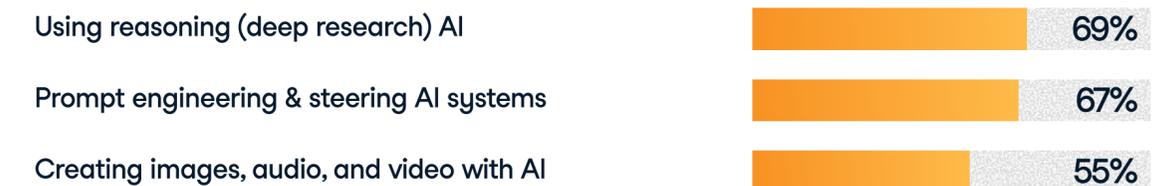
#### Foundational AI fluency & responsible use

*Rapidly becoming baseline expectations.*



#### Advanced AI interaction & reasoning skills

*Emerging; valuable but not universal.*



#### Specialized & emerging AI development skills

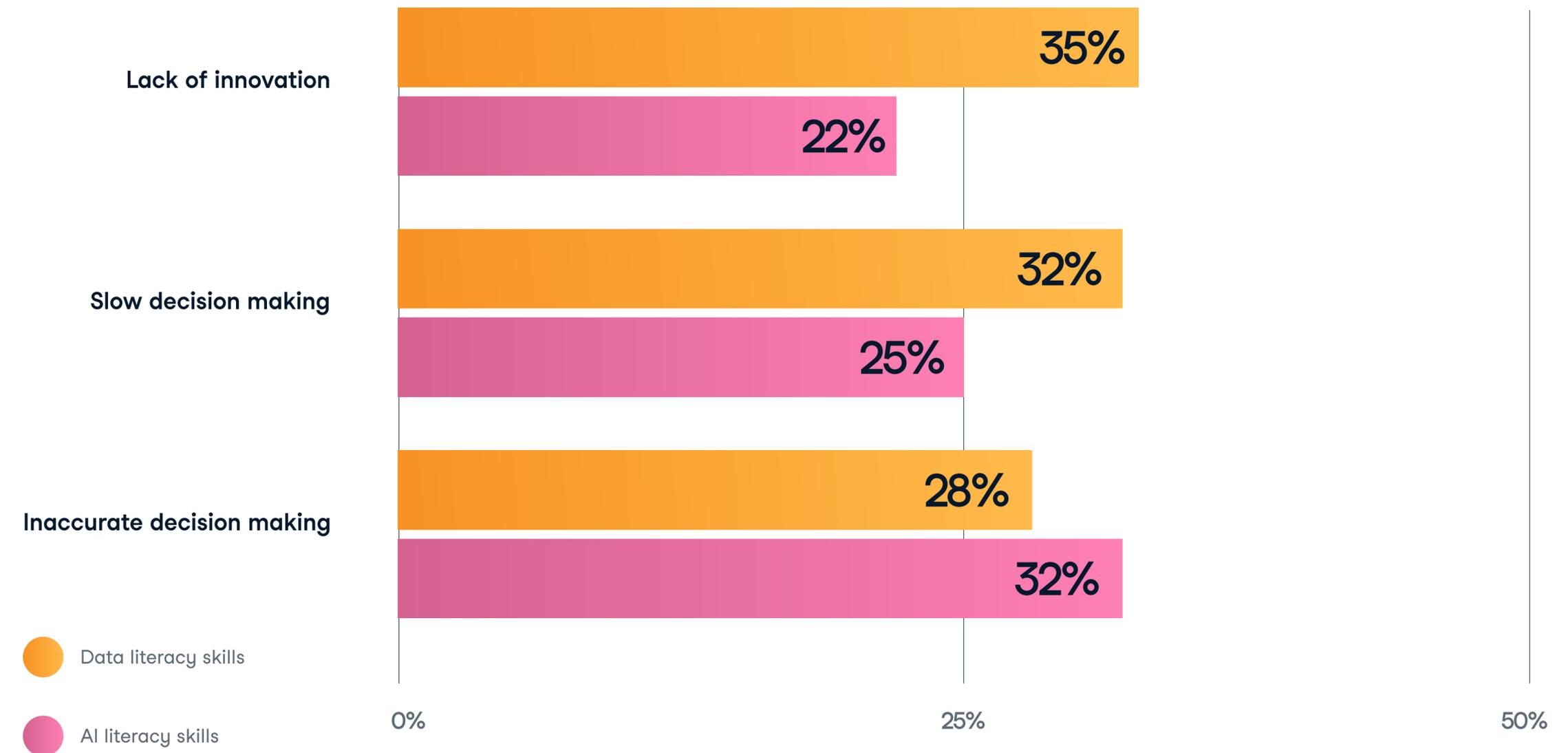
*Strategically critical, but expected for fewer roles.*



## #2 Prioritize adaptability and critical thinking

As AI becomes easier to use, the risk shifts from lack of access to lack of judgment. Employers value candidates who can not only use good judgment and, as mentioned above, combine technical with more soft skills, but also adapt quickly and think critically about the outputs they rely on.

↳ What risks do leaders identify from potential skill gaps?



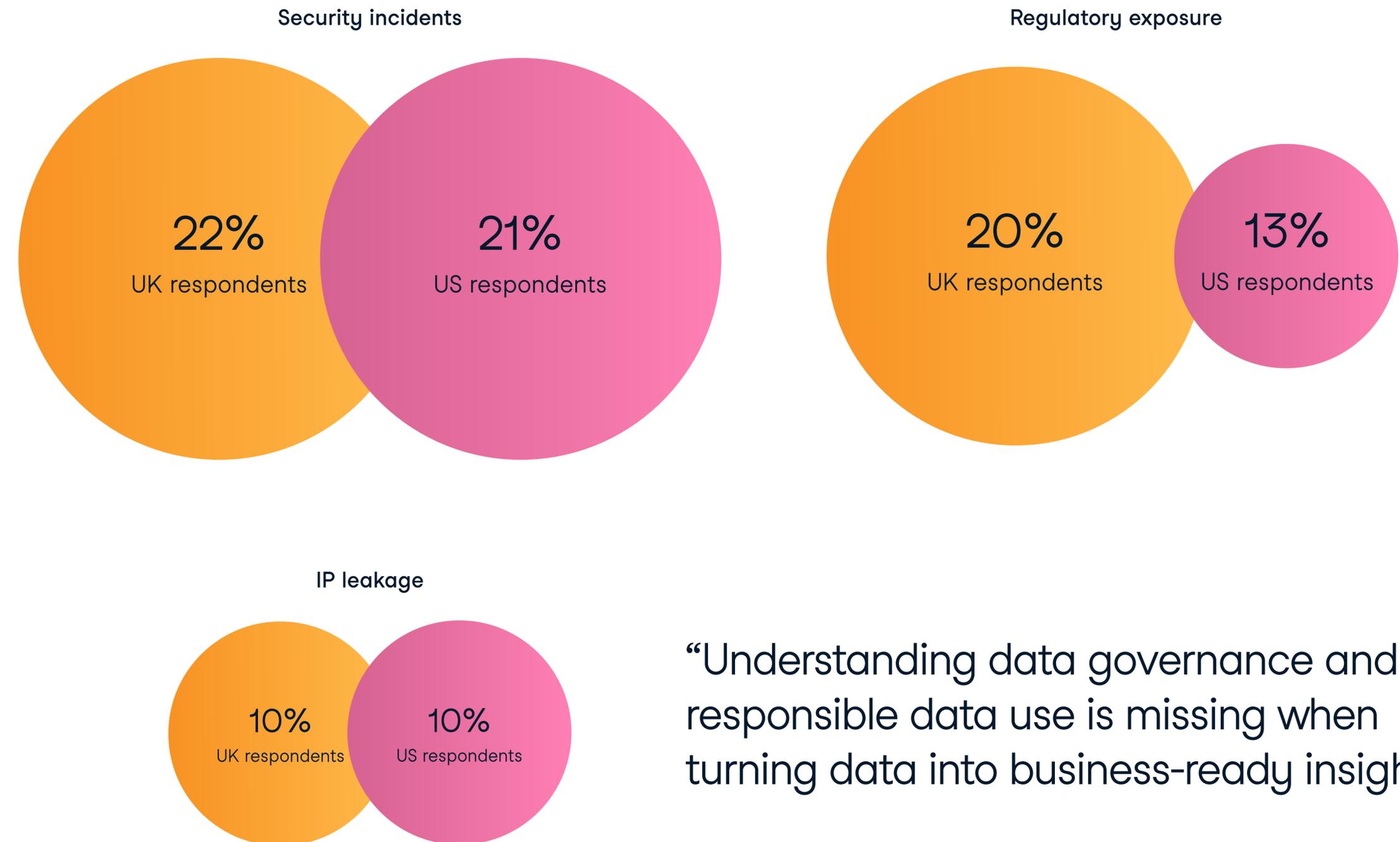
“The biggest skill gap is **staying current** with AI and being able to **accept changes** in the way we do things.”

Note: Exact question was “What risks is your department or team facing if your people do not have adequate data or AI skills?” Respondents could select up to three risks for data skills, three risks for AI skills; this represents the top selected responses across both. There was also an open text field for comment.

## #3 Engage with data quality, governance, and trust issues

Employers consistently point to issues like inconsistent definitions, unclear ownership, and weak governance as barriers to effective decision making. Show you can navigate these realities by understanding data quality, asking the right questions, and working within governance constraints to stand out as more credible and impactful with data and AI.

↳ Governance risks leaders identify arising from inadequate data skills

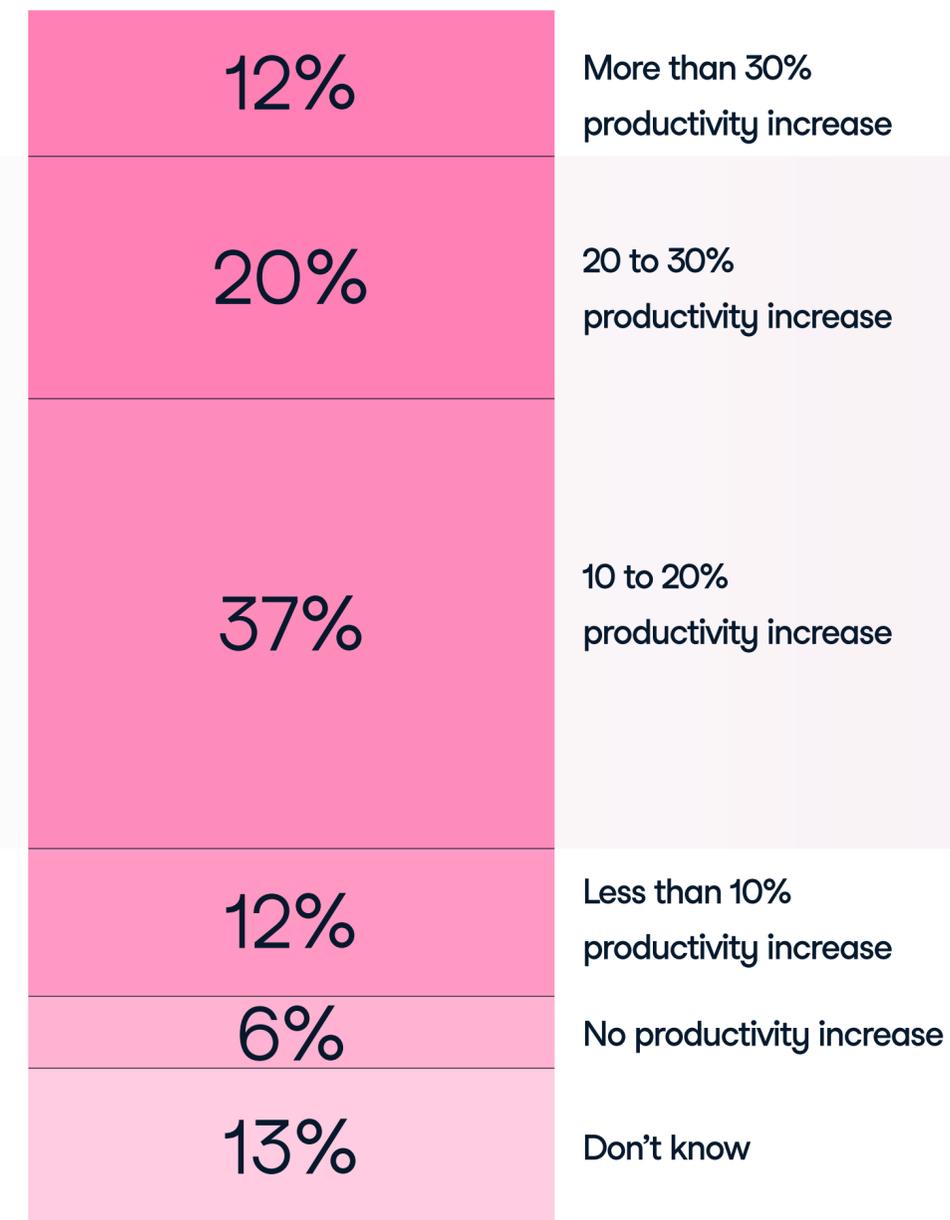


“Understanding data governance and responsible data use is missing when turning data into business-ready insight.”

## #4 Demonstrate impact, not just skill

Employers don't reward skills in isolation; they reward better outcomes. Differentiate yourself by showing how your data and AI skills improve decisions, productivity, and results in real work.

### ↳ Estimated performance uplift from AI literacy skills



These results are in line with the [2025 Generative AI at Work Brynjolfsson paper](#) showing customer service workers with gen AI access get a 15% uplift in productivity and [research from Kevin Cui at Princeton](#) showing a 26% uplift in PRs for software developers from using Copilot

# 76%

of leaders say employees with data literacy skills outperform those who don't

“Many professionals are familiar with AI concepts, but struggle to identify opportunities for implementation, integrate AI into workflows, and measure impact.”

# Building data and AI skills that actually last

Employers consistently point to the same issues: too much passive content, too little practice, and training that isn't relevant to day-to-day roles. These problems result in lack of investment at the company level for your upskilling, even though leaders want these skills.

If you're a learner, the takeaway is clear: focus on—and ask for!—hands-on, role-relevant learning with clear progression and opportunities to apply skills in real situations.

ONLY

# 35%

of leaders say they have a mature, organization-wide data or AI literacy upskilling program for all employees.

## ↳ Issues leaders report with learning programs

<p><b>1 Passive learning</b></p> <p>Video-based courses make it difficult to apply learned skills in the real world  23%</p> <p>Not enough hands-on projects or labs  24%</p> <p> Prioritize—and ask your company for—learning that requires doing, not watching</p>	<p><b>2 Poor relevance</b></p> <p>The skills people learn are not relevant to their roles  21%</p> <p>Lack of role-tailored paths  23%</p> <p>Out of date content  13%</p> <p> Pick learning aligned to how you work today (or want to work next)</p>
<p><b>3 Lack of guidance</b></p> <p>Inability for employees to understand where to start learning  21%</p> <p> Follow structured learning paths, not random tutorials</p>	<p><b>4 No proof of impact</b></p> <p>Lack of certifications for learners  15%</p> <p>Difficulty reporting on the return on investment from training  26%</p> <p> If you can't articulate impact, your learning won't be valued. Practice explaining: "Because I learned X, I was able to do Y, which resulted in Z."</p>



# Learn the data and AI skills that pay

DataCamp supports the kind of learning leaders and employers value through interactive exercises, structured learning paths, and real-world projects designed to build practical, job-ready skills.

[Start Learning Now](#)

Upskilling a small team? [Get started today](#) →

4.7/5

“[DataCamp] combines short, focused lessons with hands-on exercises, which makes it easy to immediately apply what I learn ... I also like the wide range of courses and learning tracks.”

**Morena**  
Business Intelligence Developer

A video player interface showing a Python tutorial. The video content includes a code editor with Python code and a presenter. Below the video are playback controls (play, volume, speed, etc.) and a 'Next' button.

A course progress bar for 'Getting Started (1/4)'. It shows two completed steps: 'Forming Analytical Questions' and 'Data Storytelling Concepts', both marked with green checkmarks.

An exercise titled 'What can ChatGPT do?' with a 100 XP reward. The exercise asks the user to ask ChatGPT about its capabilities. A chat interface shows a user asking 'Hey chat, what are your capabilities?' and ChatGPT responding with a list of capabilities: 1. Understanding and Generating Text, 2. Answering Questions, and 3. Language Translation. The user has typed 'That's way too long. Summarize it in one short sentence.' in the input field.

A practice exercise for a lambda function. The prompt asks to rewrite a function as a lambda function. The code provided is: `def plus_5(number):  
 """Adds 5 to a given number and returns the result."""  
 new_number = number + 5  
 return new_number`. The user is to complete the code to return the output. The interface shows a code editor with a lambda function skeleton and input fields for testing.

A user dashboard for Sanita Jr IV. It shows the user's profile, a 'Daily Streak' of 2 days, and 'Total XP' of 145,078. There are buttons for 'Practice', 'Notes', and 'Continue' for the 'Case Study: HR Analytics in Power BI' course. A 'Leaderboard' section shows other users like Johnny Depp and Rose Tate. The dashboard also features a search bar and navigation links for Home, Learn, Certification, Jobs, and DataLab.

A career track for 'Associate AI Engineer'. It shows the track description: 'Train and fine-tune the latest AI models for production becoming an AI Engineer today!'. It lists prerequisites, including 'Track Prerequisites' and 'Introduction to Python'. There is an 'Enroll in Track' button and a progress bar for the track.

## APPENDIX

# Survey Methodology

This year, we asked 517 leaders in the UK and in the US about the state of data and AI literacy in their organizations.

The research was conducted by YouGov from December 2025-February 2026. The survey consisted of 44 questions. Some example question areas included:

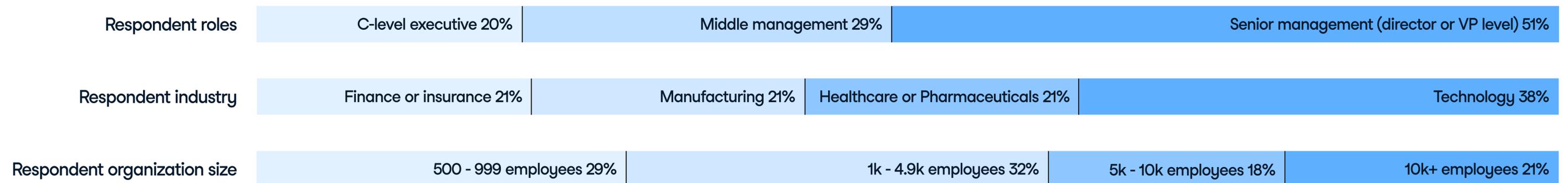
- How has the data and AI skills agenda evolved over the past 12 months
- How are organizations adopting AI
- How are organizations adapting to the data & AI skills gap
- What best practices can help organizations future-proof their workforce?

While this is the fourth edition of the DataCamp Data & AI Literacy Report, note that in the 2026 edition, there are notable changes to methodology, namely:

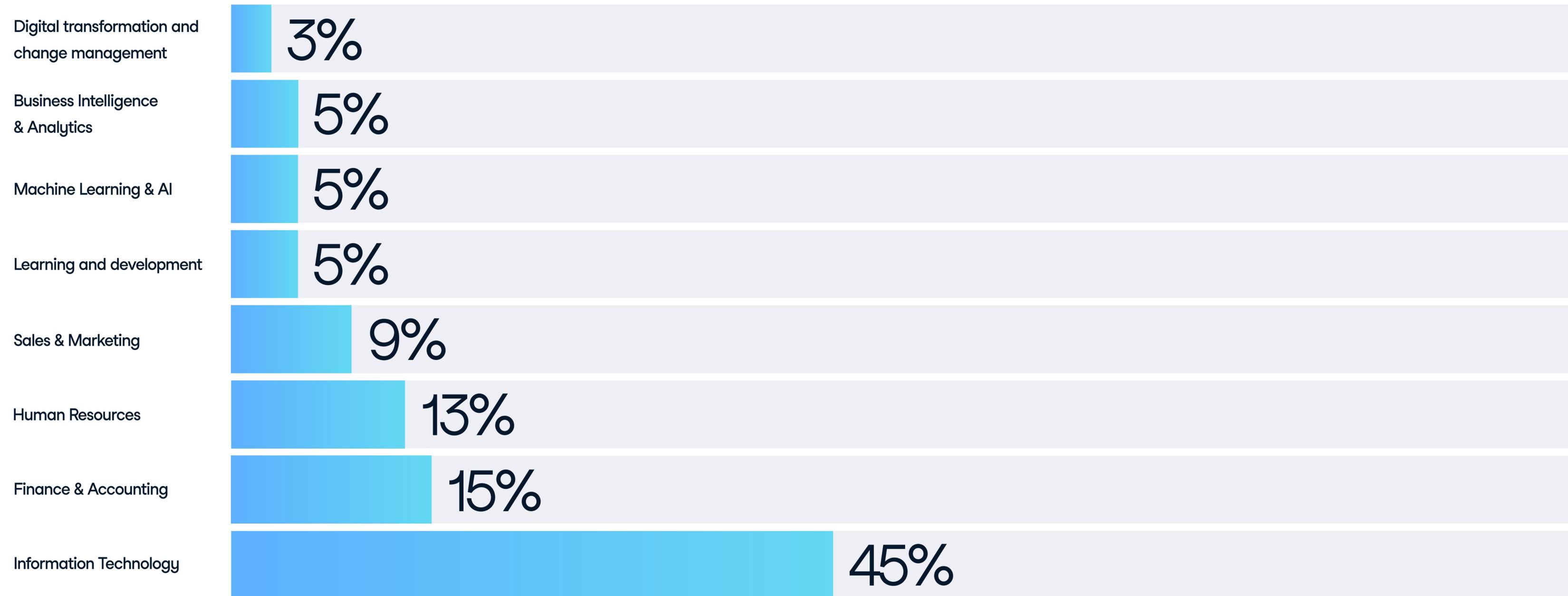
- The minimum organization size has been increased from 200 people to 500 people
- Respondent industries in 2026 were limited to finance/insurance, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals/health care, and technology

Due to these changes, we refrained from making year-over-year comparisons, even where we asked identical questions in previous editions. Where we did note year-over-year comparisons, we included specific commentary about the demographic changes of the respondents that could have had an impact.

## ↳ Survey respondent demographics



## ↳ Survey respondent function





# Thank you for reading

Are you an organization interested in scaling  
your data and AI literacy skills?

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