From intent to action: the leaders’ guide to building AI-powered workplaces

An AI-powered workplace does not treat artificial intelligence (AI) as a standalone technology. It uses AI as a core organisational enabler, embedded across daily operations, decision-making and workflows to augment human capability and build sustainable ways of working.

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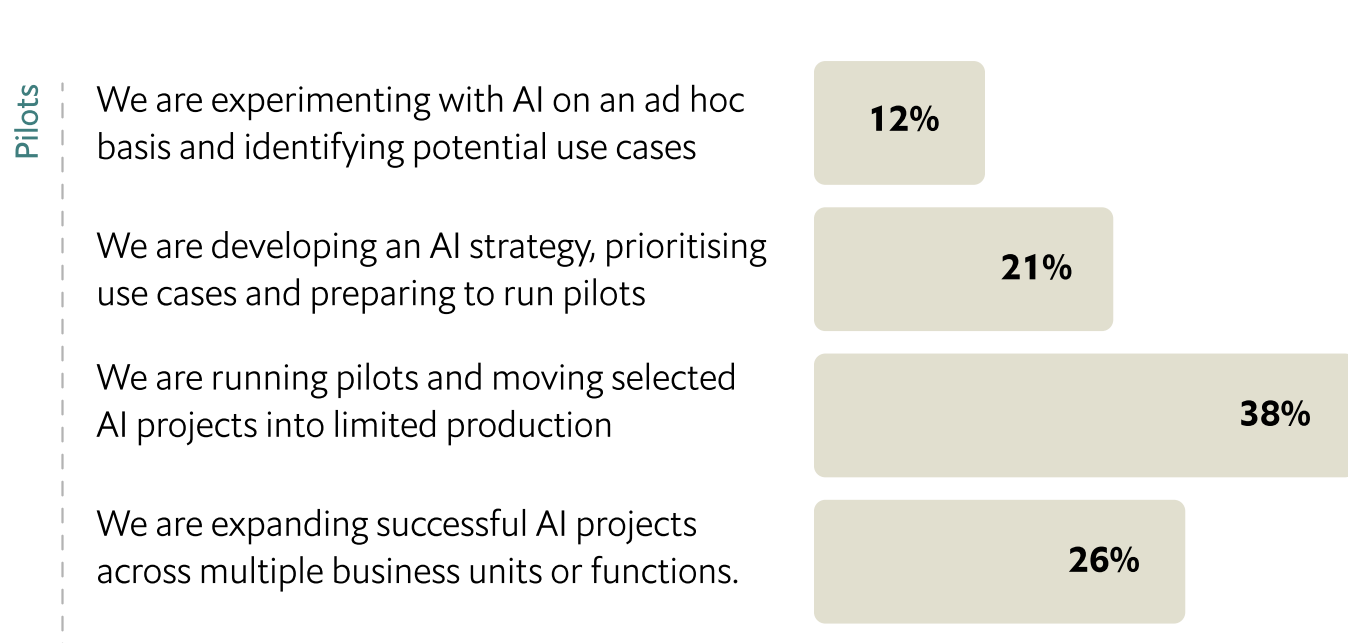
The foundation gap: without governance, ownership and KPIs, AI stays stuck in pilots

> “Most organisations still treat AI as a technology initiative, not a cross-functional transformation. Without governance, ownership or key performance indicator tracking, pilots remain isolated and culture and workforce readiness are left behind.”
>
> — Nazrul Islam, chair professor in business at the University of East London and associate director at the Centre of FinTech, London

From pilots to scale: few have arrived



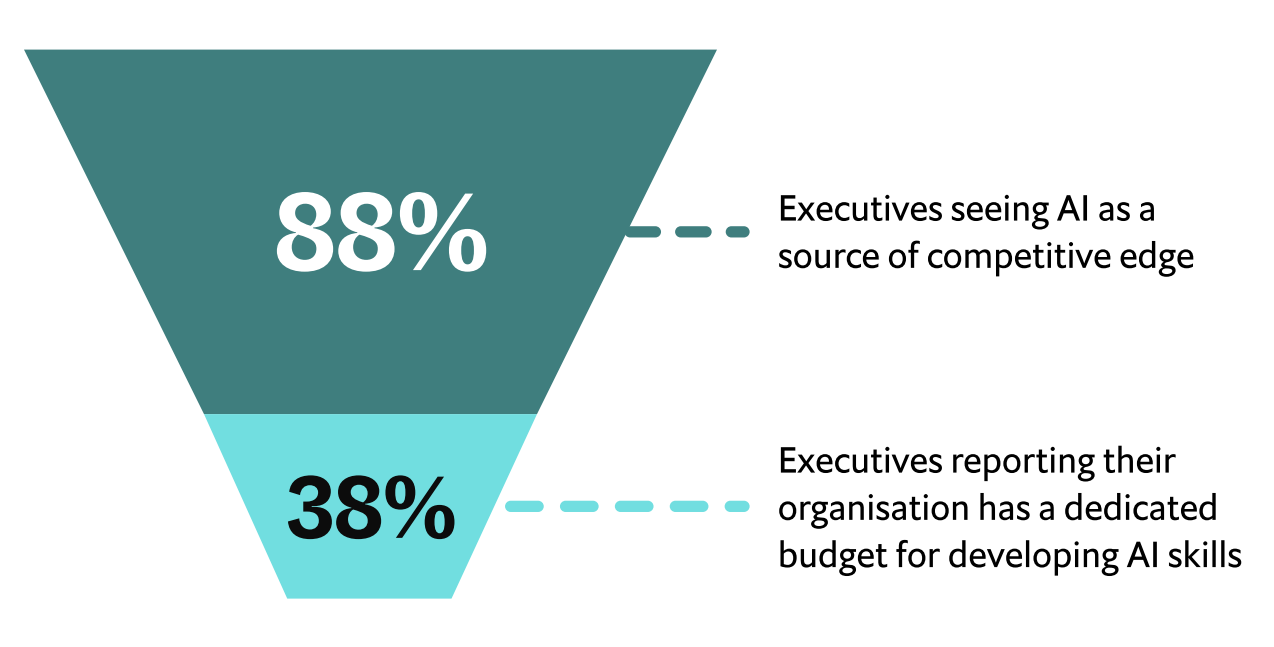
Source: Economist Impact, 2025

Only around **4% of executives** report they have achieved repeatable business value at scale by using AI.

01

THE PARADOX

Ambition without action



Without real investment and redesigned workflows, organisations remain far from embedding AI.

Leadership key takeaways

Prioritise strategic, long-term investment in AI skills and workflows:

- **Reinvest productivity gains from automation into workforce capability.**
- **Allocate dedicated budgets for upskilling and reskilling.**
- **Redesign workflows for effective human–AI collaboration.**

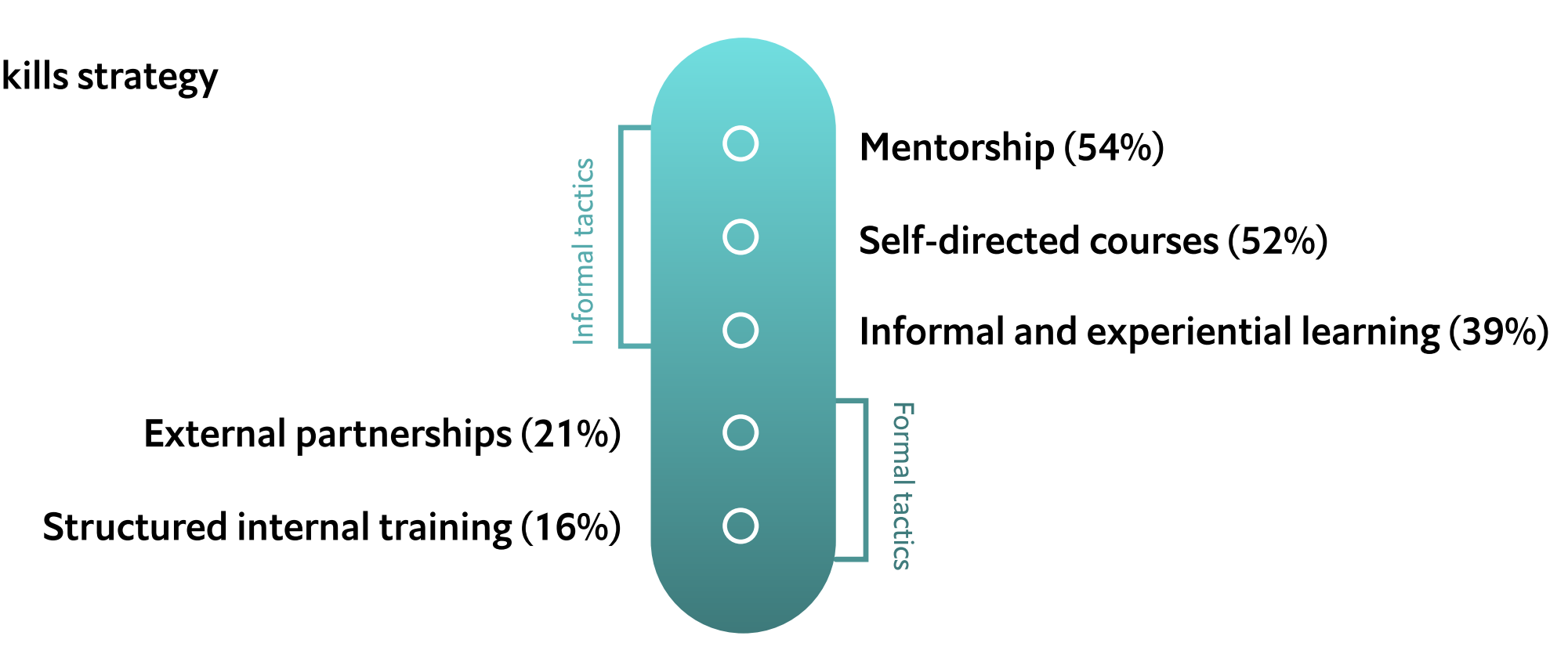
02

TRAINING DOES NOT ALWAYS MEAN TRANSFORMATION

Learning on paper, lagging in practice

Nearly all (**99%**) executives say they are developing AI skills. But most rely on informal tactics.

AI skills strategy



Leadership key takeaways

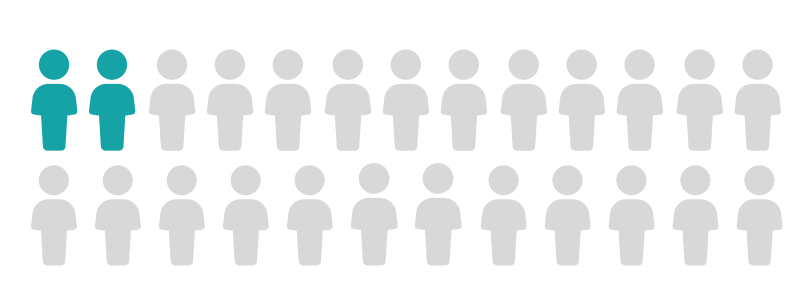
Build structured, practice-based training programmes that link directly to company strategy:

- **Build structured training programmes that complement informal learning.**
- **Map roles and conduct internal skills audits to identify and activate talent.**
- **Embed continuous learning into everyday operations—not one-off interventions.**

03

THE GOVERNANCE VOID

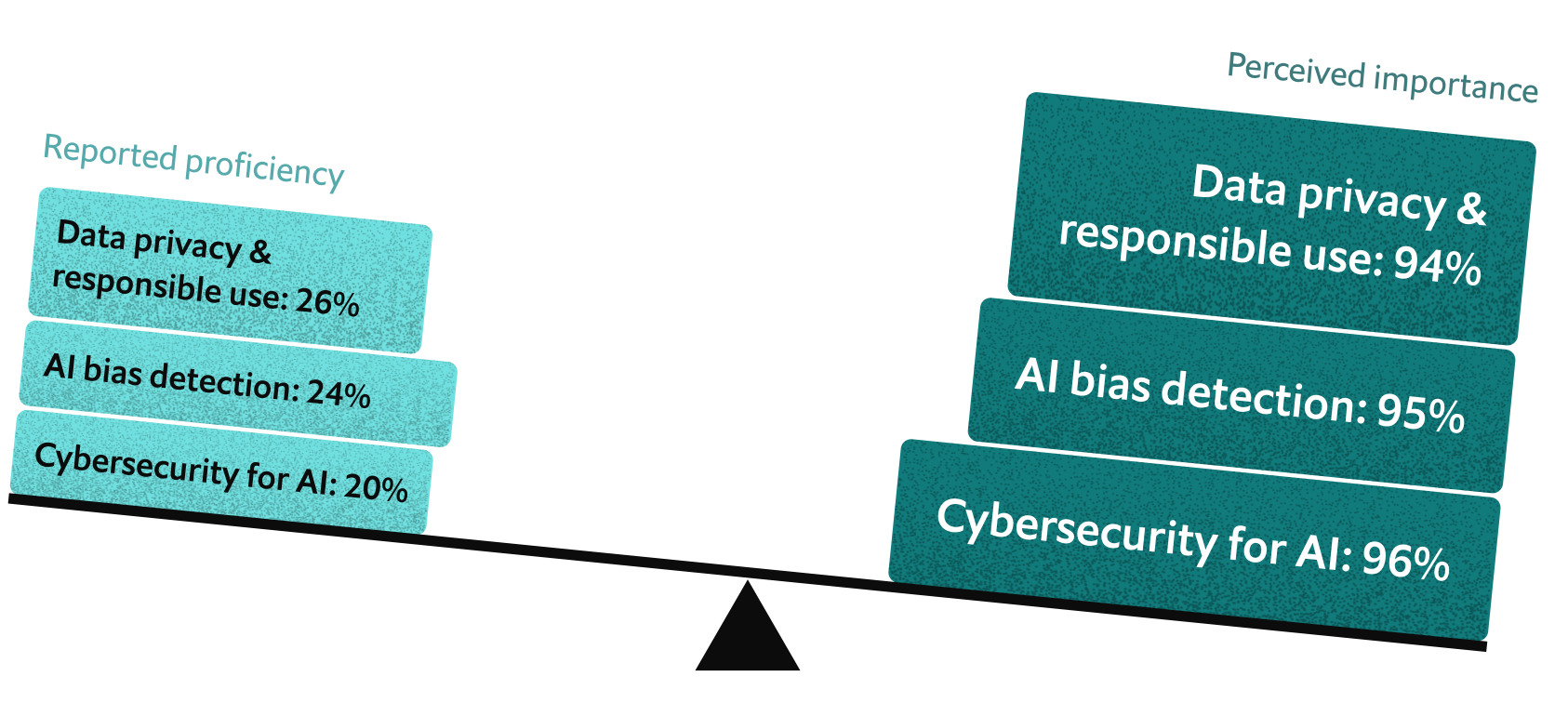
Risk without rules



Only **8% of executives** have comprehensive governance frameworks.

Significant skills gaps exist between awareness and proficiency across cybersecurity (76-point gap), bias detection (71-point gap) and privacy (68-point gap).

Executives recognise the risks but lack the tools to manage them.



Leadership key takeaways

Embed responsible governance and ethical oversight into AI use.

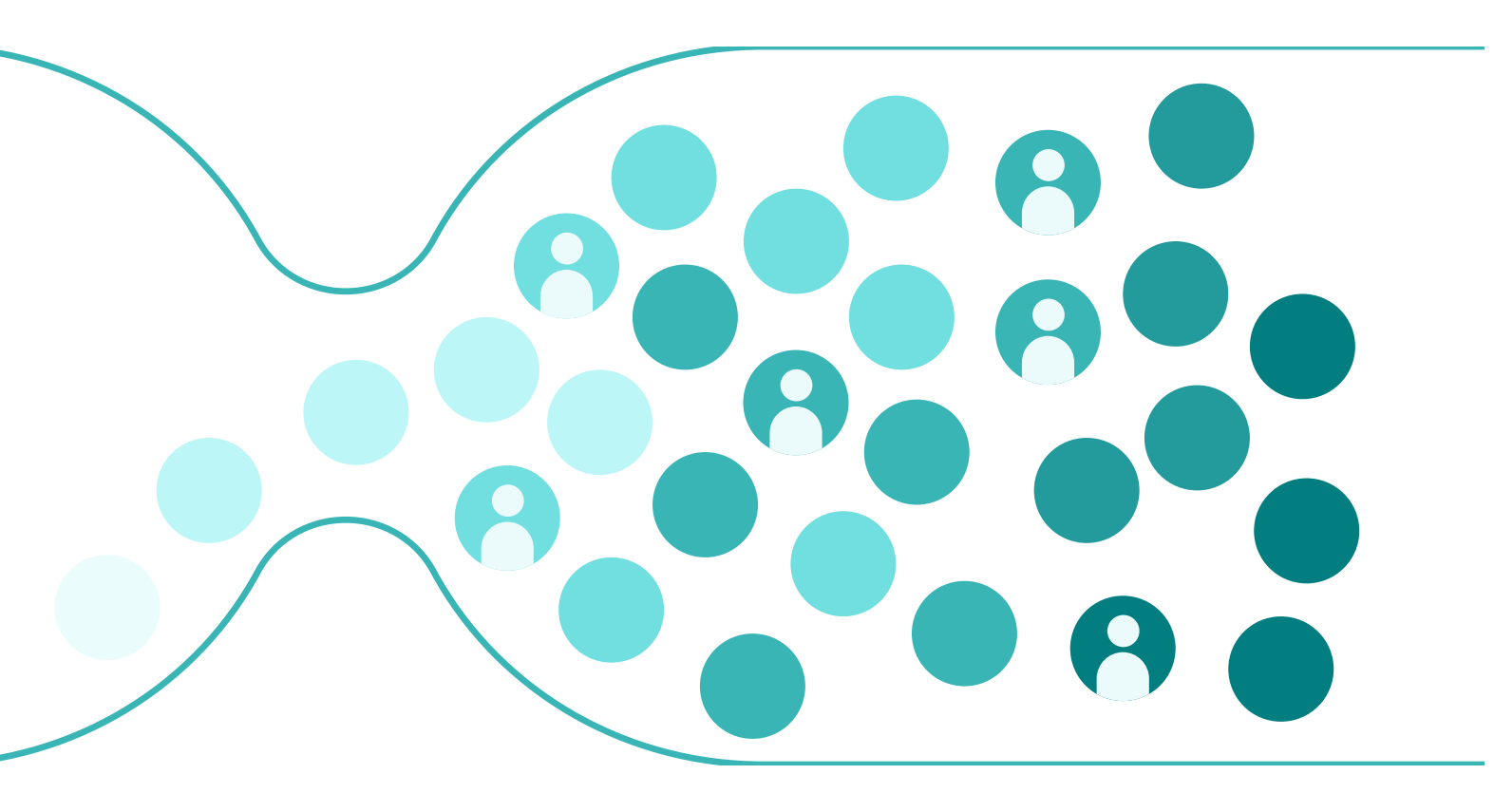
- **Engage with regulators and align policies to ensure responsible, ethical AI practices.**
- **Create safe, transparent environments that encourage experimentation and reduce resistance.**

04

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

The middle-manager bottleneck

Nearly **60%** of business leaders say their organisation is actively championing an AI talent strategy. But **56%** note that managers have minimal or no accountability for developing their team’s AI skills.



Leadership key takeaways

Equip managers and leaders at all levels to guide human–AI collaboration:

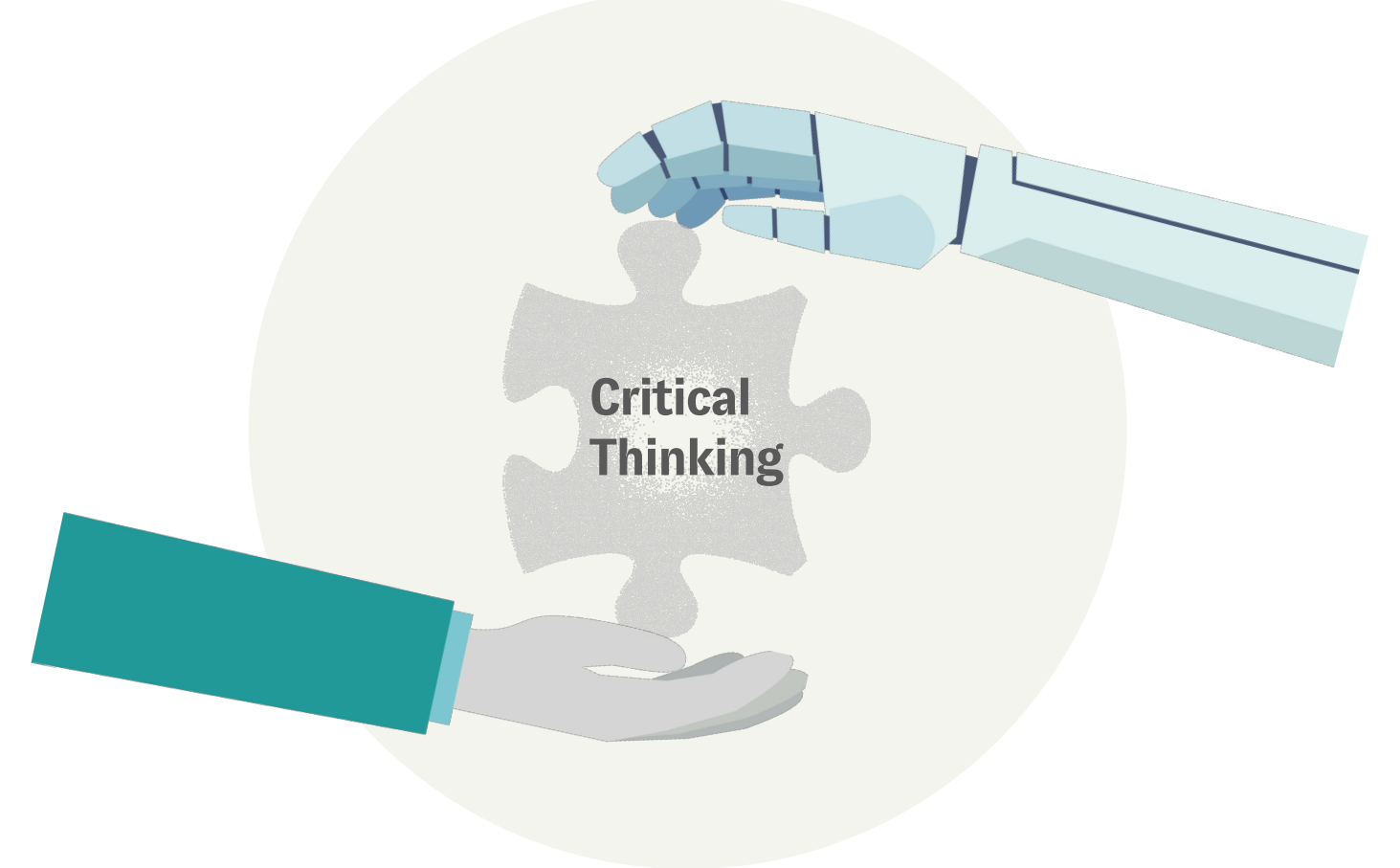
- **Make people managers accountable for team training and AI integration outcomes.**
- **Provide hands-on AI and governance training for leaders at all levels.**

05

THE HUMAN EDGE

Creativity: the next frontier

95% of business leaders say they value human-centric skills such as critical thinking and creativity. But only **a third** say their teams excel at them. As AI handles routine tasks, innovation depends on human creativity. Without proficiency in these, progress could stall.

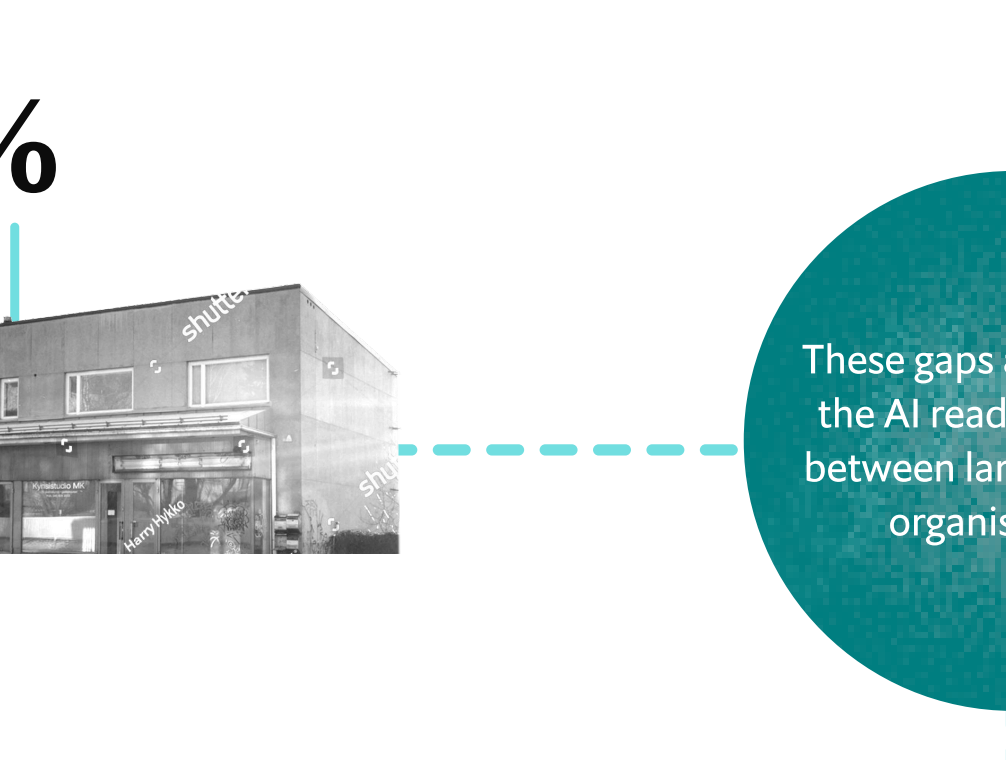


Leadership key takeaways

Balance technical and human-centric skill development:

- **Enable knowledge sharing.**
- **Pair tech and non-tech teams together to cultivate creativity, collaboration and critical thinking.**

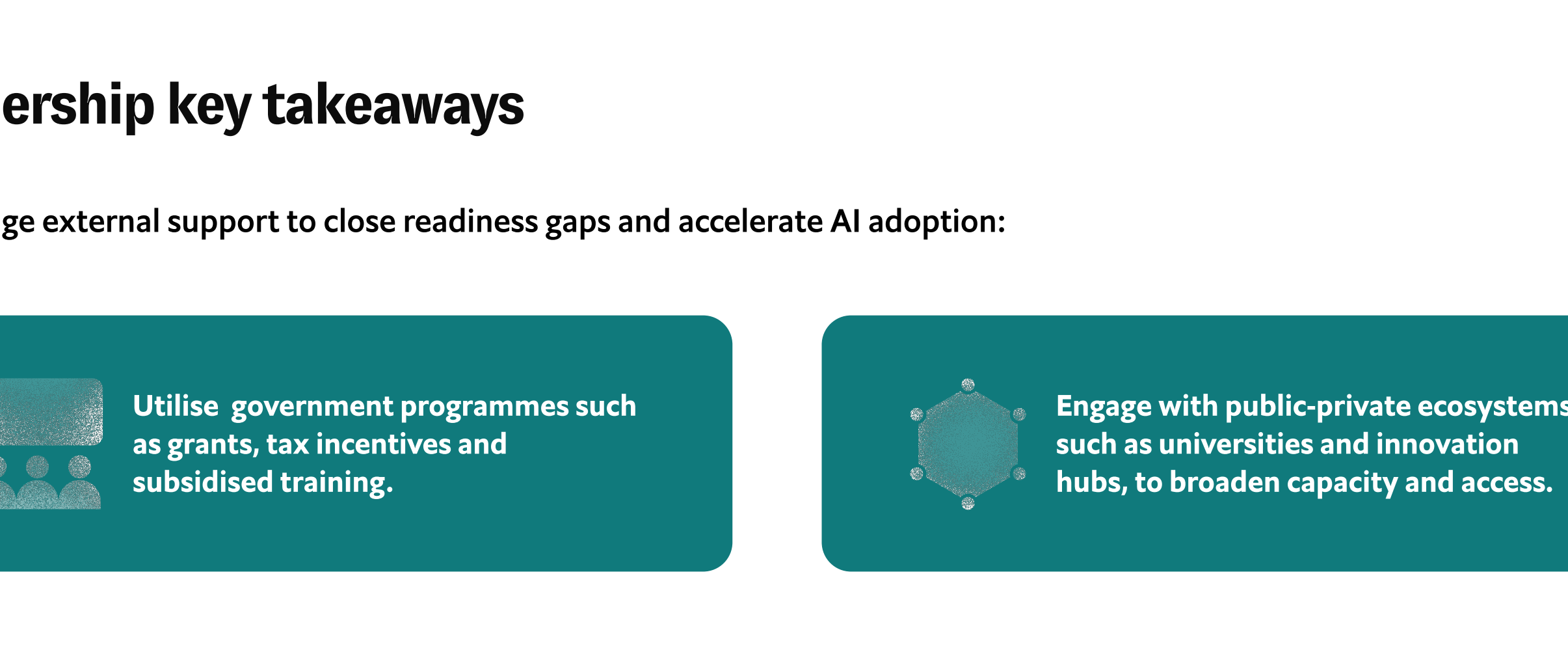
06



SMALL FIRMS, BIG RISKS

The growing digital divide

Executives from small firms are four times more likely to cite budget constraints for AI training and development than those from global firms (**18% v 4%**). Nearly two-thirds lack funds to hire specialists.



These gaps are widening the AI readiness divide between large and small organisations.

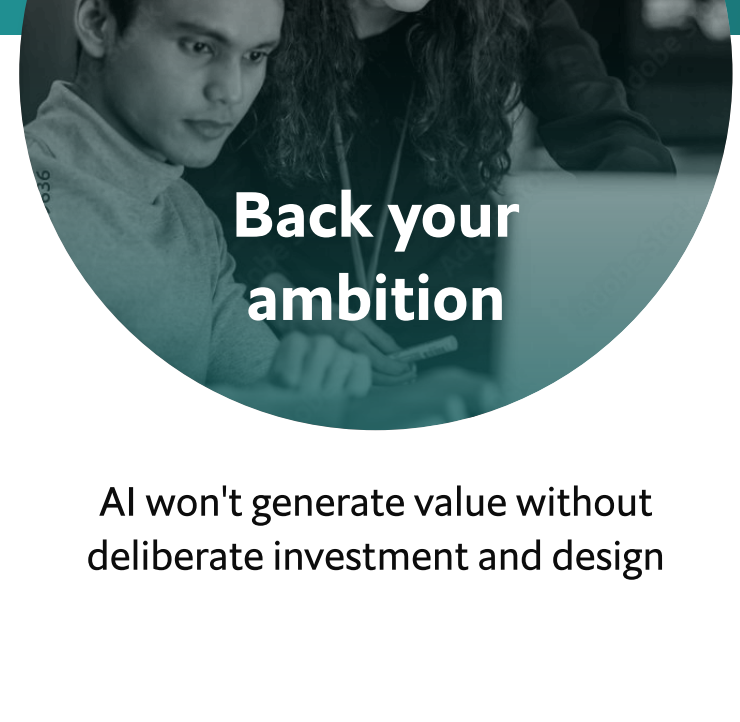
Only **2%** have robust governance.

Leadership key takeaways

Leverage external support to close readiness gaps and accelerate AI adoption:

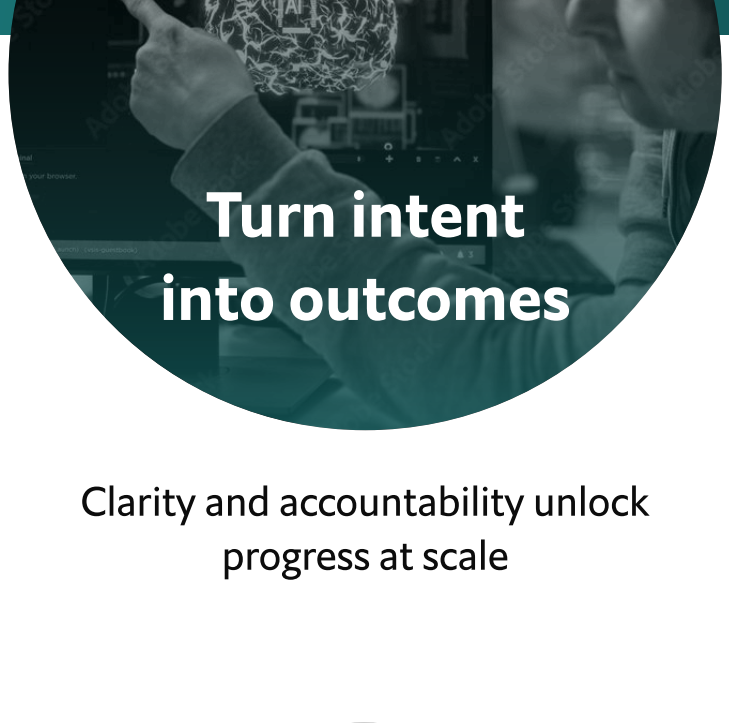
- **Utilise government programmes such as grants, tax incentives and subsidised training.**
- **Engage with public-private ecosystems, such as universities and innovation hubs, to broaden capacity and access.**

Turning AI ambition into action



Back your ambition

AI won't generate value without deliberate investment and design

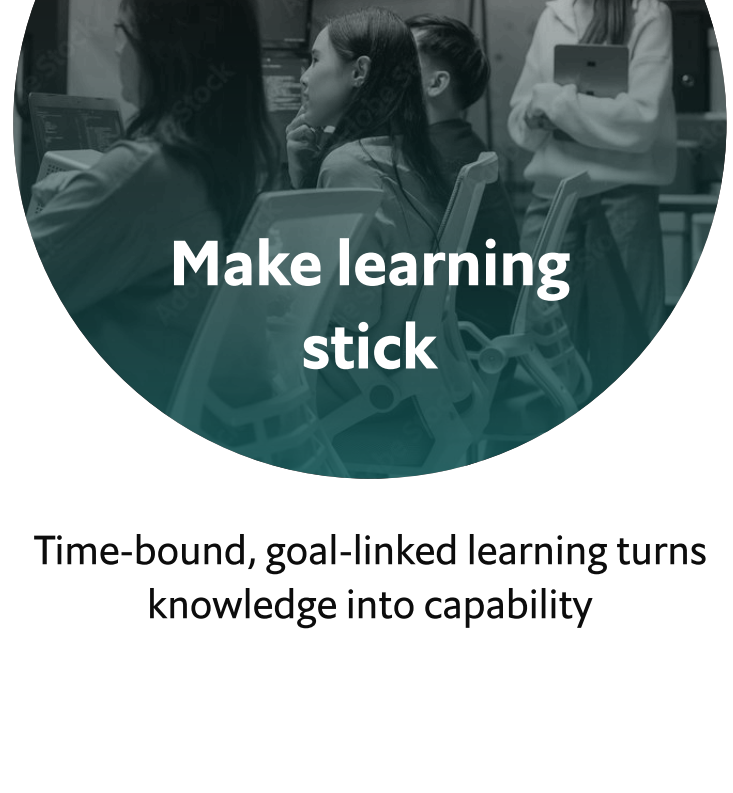


Turn intent into outcomes

Clarity and accountability unlock progress at scale

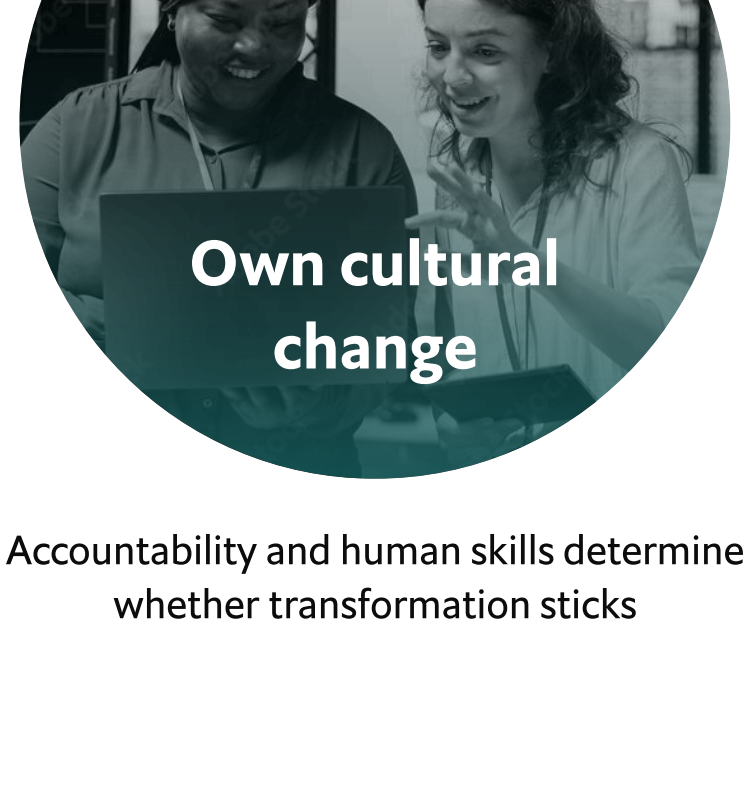
Formalise skills development

Capability isn’t optional; it’s structural



Make learning stick

Time-bound, goal-linked learning turns knowledge into capability



Own cultural change

Accountability and human skills determine whether transformation sticks

Protect ESG trust

Strong guardrails earn trust and reduce organisational risk