

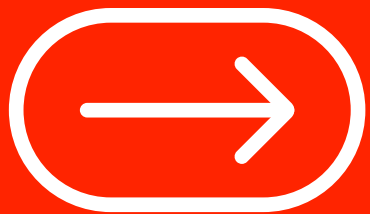


Workforce Wishlist: Middle East

The Talent Blueprint — Unlocking the
Middle East Workforce Potential



Foreword



The UAE’s Vision 2071 and Emiratization initiatives are reshaping organizational approaches to talent management. In this context, leaders are increasingly recognizing the need to understand workforce aspirations and align learning investments with both national priorities and business goals to stay competitive and future-ready.

Based on insights from 3,382 professionals across the GCC— this Workforce Wishlist highlights how employers can cultivate culturally fluent, strategically skilled teams equipped to succeed in a rapidly evolving economy.

Executive Summary

Workforce Wishlist 2025

> A workforce hungry to skill at scale

GCC professionals aren't sticking to one domain. On average, each chose about 10 areas to develop across technical, strategic, and interpersonal skills. This appetite is far greater than most L&D budgets plan for.

> Training is now a retention strategy, not just a perk

Over 60% of professionals say training quality influences whether they stay. Yet, 52% haven't been trained in the skills they value most. That gap makes training both a capability and a retention issue.

> Strong demand for on-the-job, contextual learning

4/10 say previous training felt disconnected from their daily work, lacking real-world examples or GCC-specific case studies. Another 24% want stronger follow-up after sessions, and ask for tailored feedback or right-level content. Skipping context and reinforcement results in wasted budgets and limited performance impact.

> Cultural nuance matters, national relevance is non-negotiable

Region-aware programs win trust: 58% prefer trainers with GCC expertise, 50% want Arabic or bilingual delivery, and 88% expect programs to align with national transformation priorities such as Vision 2071. Skilling designed for other markets loses credibility fast as leaders need training that reflects local realities.

> 'Tailored-to-me' beats 'one-size-fits-all'

Nearly half of professionals (49%) want training designed for their roles, versus 29% who accept generic courses. Mass-produced learning no longer meets expectations. Employees now see tailored journeys as a baseline requirement. Not meeting that bar risks disengagement and lower ROI on L&D investments.

> Business growth requires balance between tech & human skills training

Demand for tech capability is intense: data analytics & visualisation (79%), public-sector transformation (73%), cloud security (72%), and cybersecurity (69%). Yet, only 1/3 feel confident in human skills that hold teams together under pressure: conflict-management, decision-making, emotional intelligence.



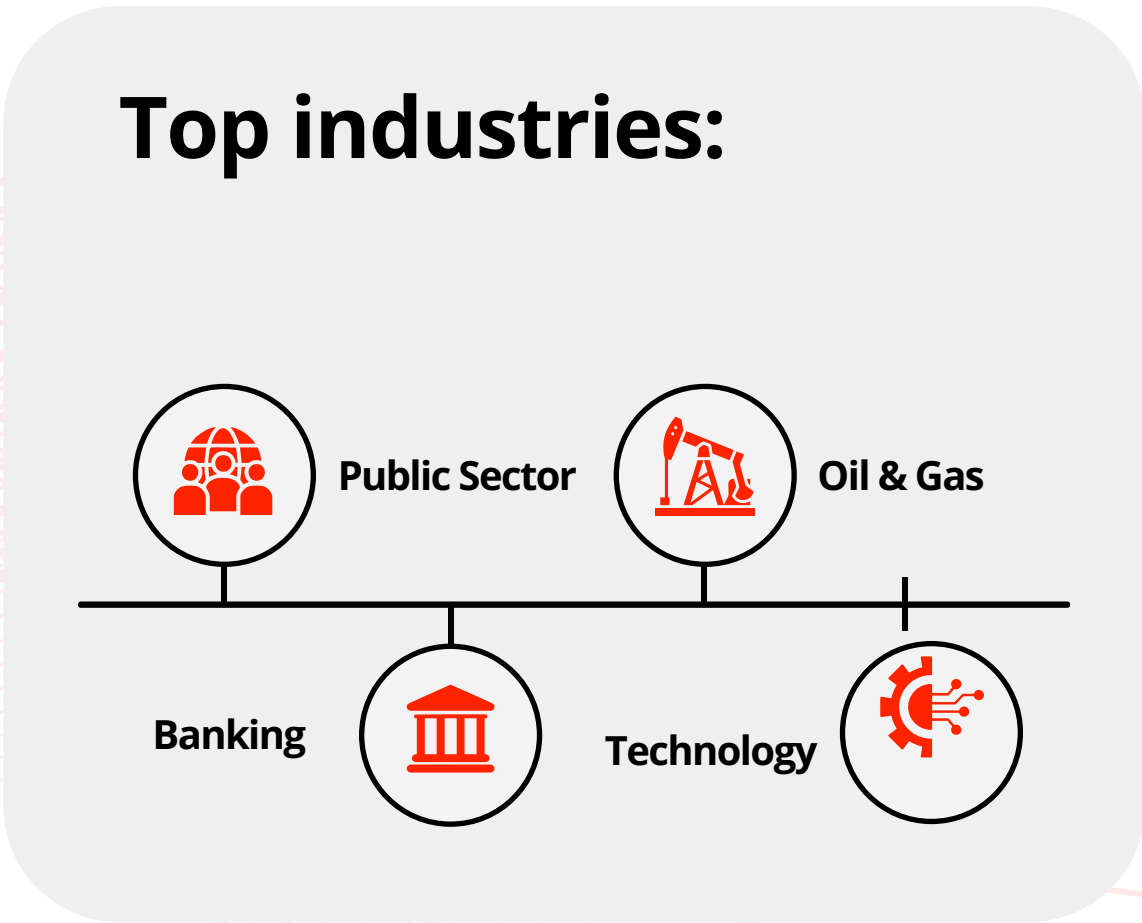
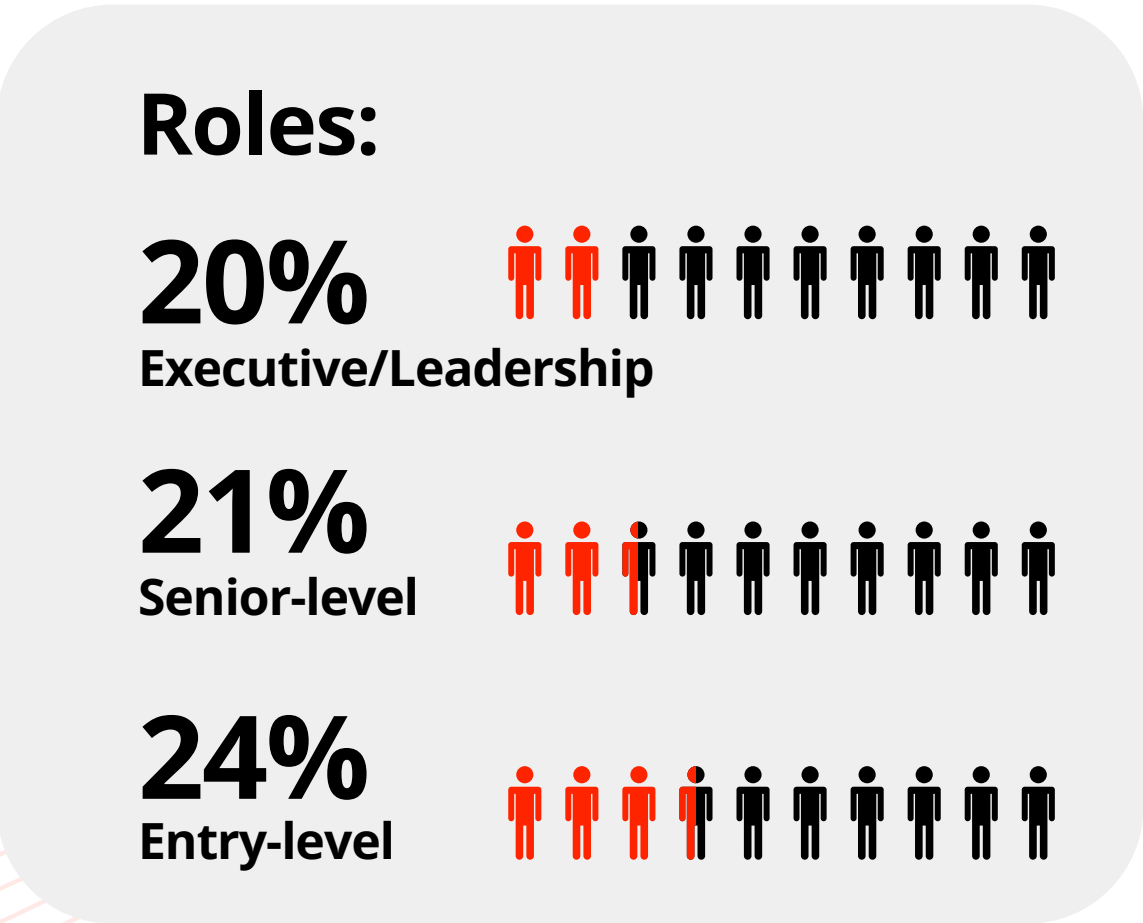
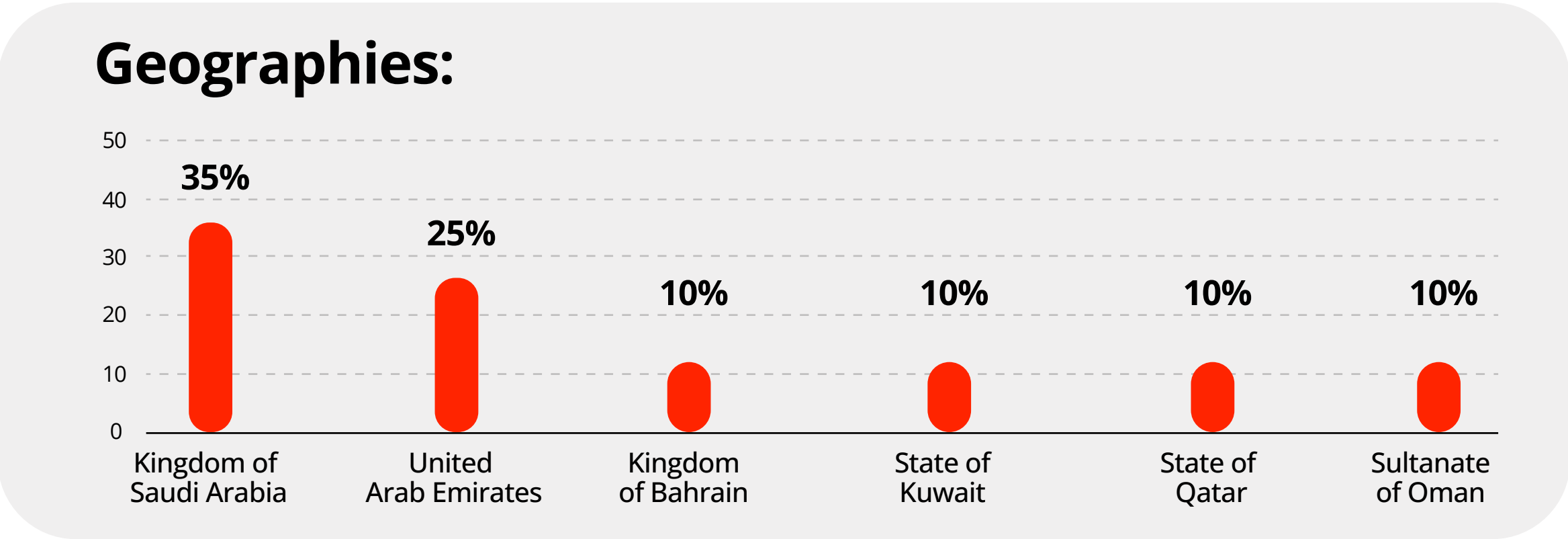
Methodology

This report reflects insights from 3,382 professionals across the GCC. Participants represent a cross-section of industries and roles, from entry-level to executive leadership.



Demographic Highlights:

Workforce Wishlist 2025





Skilling has evolved beyond a 'good to have' - it now impacts talent retention

TO TRAIN

50%

still feel they don't get enough support to build the skills that matter most to their roles

IS TO RETAIN

60%

of UAE professionals say the quality of training determines whether they stay with an employer

“

“Training isn't optional anymore. If an organization won't invest in me, **why should I invest my time in them?**”

Senior Analyst,
Abu Dhabi

National workforce development & leadership readiness lead all upskilling priorities

Workforce Wishlist 2025

Respondents identified the following as the most critical areas for upskilling:

Nationalization strategy and local talent development



94%

Leadership for GCC transformation agendas



90%

Soft skills (communication, leadership, negotiation, stress management)



80%

Data analytics and visualization



79%

Artificial intelligence and public sector AI tools



73%

These priorities highlight a strong alignment with national transformation goals, anchored in leadership and supported by both human and technical capabilities.

Shared priorities, distinct pathways: tech v/s non-tech

Workforce Wishlist 2025

Tech and non-tech respondents show strong alignment on the top two priorities: nationalization and leadership for transformation agendas.



Beyond these, the emphasis diverges:

Tech respondents

prioritize digital and analytical expertise data analytics, AI, cloud, and cybersecurity.

Non-tech respondents

emphasize people-centric and organizational adaptability skills soft skills, managing diverse teams, and customer service.

The findings point to a common strategic focus supported by differentiated skill depth across functions.

Beyond Basics: Sustainability, security and smart analytics top the skilling agenda

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Top 5 Tech Skills GCC Professionals Want to Hone

Data Analytics & Visualization

79%



AI for public sector transformation

73%



Cloud Security

72%



Cybersecurity for cloud environments

69%



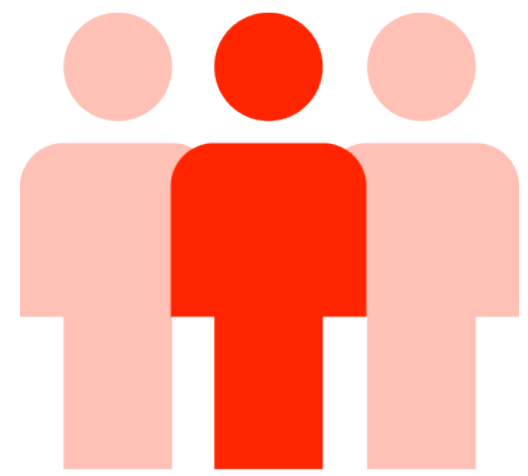
Predictive Analytics

68%



The soft skills slumber: An untapped competitive edge

A **disconnect** between awareness and action



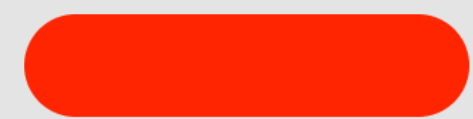
1/3

professionals
report lacking soft
skills, yet only



“We’ve trained for
technology adoption, but
soft skills are what keep
teams aligned and
performing under
pressure.”

Senior HR leader, Sharjah

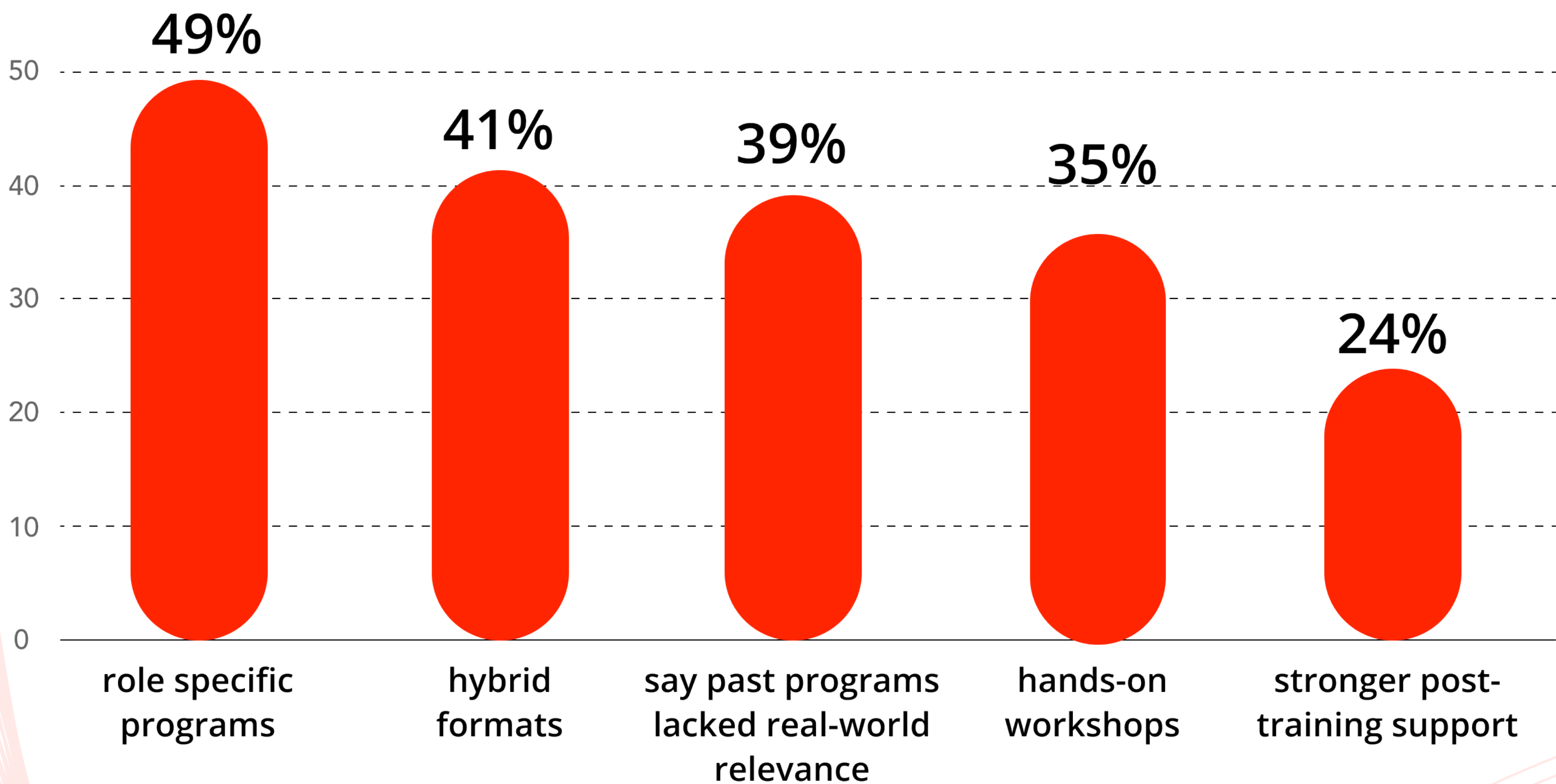


20% prioritize soft skills training

Personalisation Wins Over Standardisation

Strong demand for custom content and context

WHAT PROFESSIONALS WANT

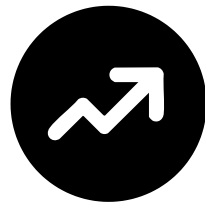


“
As one HR manager in Dubai shared,
A standardized approach doesn't account for our unique challenges. We need training that speaks to our sector, our teams, and our goals.”

Forging the GCC's Talent Future: Academia, Industry, and Government in Partnership

Workforce Wishlist 2025

Evolving corporate skilling to an intentional, immersive experience



Shift from inflection points to continuous capability-building



Ask for evidence beyond attendance



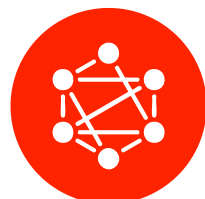
Implement embedded practice and local context



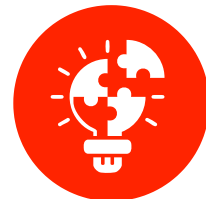
"We need training that travels from slides to sprints: measurable, repeatable, and mapped to business KPIs."

Regional CEO, Technology

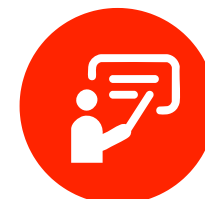
Accelerating academic relevance from classrooms to boardrooms



Co-design and refresh micro-credentials with employers and ministries



Expand applied research studios to solve live industry problems



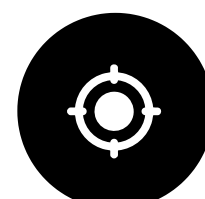
Build assessment that mirrors workplace realities



"Embedding learners in real business challenges turns graduates into contributors on day one."

Program Chair, Analytics

Reimagining policy as a talent catalyst



Convene public-private task forces to pilot job-role standards



Incentivize cross-sector mentorship to accelerate leadership



Encourage culturally fluent leadership programs for diverse workforces



"Strategic skilling isn't a nice-to-have; it's economic security in an innovation economy."

Undersecretary, Economic Affairs

The bottom line: **what leaders must act on today**

Make Learning a Core KPI

Link training quality to retention—60% of UAE professionals say training shapes whether they stay while measuring productivity and decision quality.

Align with UAE Context & Vision 2071

Deliver bilingual or Arabic programs with UAE-specific case studies; 58% prefer trainers with GCC expertise, and 88% want alignment with national agendas.

Balance Tech & Human Skills

Respond to high demand for tech skills like Data Analytics (79%) and AI (73%), while addressing gaps in emotional intelligence and decision-making reported by one-third of professionals.

Customize, Don't Standardize

Meet learner expectations—49% prefer role-specific training over generic courses—and offer personalized feedback and relevant content for real job application.

Build Cross-Sector Coalitions

Foster partnerships across academia, business, and government to refresh curricula quarterly, co-design micro-credentials, and pilot job-role standards aligned with Vision 2071.



Ready to take your workforce to the next level?

Learn how at www.upgrad-enterprise.com