

# The **Power Skills** Imperative

Global Outlook 2026

# Foreword

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As societies and organizations move deeper into an AI-enabled world, the role of **human capability** becomes more, and in no way 'less critical'. Advanced systems may shape how work gets done, but **outcomes continue to depend on judgment, influence, collaboration, and the ability to navigate complexity together - what we term as 'power skills'**.

The **Power Skills Imperative: Global Outlook 2026** reflects this clearly. While there is broad agreement on the importance of power skills, **many organizations are still trying to build them using conventional models**, which may not be relevant for the workplace of today and tomorrow.

**Technical & AI fluency cannot create value in isolation.** They require the power skills that allow people to apply judgment, work through ambiguity, challenge constructively, and act with speed and accountability - and these **need to be built differently**.

As you read this report, I hope you take away not just which **'power skills' matter**, but a clearer view of whether your organization is deliberately designing for them, or risking the assumption that they will emerge on their own.

This report examines how organizations across **India, the USA, the UK, and the EU** are approaching this challenge today, and what needs to change for **awareness to translate into performance outcomes**.

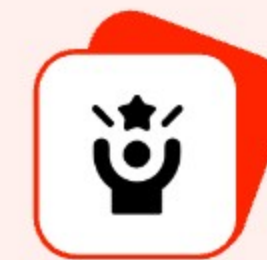
**Amit Mehta**  
CHRO - upGrad

# Executive summary



## Impact is clear, even if the term isn't

51% of professionals don't recognize the term, "power skills," yet 56% say these capabilities drive success, highlighting a naming gap but undeniable value.



## Human skills remain irreplaceable

Problem-solving, collaboration, adaptability, communication, and resilience fuel judgment, agility, and performance where technology alone falls short.



## Prioritization delivers measurable business results

Companies focusing on power skills see tangible gains—India shows ~7 p.p. profitability lift, with the UK and EU showing similar positive trends.



## Measurement gaps limit strategic leverage

87% of organizations rely on manager ratings, while only 53% track business outcomes, leaving key capabilities under-measured and under-leveraged.



## Leadership drives scale

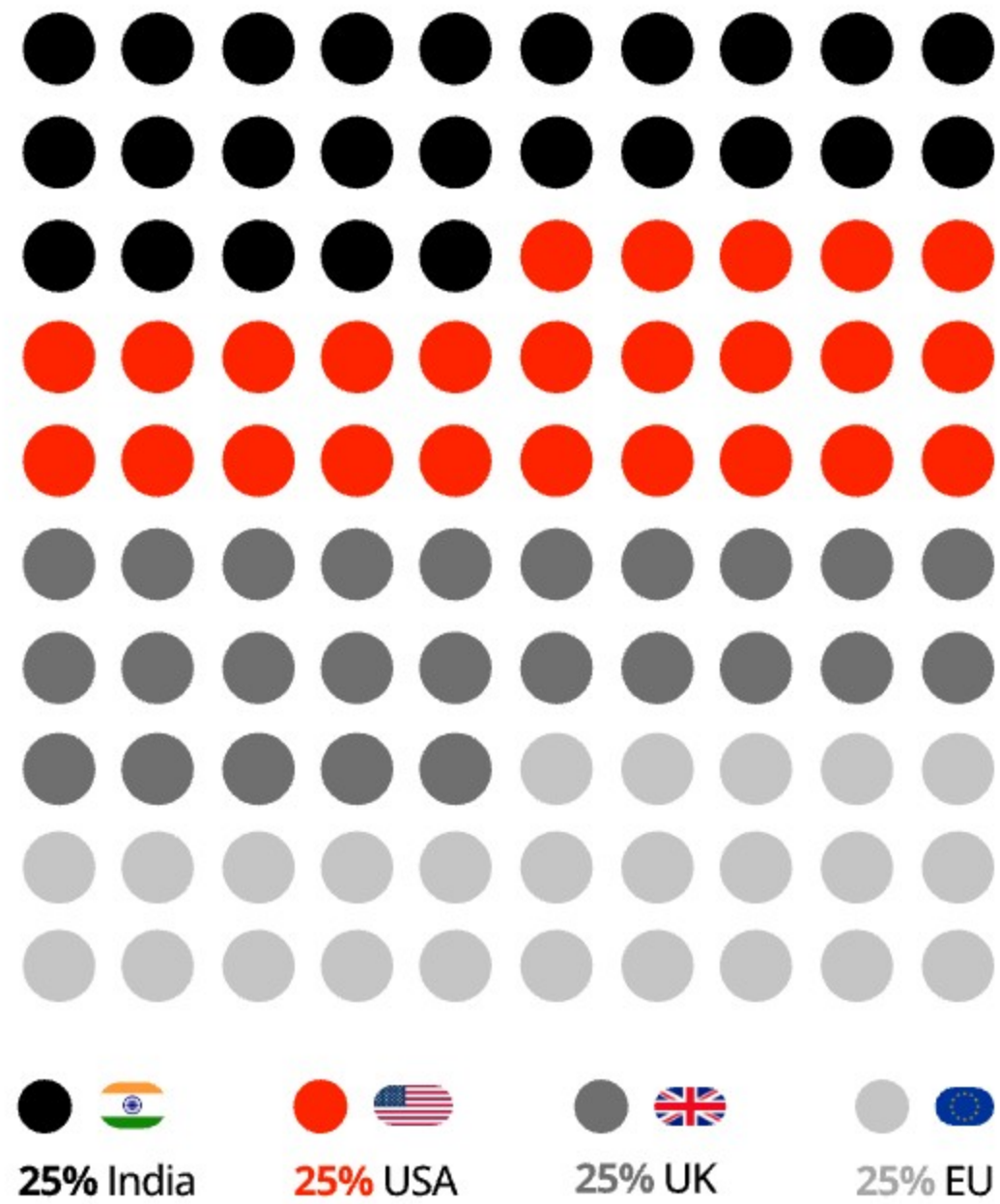
Managers ignite skill-building, but without active C-suite sponsorship and strategic integration, programs remain informal rather than core organizational levers.

# Methodology

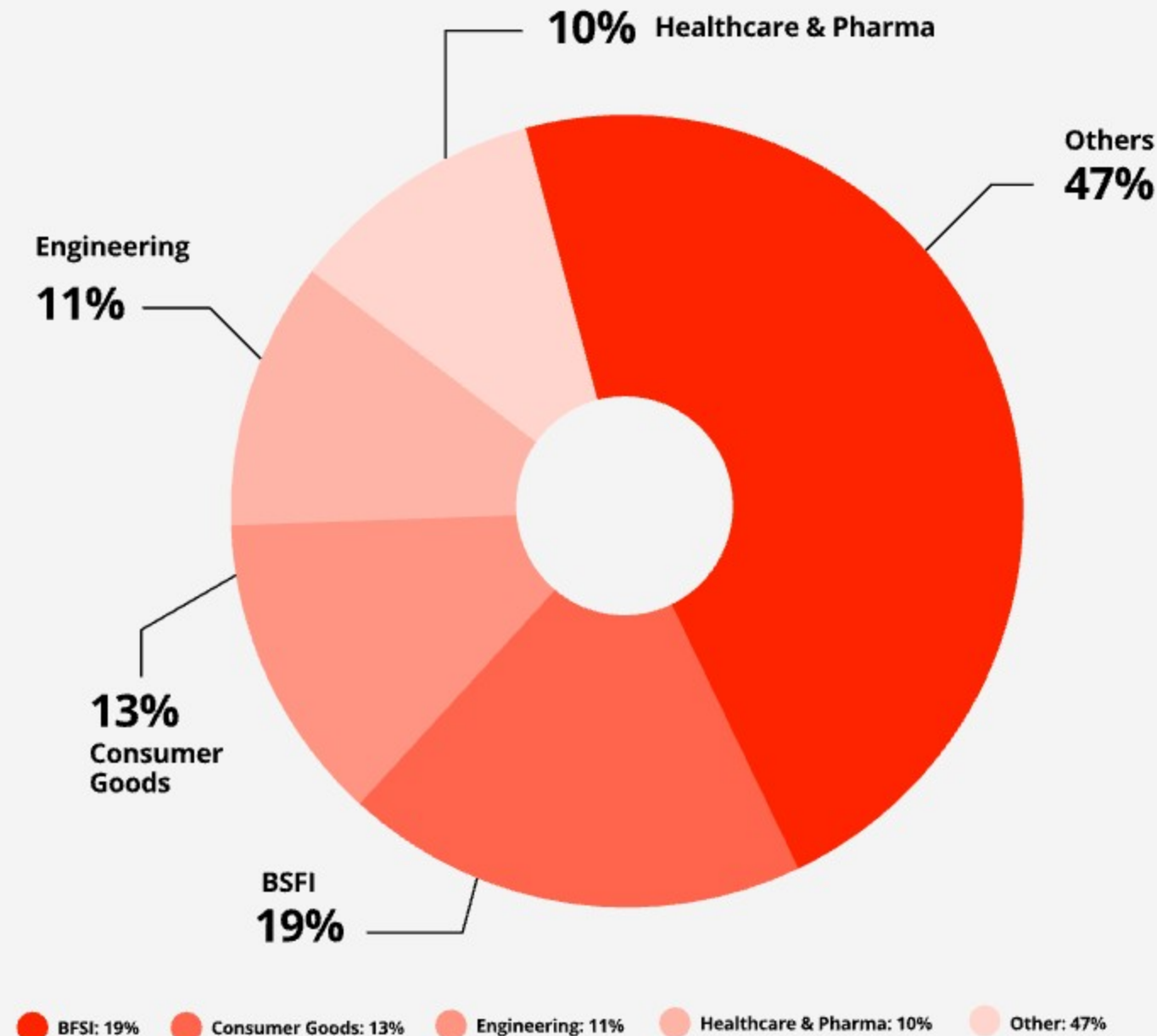
In November 2025, we conducted a **mixed-methods study** combining surveys, secondary research, and qualitative inputs from **subject matter experts**, alongside insights from **1,625 HR professionals** representing the top **100 publicly listed companies** across global markets. The study examined **awareness, perceived importance, prioritization, measurement practices, and business impact** of power skills, providing a comprehensive view of how they are shaping today's world of work.

## Demographics

### Region



### Industries



Industries under 'Others' include: Automobiles and auto components (4%), conglomerates (2%), hospitality (3%), infrastructure (5%), internet services (4%), IT services and consulting (6%), materials (4%), metals & mining (4%), oil (4%), real estate and property development (2%), retail (5%), telecom (3%), and utilities/power (1%).

### Organization Size

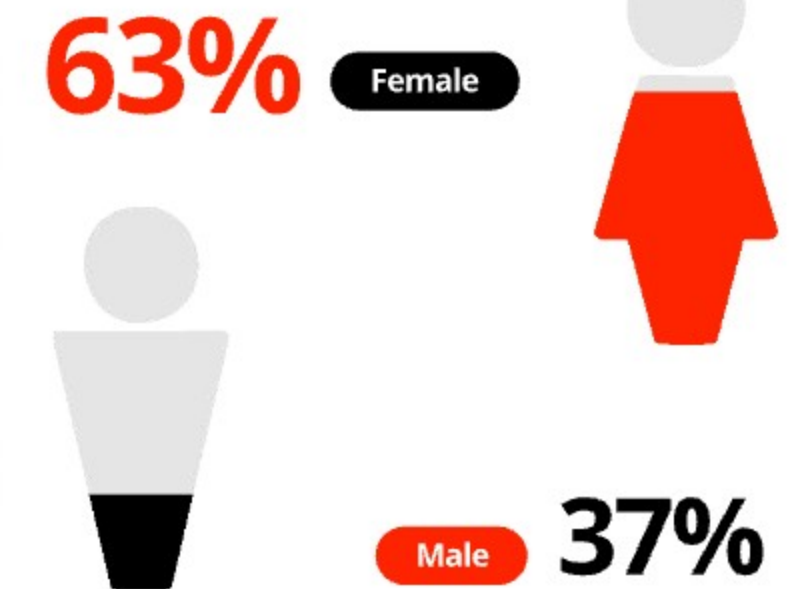
- > 10,000: **82%**
- 2,500 - 10,000: **13%**
- 500-2,500: **3%**
- < 500: **2%**

### Seniority

- **51%** Senior Managers
- **43%** Team Leaders
- **6%** Heads of Department

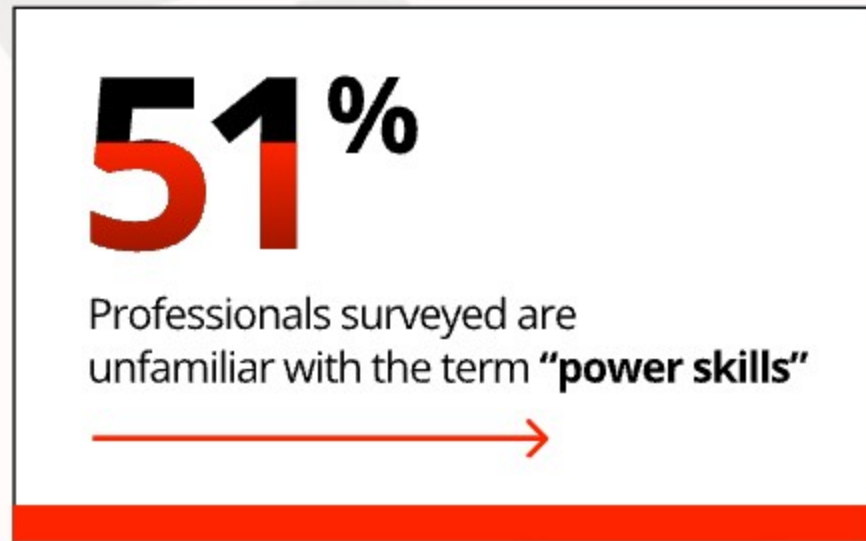


### Gender



# Terminology in transition: Traditional soft skills gain **power** in 2026

A decade ago, only 25% of large Indian firms invested in soft skills training. In 2024, 9 in 10 L&D leaders made them a top skilling priority. Today, in 2026, the shift from **“soft” to “power” skills** reflects a simple truth: technical skills open doors, but human skills drive influence.




The renewed focus on ‘power skills’ is more than a terminology shift—it’s a **mindset reset**. As technology accelerates efficiency, it’s **human capabilities** that ultimately **drive judgement, growth, and business impact**.

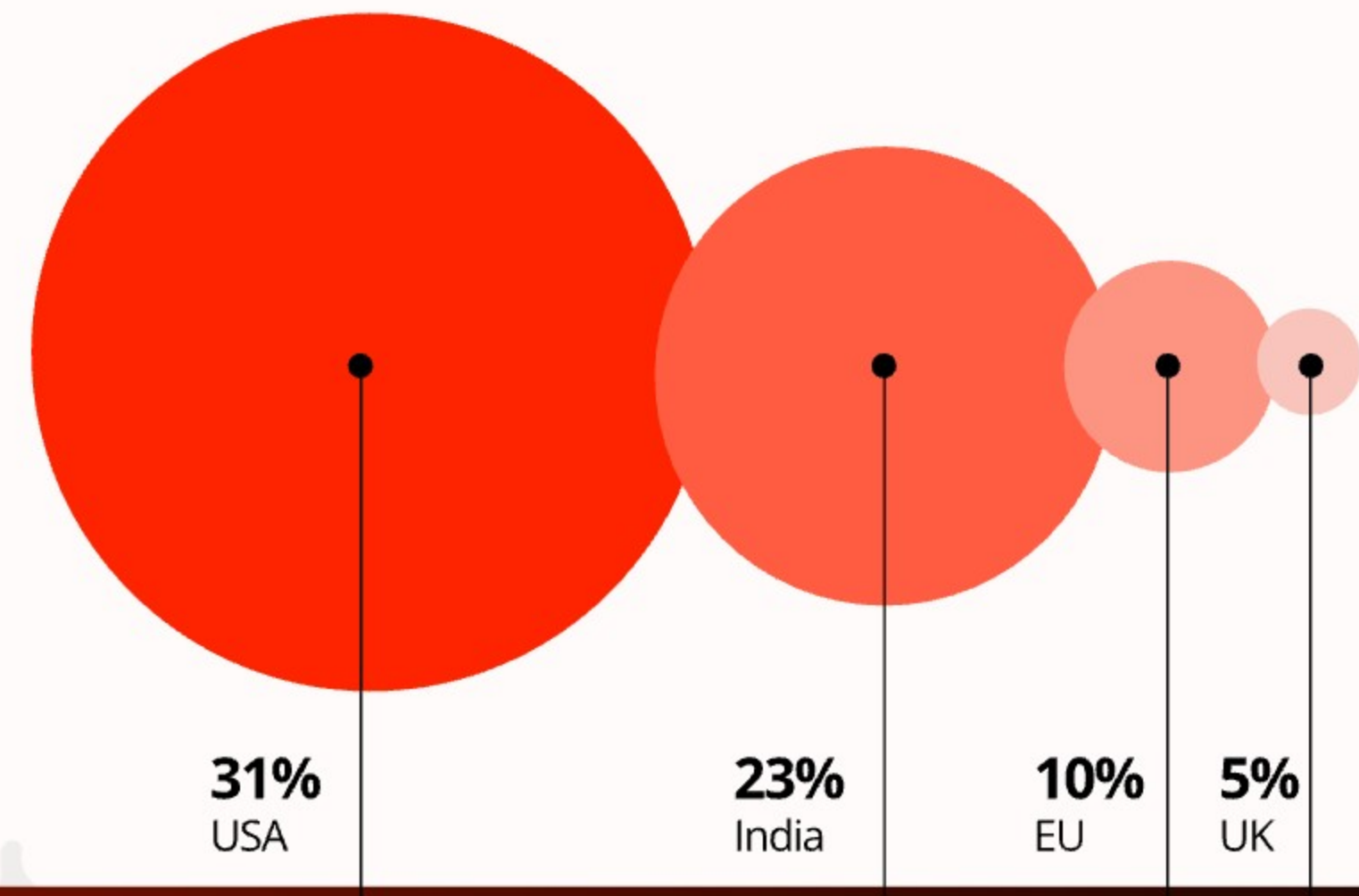
**Srikrishnan M**  
General Manager Customer Excellence Academy, Tata Motors



**Parinaz Siganporia**  
Corporate Trainer

**I have been a soft skills facilitator for 19 years now** and have trained freshers to leaders across conglomerates and academia; for sure the **shift in these power skills is seen brightly as they armor you with enrichment beyond the workplace!** They bring meaningful personal relationships, better intelligence at conflict resolution, powerful communication abilities, and confidence for overall personal well-being.

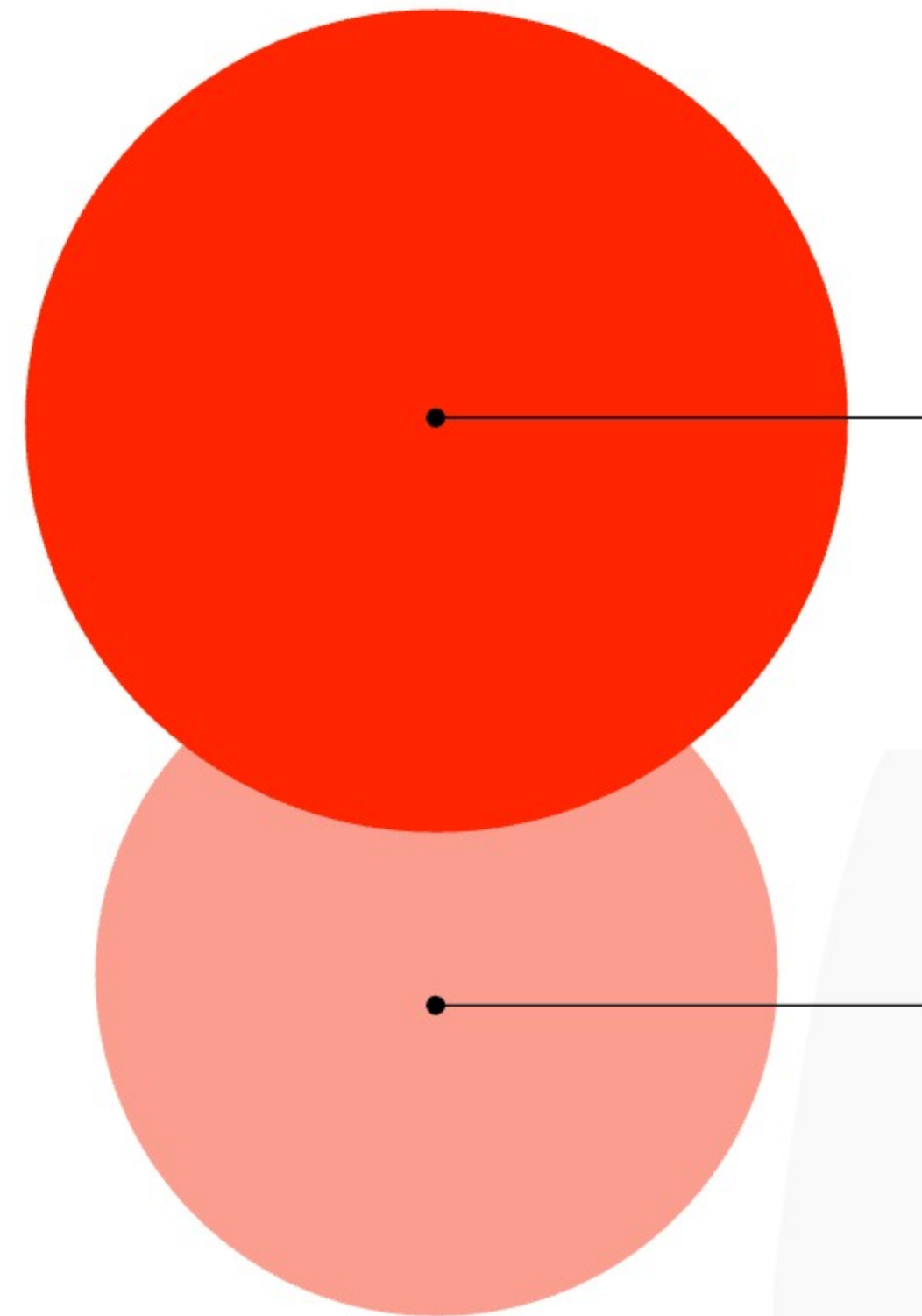
## Power skills awareness by region



Organizations across the globe may differ on terminology, but the data is unambiguous - what was once dismissed as “soft” is now seen as the essential power source of performance in the AI era.

# Power skills: A personal and professional driver of success

Across geographies, HR and L&D leaders demonstrate strong and near-equal conviction in the value of power skills—recognizing them as essential both to individual career success and to organizational performance.



**56%** Powering individual success

Professionals identify power skills as mission-critical to achieving sustained career growth

**50%** Powering organizational outcomes

Leaders affirm power skills as a decisive driver of enterprise effectiveness and results



**Kashmira Shah**  
Director, GenAI and Future Skills Academy, Walmart

“ While AI has incredible potential, it takes skilled people with creativity, curiosity and first principles thinking to be able to work with these tools and make smart decisions, analyze this data and use it to solve real world problems with these tools. So, **power skills will complement and be as essential as technological skills and AI know-how.** ”

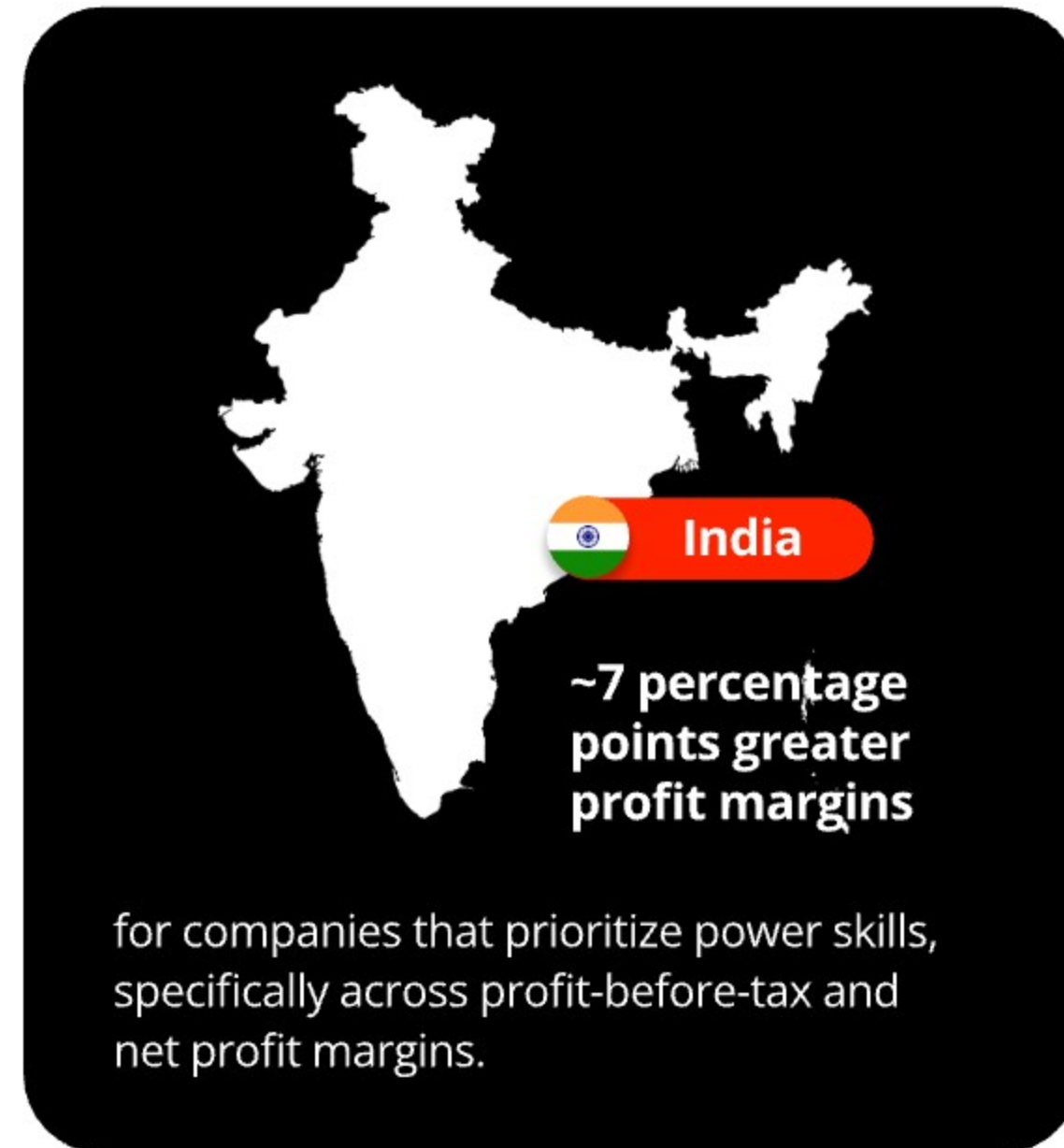
Power skills are no longer viewed through a singular lens. The workforce increasingly recognizes them as a **shared source of value**, simultaneously accelerating individual careers and strengthening organizational capability.

# Power skills boost performance globally—but gains vary by region

Awareness of power skills is table stakes. Measurable business impact emerges only when they are prioritized, and that impact manifests differently across regions.

## Where impact is evident

Regions with statistically significant performance gains linked to power skills focus



## Where emerging signals show similar patterns

Early signals show that UK companies prioritizing power skills report meaningfully higher operating margins, though insights remain directional rather than conclusive. In the US, companies that deprioritize power skills trend toward underperformance, with outcomes more strongly influenced by industry structure than by skills focus alone.



These visuals compare the strength and nature of association – not absolute financial performance – between power skills prioritization and business outcomes across regions.

The data increasingly indicates that power skills translate into measurable performance gains, but not uniformly. In efficiency-driven markets such as India, returns materialize faster, while in more mature markets like the US, impact emerges first at an industry level rather than economy-wide.

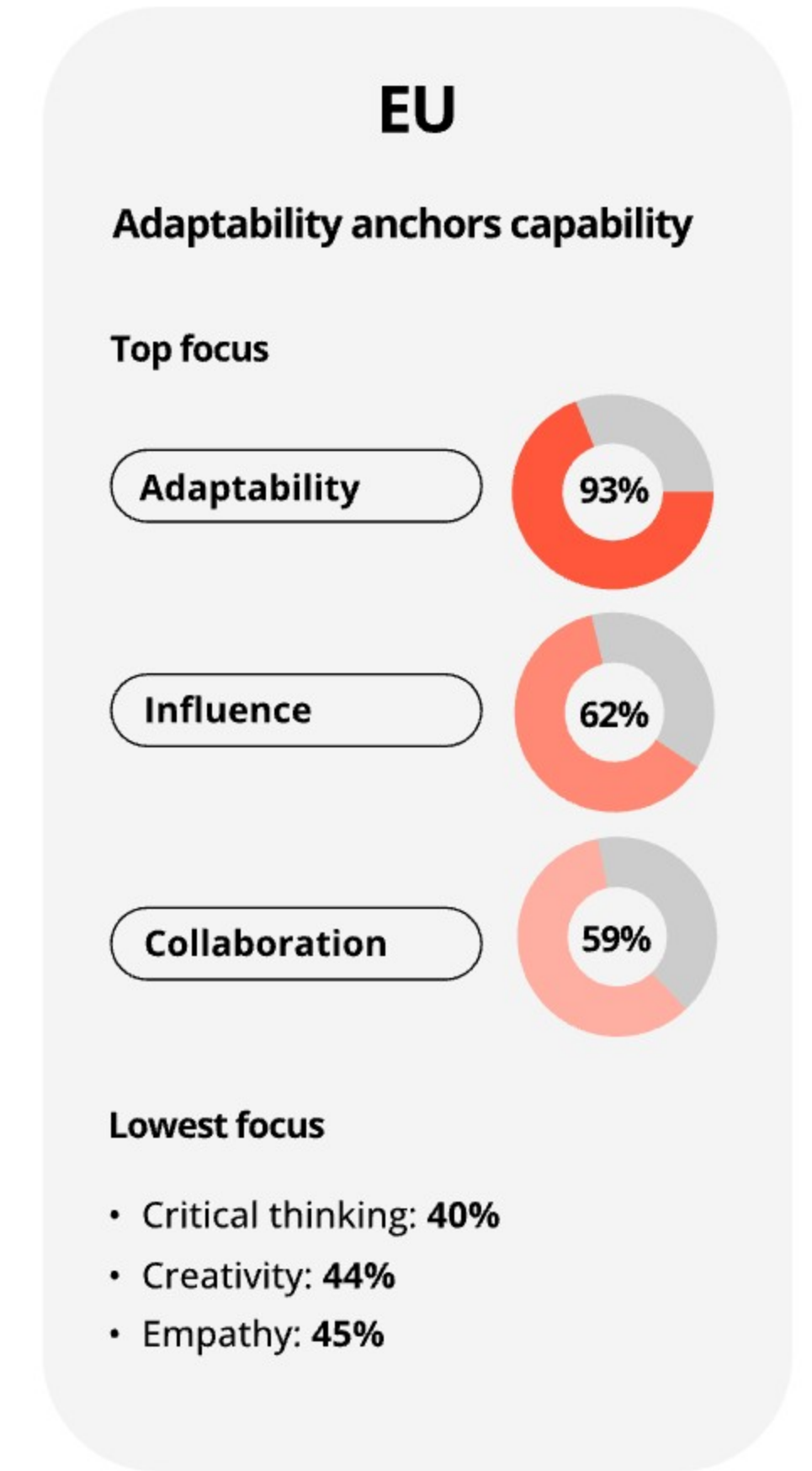
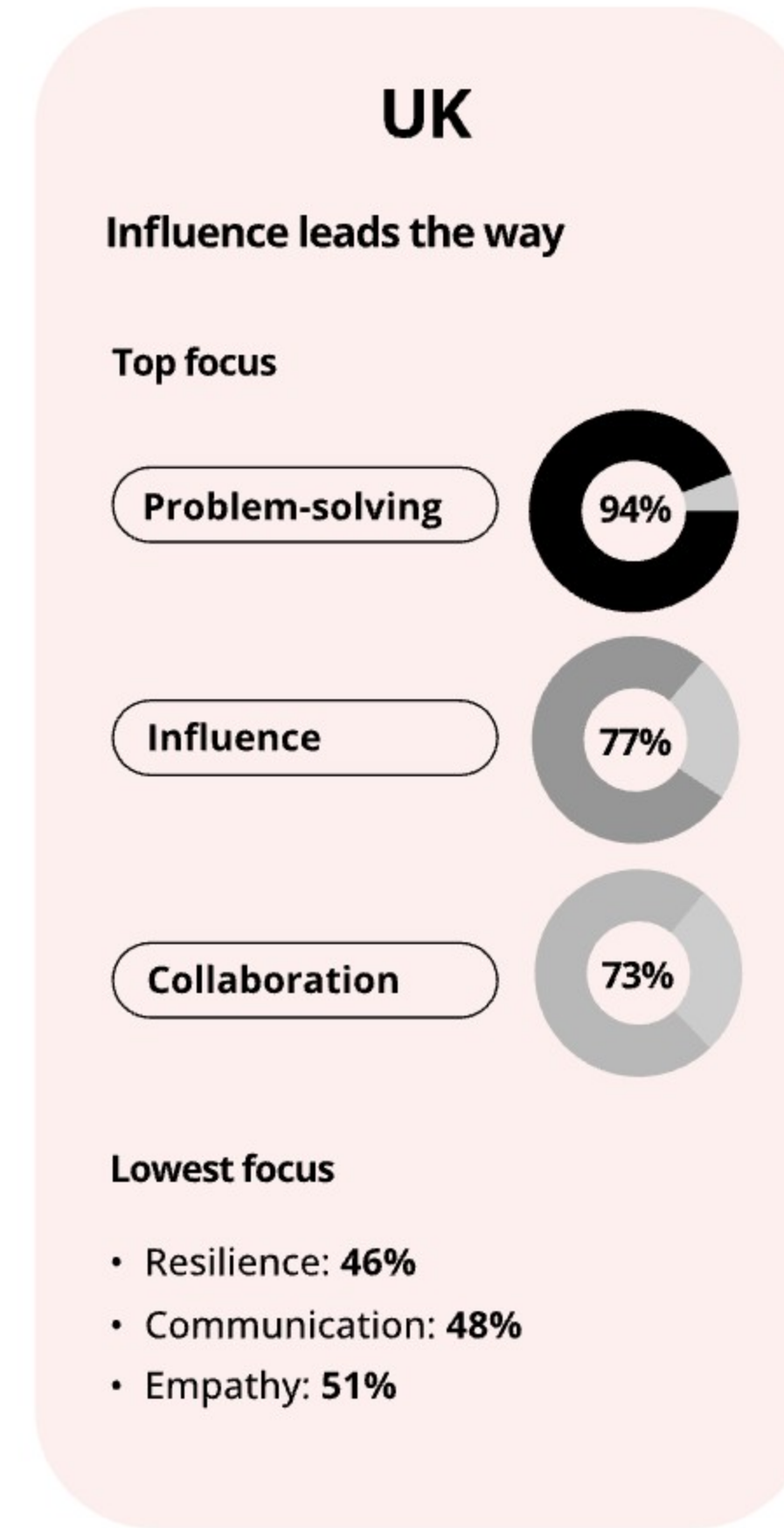
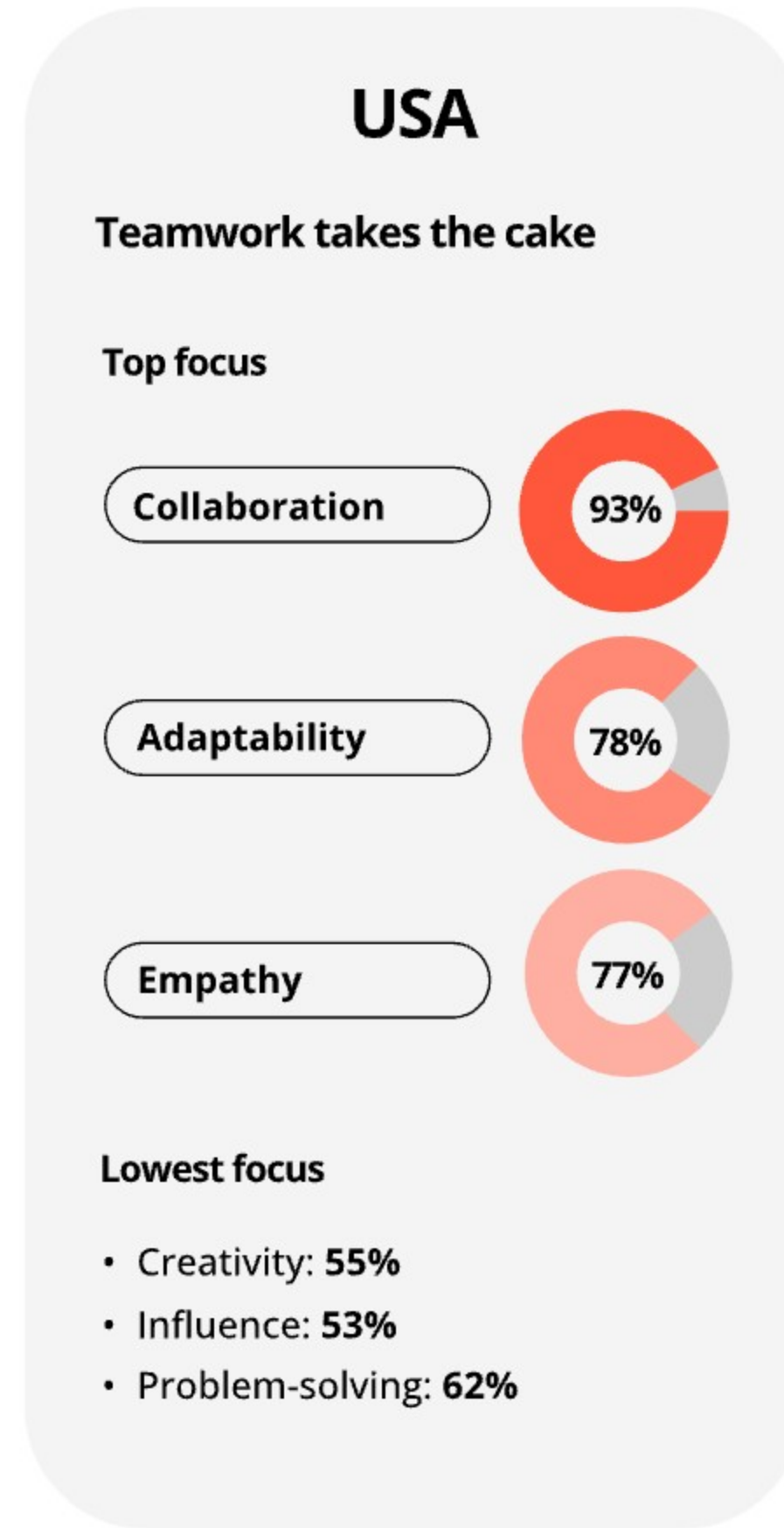
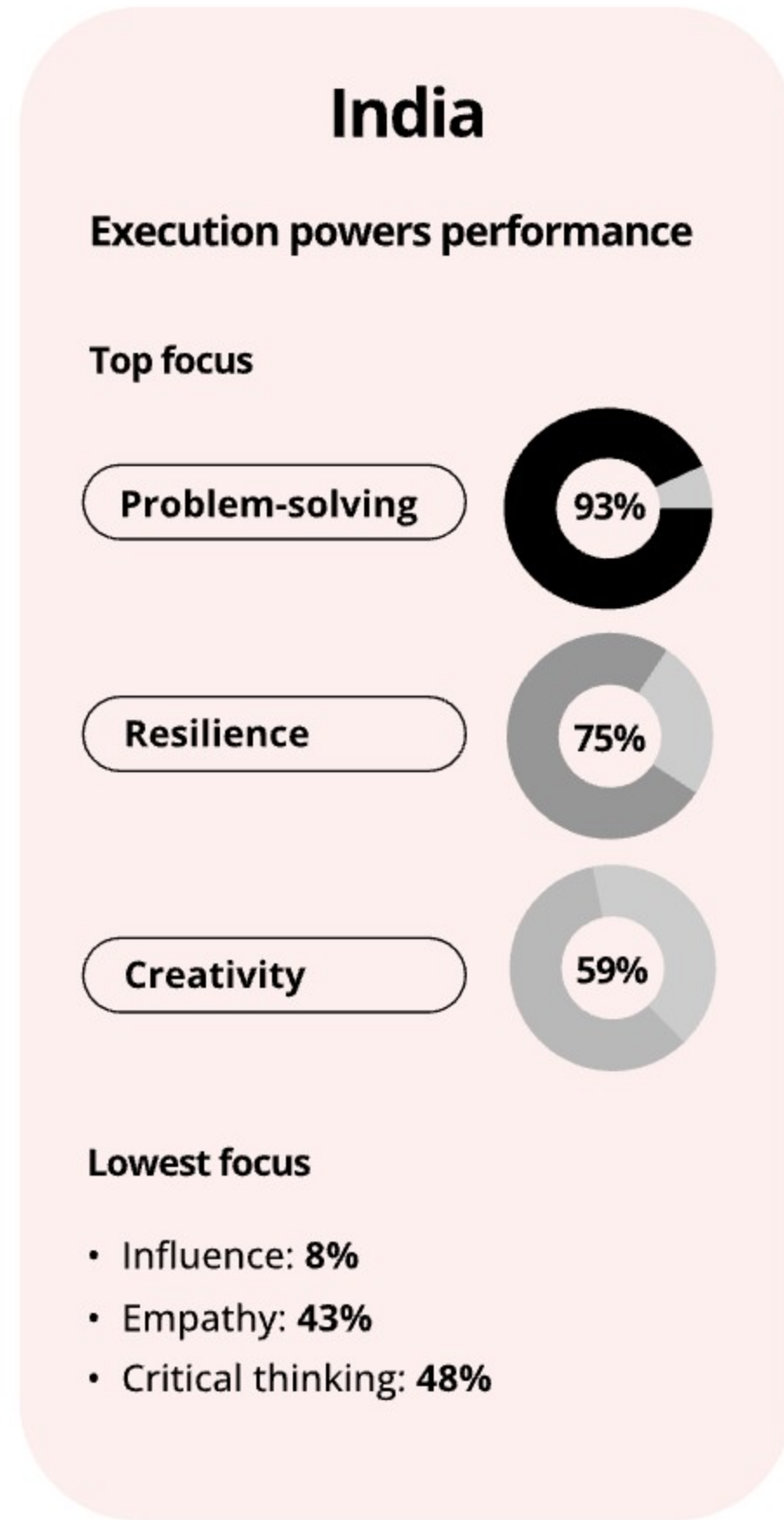
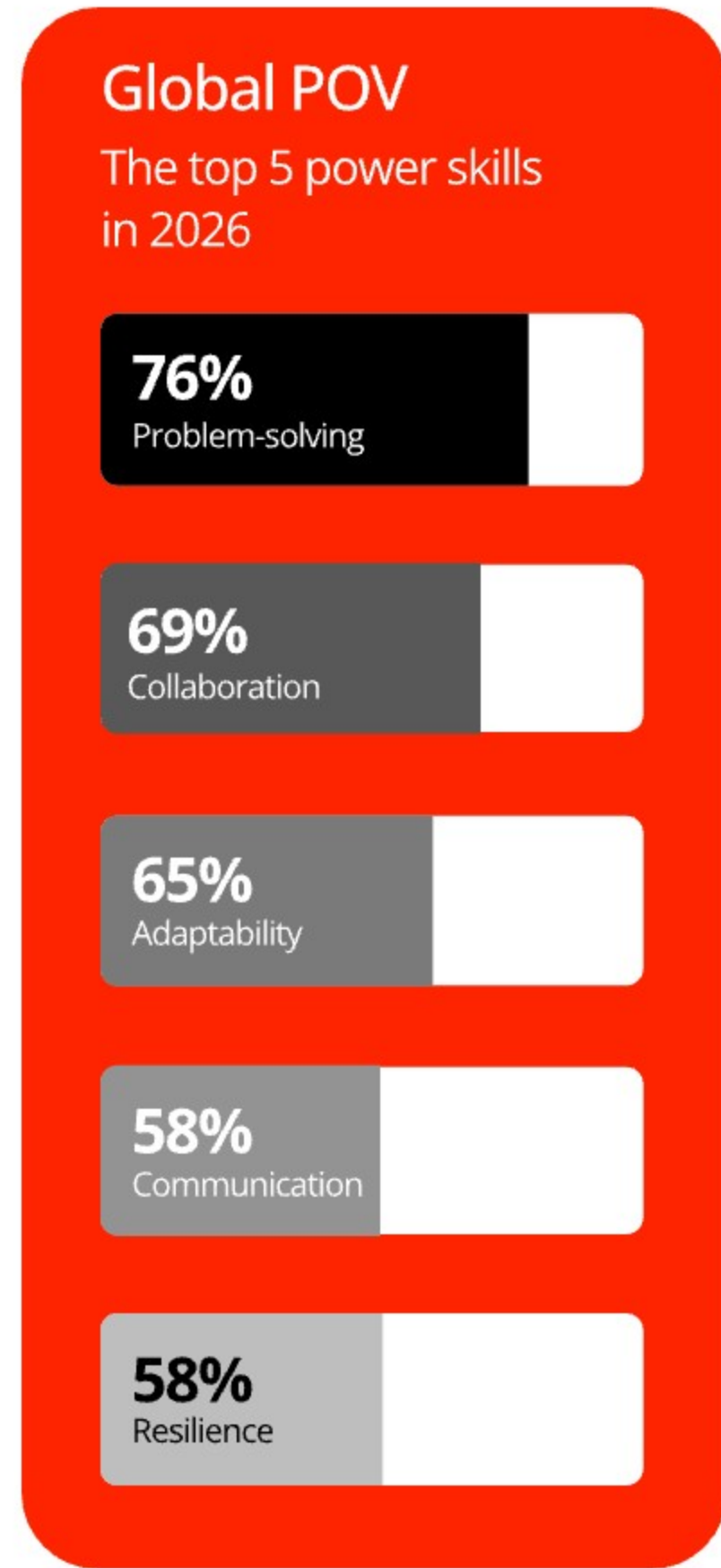
### Confidence indicators

- Proven impact: Statistically significant differences observed
- Emerging signal - Large effects seen but limited sample confidence
- Industry-dependent - Industry explains more variance than category alone

**How to read this map:** Regional callouts highlight the business outcome with the strongest observed association between power skills prioritization and performance in each geography. Metrics differ by region based on statistical significance and data availability.

**Data sources and classification:** Financial indicators—Profit Before Tax (PBT), Net Profit, Operating Margin, Return on Equity (ROE), and Return on Capital Employed (ROCE)—were sourced from publicly available stock-market filings for the companies respondents reported as their employers (e.g., Abbott Laboratories data sourced from the New York Stock Exchange). Respondent ratings of organizational emphasis on power skills across hiring, promotion, and performance appraisal were used to classify companies as “prioritizing” or “not prioritizing” power skills, enabling binary group comparison.

# One skill set, many stories: regional focuses shape power skills priorities

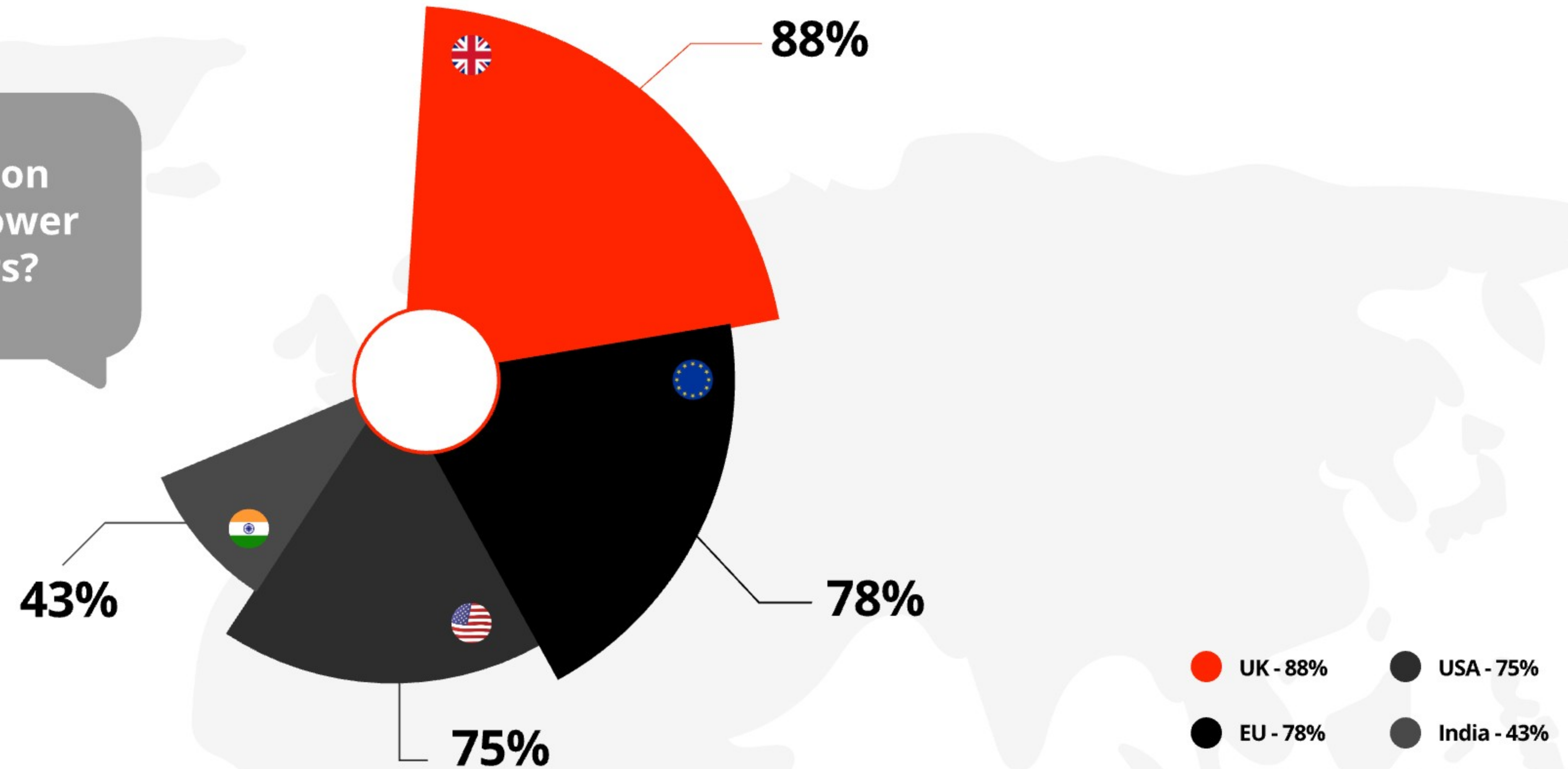


The world speaks a common skills language, but with local accents. Power skills training must now reflect these nuances, shaping leaders the way their contexts demand.

# The power skills investment gap: ambition high in Europe, cautiously optimistic in India

Organizations globally are preparing to increase investment in power skills over the next two years, though confidence levels vary by region. The UK and EU lead in intent, the US shows steady commitment, and India is gaining momentum, albeit more cautiously.

How likely is your organization to increase investment in power skills over the next two years?



Growing momentum in global investment is undeniable. What matters now is how power skills training aligns to regional maturity levels and adoption appetites. Tailored training can possibly balance this universal urgency with local contexts.

# Cases in point

How organizations across industries achieved measurable performance gains through multi-format power skills training

# From power skills to performance: Axis Max Life's CX transformation with upGrad Enterprise

Project VISHWAAS

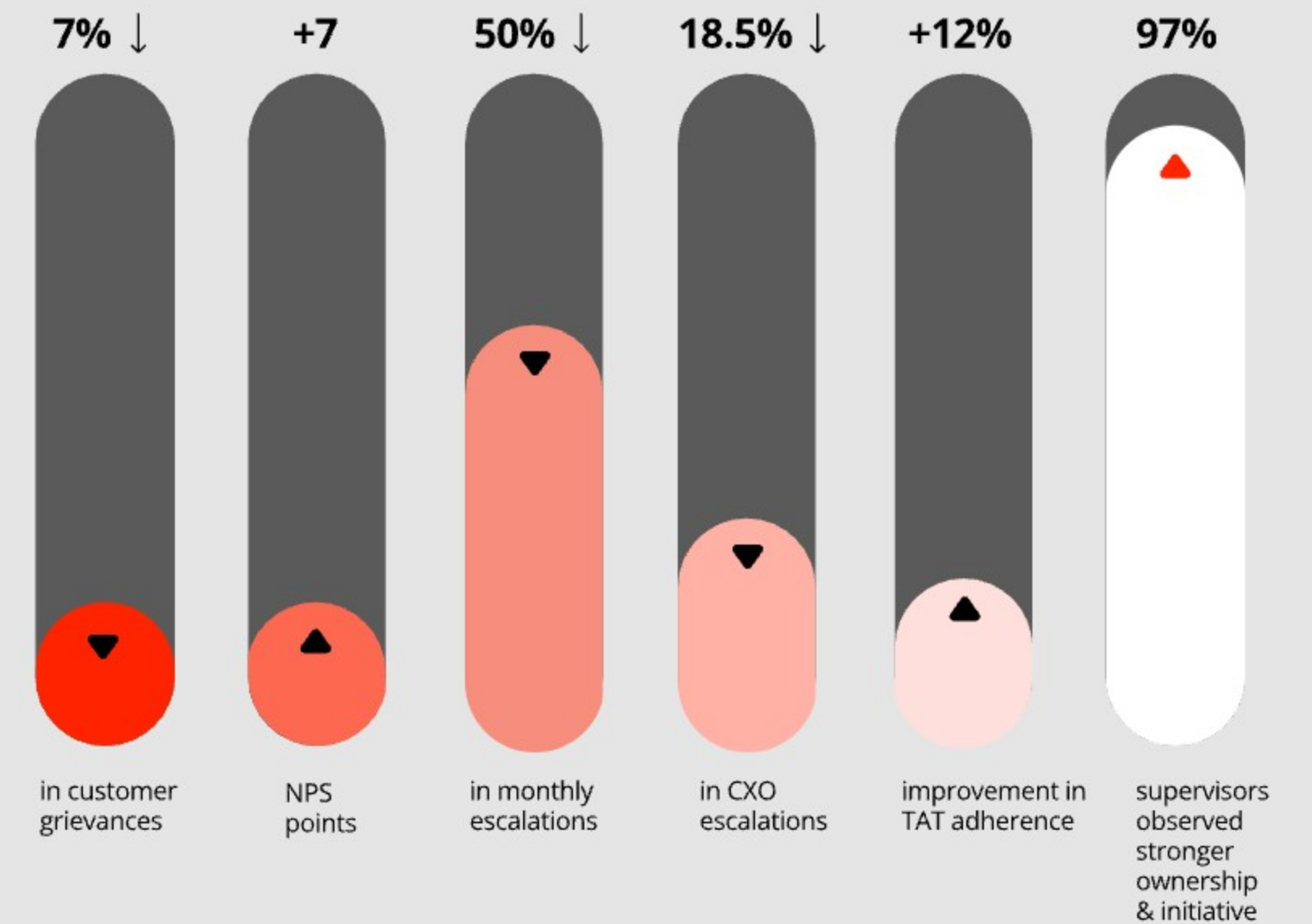
## The challenge

-  Customer experience was fragmented by siloed KPIs, limiting end-to-end ownership
-  Trust erosion driven by inconsistent engagement and high churn
-  Escalation handling and emotionally complex interactions varied widely across operations, claims, underwriting & digital
-  Breakdown of trust was the single biggest barrier to becoming a Top 3 insurer in India

## Our approach

- 01 Behavior-first CX framework (VISHWAAS)**  
Customer obsession hardwired across ownership, communication, recovery, conflict management, and negotiation
- 02 Case-led, metric-driven learning**  
Real Axis Max Life customer cases mapped to V1-V5 performance outcomes across functions
- 03 Blended capability building**  
Immersive workshops, simulations, leadership launch & tracked personal behavior action plans
- 04 Multi-touch reinforcement**  
Leader-led coaching, mobile micro-learning, peer learning & gamified reinforcement

## The impact



# From skills to sustained employment: How Mahindra & Centum Foundation scaled women's employability through power skills

The Employability Enhancement Training (EET) Program

## The challenge



A deep capability gap limited employability across India's emerging workforce, especially among women



Structural barriers restricted access to professional communication, confidence, and career navigation



Market demand had shifted toward adaptability, decision-making, and workplace readiness



Economic risk: Low job readiness → high churn → underrepresentation in leadership and income mobility



DEIB mandate: A need for a targeted, scalable intervention, not generic training

## Our approach

**01 National Employability Mission at scale**  
20,000+ women across UG/PG, ITIs & Polytechnics, prioritizing marginalized backgrounds

**02 100-hour workplace readiness curriculum**  
Communication • Resume & interview readiness • Time & people management  
• Finance for non-finance • Decision-making  
• POSH

**03 Hybrid, practice-led training model**  
Trainer-led classrooms + LMS • Role-plays • Mock interviews • Simulations & group activities

**04 End-to-end employability enablement**  
College-NGO-Govt partnerships • Dedicated placement assistance • 3-month post-training LMS • Continuous feedback loops

## The impact

**20,850**

women trained across  
**18 states & 250+ locations**

**10K+**

placements into  
active employment

**100+**

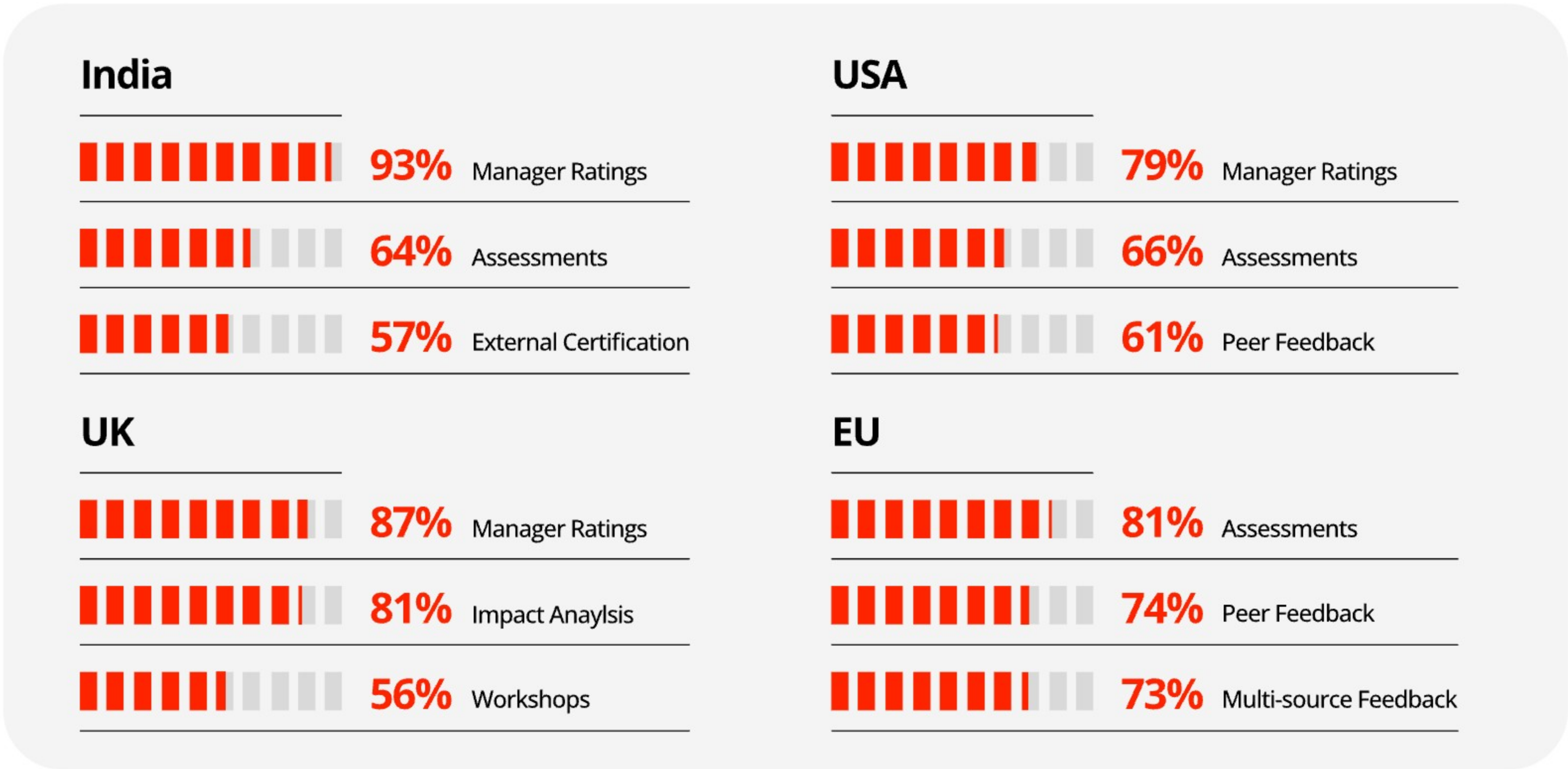
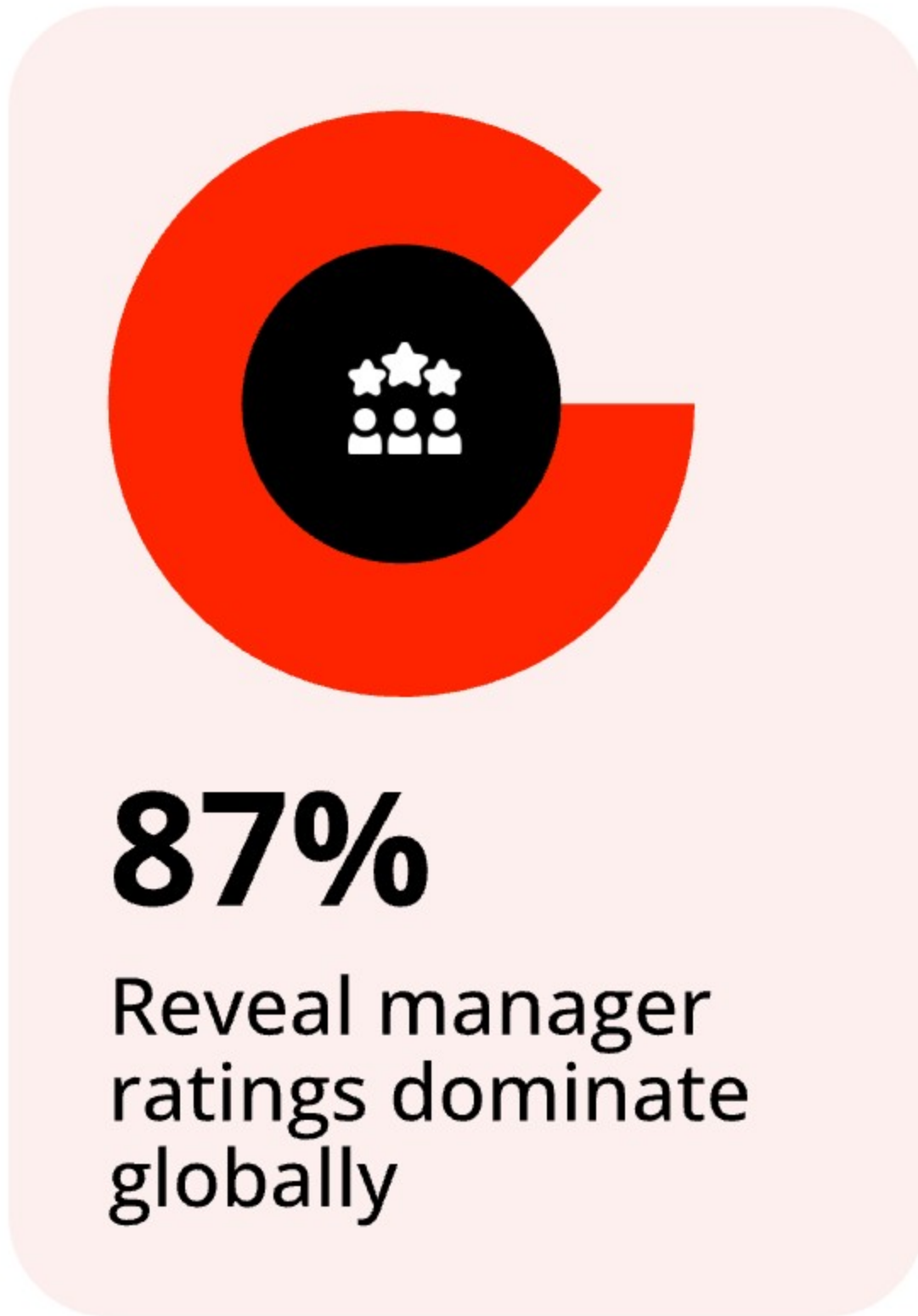
hours of structured  
training per participant

**99%+**  
learner satisfaction

**85%+**  
6-month job retention

# Manager ratings dominate power skills measurement — making objective accuracy a challenge

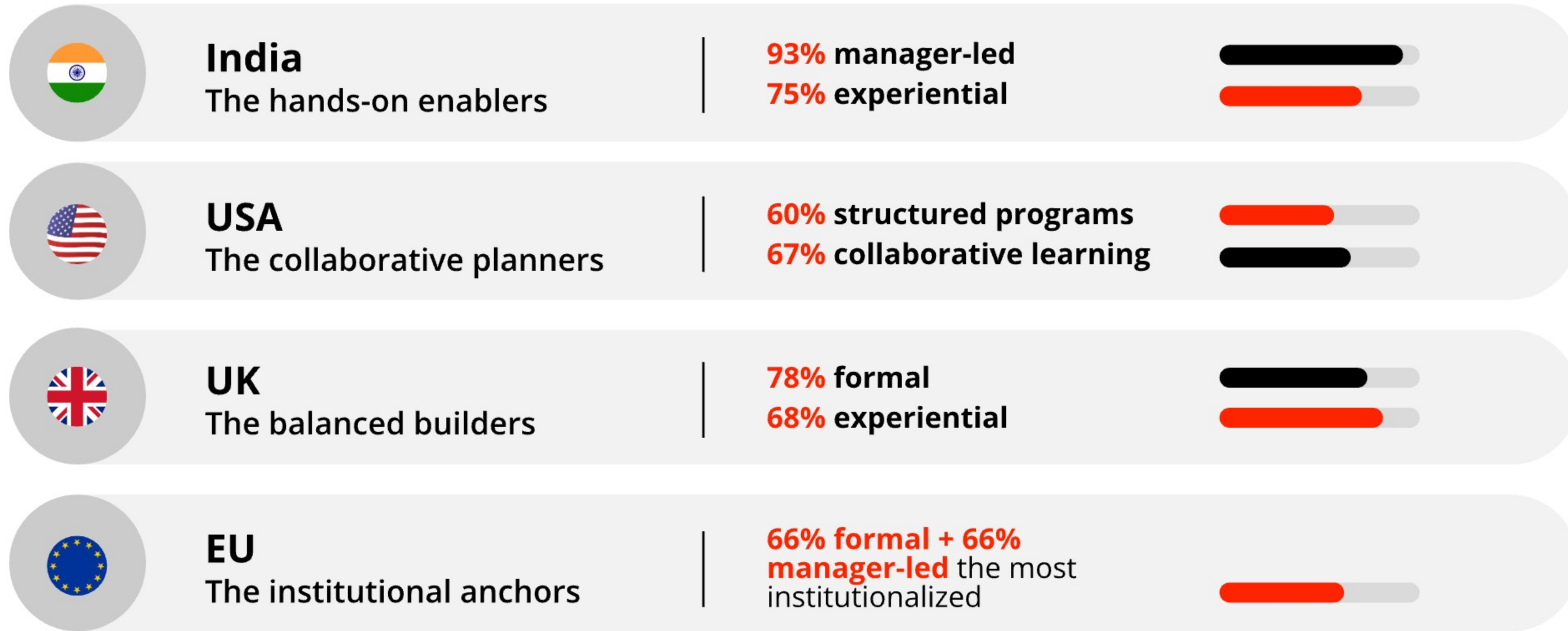
Power skills have long been assessed—formally or not—but the heavy reliance on manager judgement shows a system that tracks what matters, yet still struggles to measure it well.



Despite widespread measurement, rigor remains the missing link. Until organizations move beyond manager perceptions to multi-source evidence, power skills ROI will remain hard to accurately quantify, and harder to scale.

# Blended, not binary: how regional approaches drive power skills engagement

While manager-led coaching (65%) is the most widely observed model of power skills training worldwide, followed closely by formal training, the gradual popularity of experiential methods (53%) indicates the need to re-evaluate the merit of potentially outdated and one-dimensional approaches.



Regional differences in delivery show that power skills programs are evolving beyond single-method approaches. Organizations that align training methods with local patterns - balancing manager-led, formal, and experiential - can better meet workforce expectations and unlock adoption potential.

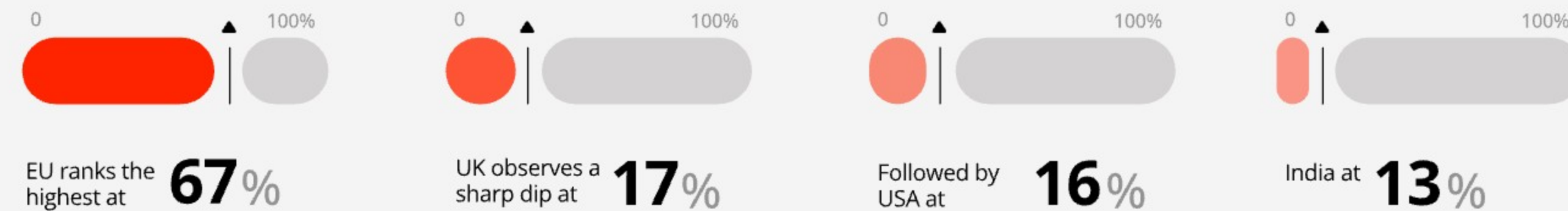
# Power skills training isn't landing—and teams are telling us why

Low satisfaction with the quality and relevance of current programs is limiting engagement and slowing adoption, signalling a clear need for redesign.

## Gauged effectiveness

Only **45%** of surveyed professionals find power skills programs to be **truly effective**  
**34%** say these are, more often than not, **below expectation**

### Among those voting "extremely effective"



## On-ground participation

Globally as well as regionally, nearly 1 in 2 HR professionals reveal that the average employee spends **less than 5 hours a year on power skills training.**

Engagement gaps highlight a leadership priority: begin with relevant skilling, then reinforce through thoughtful design and leadership communication to show employees why power skills matter.

# Design drives impact: customization outperforms volume in power skills training



As AI and agentic AI embed into everyday work, **problems, and therefore program design, are becoming increasingly multi-disciplinary.** In response, clients are shifting the premium from degrees to "forever learning", and from knowledge alone to **knowledge plus power skills** such as active listening, emotional intelligence, judgment and sense-making, problem-solving, and collaboration.

**Neeraj Gera**  
President, upGrad Enterprise



## Applied practice matters

Role-plays, simulations, and real-world scenarios translate learning into behavior.



## Manager involvement accelerates adoption

Coaching, check-ins, and leader nudges reinforce new skills across teams.



## Peer learning multiplies impact

Collaborative formats break silos, enable reflection, and strengthen collective capability.



## Sustained outcomes through AKAR™

Awareness → Knowledge → Application  
→ Reinforcement ensures skills move from learning to measurable on-the-job impact.

Effective power skills development isn't about hours logged; it's about how programs are designed, embedded, and reinforced—context, practice, and leader involvement drive impact.

# For training design to land, **structural and cultural barriers need to make way**

Even the most thoughtfully designed power skills programs can come to a standstill if structural and cultural bottlenecks aren't resolved: gaps in measurement, leadership buy-in, and resources impact regional adoption.

## Top global barriers to skilling



report measurement as the top global barrier



point at leadership buy-in



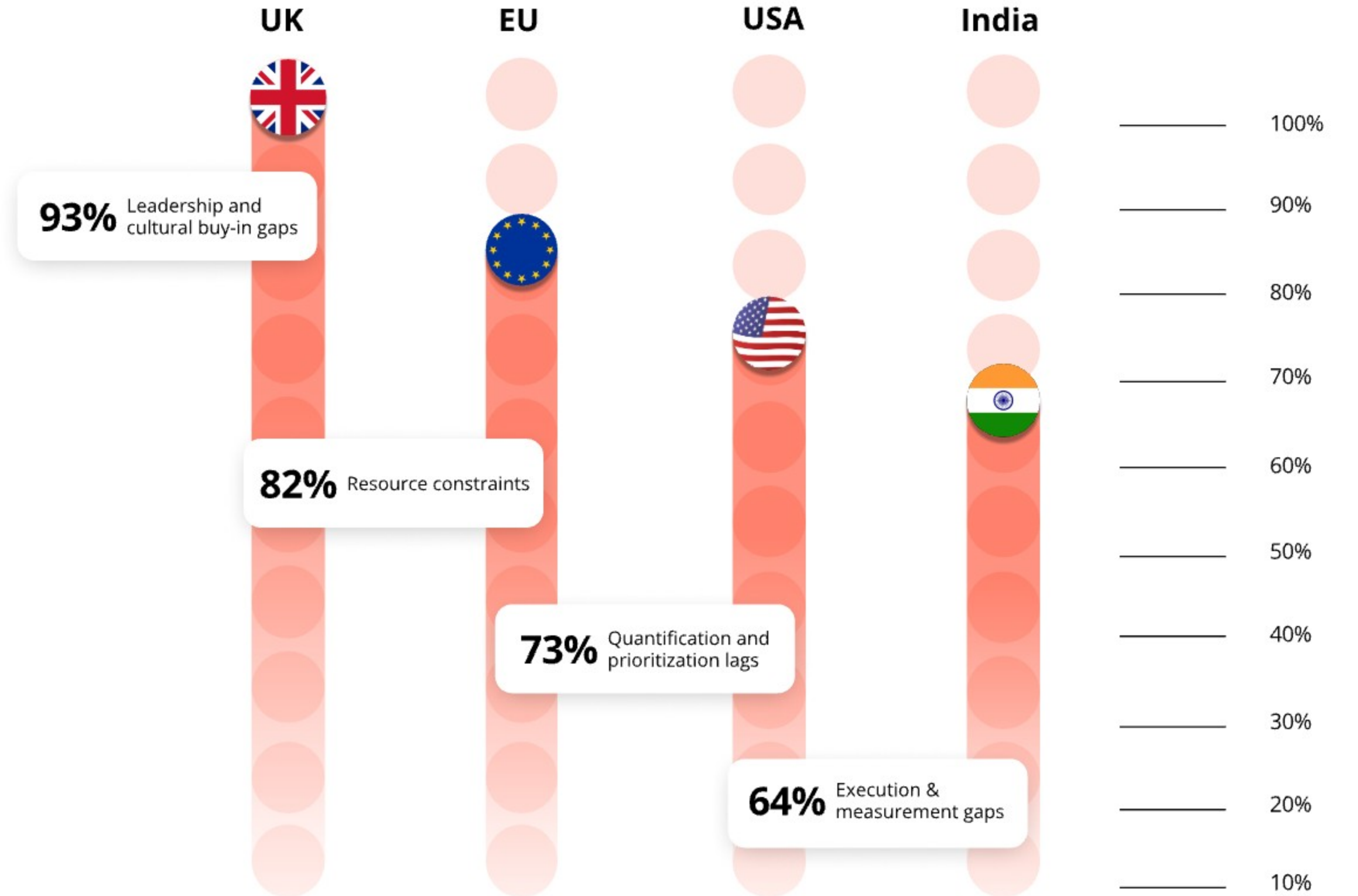
see resource constraints as a hurdle



**Vaibhav Goel**  
Head of HR &  
Sr. Vice President, RIL

Coaching skill truly sparks full spectrum of power skills... **while senior leaders set the tone, it's the middle managers who are at the fulcrum of scaling these power skills at speed.** With advent of GenAI technology, C-suites are realising: it's the **people mindset and capabilities**, and not just the technology & tools, that can either help leapfrog and transform or can become the spanner in the wheels!

## Top constraints by region



Overcoming region-specific structural and cultural barriers is critical to ensure power skills programs achieve measurable, sustainable impact.

# Power skills: From awareness to advantage – **the true human differentiator in an AI world**

## From soft skills to power skills

What was once niche is now essential—9 in 10 L&D leaders globally prioritize power skills, recognizing that technical skills open doors, but human skills drive influence, decision-making, and sustained impact.

## Dual value for individuals and organizations

Power skills accelerate **career growth (56%)** while **strengthening organizational performance (50%)**, making them both a personal and business imperative that cannot be ignored.

## Regional nuances shape focus

Globally, **problem-solving, collaboration, and adaptability** lead the agenda, but each region emphasizes its own strengths—India: execution and creativity; USA: collaboration and empathy; UK: influence and problem-solving; EU: adaptability and cross-functional impact.

## Design determines adoption and outcomes

**Blended, experiential, and context-driven programs** outperform standard approaches. Approaches like **AKAR™** ensure skills move from learning to measurable on-the-job behavior, while leadership involvement and peer learning multiply engagement.

## Barriers must be addressed for measurable impact

Engagement is limited; only **45% find programs effective and nearly half of employees spend <5 hours/year**. Structural and cultural hurdles, including **measurement gaps, leadership buy-in, and resources**, must be resolved to scale impact and realize true ROI.

Tailored design, sustained reinforcement, and strategic adoption make Power Skills the defining differentiator in a world where technology alone won't win.



## Region

India	404 (24.86%)
USA	407 (25.04%)
UK	413 (25.41%)
EU	401 (24.67%)

## Gender

What is your gender identity?	Overall	India	USA	UK	EU
Female	63%	65%	66%	61%	60%
Male	37%	35%	34%	39%	40%

## Seniority

What of these most closely resemble your role?	Overall	India	USA	UK	EU
Head of Department (HR/Learning/Talent)	6%	2%	5%	8%	9%
Senior HR Manger	51%	49%	49%	53%	53%
Team Leader	43%	49%	46%	40%	37%

Region	Metric	Cat 1 Mean	Cat 2 Mean	Δ (Cat 2 – Cat 1)	Test(s) Used	p-value(s)	Effect Size / R <sup>2</sup>	Statistically Significant	Rationale for Inclusion	Executive Interpretation
India	PBT Margin (%)	23.64	16.97	-6.67 pp	t-test, bootstrap	≈0.04	Cliff's Δ = 0.21	Yes	Strongest aggregate profitability signal	Category 2 firms are materially less profitable pre-tax.
	Net Profit Margin (%)	18.73	11.96	-6.77 pp	t-test, MWU	≈0.006-0.018	Cliff's Δ = 0.30	Yes	Confirms robustness of profitability gap	Confirms robustness of profitability gap Net profitability is significantly weaker without power skills prioritisation.
	ROCE (%)	21.82	18.23	-3.59 pp	t-test, bootstrap	≈0.20-0.22	Cliff's Δ = 0.20	No	Directional but weaker signal	Capital efficiency differences exist but are not conclusive.
EU	Operating Margin (%)	17.87	-0.95	-18.82 pp	t-test	≈0.045	—	Yes	Cleanest operational efficiency signal	Category 2 firms operate with significantly weaker margins.
	ROE / ROCE (%)	21.11	4.49	-16.62 pp	t-test	≈0.0006	—	Yes	Strongest capital return signal	Power skills prioritisation aligns with superior capital efficiency.
	Net Profit Margin (%)	12.47	-15.71	-28.18 pp	t-test	≈0.088	—	Marginal	Directionally aligned outcome	Profitability gap exists but confidence is lower.
UK	Operating Margin (%)	60.6	13.3	-47.3 pp	t-test	0.050	Cohen's d = 2.87	Yes	Only statistically robust UK metric	Strong operational advantage for Category 1 firms.
	Net Profit Margin (%)	52.8	2.6	-50.2 pp	t-test	0.064	Cohen's d = 2.75	Marginal	Large effect, small sample	Substantial gap, but sample size limits certainty.
	ROE / ROCE (%)	29.2	9.3	-19.9 pp	t-test	0.103	Cohen's d = 0.96	No	Directional confirmation	Capital returns are lower but not conclusive.
USA	Net Profit Margin (%)	18.22	16.37	-1.84 pp	t-test	≈0.24	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.003	No	Included for completeness	Margins are slightly lower but not meaningfully different.
	Operating Margin (%)	24.79	21.10	-3.68 pp	t-test	≈0.11	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.011	No	Directional check	Operating differences are weak and inconsistent.
	ROE (%)	30.09	29.00	-1.09 pp	t-test	≈0.46	~0	No	Confirms weak category effect	Returns are not explained by category alone.
US (Industry-controlled)	Net Profit Margin	—	—	-1.33 pp	Regression	≈0.68	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.35	No	Tests category net of industry	Industry explains most variance in margins.
	Operating Margin	—	—	-3.38 pp	Regression	≈0.34	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.41	No	Robustness check	Operating performance is industry-led.
	ROE	—	—	-9.93 pp	Regression	≈0.54	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.22	No	Completes model	Category-level ROE differences remain insignificant.

# Purpose of this appendix

This appendix provides the full analytical basis for the regional summary presented in the main report. It is intended for leaders who want to understand what was tested, what held statistically, and why different metrics were highlighted by region.

## How to read the rows

### Category definitions:

- **Category 1:** Companies prioritising power skills
- **Category 2:** Companies not prioritising power skills (All results reflect association, not causation.)
- Each row represents a specific business outcome tested within a region
- Category 1 and Category 2 means show average performance differences
- The  $\Delta$  column indicates direction and magnitude of difference
- Statistical significance reflects whether differences are unlikely to be due to chance

### Why metrics differ by region

Not all business outcomes respond equally to power skills prioritisation in every geography. For each region, the metric highlighted in the main report reflects the strongest statistically supported association observed in that context.

### What this does not imply

- These results do not establish causality
- Absence of significance does not imply absence of impact
- Industry structure may dominate outcomes in some regions (notably the US)

### How to interpret confidence

- **Statistically significant:** Strong evidence of association
- **Marginal:** Directionally consistent, but sample size or variability limits certainty
- **Not significant:** Differences observed, but not robust enough to draw conclusions

### How this supports the main visual

This table ensures the world-map summary:

- Is transparent, not selective
- Reflects regional realities, not forced uniformity
- Separates strength of evidence from strength of performance

## Organization size

	Overall	India	USA	UK	EU
What is your company's primary sector?					
Automobile & Auto Components	4%	8%	2%	0%	6%
Conglomerate	2%	4%	3%	3%	
Consumer Goods	13%	12%	9%	13%	17%
Engineering	10%	6%	14%	11%	11%
Banks	8%	9%	8%	6%	8%
Other Financial Services	11%	14%	9%	17%	5%
Healthcare	4%	2%	7%	2%	4%
Hospitality	3%	2%	3%	6%	2%
Infrastructure	5%	7%	7%	5%	3%
Internet Services	4%	2%	5%	7%	4%
IT Services & Consulting	6%	7%	10%	2%	5%
Materials	4%	6%	2%	2%	7%
Metals & Mining	4%	6%		7%	3%
Oil	4%	5%	3%	2%	5%
Pharmaceuticals	6%	5%	7%	3%	8%
Real Estate & Property Development	2%	2%	1%	6%	
Retail	5%	2%	6%	7%	4%
Telecom	3%	1%	4%	3%	3%
Utilities / Power	1%				5%

# Acknowledgements

This report was informed by the inputs of HR professionals, trainers, subject matter experts, and organizations from across the globe. We thank all parties for their valuable contributions.

## Contributors

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