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The State of On-demand Tech Skills 2026

World's first independent benchmark and report

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Foreword

The way organisations build and deploy technology capability is changing faster than most operating models can keep up with.

When we founded Brightbox in 2017, we believed that on-demand tech skills would become a strategic necessity, not just a tactical convenience. The world's first State of On-demand Tech Skills Report confirms that belief, and then some.

85% of organisations already use on-demand tech skills or capacity

That single finding from the inaugural report tells you everything about the direction of travel. On-demand delivery is no longer a fringe approach. It has become core to how modern organisations operate and improve business performance, growth and innovation.

But the report reveals something equally important. Most organisations are using on-demand capacity reactively, without a formal model, and without capturing anything close to the full value it can deliver. The gap between how most organisations use on-demand skills and how the best organisations use them is significant, and it is widening. Those [embracing what we call the Liquid Workforce](#) consistently outperform their peers.

Five major themes run through this report



Adoption is mainstream, but strategic maturity is lagging

85% use on-demand tech skills or capacity in some form, yet only 11% describe their approach as strategic and business-critical. 30% are still operating in purely reactive, ad hoc mode.



AI is the accelerant

Data and AI acceleration are the single most cited strategic priority, with 67% of organisations actively pursuing it. This is creating sustained, structural demand that reactive models simply cannot meet.



Talent quality is the defining friction point

66% cite quality and consistency of talent as their biggest challenge, almost double the rate of any other concern.



Traditional hiring models are creating costly delivery gaps

39% of organisations experienced missed delivery deadlines as a direct result of being unable to access the right skills fast enough through traditional talent sourcing.



The gap between leaders and laggards is widening

Organisations with structured, strategic approaches to on-demand delivery are pulling ahead. Those still relying on traditional models are accumulating risk and falling further behind.

We designed this report to be used, not just read. The findings are organised so that you can first understand where the market stands and how your own approach compares. From there, you can decide where to focus. And finally, you can act with a clear picture of the steps the most mature organisations are already taking.

The model that underpins that shift is what we call the Liquid Workforce. A structured, outcomes-focused approach to on-demand delivery that replaces reactive firefighting with planned, scalable capability. This report is the first independent evidence base for why it matters, and why it is no longer optional.

"The shift to on-demand tech skills is not a trend. It is a structural change in how organisations compete. The businesses winning today are those that can access the right skills at the right moment, not those waiting months for a hire to land. This report gives leaders, for the first time, the data they need to benchmark their approach and make better decisions."

Stuart Houghton

CEO and Founder, Brightbox



About This Report

Until now, no independent benchmark existed to help business and technology leaders understand how their peers approach on-demand tech skills delivery, what drove adoption, how organisations engaged, and where value was actually being created. The World's First State of On-demand Tech Skills Report 2026 was commissioned by Brightbox to fill that gap and establish a definitive benchmark for the industry.

The research was conducted between March and May 2026 and captured responses from a global cross-section of business and technology leaders. It was designed to help you gain access to invaluable insights:

- Compare your skills approach with peers
- Identify where on-demand skills deliver the greatest value
- Inform future skills and delivery decisions with confidence
- Understand which tech skills organisations are planning to hire
- Benchmark levels of investment in on-demand tech skills

Respondents included CTOs, CIOs, Heads of Engineering, Heads of Delivery, Heads of Product, and HR and People leaders. Nearly a third were CTOs or CIOs. Organisations ranged from SaaS and product companies (44%) to enterprises (26%), digital consultancies (15%), and systems integrators (8%). The research was fully anonymous, and results are presented in aggregate.



Executive Summary

On-demand tech skills have moved from the margins to the mainstream, and the data confirms they are delivering real, measurable value. Six findings stand out.

- 85%** already use on-demand tech skills or capacity in some form to improve business performance
- 52%** cite flexibility to scale as their primary driver, more than double the next most common reason
- 66%** flagged consistency of talent quality as their top challenge, almost double the rate of any other issue
- 67%** have data and AI acceleration in their strategic roadmap, ahead of new products (52%) and platform modernisation (46%)
- 39%** missed delivery deadlines through inability to source skills fast enough via traditional models
- 62%** source software engineering on demand, with data, design and DevOps close behind

On-demand skills in action

The journey from a skills need to a delivered outcome follows a clear path. Understanding where your organisation sits on that path, and where friction enters, is the first step toward unlocking more value from your skills strategy. On-demand delivery consistently outperforms traditional models at every stage of that journey:

- Faster time to market and greater responsiveness to change
- Lower total workforce costs, with utilisation rates significantly higher than traditional models
- Better access to specialist expertise, deployed in days rather than months
- Fewer missed deadlines and lower delivery risk
- Greater ability to scale up and down as strategic priorities shift

Demand identified

Skill matched

Expert deployed

Results delivered

Each section of this report follows that journey. We start with why organisations turn to on-demand skills, move through how they engage and what they gain, examine where things break down, and finish with what the road ahead looks like for leaders ready to move from reactive to strategic.

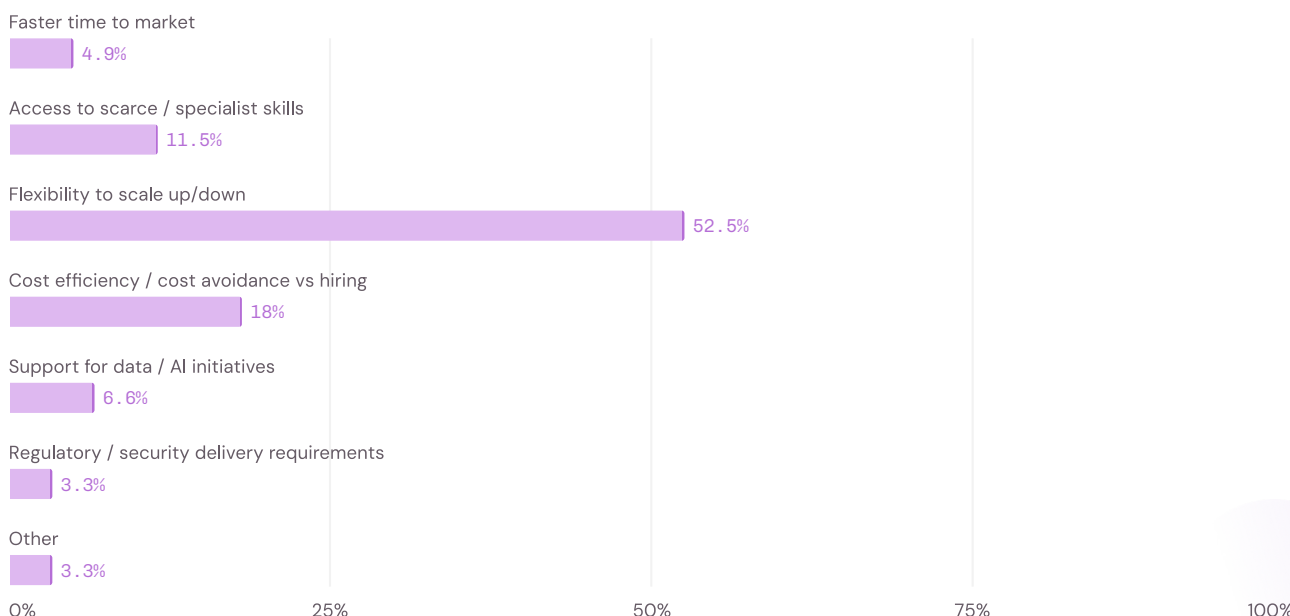


Why they use it

Flexibility is the headline, but AI is the real story

52% cited flexibility to scale up and down as their main driver, more than double the next most common answer. Cost efficiency came second at 18%, and access to scarce or specialist skills third at 11%.

2b What is the primary driver for using (or planning to use) on-demand delivery capacity?



Look beyond the headline and a more significant picture emerges. 67% of organisations had data and AI acceleration in their active strategic roadmap, the single most commonly cited initiative, ahead of new product or market launches (52%) and major platform modernisation (46%). McKinsey reports that 71% of organisations now use generative AI in at least one business function, up from 65% in 2024. The World Economic Forum projects that 39% of core skills will change by 2030. The demand for specialist capability is structural and sustained, and a reactive approach simply cannot meet it.

The decision sat primarily with technology leadership

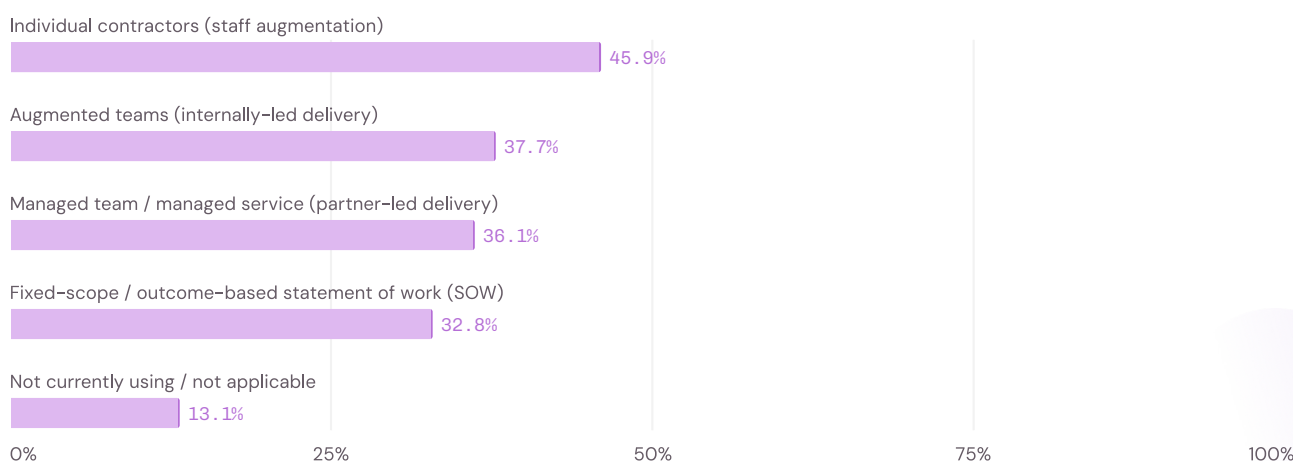
54% identified the CTO, engineering leadership, or product leadership as the primary decision-maker. Business leadership accounted for 16%, and delivery or transformation leadership for 15%. The data is clear: organisations where on-demand delivery is championed at technology leadership level are already seeing significant results. As that ownership extends across business leadership, the value compounds further.

How they engage

Adoption is broad and growing with significant upside ahead

85% of organisations now use on-demand tech skills or capacity in some form, a clear signal that flexible delivery has become a mainstream part of how organisations operate. Engagement ranges from project-based use through to fully embedded strategic models, reflecting organisations at different points in their on-demand journey. Those who have moved furthest – the 31% with embedded or strategic approaches – are already capturing the greatest returns.

3b Which engagement models does your organisation use for on-demand tech skills?

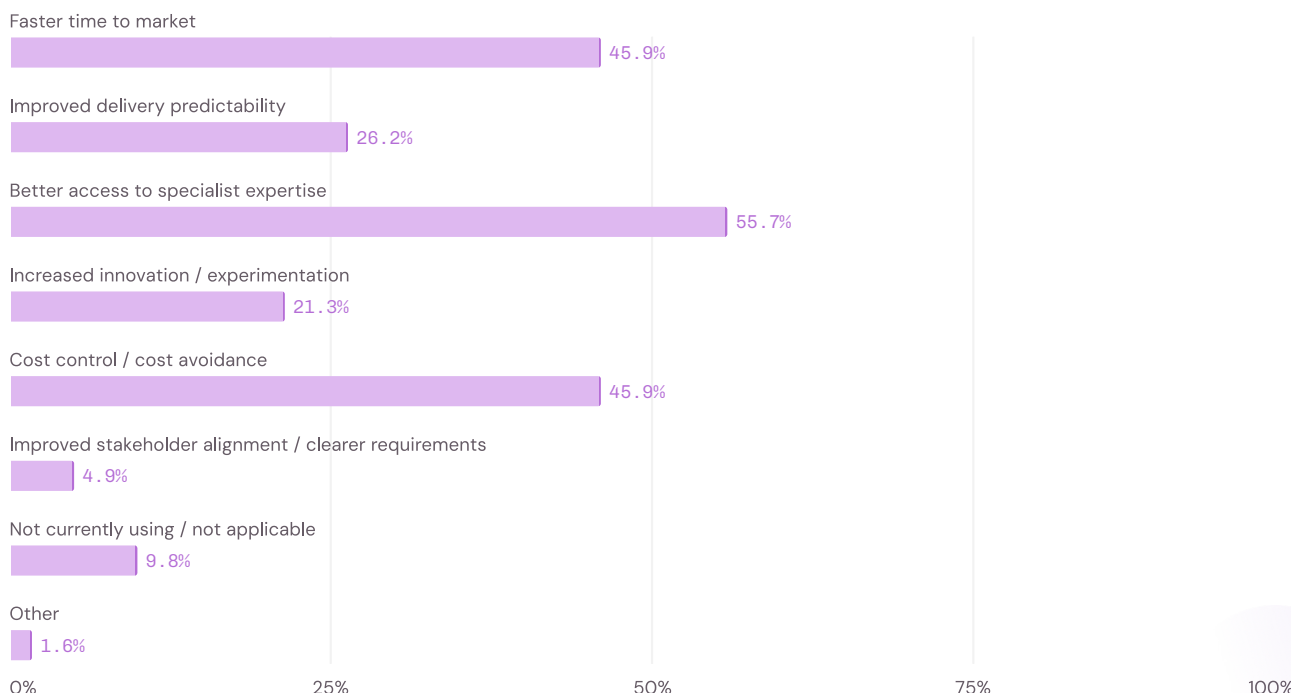


Research shows on-demand models, when structured properly, can reduce time to value by 60 to 90% compared with traditional hiring. This evolution mirrors the [Brightbox Liquid Workforce Operating Model](#), which moves organisations from isolated contractor use toward a fully integrated, outcomes-focused delivery capability that continuously maps skills to strategic priorities.

What they get

Among organisations using on-demand capacity, the benefits were concrete and commercially significant

5b Which business outcomes have delivered the greatest value from on-demand delivery capacity?



Research shows organisations adopting flexible, [on-demand delivery can reduce total workforce cost by 40 to 50%](#), with utilisation rates rising from around 65% to 95%. McKinsey shows agile resourcing can lift throughput by 20 to 30%. For organisations facing competitive pressure or regulatory deadlines, the ability to deploy expert capacity in days rather than months is a material commercial advantage.

“On-demand tech skills have fundamentally changed how we respond to market opportunities. We can now build and deploy specialist capability in days rather than months, and that speed is a genuine competitive advantage that our competitors on traditional hiring models simply cannot match.”

Composite insight from report respondents

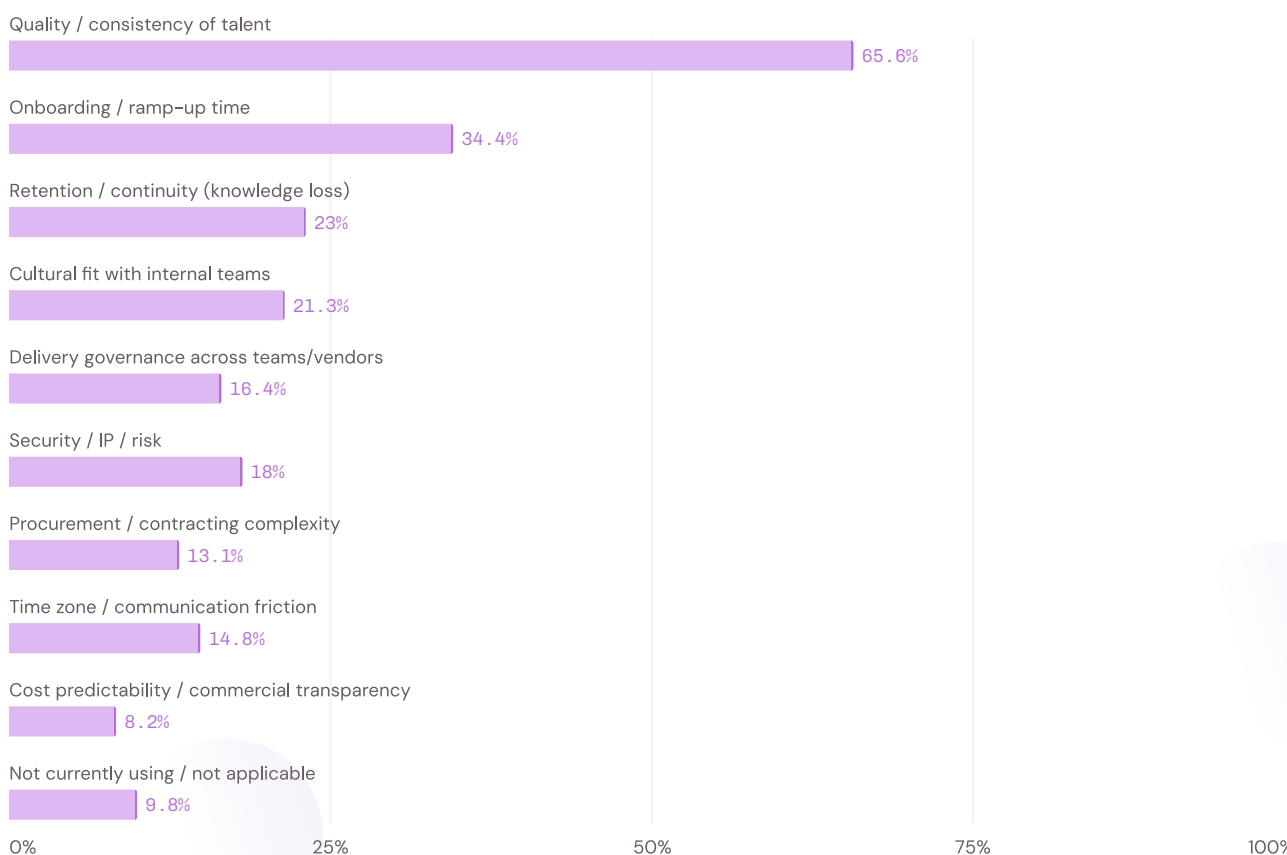
Brightbox State of On-demand Tech Skills Report, 2026

Software engineering was the most commonly sourced skill on demand at 62%. Data engineering and analytics came second at 34%, reflecting the growing priority of AI programmes. Design was third at 28%, followed by programme management and platform or DevOps at 26% each.

Where the right partner makes all the difference

Talent quality is the standout challenge, by a distance

5c What are the biggest challenges your organisation faces (or has faced) when engaging on-demand delivery capacity? (select up to 3)



The organisations extracting the greatest value from on-demand delivery share one thing in common: they chose partners who invested heavily in vetting, assessment, and cultural alignment. When the right talent is deployed, the results are immediate and measurable.

"The quality of the talent matters as much as the speed. When we found the right on-demand partner, with properly vetted specialists who could integrate with our teams from day one, the difference in delivery outcomes was immediate and measurable."

Composite insight from report respondents

Brightbox State of On-demand Tech Skills Report, 2026

Traditional hiring models created costly delivery gaps

39% of organisations experienced missed delivery deadlines as a direct consequence of being unable to source the right skills fast enough through traditional talent models. 28% reported slower response to market changes, and a further 28% reported increased delivery costs. All rooted in the same structural problem: hiring cycles that take weeks or months in a world that moves in days.

39% missed delivery deadlines due to slow traditional talent sourcing

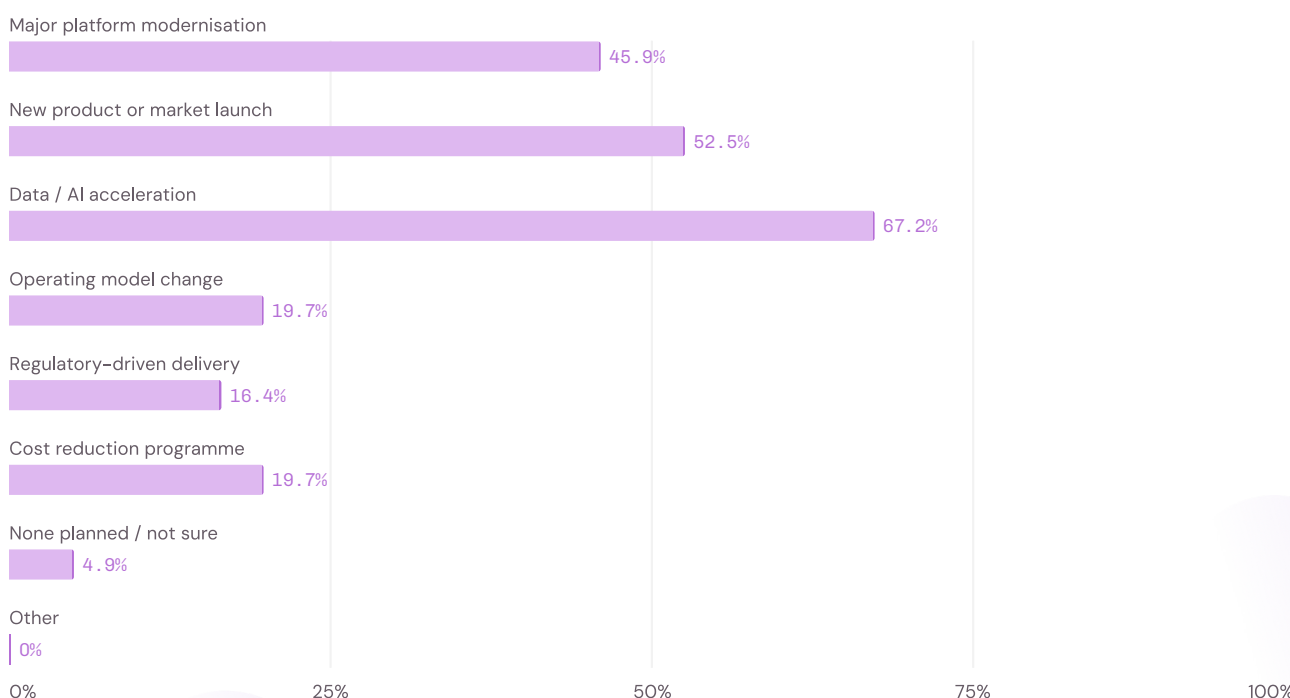
33% said budget availability was the primary blocker to faster engagement



What comes next

41% expected their use of on-demand tech skills or capacity to stay broadly the same over the next two to three years. 31% expected moderate growth, and just 8% anticipated significant increase. Yet the same respondents told us that 67% were pursuing data and AI acceleration, 52% were launching new products or entering new markets, and 46% were undertaking major platform modernisation.

5e Which of the following are likely in the next 12–24 months? (select up to 3)



The organisations that have already built structured, scalable on-demand delivery models, such as those powered by Brightbox, are well placed to meet these ambitions. The data points clearly to where the next wave of value will be created.

67%

rated on-demand capacity as important or very important over the next 2 to 3 years

11%

went further, describing it as business-critical

[Research from Brightbox's economic analysis](#) shows that organisations closing the workforce value gap through on-demand tech skills achieve 60 to 90% faster time to value compared with traditional hiring models.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

What leaders really want to change

We asked respondents a final open question: if you could change one thing about how your organisation delivers technology today, what would it be? 36 leaders responded, and their answers cluster around four clear themes. Taken together, they paint a candid picture of where the real pain sits and where on-demand delivery has the most to offer.

9 MENTIONS

Speed and delivery

The single most common wish was simply to go faster. Respondents cited better planning, reduced complexity, fewer decision-makers slowing projects down, and the need to deliver with greater predictability. The frustration was not with ambition but with execution.

"We would like to improve the predictability and planning of project delivery by having clearer client-side engagement and decision timelines, so that technical work can progress without avoidable delays."

"More speed and simplicity."

8 MENTIONS

AI adoption and readiness

AI featured prominently, but not as a solved problem. Respondents wanted a clearer strategy, faster adoption, better integration of AI into the build process, and the organisational readiness to keep pace with how quickly AI itself is changing.

"Cohesive, integrated, clear strategy around use of AI and digital."

"Coding will become the domain of AI. It is happening but not fully tipped yet, however we need to get ready for it."

8 MENTIONS

Alignment and strategy

A striking number of responses pointed to the gap between technology and business. Respondents wanted less siloed working, stronger alignment with business outcomes, better stakeholder engagement, and a clearer shared understanding of what technology is there to achieve.

"Tighter alignment with business outcomes and AI strategy."

"If I could change one thing, it would be building a cleaner, more unified technical spine so innovation flows straight through the organisation instead of getting slowed by integration drag."

5 MENTIONS

Skills and talent access

Several respondents pointed directly to skills as the constraint. Access to specialist knowledge, stronger product and engineering capability, and the ability to scale teams without the friction of traditional hiring were all cited. One response captured the direction of travel with particular clarity.

"I would move from a fixed, capacity-constrained delivery model to an on-demand delivery model where teams, environments, and pipelines can scale dynamically based on business demand."

Taken together, these responses reinforce the core argument of this report. Speed, AI readiness, business alignment, and skills access are not separate problems. On-demand tech skills address all four — at once, and at speed.

Conclusion: From reactive to strategic

The data in this report makes one thing clear: on-demand tech skills are no longer a backup plan. [They are a proven, strategic asset](#) for how high-performing organisations access, deploy, and scale the capability they need. The question is not whether on-demand delivery works. The report answers that emphatically. The question is how far and how fast your organisation is prepared to take it.

The report also highlights where the gains are greatest: choosing the right partner matters enormously. 66% of respondents cited talent quality as their primary concern. This is not a problem with on-demand delivery itself. It is a selection and vetting challenge, and one that the right partner, with the right platform and the right data, resolves decisively.

The [Liquid Workforce Operating Model](#) exists precisely to address this. By continuously mapping skills to strategic priorities, pre-vetting talent for both technical capability and cultural fit, and providing the governance that gives organisations confidence to engage at speed, it converts on-demand delivery from a reactive fix into a planned, scalable capability.

Welcome to the era of the [Liquid Workforce powered by Brightbox](#).

If you take one thing from this report, let it be this

The organisations pulling ahead are not doing something radically different. They are simply doing it deliberately. They have moved from reacting to planning, from sourcing individuals to building capability, and from treating on-demand skills as a cost to managing them as a strategic asset. That shift is available to every organisation in this report. The data shows what it looks like. The only question is when you start.

Ready to start a conversation?

Talk to Brightbox. We will show you where your organisation sits relative to peers and what the next step looks like, whether you are just starting out or ready to scale your Liquid Workforce.

www.brightboxgrp.com/contact



Brightbox, the global provider of on-demand tech skills, is the pioneer of the Liquid Skills Workforce. Brightbox leverages its proprietary LiquidSkills Agentic AI Platform to connect scale-ups, enterprises, software agencies, and consultancies with pre-vetted software, digital, and AI talent on-demand skills that enable them to capture opportunities, accelerate innovation, and rapidly deliver measurable business impact.

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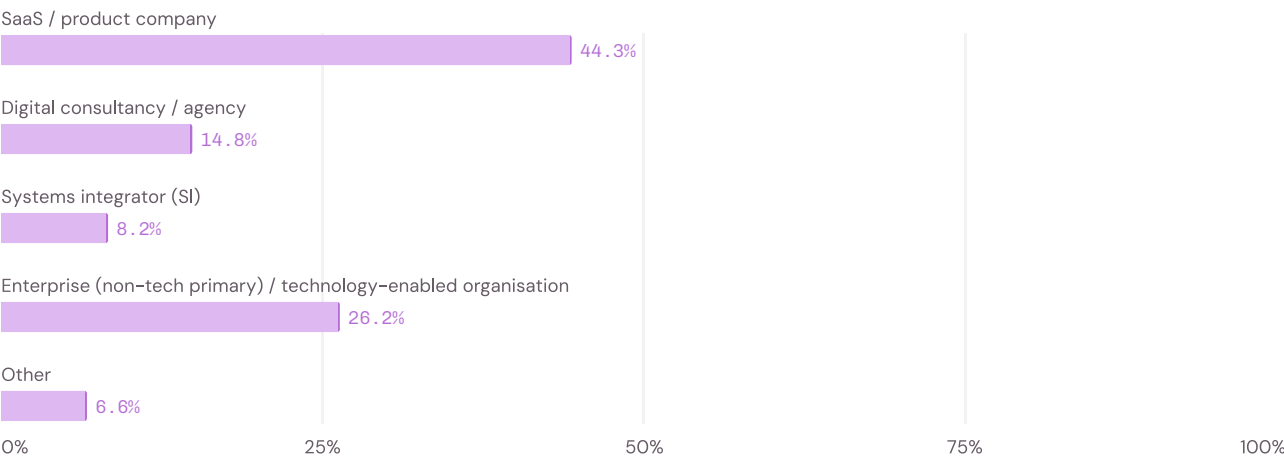
Addendum

All report questions and results

Research conducted between March and May 2026. Responses captured from a global cross-section of business and technology leaders. Results presented in aggregate. The research was fully anonymous.

Section 1 of 5: About you

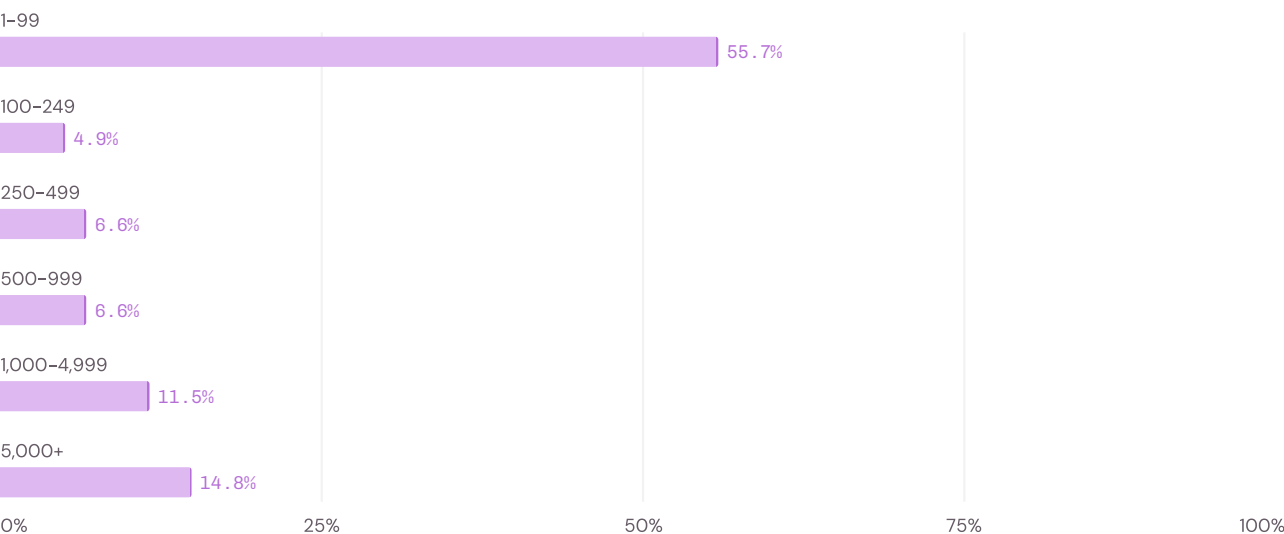
1a Which best describes your organisation?



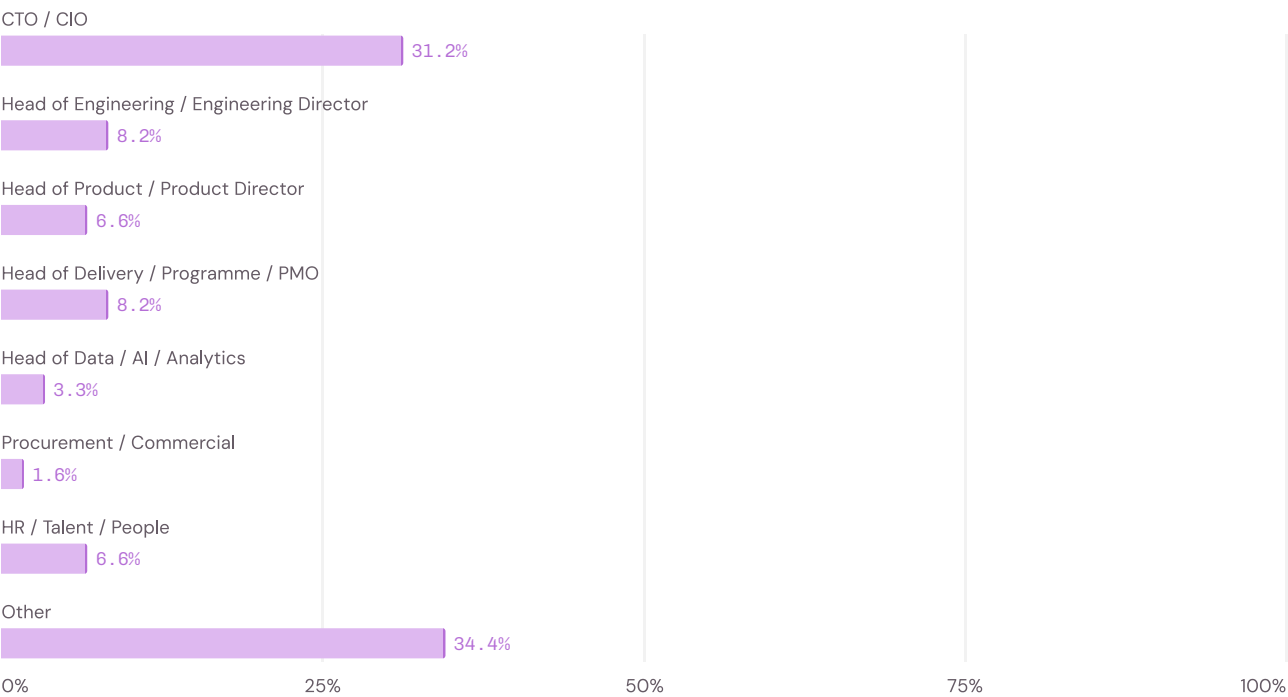
Responses for 'Other':

"Healthcare", "Experience Realisation Architecture Consultancy", "Logistics", "Property Consultancy"

1b Approximately how many employees does your organisation have?



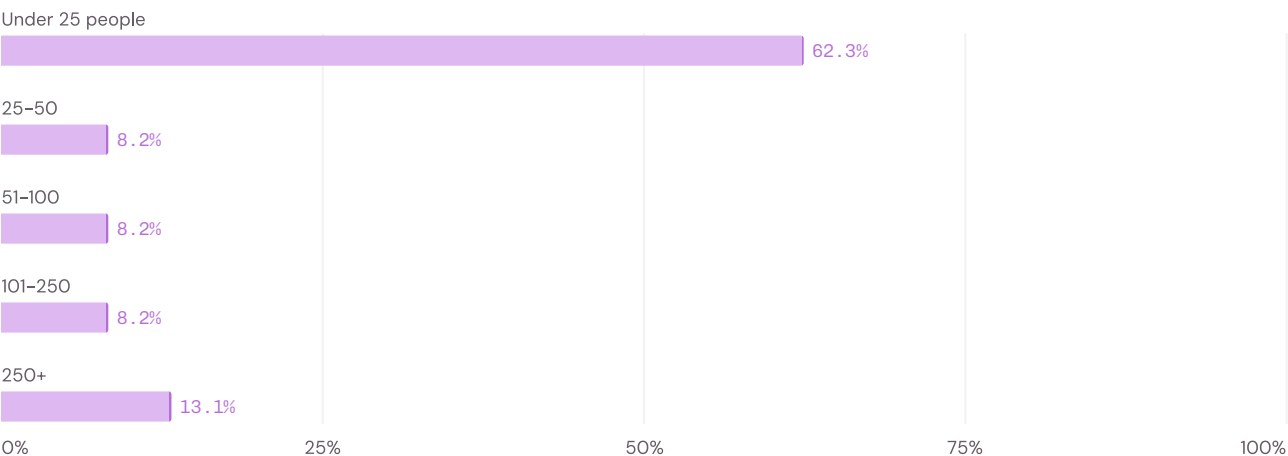
1c Which best describes your role?



Responses for 'Other':

"Founder, President", "Chief Architect", "UX director", "CEO & Co-Founder", "CEO", "Director / strategic leadership", "Practice Director", "Partner", "CEO", "COO", "Sales", "CEO", "CEO", "CEO", "CEO", "Deputy CEO and Finance Director", "Chief Executive", "CEO", "Founder", "Head of Cyber Security", "Founder"

1d Approximately how large is your digital delivery organisation?

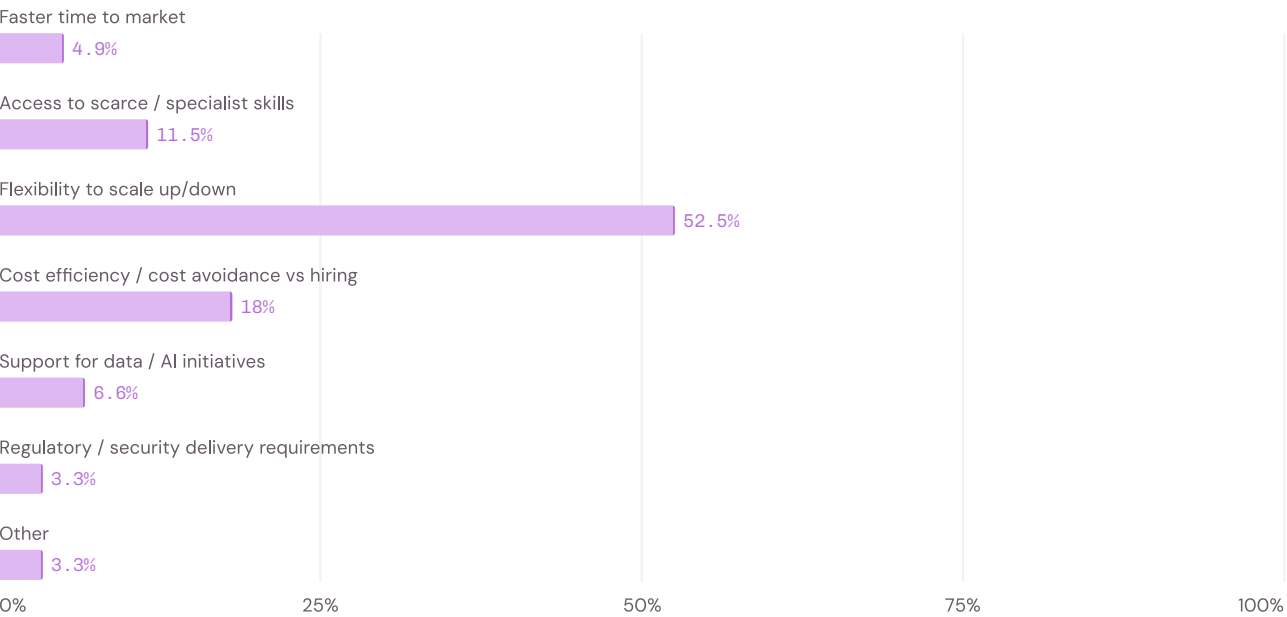


Section 2 of 5: Adoption, drivers & use

2a Which best describes your organisation’s approach to on-demand tech delivery capacity?



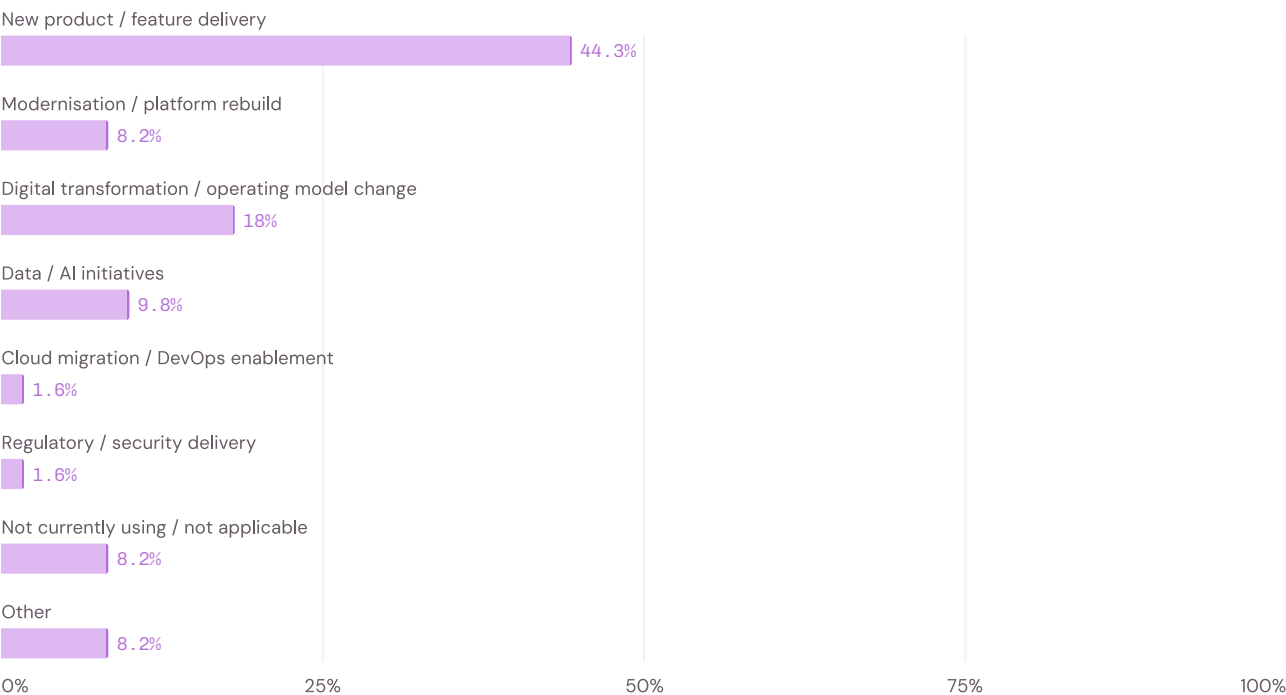
2b What is the primary driver for using (or planning to use) on-demand delivery capacity?



Responses for 'Other':

"We're not", "we are big organization and do not plan to use on demand external resources"

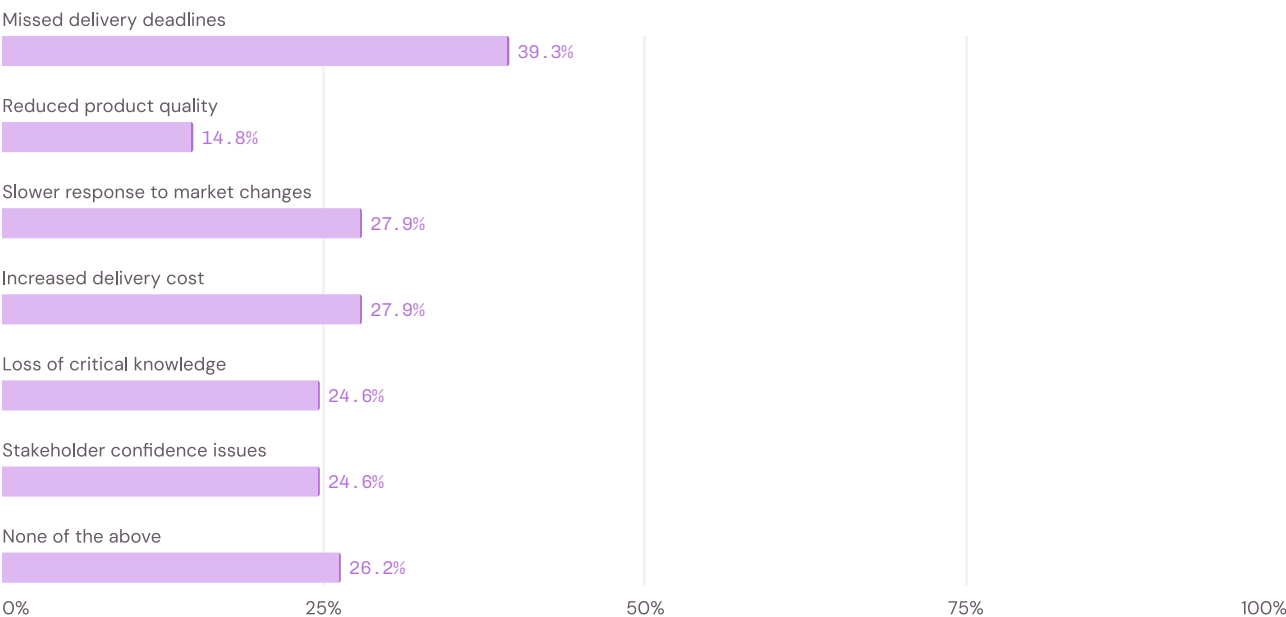
2c What type of work do you most often use on-demand capacity for?



Responses for 'Other':

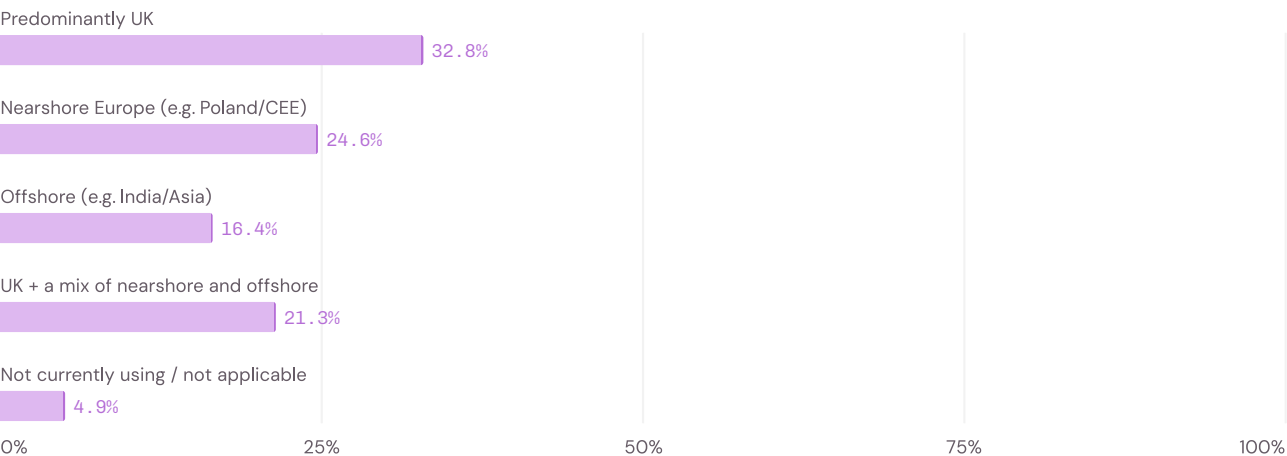
"Most of the above", "We don't", "Infrastructure deployment, hardware rollout, network installations and specialist onsite delivery work", "Client-specific build", "Not using"

2d In the last 12 months, which (if any) have had a material impact on your organisation? (multi-select)

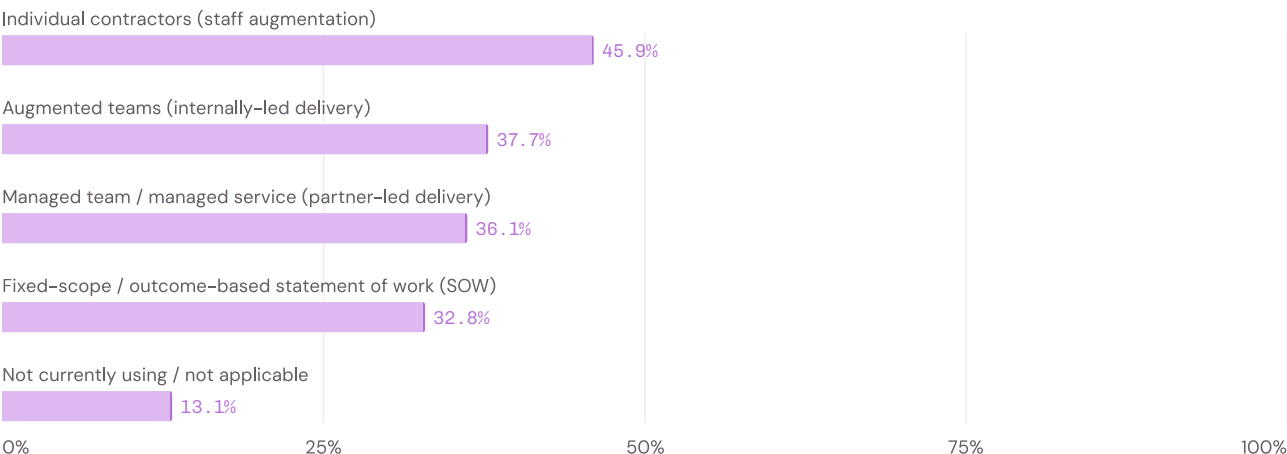


Section 3 of 5: Delivery footprint & engagement model

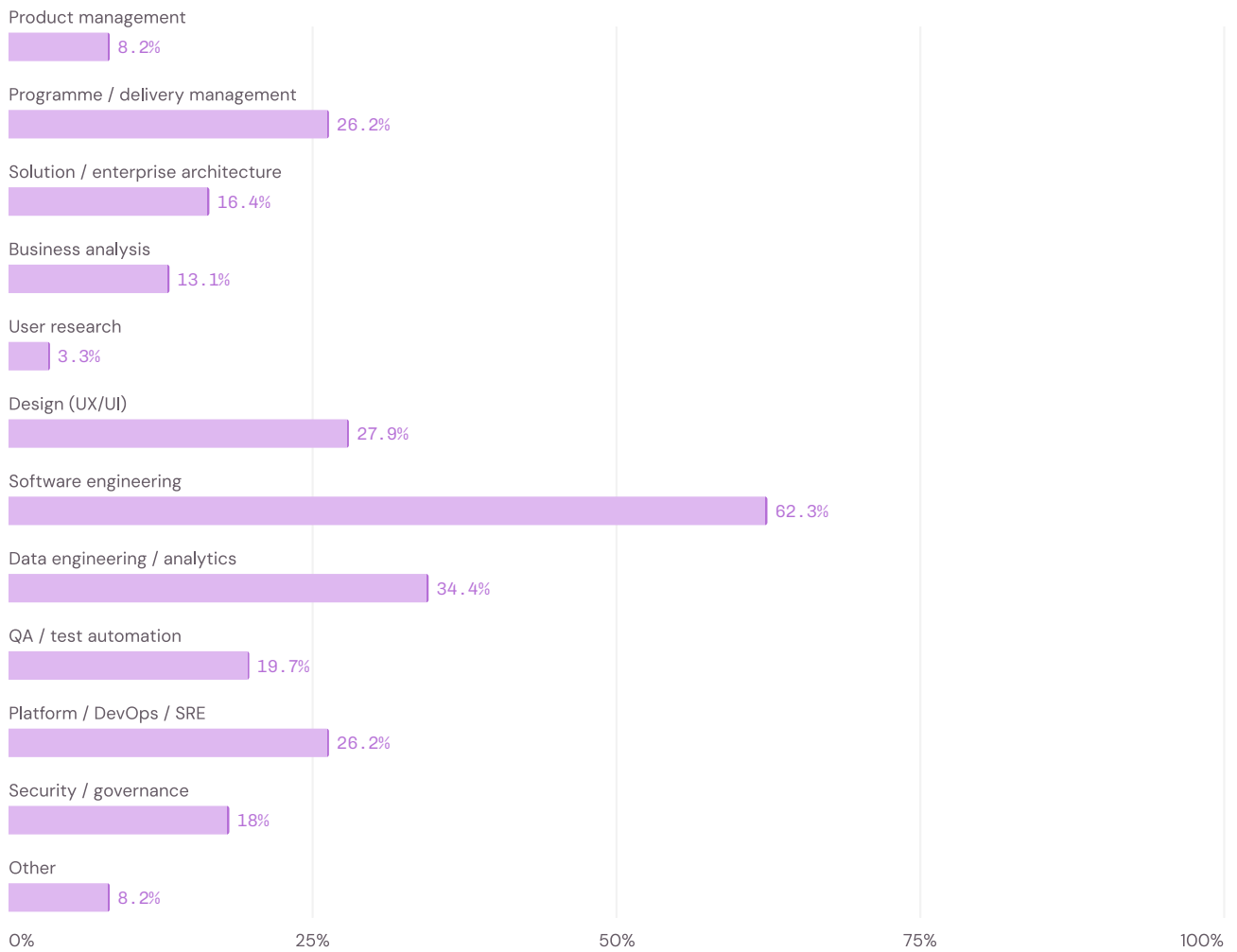
3a Where are the teams you work with primarily located when using on-demand capacity?



3b Which engagement models does your organisation use for on-demand tech skills? (multi-select)



3c Which roles do you most commonly source on-demand? (multi-select)

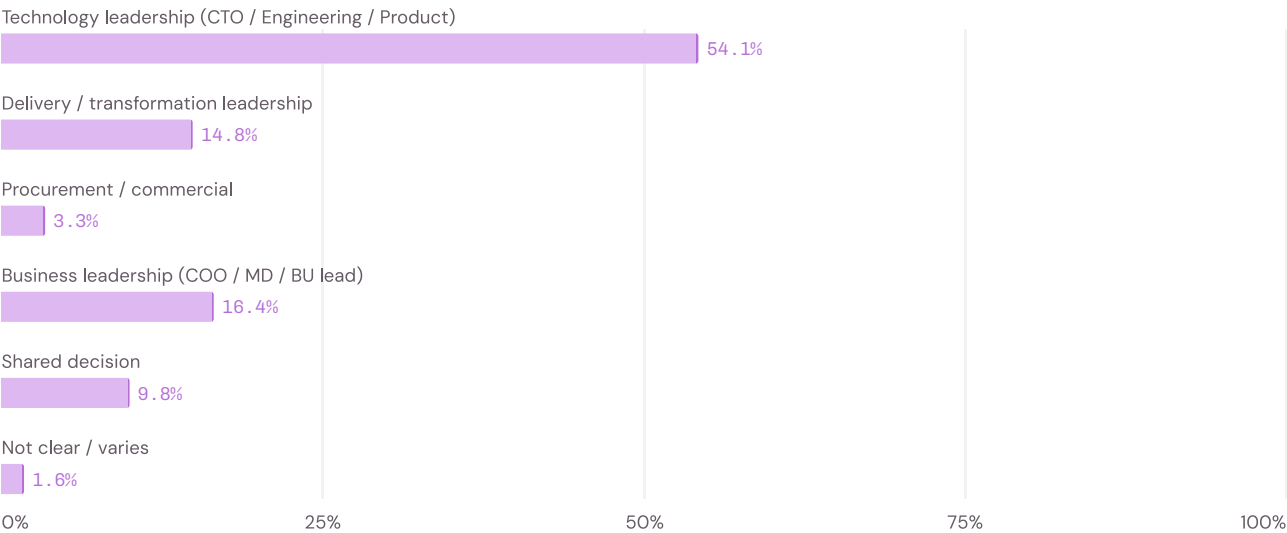


Responses for 'Other':

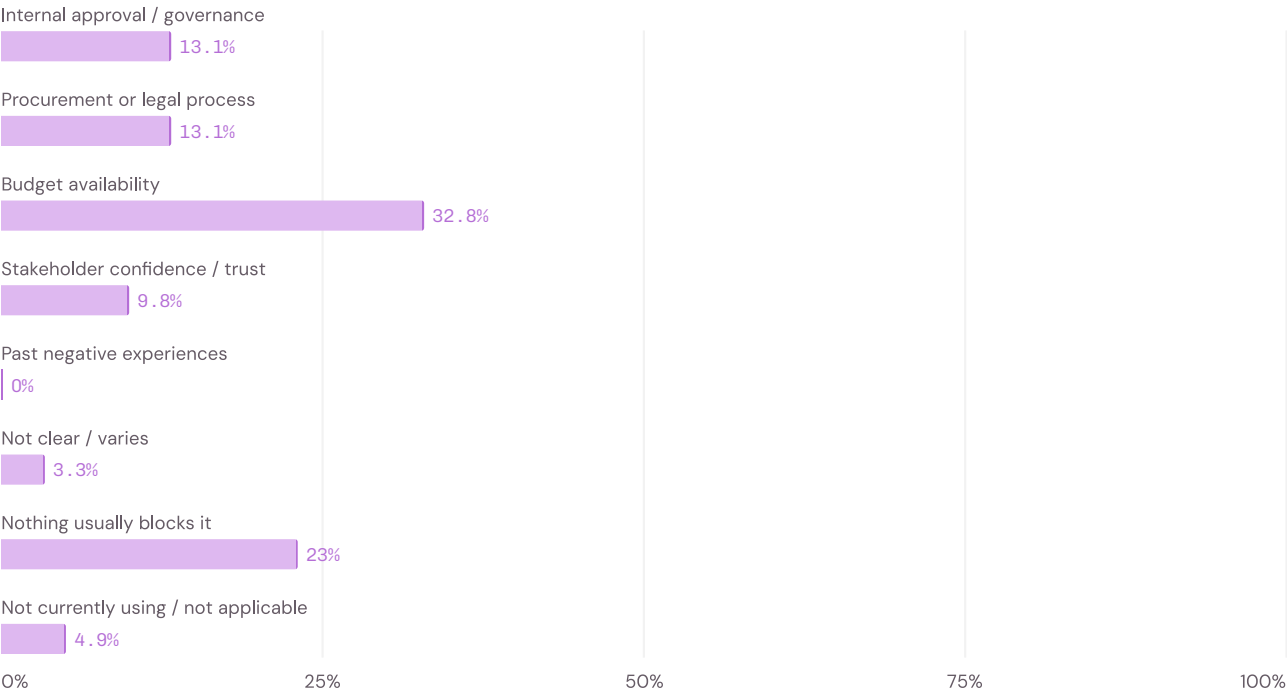
"Niche product skills", "Non IT", "We don't use on demand help"

Section 4 of 5: Decision-making & friction

4a Who is the primary decision-maker for engaging on-demand delivery capacity?

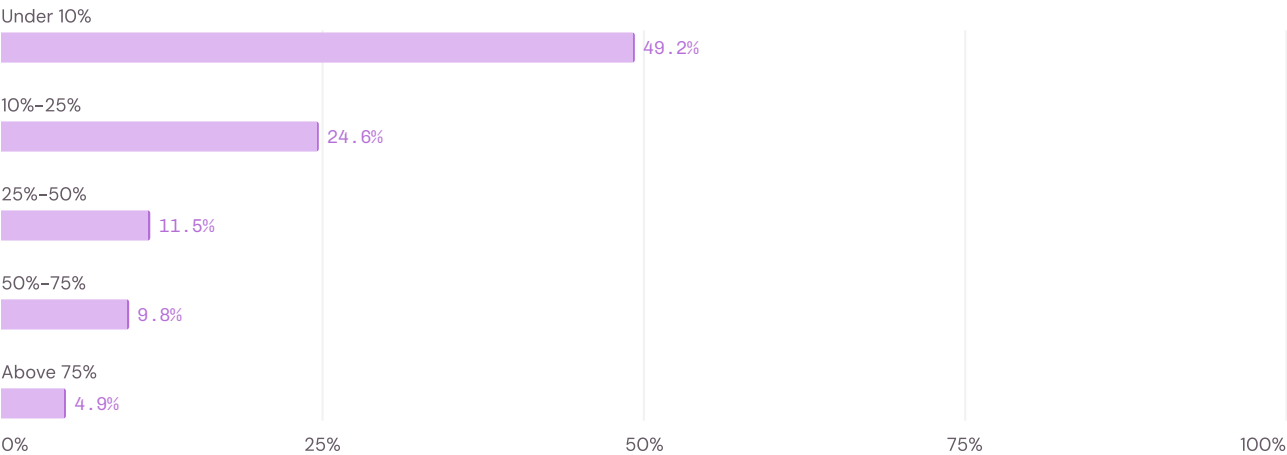


4b What most often delays or blocks engagement with on-demand delivery partners?

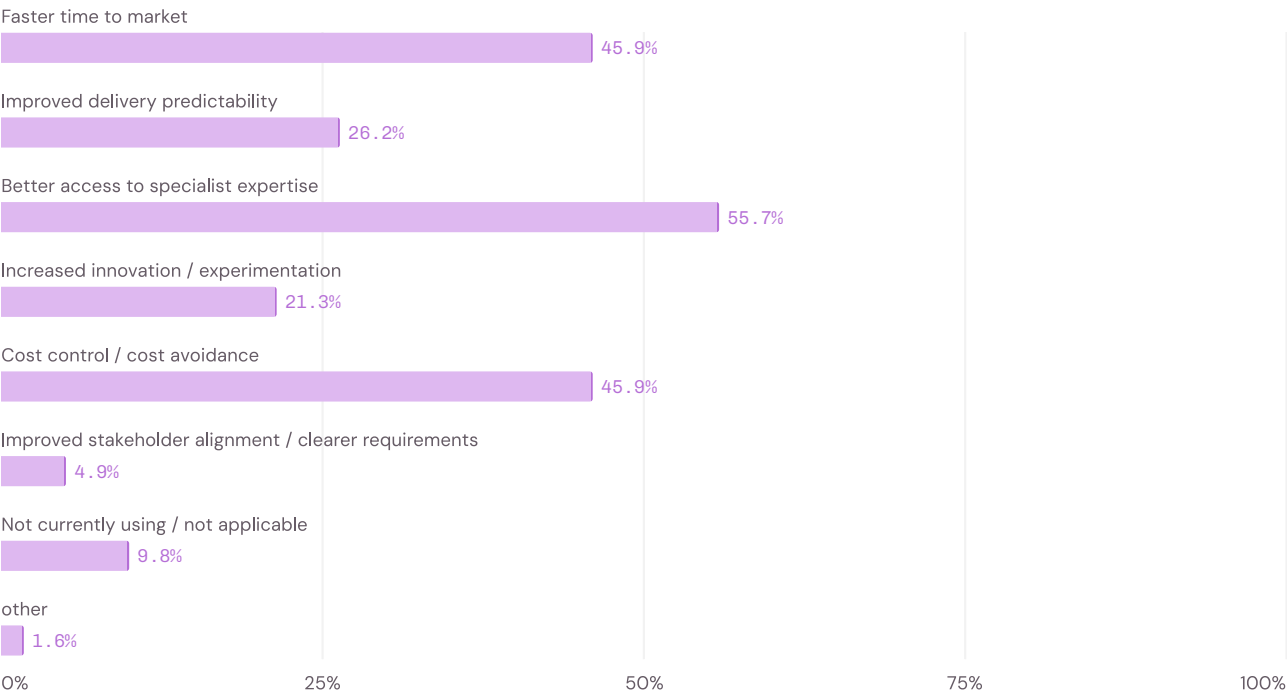


Section 5 of 5: Strategy, outcomes & outlook

5a What percentage of your workforce is contingent / external?



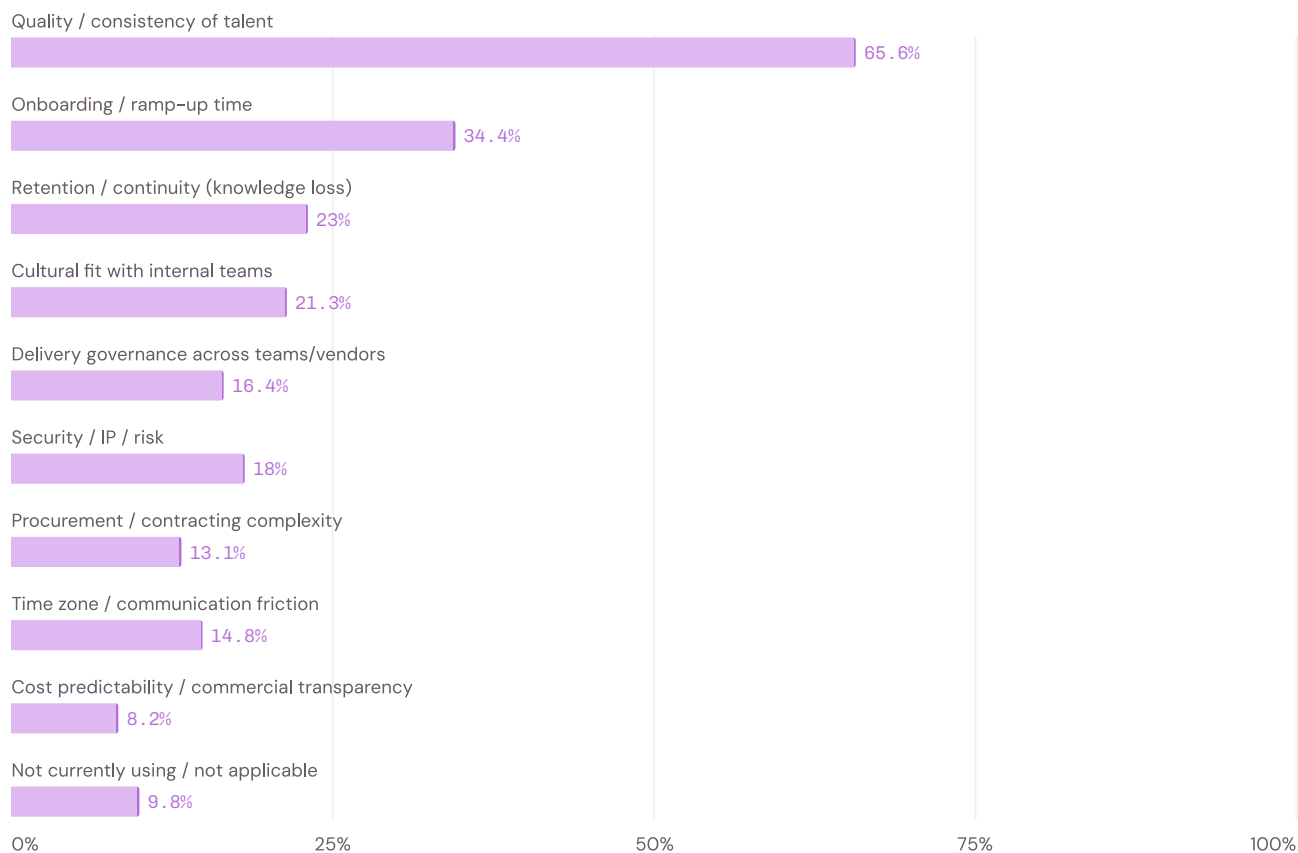
5b Which business outcomes have delivered the greatest value from on-demand delivery capacity? (select up to 3)



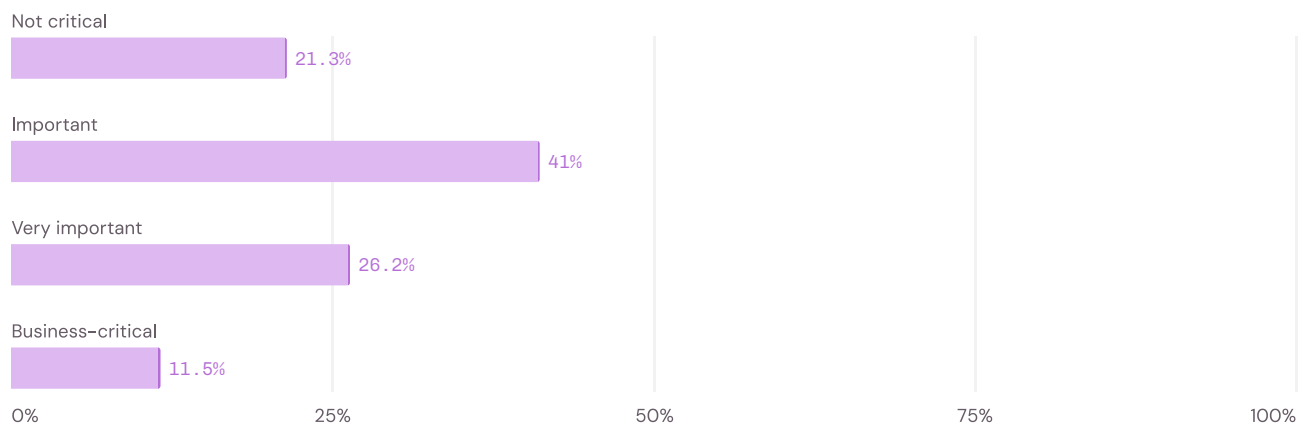
Responses for 'Other':

"Flexibility"

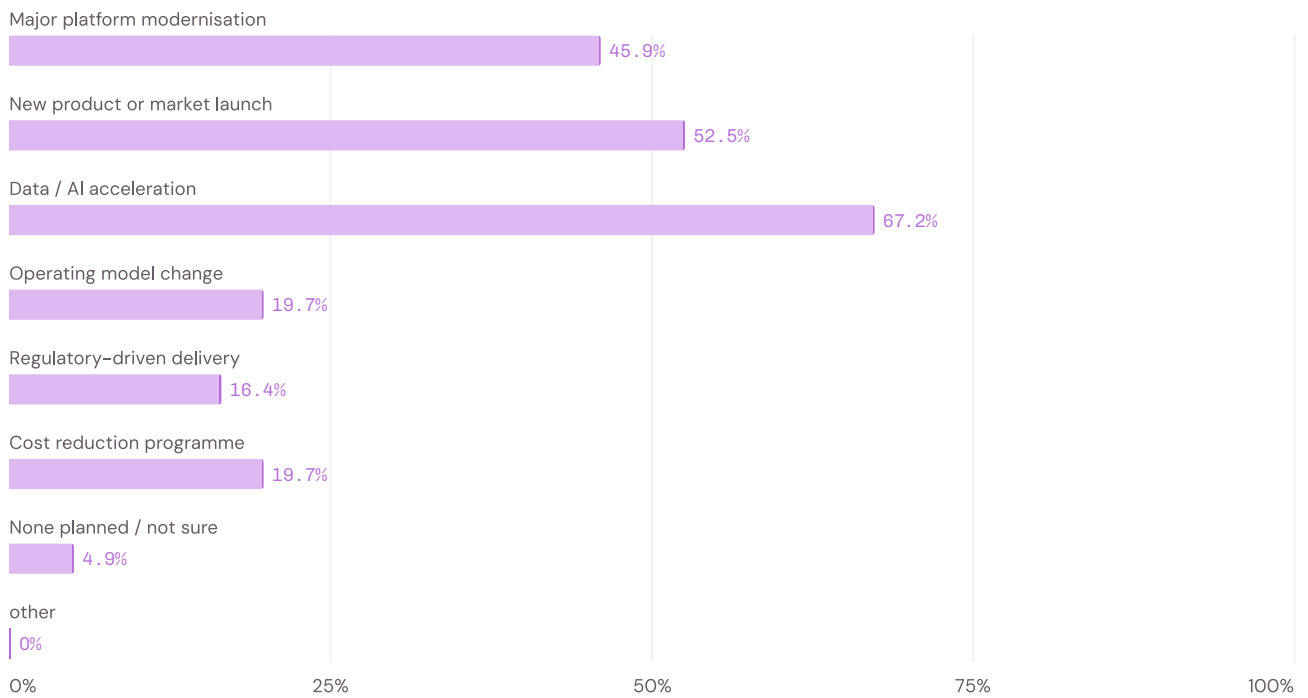
5c What are the biggest challenges your organisation faces (or has faced) when engaging on-demand delivery capacity? (select up to 3)



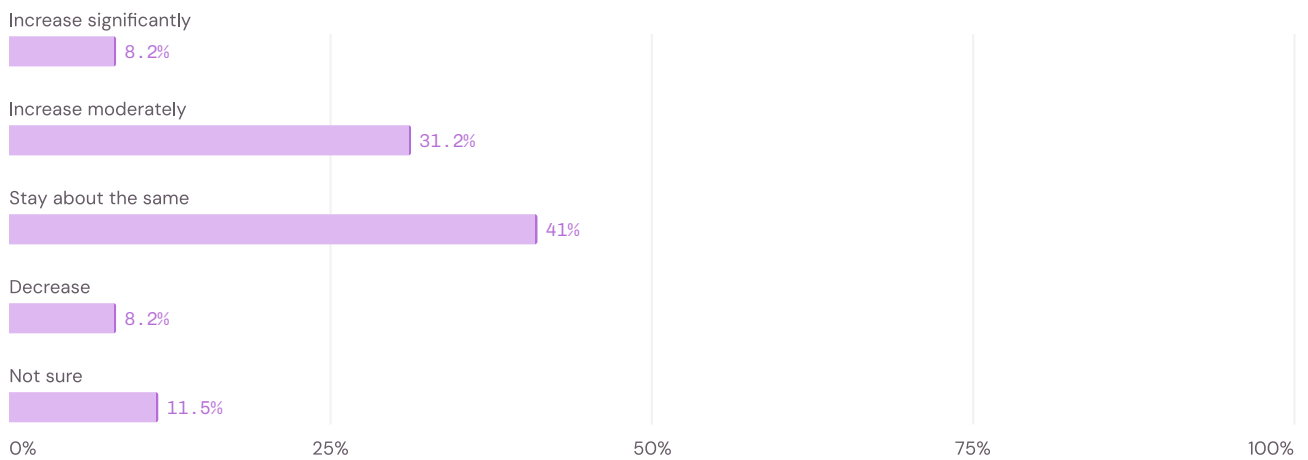
5d How critical will on-demand tech delivery capacity be to your organisation's success over the next 2-3 years?



5e Which of the following are likely in the next 12–24 months? (select up to 3)



5f Do you expect your use of on-demand delivery capacity to:



If you could change one thing about how your organisation delivers technology today, what would it be?

"I believe we are on a righteous path"

"We would like to deliver more"

"Better funding to support technology since they want to sell themselves as a tech company but with less than 10% of staff in the tech and product teams."

"more focus on cost benefit and less on the cost, projects fail to earn because finance are looking at cost only"

"Less siloed teams"

"Better planning"

"I would move from a fixed, capacity-constrained delivery model to an on-demand delivery model where teams, environments, and pipelines can scale dynamically based on business demand."

"deliver via saas based platform"

"Deliver faster and more confidently"

"Not trying to do so many things at the same time"

"Better use of new tooling, adapting for the future"

"If I could change one thing, it would be building a cleaner, more unified technical spine so innovation flows straight through the organisation instead of getting slowed by integration drag."

"Speed of delivery, and wider digital literacy."

"Increase utilisation of AI in the build and stronger focus on UX"

"Tighter alignment with business outcomes and AI strategy."

"We would like to improve the predictability and planning of project delivery by having clearer client-side engagement and decision timelines, so that technical work can progress without avoidable delays. This would allow us to deliver change more efficiently while maintaining the high level of service our clients expect."

"Ability to foresee how AI and its related disruptions will affect the demand for services (and type of services) from external suppliers"

"Skills and knowledge"

"Coding will become the domain of AI. It's happening but not fully tipped yet, however we need to get ready for it"

"Better alignment with stakeholders"

"Better product team skills"

"More collaboration with business units"

"Keep abreast of the ever-improving ways of working with AI advances."

"More flexibility and scale"

"Improved product management and roadmap management"

"Cohesive, integrated, clear strategy around use of AI / Digital"

"Use more automation"

"Specialist knowledge access"

"Increase knowledge within the engineering team"

"Faster delivery by more efficient re-use of existing tech"

"Efficient and high quality"

"Have fewer people involved in projects to expedite delivery."

"Hire more Pre-Sales People"

"More speed and simplicity"

"We need to keep pace with new change"

"For all to understand the benefits of using the technology from the outset"