

The Global Intelligent Delusion



2025 Emergn Survey Report

Welcome to the 2025 Emergn Survey Report: The Global Intelligent Delusion. By “delusion”, we mean the belief that AI tools alone will transform how your organization works. They won’t. Early wins from AI tools are common; scaling them into repeatable business value is where most stumble. Drawing on responses from more than 750 leaders at global enterprises, this report shows where AI is paying off, how product leadership is rising, and where progress slows as firms move toward product-led ways of working. Against a backdrop of training shortfalls and transformation fatigue, the findings cut through the “intelligent delusion”: without a product operating model that unites technology, talent, and strategy, AI remains a set of tools, not a source of sustained advantage.



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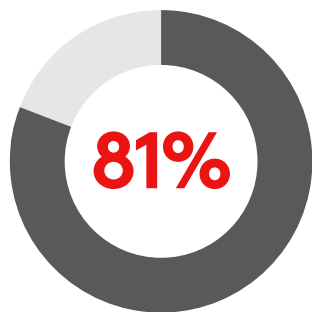
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Highlights how AI, product leadership, and learning are quietly transforming the rules of success in transformation.		Details the risks that arise when organizations fail to invest in meaningful training and upskilling.	
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Examines how AI has transitioned from isolated pilot programs to a core component of long-term revenue growth.		Investigates how employee attitudes toward learning and development are evolving, particularly in relation to AI and digital transformation.	
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Explores the growing influence of product management in shaping company strategy and the emergence of the Chief Product Officer as a key leadership role in the AI era.		Discusses the increasing demand for skilled product professionals and the difficulties companies face in recruiting and retaining top talent.	
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Looks at how AI is reshaping the responsibilities, tools, and decision-making processes of product managers across industries.		Analyzes the cumulative strain of ongoing change initiatives and the impact on employee morale, productivity, and engagement.	
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Unpacks the gap between executive expectations of AI and the real-world implementation challenges faced by product and technology teams.		Considers the importance of a shared understanding of AI across leadership and teams to ensure aligned, effective strategies.	
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Highlights the disconnect between AI-driven strategic ambitions and the current skills and preparedness of teams.		Outlines the research methods used in compiling this survey report.	



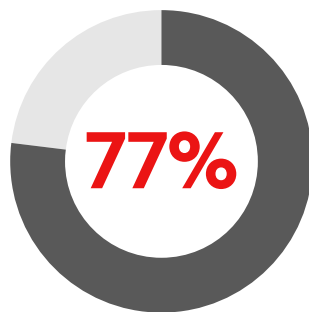
Key takeaways

AI is now a growth lever, not a side project

When asked how their organization is planning to generate business value in the next 12 months:



said business and operational efficiencies

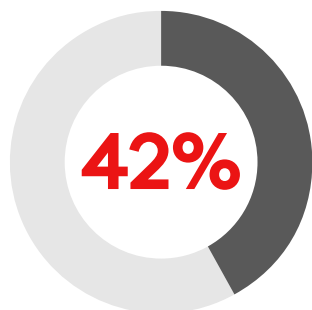


said new AI solutions

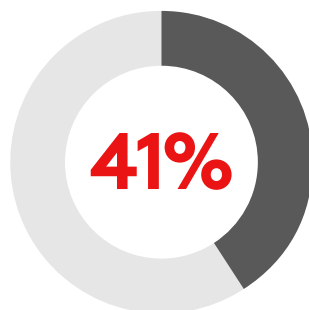
77% of leaders say new AI solutions will generate business value alongside 81% citing efficiency. Ambition is high; the constraint is scaling what works across products and markets.

Product leadership is a multiplier for AI outcomes

When asked what the primary reasons are behind their change in investment in product management:



said ensuring successful implementation of AI and realizing financial gains

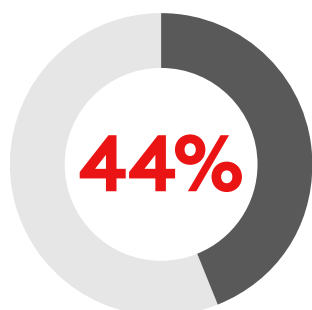


said integrating AI/ML capabilities into products or workflows

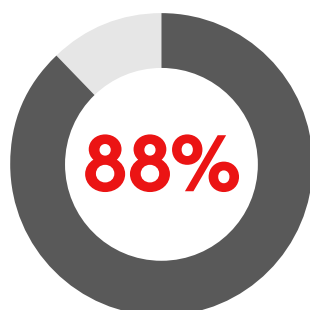
Investment is flowing to product to make AI pay (42% to ensure financial gains; 41% to integrate AI/ML into products and workflows). When product owns problem framing and cross-functional delivery, AI shows up in results.

CPOs take center stage as product management investment grows

When asked how their organization's investment in product management changed over the past 12 months:



said their organization established or hired a Chief Product Officer (CPO)

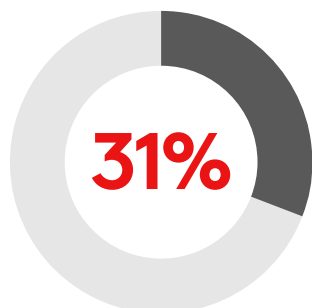


said investment in product management (roles, tools, or processes) increased

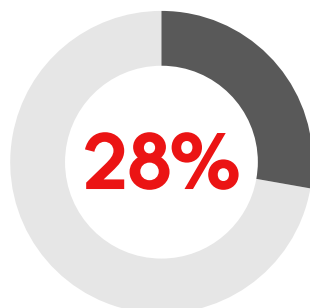
44% hired a CPO in the last year; 88% increased product management spend. Governance is moving from shipping features to owning customer, operational, and financial outcomes.

Lack of learning is a hidden killer of transformation success

When asked what impact(s) their organization experienced over the last 12 months as a result of a lack of training:



said significant delays (>6 months) to digital transformation projects



said high employee churn

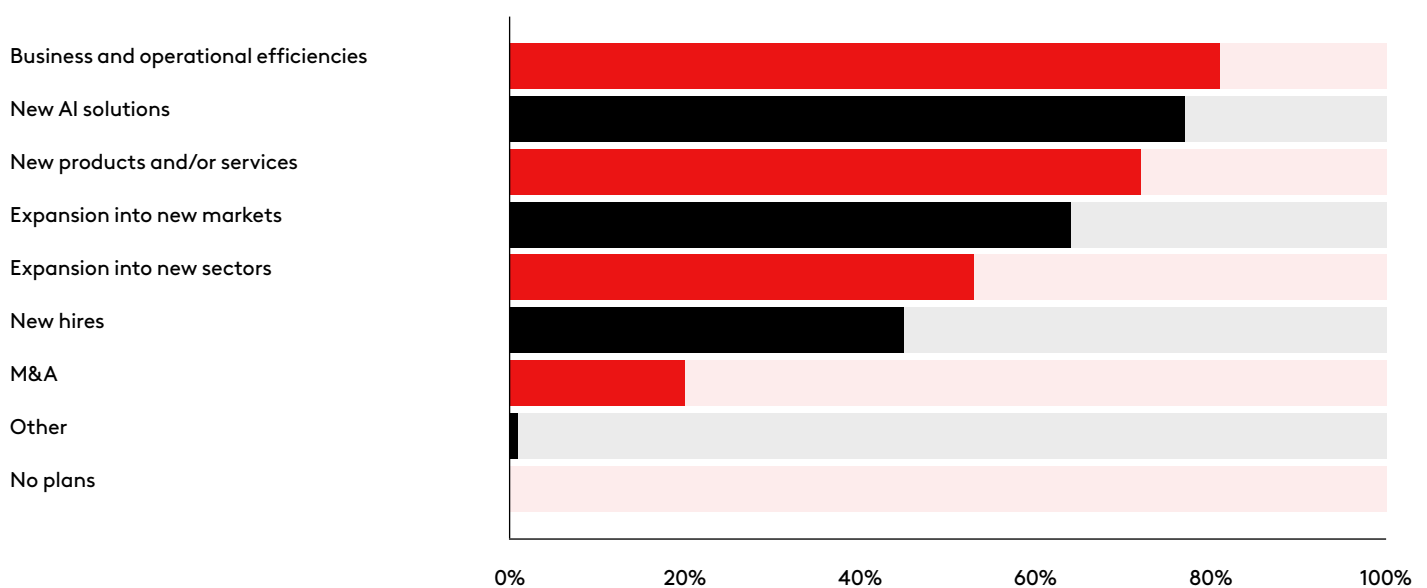
Gaps have tangible costs: 31% report greater than 6-month delays, 28% high churn, 27% productivity loss. Technology is outpacing manager and team readiness; enablement must catch up to ambition.

AI moves from experimentation to strategic growth driver

Artificial intelligence is now embedded in growth plans. 77% of respondents cite new AI solutions as a business value driver in the next 12 months. This nears parity with operational efficiency (81%) and ahead of traditional factors like new product development (72%) and market expansion (64%). New hires (45%) and mergers and acquisitions (20%) are seen as less important revenue drivers in the coming year.

FIGURE 1

How is your organization planning to generate business value in the next 12 months?

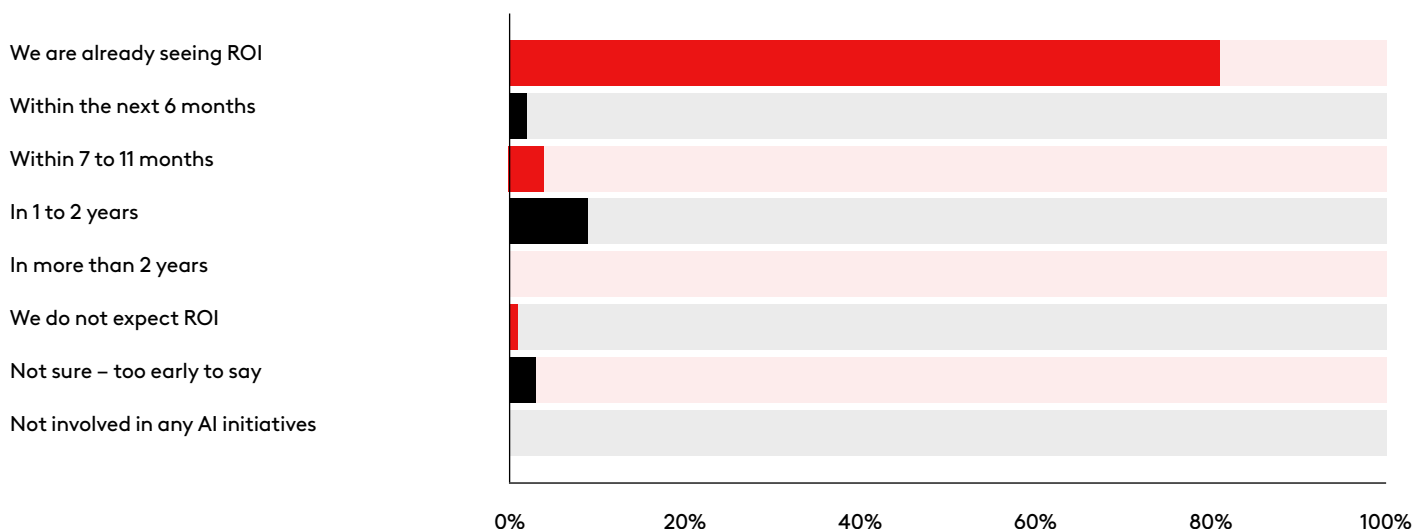


77%

OF RESPONDENTS CITE NEW AI SOLUTIONS
AS A KEY DRIVER OF BUSINESS VALUE IN
THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

FIGURE 2

When do you expect your organization to see a measurable return on investment (ROI) from its AI initiatives?



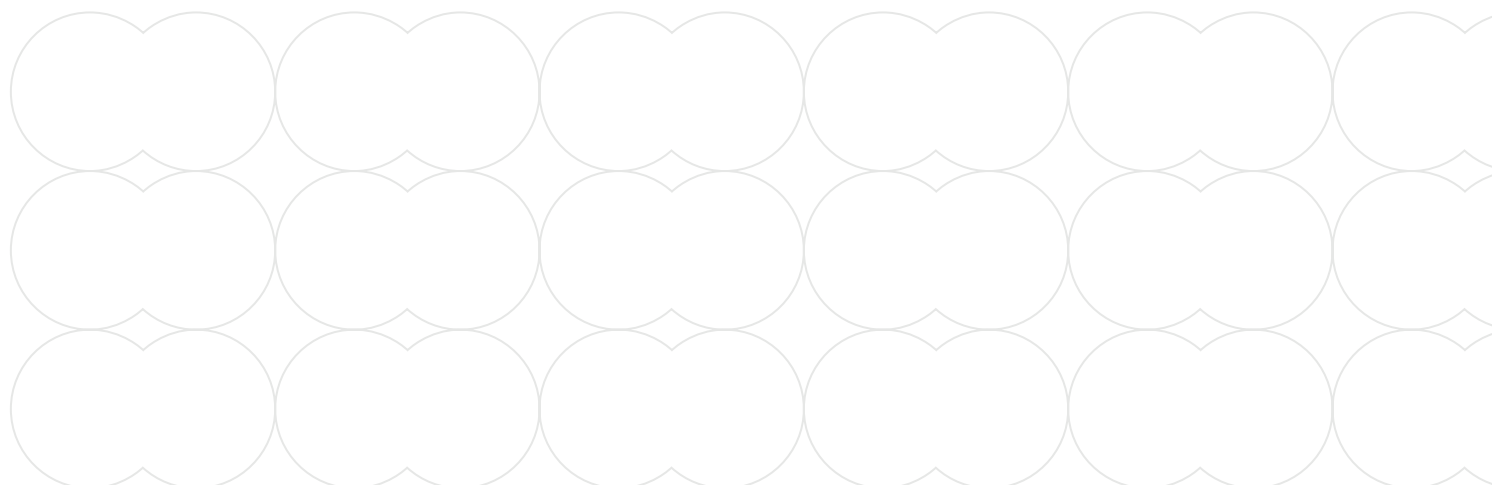
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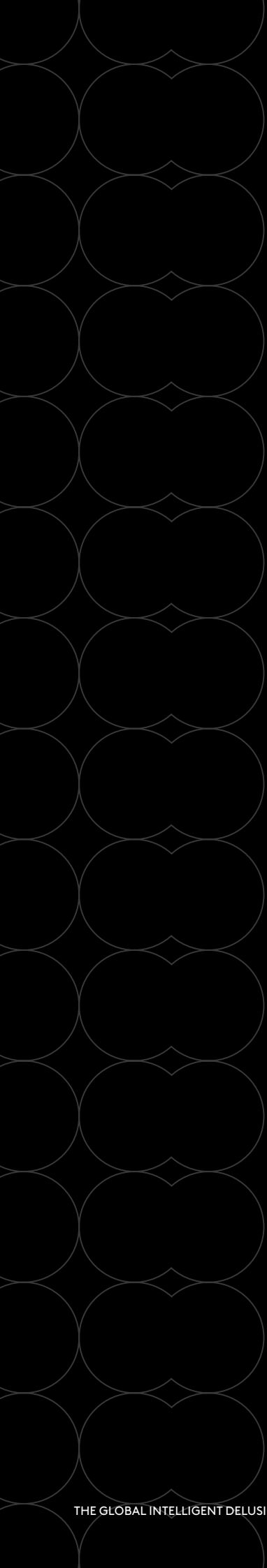
**0% OF RESPONDENTS ARE UNINVOLVED IN AI,
AND 0% EXPECT ROI ONLY BEYOND TWO YEARS**

These findings mark a turning point. Widespread adoption and expectations of near-term ROI show a shift from exploring AI to implementing it at scale. The priority now is to deliver consistent business outcomes and meet rising expectations. Success depends on aligning AI initiatives closely with strategic goals as the focus moves from experimentation to results.

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AI is on the revenue line; the bottleneck is operating discipline. Treat scale-up like any other investment: frame the problem, name the customer/operational/financial metrics to move, and release more funding only on evidence.





“AI is no longer about experiments – it’s about results. Leaders expect systems, capabilities, and teams that can deliver measurable impact at scale. The winners will be the ones who turn AI into growth, with AI contribution margin as the new scoreboard.”

Alex Adamopoulos
Chairman and CEO, Emergn

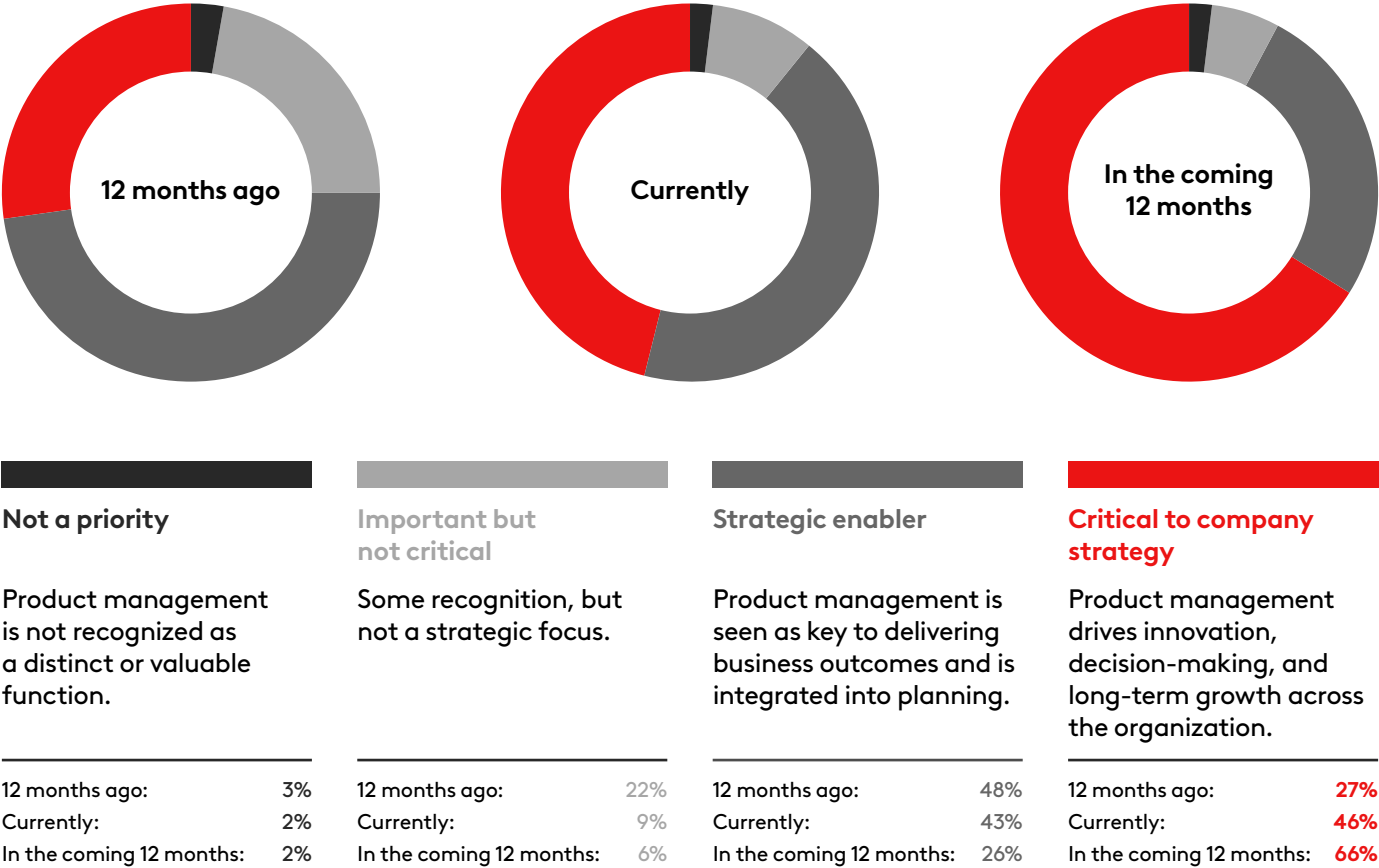


The rise of product management and the CPO

As AI moves to the center of business strategy, product management is rising with it. 66% of respondents say product management will be critical to company strategy over the next 12 months, up from just 27% last year. The jump highlights its growing influence on innovation, decision-making, and long-term growth.

FIGURE 3

How would you best describe your organization’s attitude to product management in the following time frames?



Leadership is catching up: 44% say they appointed a CPO in the past 12 months, and another 33% say they already had one in place; 77% in total.

FIGURE 4

Has your organization established or hired a Chief Product Officer (CPO) in the last year?

- Yes (44%)
- No (23%)
- Already had a CPO a year ago (33%)



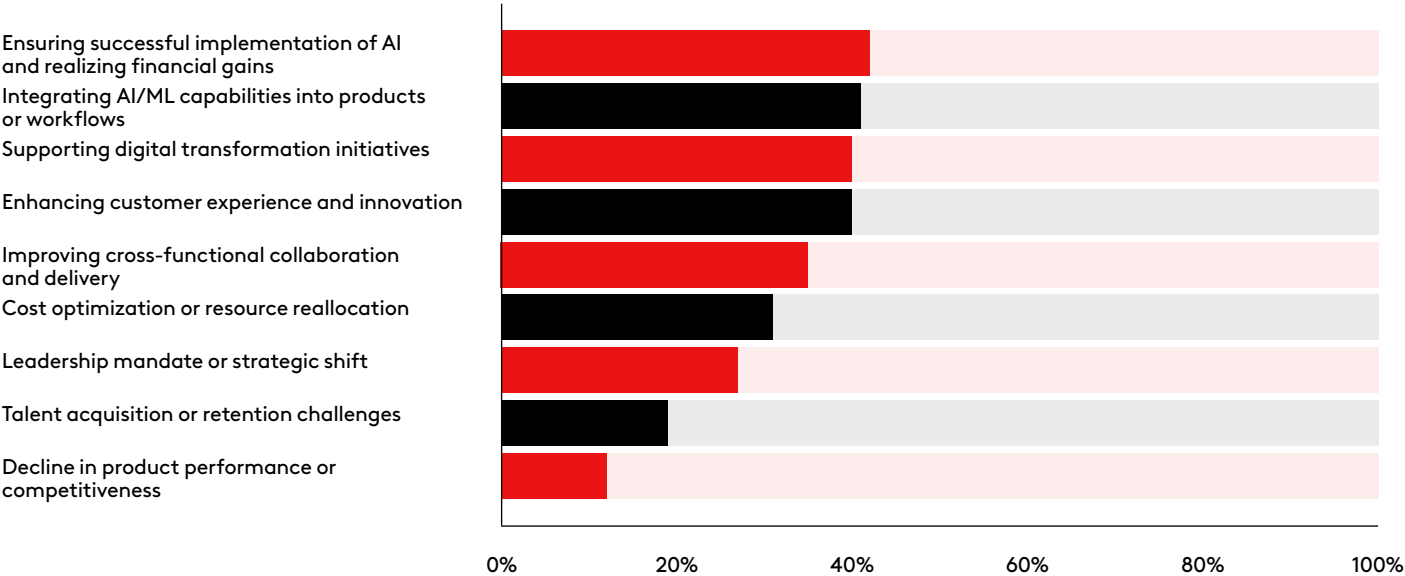
Investment in product management capabilities is also rising. 88% report increased spend on product roles, tools, and processes, underscoring recognition that strong product leadership is essential for transforming AI capabilities into customer-ready, commercially viable solutions.

88%

OF RESPONDENTS REPORT HIGHER INVESTMENT IN PRODUCT MANAGEMENT ROLES, TOOLS, AND PROCESSES

Investment is rising as leaders push AI to deliver real outcomes, anchored by four priorities: ensuring the successful implementation of AI and achieving financial gains (42%); integrating AI and machine learning capabilities directly into products or workflows (41%); supporting digital transformation initiatives (40%); and enhancing customer experience and innovation (40%). Other drivers include improving cross-functional collaboration and delivery (35%), cost optimization or resource reallocation (31%), and leadership mandates or strategic shifts (27%), with smaller shares citing talent acquisition or retention challenges (19%) and decline in product performance or competitiveness (12%).

FIGURE 5
What are the primary reasons behind the change in investment in product management?



The tight clustering of responses between 40% and 42% shows leaders are prioritizing a single, interconnected agenda: ensuring successful implementation of AI and realizing financial gains, integrating AI/ML capabilities into products or workflows, supporting digital transformation initiatives, and enhancing customer experience and innovation. Together, this signals a redefinition of product management from a downstream delivery role to a strategic enabler aligning technological innovation with market demand. As AI becomes embedded in products, services, and workflows, the influence of CPOs and their teams is growing. Their ability to drive innovation while remaining customer-focused is becoming decisive in unlocking AI’s full business potential.



When product controls priority, funding, and pace, AI turns into shipped value. Concentrate portfolio authority in product, tie budgets to outcomes, and run a single evidence cadence across product, technology, and operations.

AI's impact on product management roles

AI is not only advancing product management as a function, but also changing the day-to-day responsibilities of product managers. Notably, 81% of respondents agree that AI has made the product manager role easier by increasing efficiency and boosting productivity. It's also raising product management's profile: 76% say AI has enhanced the visibility and influence of product managers within their organizations.

However, this lift comes with new pressure. 27% report higher stress levels as expectations grow and the scope of decisions widens.

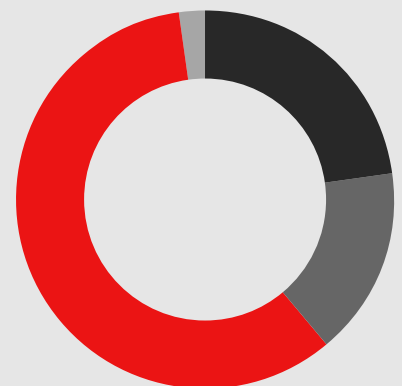
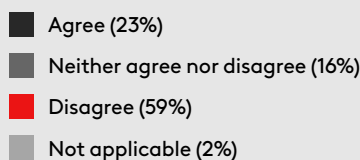
Even so, concerns about replacement remain limited: 59% disagree that AI will make the role of the product manager obsolete; 23% agree. AI is amplifying product management's impact, not removing the role, while raising the pressure to deliver.

81%

OF RESPONDENTS AGREE THAT AI HAS MADE THE ROLE OF PRODUCT MANAGERS EASIER, DRIVING EFFICIENCIES AND PRODUCTIVITY

FIGURE 6

Are you worried about AI making the role of the product manager obsolete?



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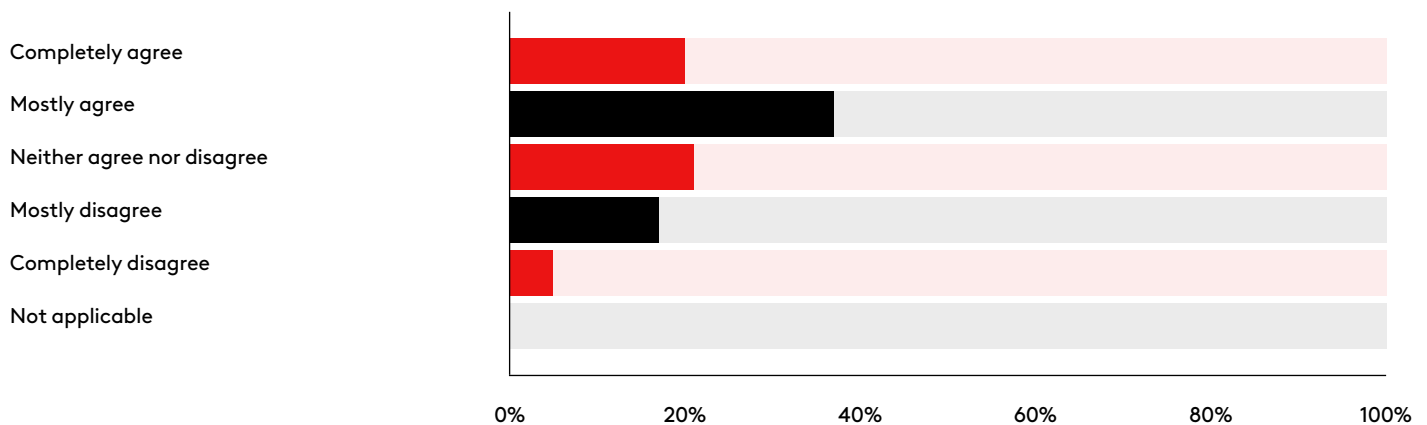
AI removes toil and raises expectations. Recast product management charters around outcome design: problem framing, experiment design, and causal metrics while automating low-value admin with AI to create room for judgment.

AI expectations vs. reality

Despite widespread adoption, AI demand is outrunning delivery. In fact, 57% agree (complete agree and mostly agree) that expectations for what AI can do are growing faster than their organization's ability to meet them. Common hurdles include keeping pace with rapid changes, the cost of training or deploying models, and governance and ethics concerns.

FIGURE 7

Expectations within our organization of what AI can do for us are growing faster than our ability to meet them, if we can even meet them at all:



In response to additional questions on this topic, two signals stand out: 29% agree AI has yet to live up to expectations; and 34% report projects are taking longer than anticipated, often under board pressure to hit deadlines.

Meeting AI goals depends on capability as much as technology. 55% say they will not meet their AI goals without talent capable of problem framing, outcome-focused design, and the market integration skills often led by product teams, and 27% acknowledge a skills gap that limits benefits. The takeaway: success requires strategic leadership and cross-functional collaboration anchored in clear problem framing, outcome-driven design, and disciplined integration into products and workflows.

55%

OF RESPONDENTS SAY THAT THEY WILL NOT MEET THEIR AI GOALS WITHOUT TALENT CAPABLE OF PROBLEM FRAMING, OUTCOME-FOCUSED DESIGN, AND THE MARKET INTEGRATION SKILLS OFTEN LED BY PRODUCT TEAMS



The gap isn't tools; it's ways of working. Make initiative funding contingent on a framed problem, a target outcome, and an evidence review schedule at the portfolio level. That's how you slow expectations to the speed of delivery.

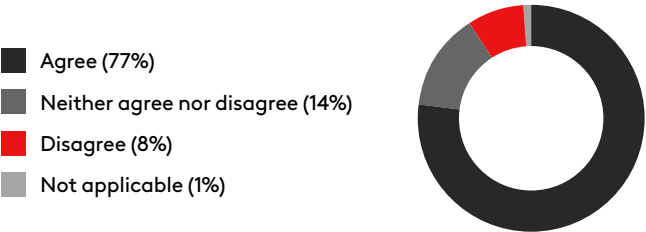
Training gaps and management challenges

Training has emerged as a major barrier to successful adoption of AI and effective product management, and a near-term priority. 77% expect additional training to realize AI's benefits, signaling that enablement needs to catch up with ambition.

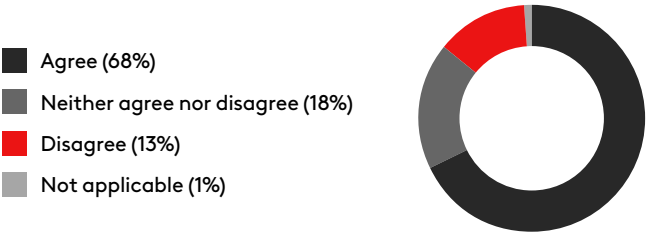
The pinch shows up most sharply in management capability: 68% see clear room for managers to improve, while 24% report managers lack sufficient training/skills today and 28% say their organization doesn't provide enough training to manage teams effectively.

FIGURE 8

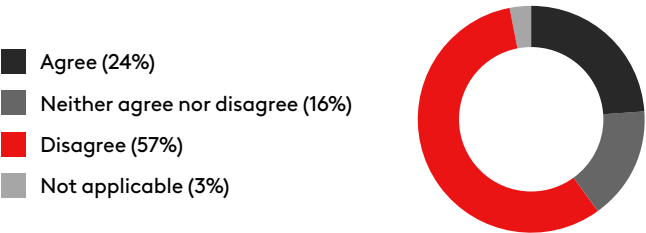
I expect to receive additional training from my organization to realize the benefits of AI:



My manager would benefit from education or training to improve their management skills:



My manager does not have sufficient training or the skills to perform their role:



My organization does not provide enough training opportunities for me to manage my team effectively:

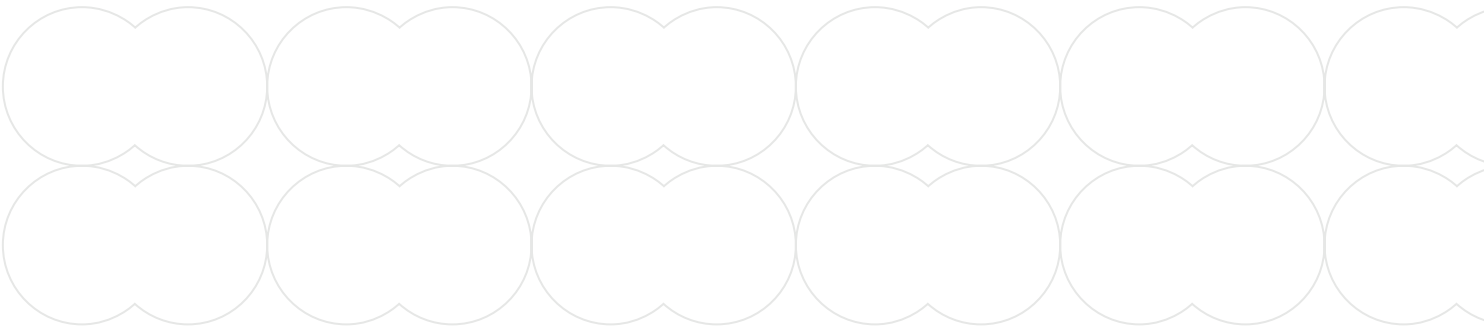
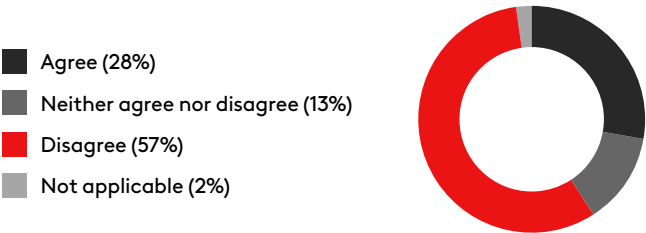
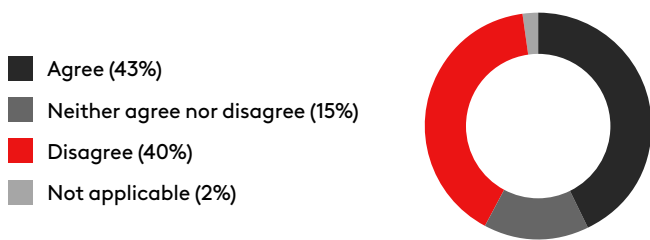
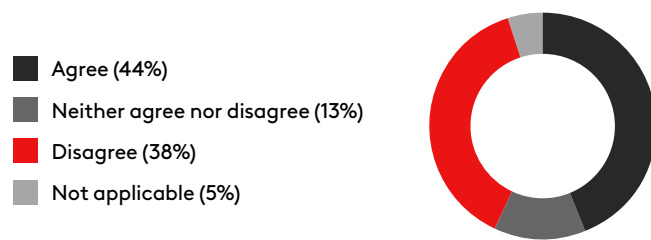


FIGURE 9

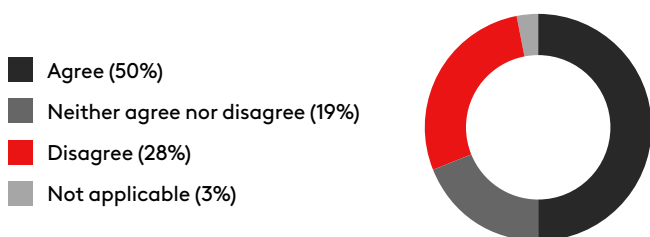
A lack of management training at my workplace contributes to lost productivity:



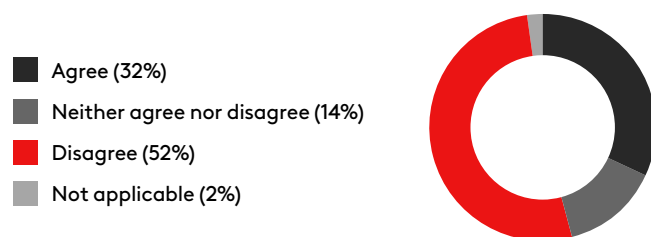
I have previously left a job because of a bad manager with a lack of leadership skills:



I would consider leaving my job because of a bad manager with a lack of leadership skills:



I have not received adequate training from my organization to keep up with the pace of change driven by AI:



These perceptions point to a broader lack of structured leadership development, which may hinder organizational performance and limit leaders' ability to manage teams effectively.

And the costs are tangible. 43% link insufficient management training to lost productivity. Retention risk is high: 44% have left a job due to a manager's lack of leadership skills, and half (50%) say they would consider doing so in the future, highlighting heightened sensitivity to leadership quality.

The rise of AI further exposes training gaps at senior levels. 32% say they haven't received enough training to keep pace with AI-driven changes, and 29% feel unprepared to meet board-level expectations. These figures underline the urgent need for targeted, ongoing learning initiatives for technical teams and all leadership levels.

32%

OF RESPONDENTS AGREE THEY HAVEN'T RECEIVED ENOUGH TRAINING TO KEEP UP WITH AI-DRIVEN CHANGES

As AI transforms roles and decision-making, training must be viewed not as a support function but as an essential investment. Organizations that embed learning into their culture and prioritize both management development and AI upskilling will be better positioned to maintain a competitive edge and attract and retain top talent.



Manager capability is a first-order dependency for AI outcomes. Build manager education into every initiative (AI literacy + product operating model) and track time-to-competence alongside time-to-value.

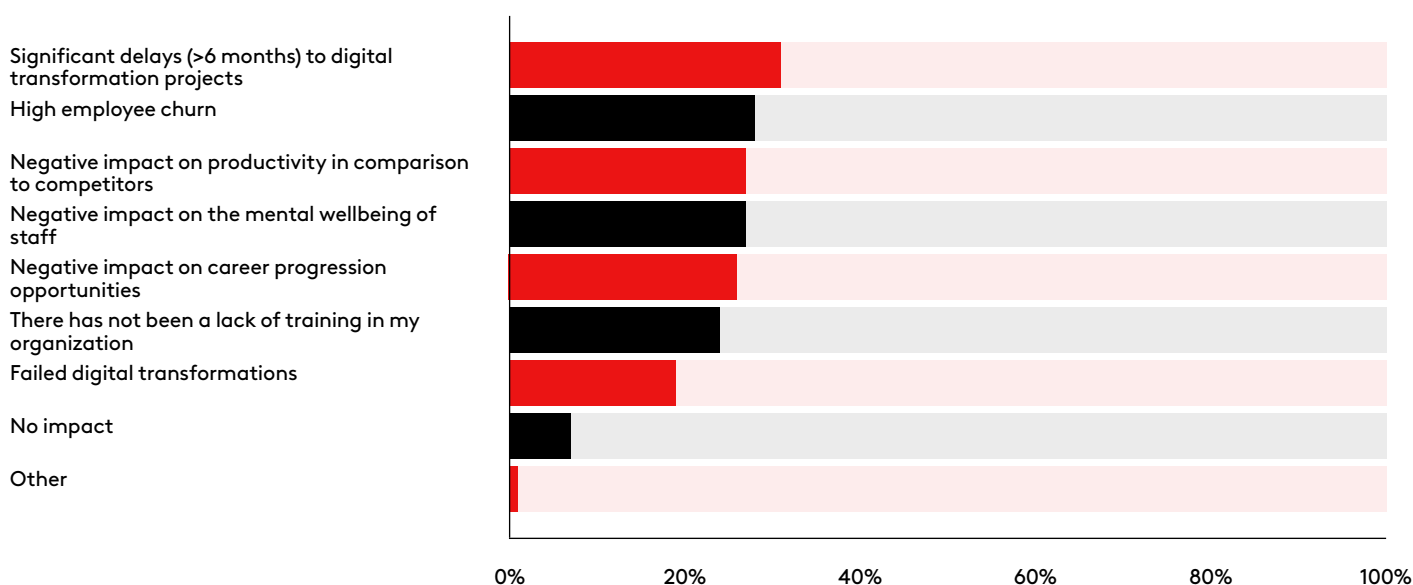
Consequences of inadequate training

Training gaps are already dragging performance. 31% report significant delays (>6 months) to digital transformation projects, and 28% cite high employee churn.

Beyond delays and turnover, the negative impacts extend across the business. 27% point to lower productivity compared to competitors, 27% to declines in staff mental well-being, 26% to reduced career progression opportunities and 19% observe the complete failure of digital transformation efforts.

FIGURE 10

What impact(s) has your organization experienced over the last 12 months as a result of a lack of training?



These findings expose the hidden cost of underinvesting in training. Only 24% report no training gap, and just 7% see no impact. For most organizations, the consequences are already clear: slower change, weaker productivity, higher churn, declining employee well-being, and growth. And in some cases, failure of critical programs. Put simply, without structured learning and development, ambition outpaces the capacity to deliver.



Underinvestment is already priced into delays, churn, and failed programs. Treat training as part of the plan of record – funded, scheduled, and reported like any other dependency.

Employee expectations around learning


Professional development has become a deciding factor in where people choose to work. 64% agree that the absence of adequate training programs would discourage them from applying, making learning and development central to employer appeal.

AI has raised the bar: 70% of respondents agree that the rise of AI has made them pay closer attention to the training programs employers offer, suggesting a marginally stronger sensitivity to AI-driven change among workers.

70%

OF RESPONDENTS AGREE THAT THE RISE OF AI HAS MADE THEM PAY CLOSER ATTENTION TO THE TRAINING PROGRAMS EMPLOYERS OFFER

Responsibility is expected to sit with employers, without absolving individuals. 81% agree it's the employer's responsibility to upskill staff, while 59% agree employees also share responsibility for their own development.



“Technology can accelerate, but people create meaningful change. Today’s best talent expects continuous learning and growth – and organizations that provide it are positioned for resiliency and stronger outcomes.”

Aldis Ērglis
Chief AI Officer, Emergn

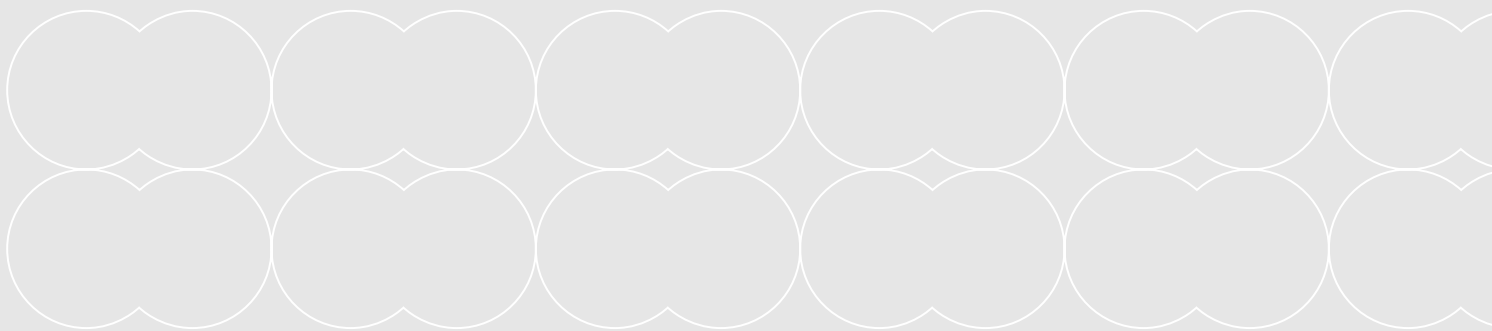


FIGURE 11

It is the responsibility of the employer to upskill staff:

- Agree (81%)
- Neither agree nor disagree (15%)
- Disagree (4%)

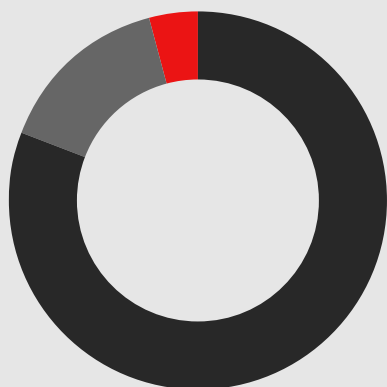


FIGURE 12

It is the responsibility of employees to upskill themselves:

- Agree (59%)
- Neither agree nor disagree (26%)
- Disagree (15%)



Investment pays back in loyalty. An overwhelming 89% of respondents state they would be more loyal to an employer that invests in their upskilling, linking development directly to retention and engagement.

Beyond skills development, training also underpins cultural and strategic outcomes: 83% of respondents agree that it is important for their organization to instill a product-centric mindset.

83%

OF RESPONDENTS AGREE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THEIR ORGANIZATION TO INSTILL A PRODUCT-CENTRIC MINDSET

Learning is more than skills enablement; it's a strategic lever for attracting talent, retaining teams, and differentiating in the market. As AI reshapes work, organizations that invest in upskilling build more resilient, adaptable, and future-ready workforces.



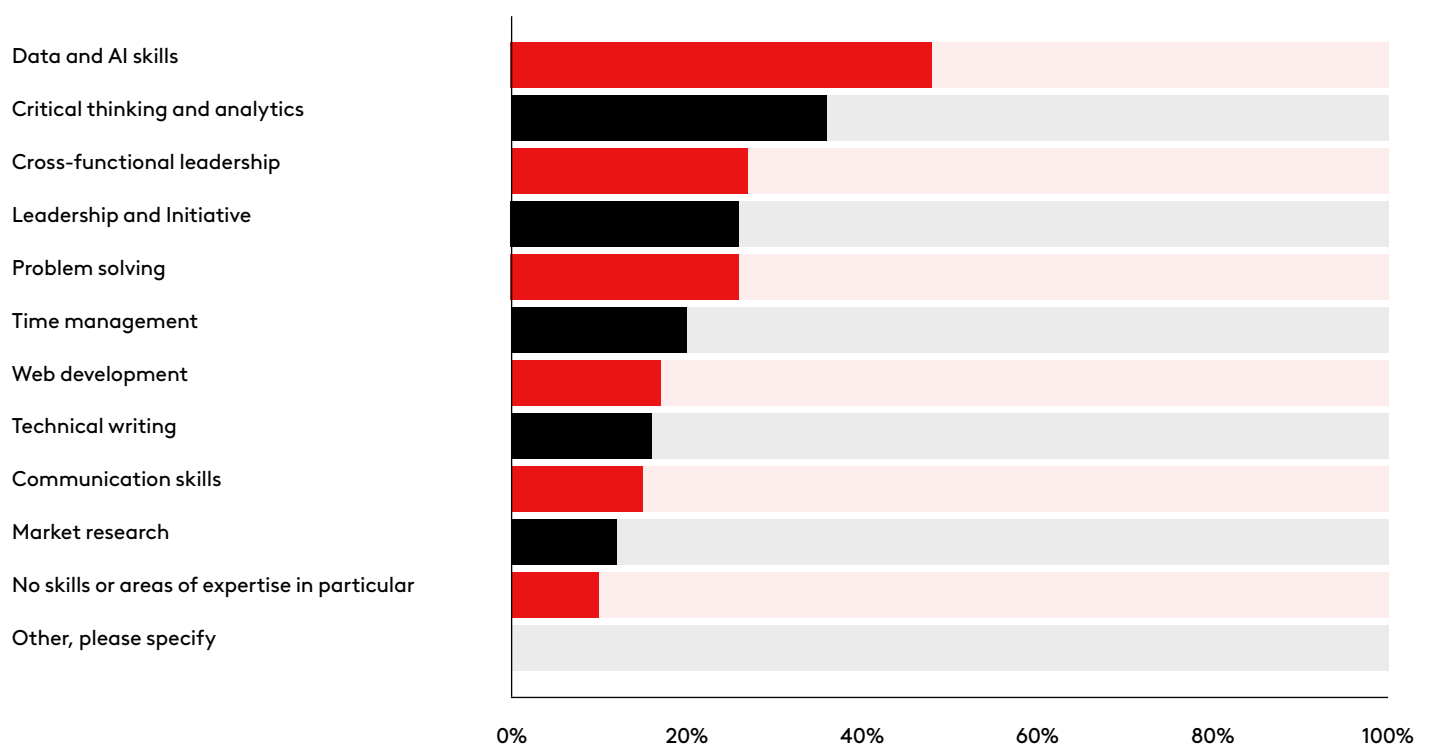
Talent selects for employers that invest in skills and product-centric behaviors. Make the training offer visible and reward teams for measurable product outcomes, not course hours.

Talent shortages in product management

As organizations accelerate their AI initiatives, talent shortages within product management teams are becoming increasingly apparent. The hardest to hire are data and AI skills (48%), with critical thinking and analytics (36%) close behind, signaling that teams need both technical fluency and strong judgment to ship AI-enabled work.

FIGURE 13

What skills/areas of expertise do you find most challenging to recruit for within your product management team?



48%

OF RESPONDENTS FIND DATA AND AI SKILLS THE MOST CHALLENGING TO RECRUIT FOR WITHIN THEIR PRODUCT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Leadership and problem-solving are also in short supply: cross-functional leadership (27%), leadership and initiative (26%), and problem solving (26%).

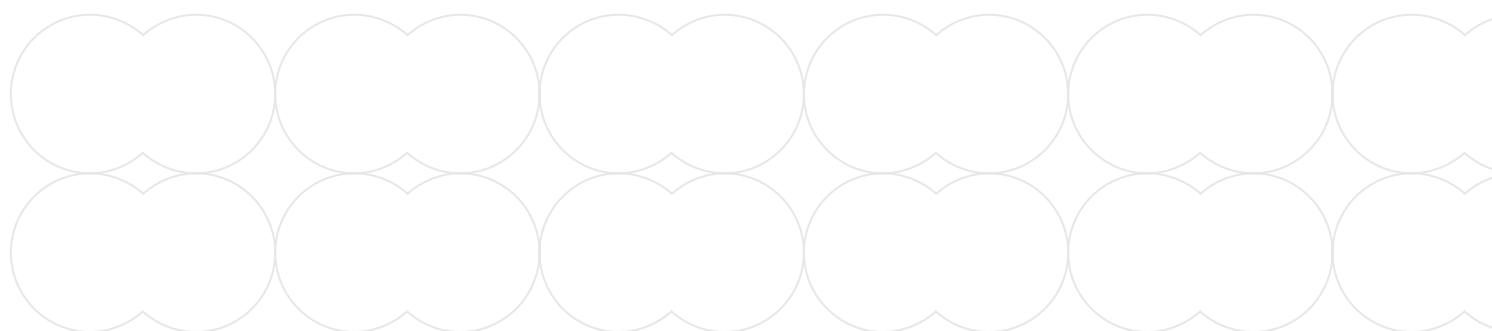
Core execution capabilities round out the list: time management (20%), web development (17%), technical writing (16%), communication skills (15%), and market research (12%). Only 10% say no skills are particularly difficult to recruit.

These talent shortages demand focused investment in recruiting and development – especially in data/AI fluency, critical thinking, and leadership – reinforced by teaching the craft of product management. Organizations that build diverse, capable product teams translate AI into shipped value, sustain innovation, and improve execution.

Ultimately, closing the product management talent gap is what separates AI ambition from results. The key is pairing data/AI fluency with product judgment, so these strengths reinforce each other. That means hiring in complementary pairs (data/AI + product strategy), growing internal pathways, and giving joint accountability for outcomes.



The more that companies invest in teaching their people the craft of product management, the greater their chances of maximizing their financial investments in emerging tech and optimizing their organizations. By reinvesting in their people, companies also increase retention and help them become as effective as possible.



Transformation fatigue and organizational change

Organizations continue to view transformation as essential, and more so than last year. 83% agree transformation projects are crucial to staying competitive (70% in 2024). Yet awareness hasn't kept pace: 31% feel uninformed about the objectives and ambitions of recent initiatives (25% in 2024).

FIGURE 14

Agree that transformation projects are crucial for staying competitive in today's environment:



Feel uninformed about the objectives and ambitions of recent transformation projects:



Transformation fatigue is easing, but still material: 50% report experiencing fatigue from frequent organizational changes (58% in 2024). 44% say the frequency of projects is too high, and 45% report burnout from ongoing change (58% in 2024). AI is part of the pressure: 55% link transformation fatigue to the rise of AI initiatives.

FIGURE 15

Report experiencing transformation fatigue due to frequent organizational changes:



Felt burnout due to the ongoing changes at work:



“Transformation fatigue isn’t burnout; it’s when teams stop adapting. The best product-led organizations don’t let that happen. They build environments where people can learn fast, adjust, and keep moving. That’s how you win at continuous change.”

Alex Adamopoulos
Chairman and CEO, Emergn

Change remains a retention risk, though improving. 36% would consider leaving their job due to organizational changes (49% in 2024).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, leadership accountability and execution quality matter. 41% agree leadership contributed to project failures, 42% report insufficient training and support during transformation, and 37% see external consultancies as contributors to challenges. The signal: transformation fatigue is less about the fact of change and more about how change is led, i.e., clarity of goals, pacing, communication, and support.

42%

OF RESPONDENTS REPORT EXPERIENCING INSUFFICIENT TRAINING AND SUPPORT DURING TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES

External partners can amplify complexity when roles are unclear or change is paced poorly: 37% of respondents say consultancies have contributed to challenges. The answer isn’t no partners, it’s the right partner in the right role: embedded behind internal product leadership, focused on capability transfer, governed by outcome-based measures, and bounded by clear exit criteria. As AI accelerates change, organizations that use partners to de-risk delivery and build internal muscle, rather than outsource ownership, sustain momentum without adding fatigue.

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Fatigue reflects poor clarity, cadence, and capacity; not the fact of change. Cap concurrent initiatives, publish legible goals, and hold short learning reviews that adjust the plan based on evidence.

Strategic alignment and AI definitions

Progress is real, but the vision-to-execution gap persists. Many organizations now say they've clarified what AI means for the business and put the right structures in place: 85% report a clear, well-understood AI definition, 82% say their portfolio management strategy supports a product operating model, and 71% have translated that definition into targeted, outcome-aligned solutions.

85%

OF RESPONDENTS SAY THEIR ORGANIZATION HAS A CLEAR AND WELL-UNDERSTOOD DEFINITION OF AI SPECIFIC TO THEIR BUSINESS

However, taken alongside earlier findings (expectations outpacing delivery, slipping timelines, and enablement gaps), the picture is more nuanced. Definitions and portfolio structures are in place, but consistent, scalable execution remains uneven. In many organizations, these elements may be codified, but not yet practiced consistently across teams and funding decisions. The differentiator now is translating intent into repeatable, outcome-linked delivery through a product operating model that funds capabilities, governs for experimentation, and builds the right enablement.

71%

OF RESPONDENTS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY TURNED THAT DEFINITION INTO TARGETED SOLUTIONS ALIGNED WITH BUSINESS OUTCOMES

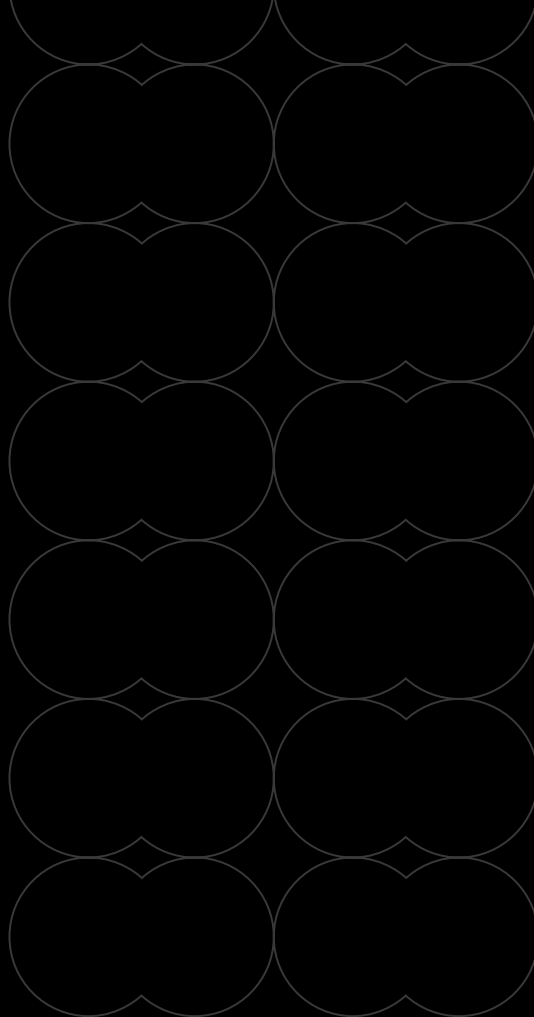
For business leaders, the message is clear. AI success requires more than just technological capability; it depends on clear definitions, tight alignment, and an operating model that links innovation directly to outcomes. Those who can implement AI within a product-focused framework will be best positioned to lead the next wave of transformation. Organizations that implement AI within a product-focused framework will be best positioned to lead the next wave of transformation because they build skilled teams, adapt quickly, and hold themselves accountable to measurable results.



Definitions are widespread; repeatable execution isn't. Connect definitions to funding, enduring teams, and shared dashboards of customer, operational, and financial measures for every AI initiative.

Methodology

This research was conducted by Censuswide, surveying 751 respondents aged 21+ across the US and UK. Participants included CEOs, CTOs, COOs, Project Managers, Project Leads, Project Coordinators, Change Management Coordinators, Transformation Consultants, and departmental managers responsible for operational change. All respondents had at least five years' experience and worked in companies with 1,000+ employees and annual revenue exceeding \$500M. Data collection took place between 26 June and 3 July 2025. Censuswide complies with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, follows ESOMAR principles, and is a member of both the Market Research Society and the British Polling Council.



About Emergn

Emergn improves the way people and companies work. Forever. Emergn works with the world's most respected businesses – including Fortune 500, FTSE 100, and Global 2000 companies – to help them make the shift from project- to product-centered organizations in how they shape, build, and deliver their products and services, including capability development of their teams using a proven philosophy called Value, Flow, Quality (VFQ).

VFQ underpins Praxis, the first product development platform designed for how product teams actually work and learn. Powered by Stella, Emergn's AI product coach, Praxis provides product leaders and their teams with the expert coaching and tools to build products that succeed in the market.

Combining AI-powered guidance, tools that help you build strategy and understand customers, and Emergn's proven knowledge base, Praxis focuses on the deep product work that creates products customers love and competitors can't match.

Emergn has its US headquarters in Boston, and its EMEA headquarters in London.

For more information, visit Emergn's website and follow Emergn on LinkedIn.

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