

2026 Conexus AI Benchmarking Report

Industry Survey Results and Analysis

Est. Read Time: 10 to 12 minutes

For Indiana manufacturing and logistics leaders

Key Findings

“Small and mid-size companies have the most to gain from AI and the most to lose by falling behind.” Jay Wirts, President and CEO, Conexus Indiana

This report measures how far AI has reached Indiana’s small and mid-size manufacturing and logistics companies, and where they trail larger ones. Small and mid-size companies make up most of Indiana manufacturing and logistics, and Conexus built this report for them. When they cannot adopt AI, their productivity stalls and the state’s competitiveness suffers. Our goal is to keep the gap between them and larger companies tight.

- 1 Small companies trail on putting AI into production, not on interest.** 21% of small companies run AI in production or are scaling it, against 48% of large companies. Small companies experiment at a higher rate than large ones, 41% against 28%. They are simply not converting experiments into production.
- 2 AI is adding and transforming jobs, not cutting them.** 20% of small companies expect AI to grow headcount, against 4% of large companies, which lean toward redeploying existing staff. No company in either group selected the option to reduce headcount. In advanced manufacturing and logistics, Indiana’s largest industry, companies see AI as a growth tool.
- 3 Large companies get AI through tools they already license.** 76% of large companies use Microsoft Copilot, available through their Microsoft 365 agreements. 69% of small companies use ChatGPT, which any employee can start using with an individual account. The underlying technology is similar. The difference is who controls it.
- 4 Early investment is small.** 57% of catalogued projects run by small companies cost under \$25,000 in the first year, against 18% of large-company projects. The budget barrier is real, but the threshold is low enough that targeted support can move a company to a first project.
- 5 The budget wall is twice as high for small companies.** 34% of small companies cite budget as a barrier, against 16% of large companies. The companies that need the productivity gains most can least afford the entry cost.

See how your company compares.

Take the Assessment

Survey Approach

This is a self-reported survey with contextual analysis, not a formal research study. Indiana manufacturing and logistics companies answered questions about where they stand on AI, what they plan to spend, and what stands in their way. The same survey collected project-level detail on cost, integration, data preparation, timing, and results. One part captures intent. The other captures execution.

Conexus treats manufacturing and logistics as a single sector, and this report follows that convention. The survey continues as the Conexus AI Maturity Assessment, which asks more detailed questions and gives each company an immediate Conexus AI Maturity Score. See [How to Compare Yourself](#).

How this report splits the data. Every figure in this report is reported three ways: all companies, small companies (fewer than 150 Indiana employees), and large companies.

Respondents are concentrated at the senior level, with 61% in executive roles.

Conexus AI Maturity Assessment

Every company that completes the Conexus AI Maturity Assessment receives a Conexus AI Maturity Score from 0 to 100. The score measures three AI Use Dimensions:

Depth of use. How far AI has moved into daily operations: adoption stage, the number of projects live and in pilot, the functions and types of AI in use, how often employees use AI, and how the company sources it.

Commitment. What sits behind the effort: a strategy and the business outcomes it names, investment and funding, ownership, whether executives use AI and expect their teams to, workforce planning, and whether the company measures results.

Readiness. What stands in the way and what supports progress: barriers, employee training and upskilling, day-to-day management of AI, and the range of goals the company pursues.

Average Conexus AI Maturity Score

Group	Average Score
Large companies	62
Small companies	48
Gap	14 points

Watching the gap

A shrinking gap means AI is reaching small companies. A growing gap means large companies are pulling ahead. The three AI Use Dimensions show what drives any change. For example, the gap could shrink because small-company Readiness rises while Depth of use holds steady.

Conexus will update the averages as new responses arrive, and future editions of this report will show whether the gap is narrowing.

How to Compare Yourself

Take the Conexus AI Maturity Assessment using the button below. When you finish, you see:

- Your Conexus AI Maturity Score next to the small and large company averages.
- Your score in each of the three AI Use Dimensions, with your biggest opportunity highlighted.
- Conexus and IN AI resources matched to your answers.
- A ready-to-use prompt for Conductor, the Conexus AI assistant, built around your weakest dimension.

Retake the assessment every six to twelve months, or after you finish a major AI project, to track your progress. The assessment also lets you describe up to three AI projects.

Take the Assessment

SECTION 1

Where Indiana AML Companies Stand

How the stages are defined. Scaling: multiple AI solutions deployed and actively expanding. Deploying: at least one AI solution live in production. Experimenting: one or more pilots or proofs of concept underway. Exploring: researching options, with no active projects yet. Not started: no AI in use and not actively exploring.

Across all respondents, 37% run pilots or proofs of concept, 27% are researching options without an active project, 14% have at least one solution live, and 14% are scaling multiple solutions. 7% report no AI use and no plans to adopt it.

Small companies: 21% are deploying or scaling. 41% are experimenting and 29% are exploring. 10% have not started at all.

Large companies: 48% are deploying or scaling, more than double the small-company rate. 28% are experimenting, and none report having not started.

Productivity is the number one driver of AI adoption, named by 80% overall. Faster decisions follow at 54%, then cost reduction at 50% and quality at 46%. Safety ranks last at 10%. The reasons differ little by size: 73% of small companies and 96% of large companies name productivity.

Key Insight

The gap is in production and scale, not curiosity.

Small companies experiment more than large ones, 41% against 28%. They reach production at less than half the rate, 21% against 48%. Both groups want the same thing, with productivity the top goal for 73% of small companies and 96% of large companies. The sector loses the productivity gain at the step between a pilot and a live system, not at the starting line.

Figure 1: Current AI Adoption Stage: All Companies

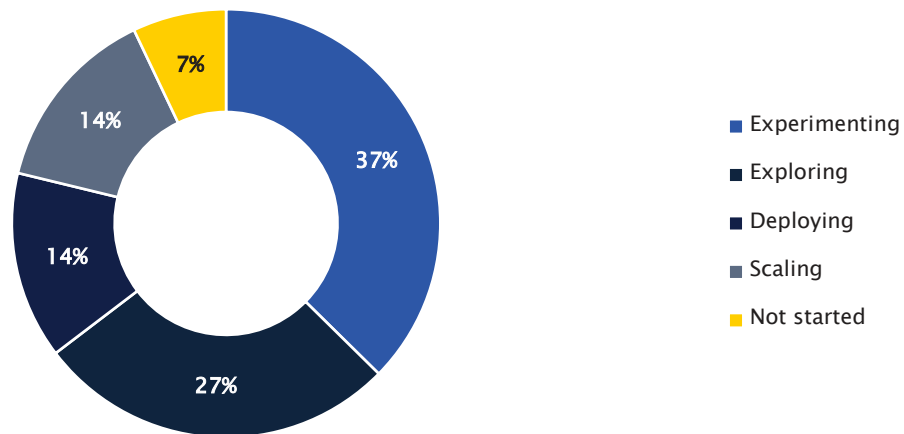


Figure 1. Percent of respondents.

Figure 2: Current AI Adoption Stage: Small Companies

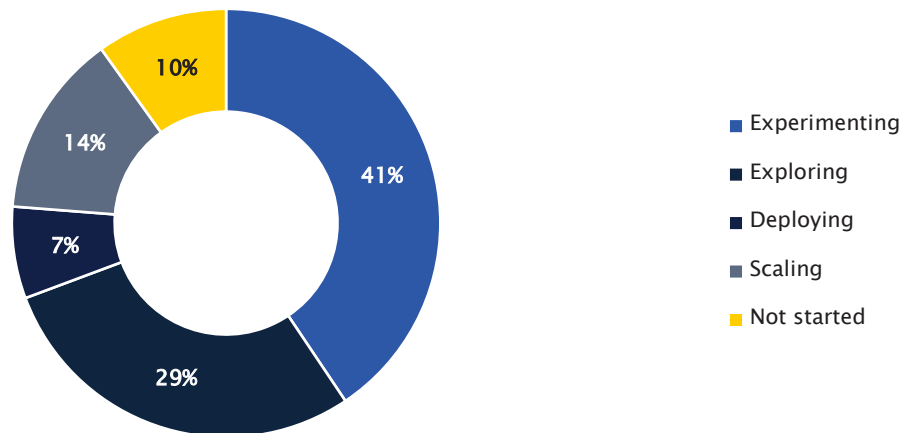


Figure 2. Percent of respondents.

Figure 3: Current AI Adoption Stage: Large Companies

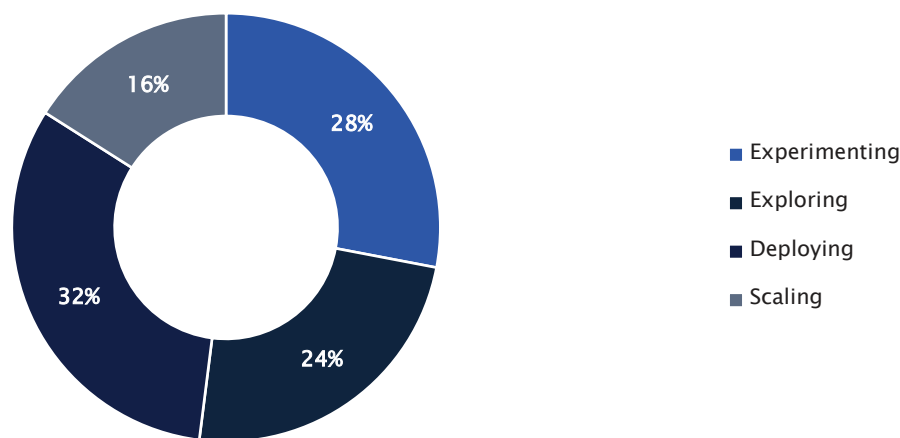


Figure 3. Percent of respondents.

Figure 4: Main Goals for AI Adoption: All Companies

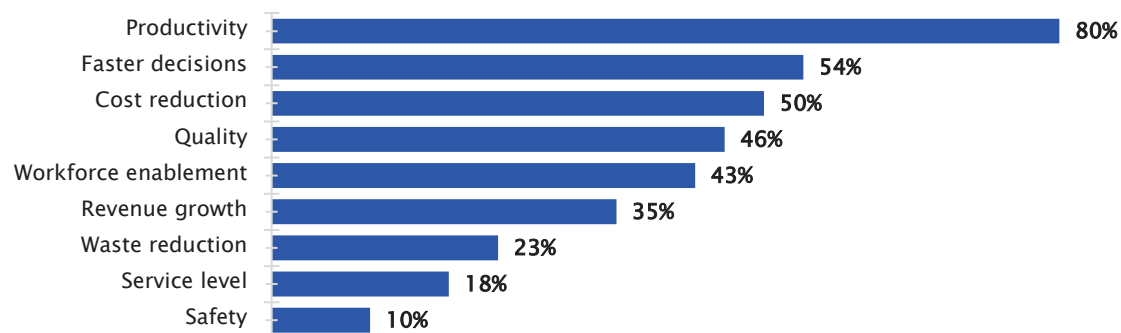


Figure 4. Percent of respondents selecting each goal. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 5: Main Goals for AI Adoption: Small Companies

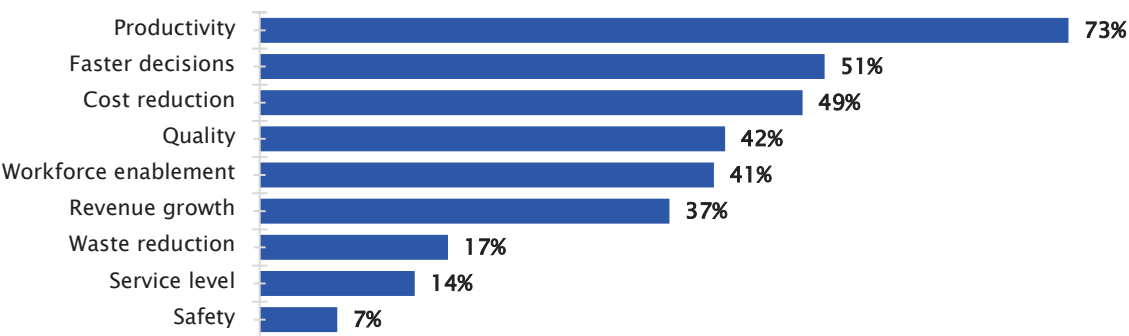


Figure 5. Percent of respondents selecting each goal. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 6: Main Goals for AI Adoption: Large Companies

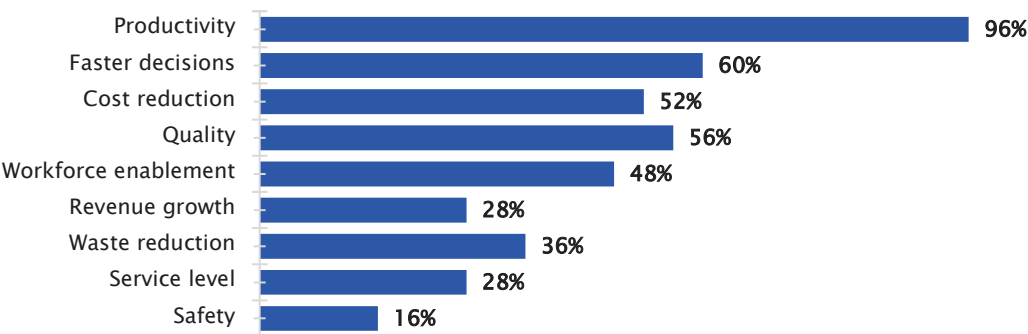


Figure 6. Percent of respondents selecting each goal. Respondents could select more than one.

SECTION 2

Investment and Workforce

Size drives the budget, not the intent, to invest in AI.

Across all respondents, 74% plan to raise AI spending in the next 12 months. 30% expect a moderate increase, 23% a significant one, and 21% a slight one. 15% have no defined AI budget.

Small companies: 67% plan an increase, but 17% have no defined AI budget and 15% will hold spending flat.

Large companies: 88% plan an increase, and none plan to hold spending flat. 28% expect a significant increase above 25%.

The budget wall. 34% of small companies name budget as a barrier against 16% of large companies. Intent to spend is nearly universal in both groups. The difference is whether the money exists to act on it.

Key Insight

Willingness to invest is not the constraint.

Both groups plan to spend more, and the gap in intent is modest. The gap in capacity is not: 17% of small companies have no AI budget line at all and 15% will hold spending flat, while no large company plans to hold flat. Meanwhile small companies are five times more likely to say AI will grow headcount, 20% against 4%. The companies expecting AI-driven growth are the ones least able to fund it.

Figure 7: Expected Change in AI Investment, Next 12 Months: All Companies

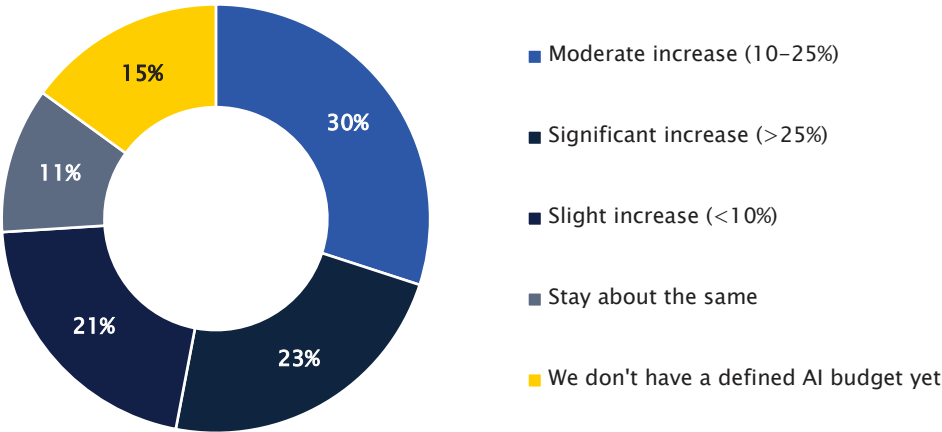


Figure 7. Percent of respondents.

Figure 8: Expected Change in AI Investment, Next 12 Months: Small Companies

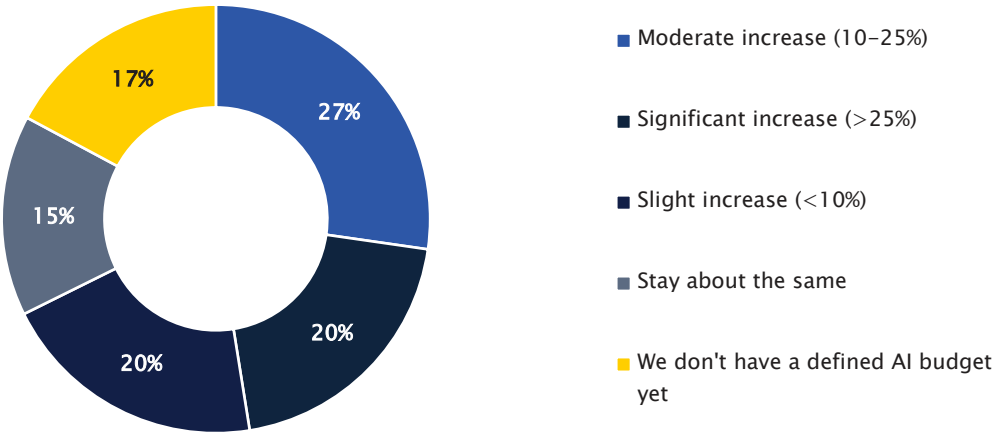


Figure 8. Percent of respondents.

Figure 9: Expected Change in AI Investment, Next 12 Months: Large Companies

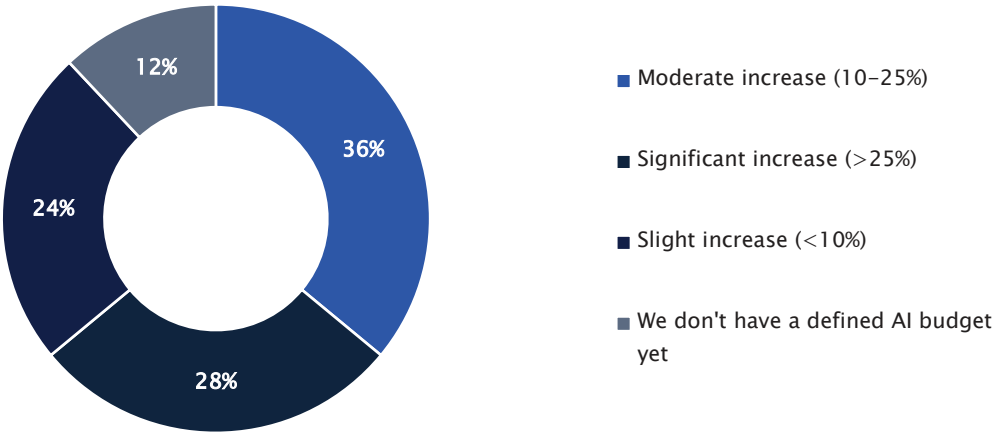


Figure 9. Percent of respondents.

AI is adding to the workforce, not subtracting from it.

Overall, 28% are redeploying people to higher-value work, 21% are holding headcount and doing more with the same team, and 15% are growing headcount because AI is enabling growth. 23% have no workforce strategy tied to AI yet.

Small companies: 20% expect to grow headcount, the highest rate of any group, while 30% have no workforce strategy tied to AI.

Large companies: 38% are redeploying and only 4% expect to grow headcount. 25% say it is too early to tell.

The survey offered a "reduce headcount" option. No company in either group selected it.

A note on these numbers. These answers describe stated intentions. They are not drawn from payroll records or hiring data. The absence of any "reduce headcount" response is a real signal about how Indiana companies think about AI, but it is a statement of intent rather than a measurement of employment.

Key Insight

Small companies are five times more likely to say AI will grow headcount (20% against 4%), while large companies lean toward redeploying existing staff. For a state carrying tens of thousands of unfilled manufacturing and logistics positions, that distinction matters: in the segment that employs most Hoosiers in this sector, companies currently see AI as a growth tool rather than a substitution tool. The risk is not job loss. It is that the companies expecting AI-driven growth are the same ones least able to fund the AI that would drive it.

Figure 10: Workforce Strategy as a Result of AI: All Companies

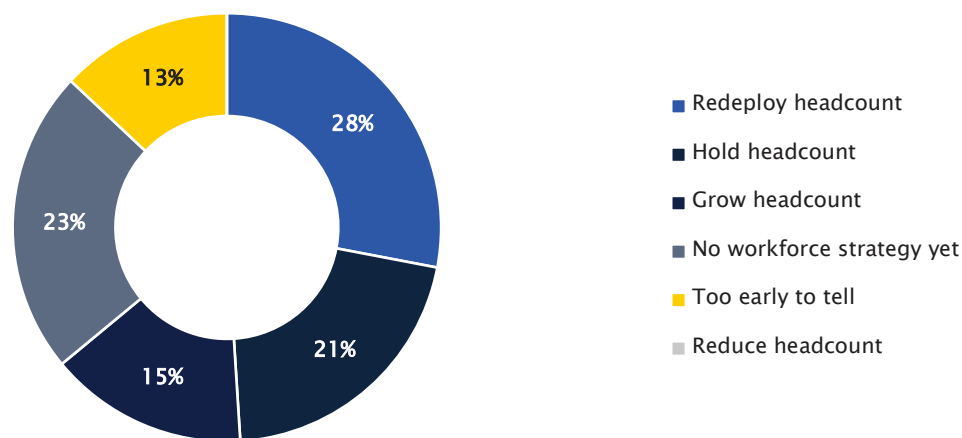


Figure 10. Percent of respondents answering the workforce question. No company selected "reduce headcount".

Figure 11: Workforce Strategy as a Result of AI: Small Companies

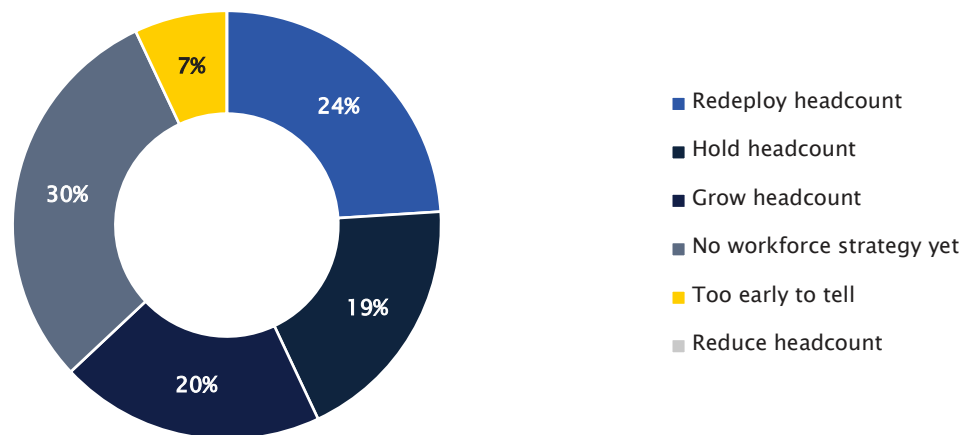


Figure 11. Percent of respondents answering the workforce question. No company selected "reduce headcount".

Figure 12: Workforce Strategy as a Result of AI: Large Companies

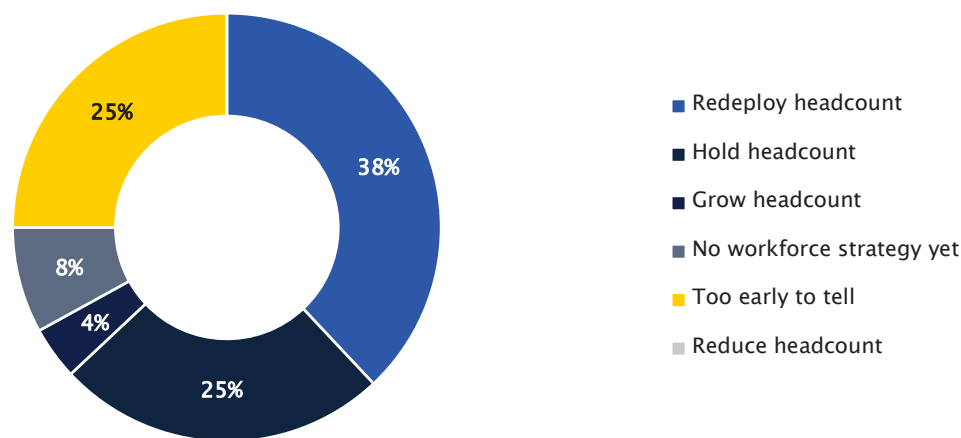


Figure 12. Percent of respondents answering the workforce question. No company selected "reduce headcount".

SECTION 3

How Companies Build, and What They Use

Overall, 40% develop AI with an internal team, 33% buy off-the-shelf products, and 31% use AI already embedded in platforms they own. 12% work with a systems integrator and 29% have no AI solution in use.

Small companies: 37% build in-house, but only 22% have access to embedded platform AI, and 31% have no AI solution at all.

Large companies: 52% use embedded platform AI, more than double the small-company rate, and 48% also build in-house.

The tools differ sharply. 69% of small companies use ChatGPT, their most common tool, against 52% of large companies. Large companies lead on Microsoft Copilot at 76% against 46%. Overall, ChatGPT is used by 64% and Copilot by 55%.

A caution on tool numbers. The survey asked which tools are in use, not who pays for them. General assistants show up at high rates partly because an employee can sign up with a personal account in minutes, with no purchase order and no IT review. Some of the usage above is licensed and governed. Some is not.

Key Insight

The tool gap is really an infrastructure gap.

52% of large companies get AI through platforms they already own, against 22% of small companies. Their AI arrives with the ERP, governed and paid for. Small companies without that foundation reach for what is available, which is why ChatGPT leads at 69% among them and Copilot leads at 76% among large companies. This is not a sophistication gap, but it carries a governance tail: company data may be moving through accounts nobody controls.

The governance gap follows. If manufacturers build their own tools on general-purpose assistants, and if a share of that usage runs on personal accounts, then AI enters these companies through the side door rather than the front. Companies with no owner, which is 18% of the field, have no way to know what is happening.

Figure 13: How Companies Source AI Solutions: All Companies

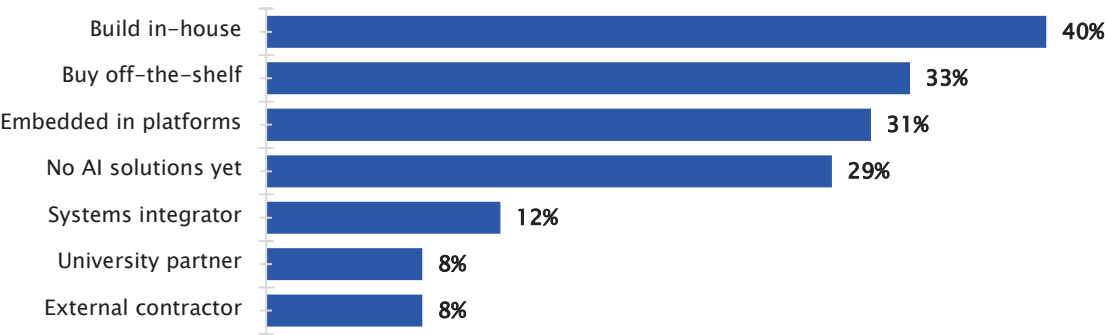


Figure 13. Percent of respondents selecting each sourcing method. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 14: How Companies Source AI Solutions: Small Companies

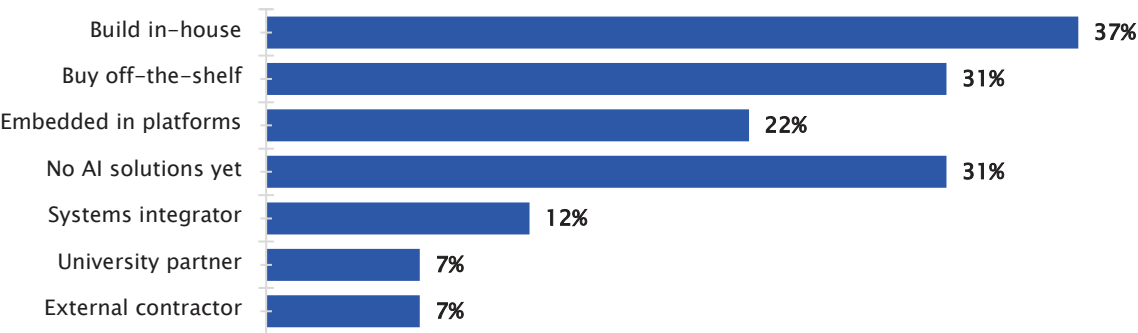


Figure 14. Percent of respondents selecting each sourcing method. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 15: How Companies Source AI Solutions: Large Companies

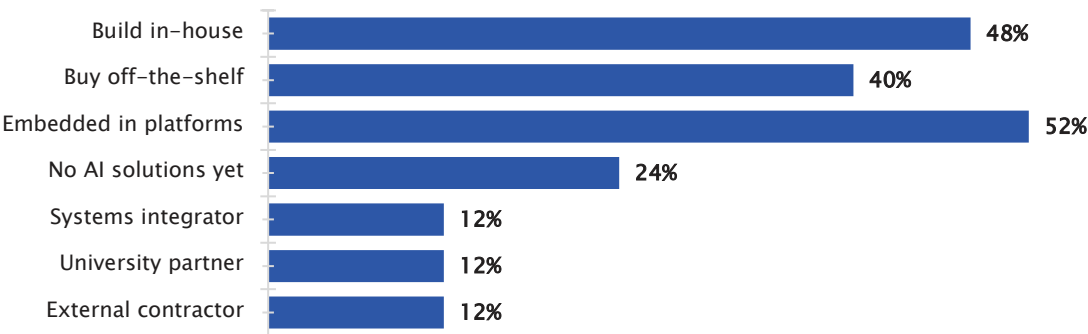


Figure 15. Percent of respondents selecting each sourcing method. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 16: AI Platforms and Tools in Use: All Companies

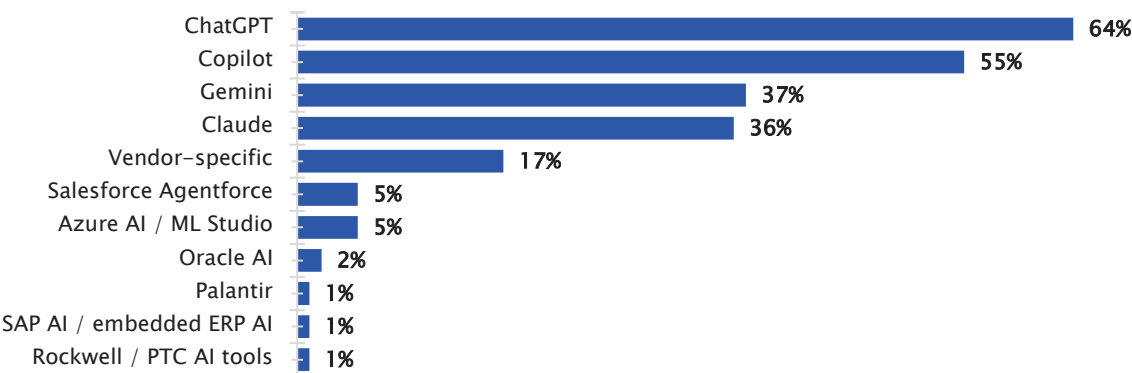


Figure 16. Percent of respondents using each tool. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 17: AI Platforms and Tools in Use: Small Companies

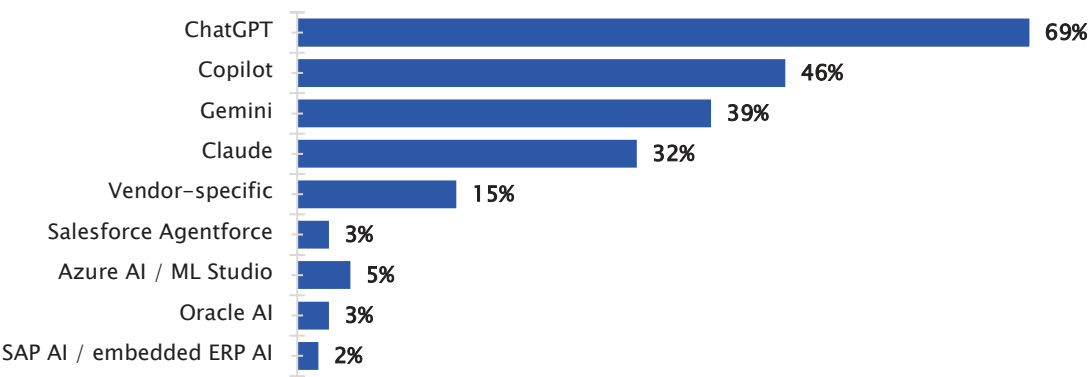


Figure 17. Percent of respondents using each tool. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 18: AI Platforms and Tools in Use: Large Companies

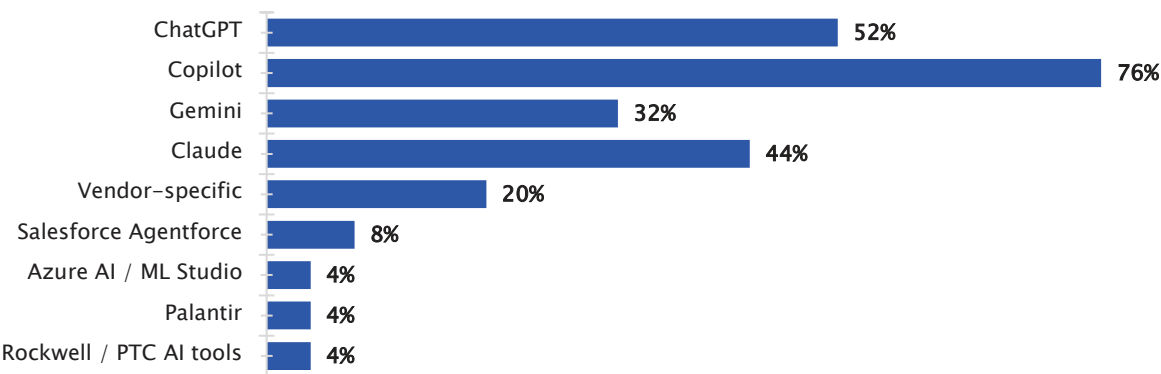


Figure 18. Percent of respondents using each tool. Respondents could select more than one.

SECTION 4

Inside the Projects

Source: the Conexus AI Use Case Catalog

The work sits close to production.

Operations and production accounts for 33% of catalogued projects, more than any other function. Sales and customer service follows at 13%, engineering and R&D at 12%, and supply chain and procurement at 9%.

Small companies concentrate their work. 42% of their projects target operations and production and another 17% target engineering and R&D.

Large companies spread wider, with 23% in operations and production and the rest distributed across quality inspection at 10%, maintenance at 8%, IT and cybersecurity at 6%, and HR at 4%.

Key Insight

Small companies aim AI at the production floor. Nearly 60% of their projects target making and designing things: 42% in operations and production, and 17% in engineering. Large companies spread their projects across support functions. Some project types rarely appear among small companies: predictive maintenance, supplier risk prediction, and computer vision inspection. All three depend on connected equipment data, which ties back to the infrastructure gap in Section 3.

Figure 19: Project Focus by Business Function: All Companies

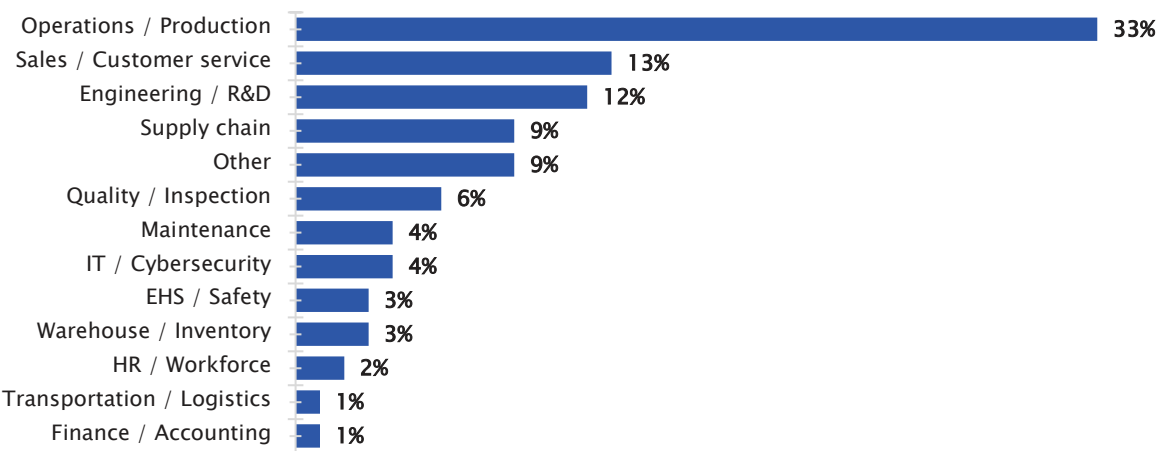


Figure 19. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 20: Project Focus by Business Function: Small Companies

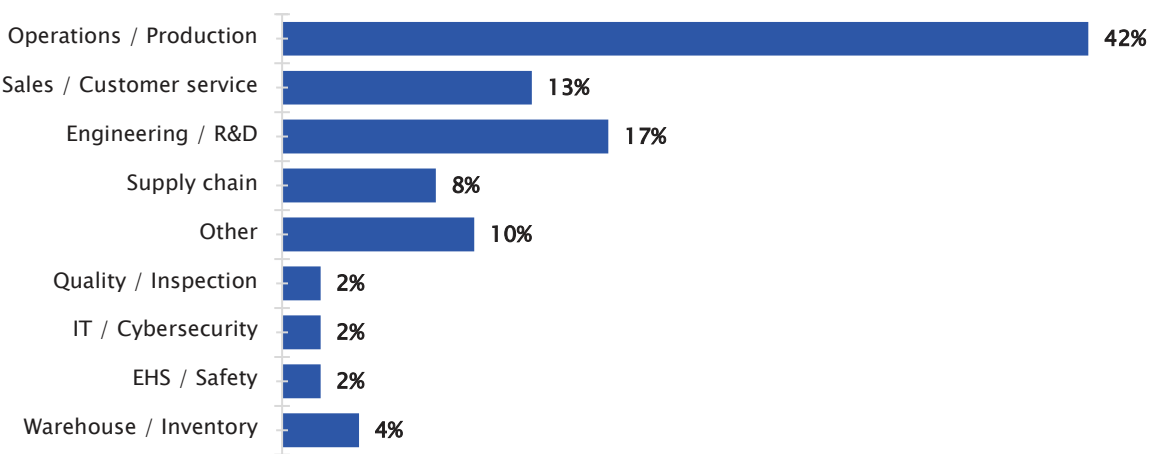


Figure 20. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 21: Project Focus by Business Function: Large Companies

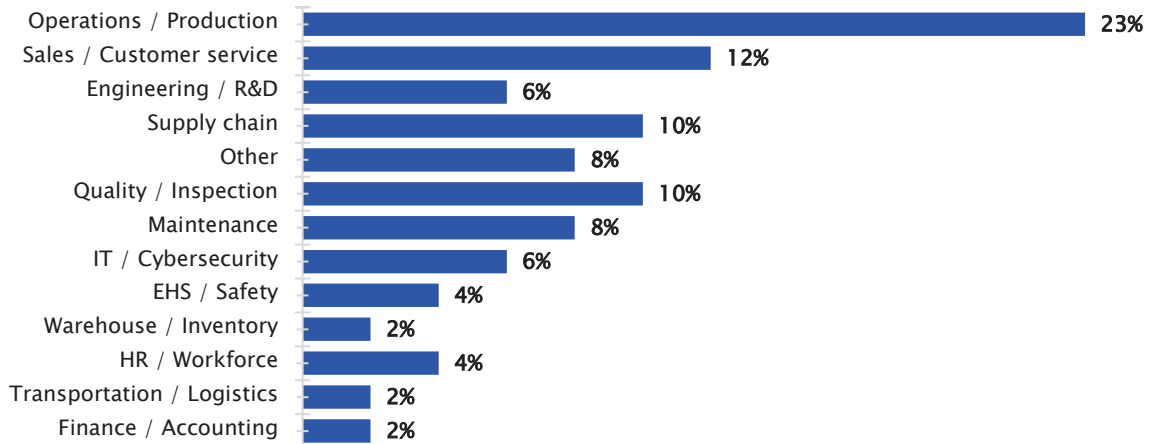


Figure 21. Percent of catalogued projects.

By project type, production scheduling and optimization leads overall at 17%, followed by general AI and LLM-powered tools at 14%.

Small companies lead with production scheduling at 21% and AI copilots for engineers at 10%.

Large companies lead with general AI tools at 15% and computer vision for quality inspection at 12%, against 4% of small-company projects.

Figure 22: Project Type: All Companies

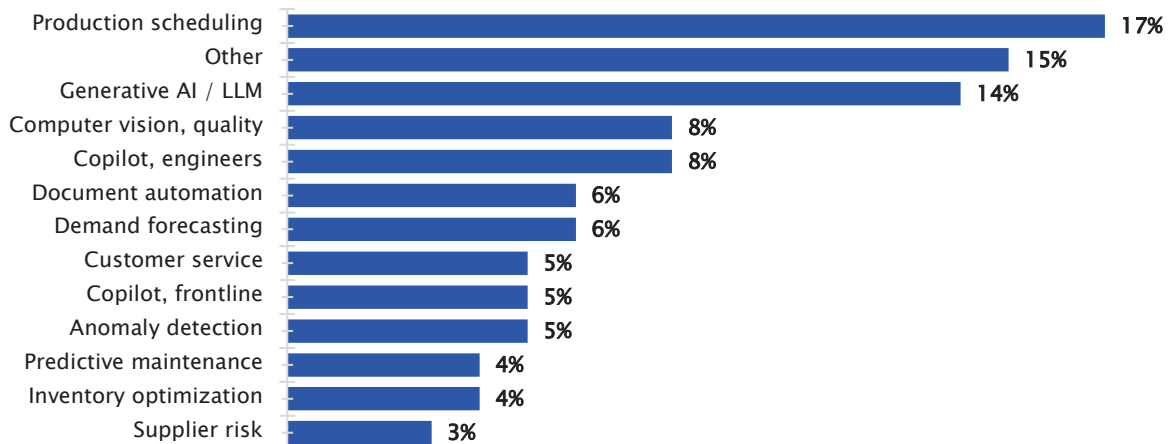


Figure 22. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 23: Project Type: Small Companies

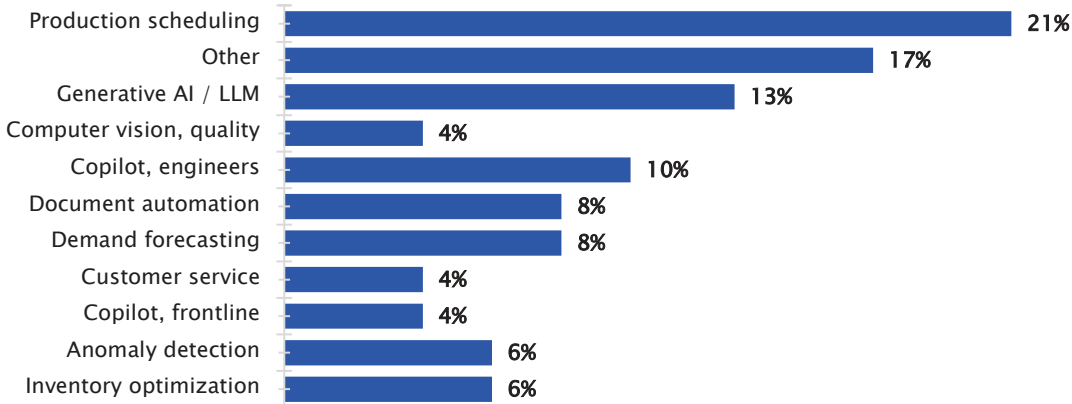


Figure 23. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 24: Project Type: Large Companies

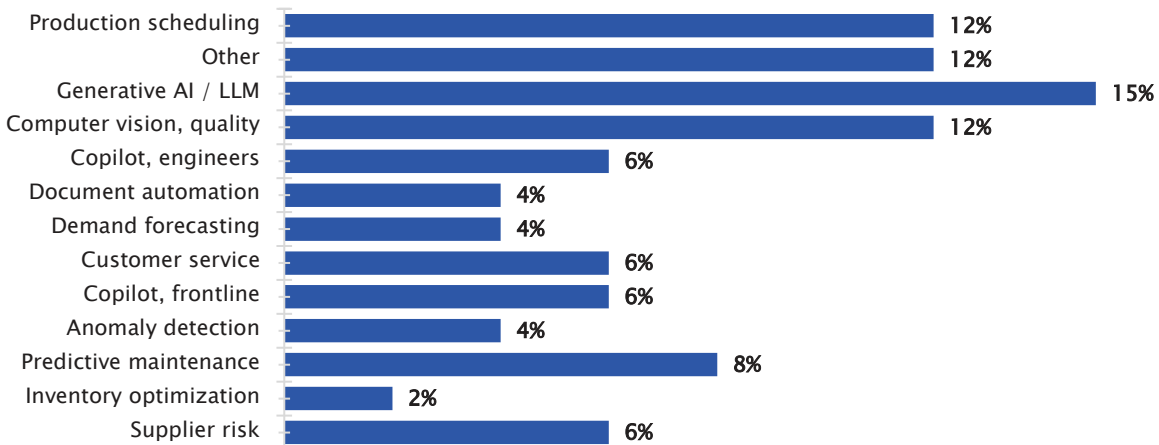


Figure 24. Percent of catalogued projects.

Small companies run cheaper projects.

Across all catalogued projects, 39% came in under \$25,000 in the first year and 8% exceeded \$150,000.

Small companies: 57% of their projects cost under \$25,000, and only 2% exceeded \$150,000.

Large companies: 18% cost under \$25,000, while 15% exceeded \$150,000 and 29% fell between \$25,000 and \$75,000.

The hardest step is the first one. Small companies name budget as a barrier at twice the rate of large companies, yet 57% of the projects they complete cost under \$25,000.

That makes moving from zero projects to one the most important gap in this report. A right-sized first project with a clear return is the most direct way to close it.

Figure 25: First-Year Project Cost: All Companies

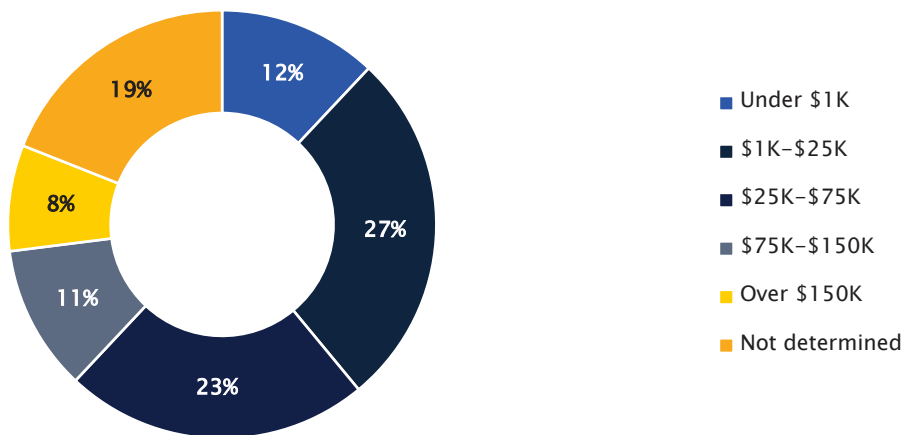


Figure 25. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 26: First-Year Project Cost: Small Companies

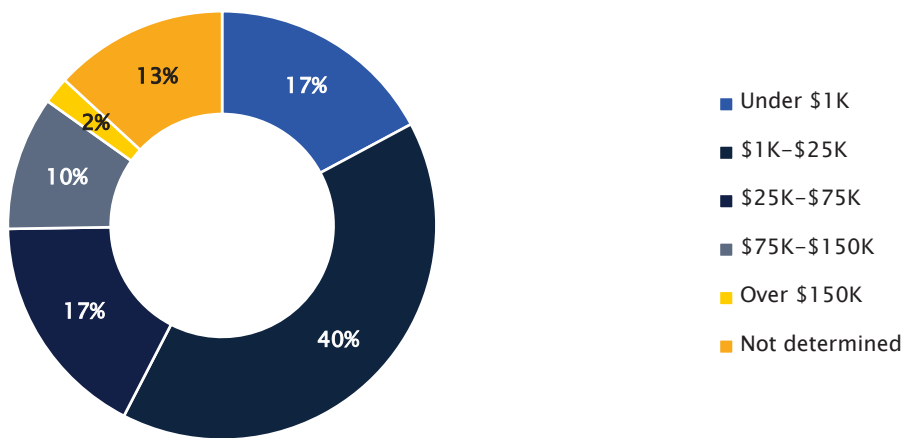


Figure 26. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 27: First-Year Project Cost: Large Companies

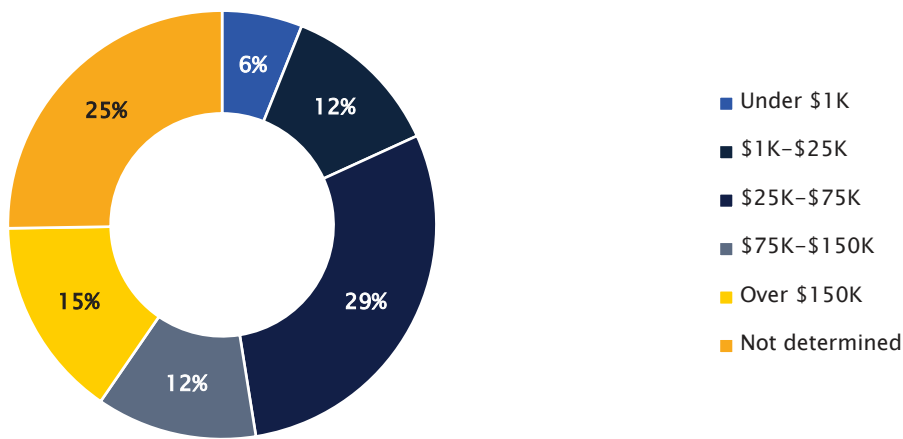


Figure 27. Percent of catalogued projects.

Small companies take on simpler, cleaner work.

Data preparation is the hidden cost across the catalog. Only 15% of projects found data ready to use. 36% needed minor cleanup and 35% required significant cleansing, labeling, or new data pipelines.

Small companies: 27% of their projects required significant data work, and 17% found data ready to use. On integration, 29% of their projects ran standalone with no integration at all.

Large companies: 44% required significant data work, and only 8% ran standalone. 38% connected three or more systems.

Figure 28: Data Preparation Required: All Companies

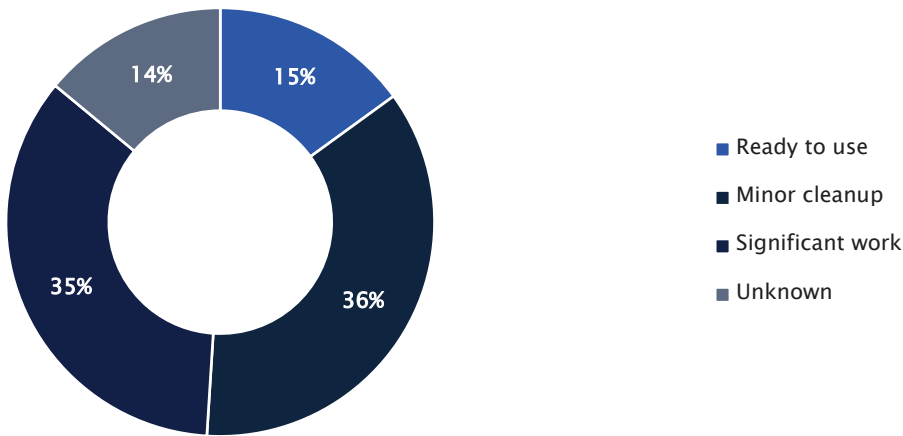


Figure 28. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 29: Data Preparation Required: Small Companies

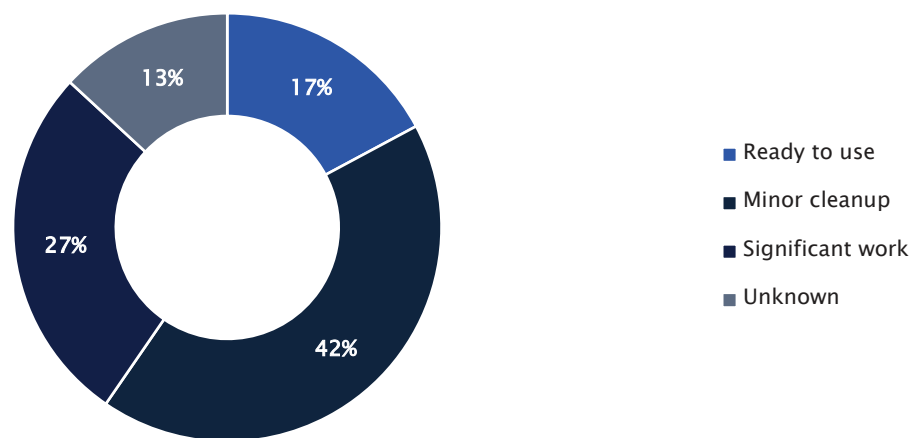


Figure 29. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 30: Data Preparation Required: Large Companies

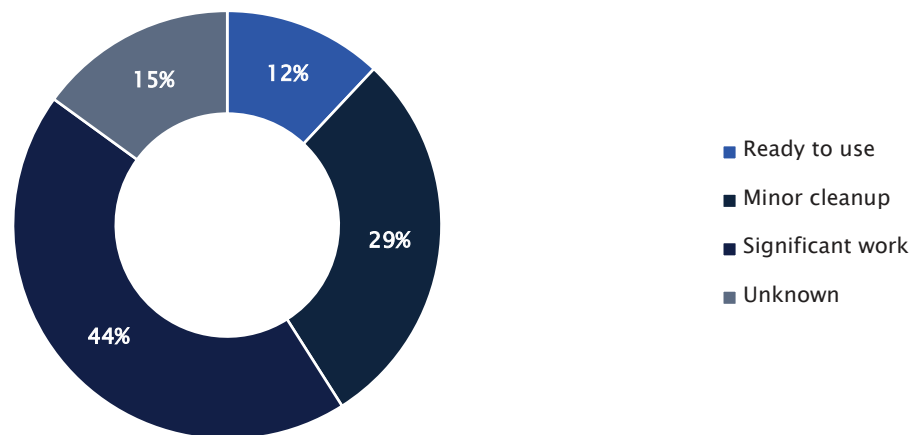


Figure 30. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 31: System Integration Required: All Companies

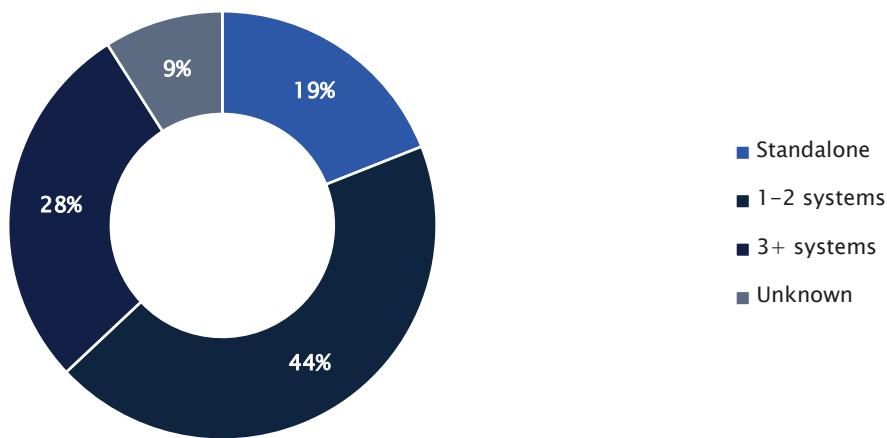


Figure 31. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 32: System Integration Required: Small Companies

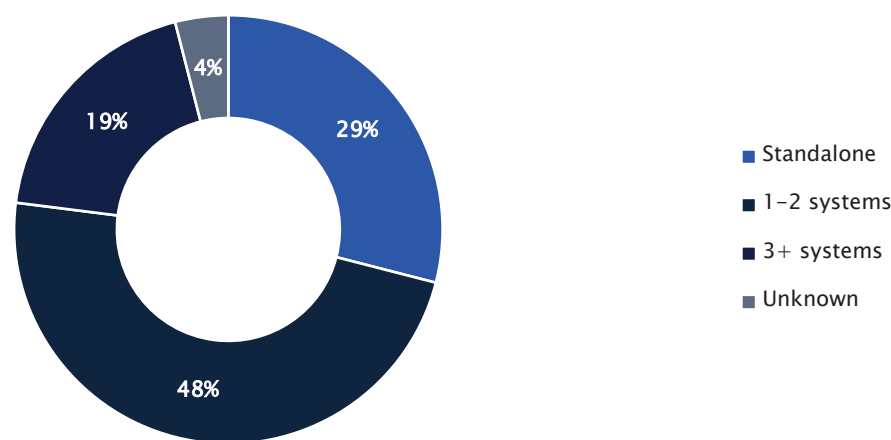


Figure 32. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 33: System Integration Required: Large Companies

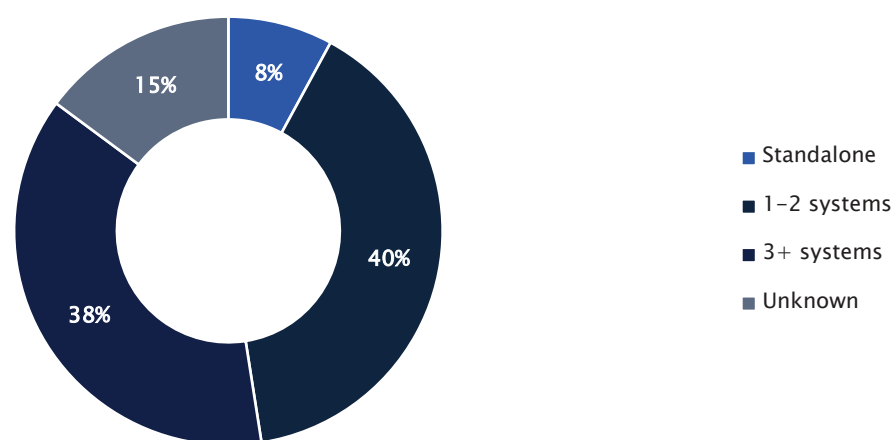


Figure 33. Percent of catalogued projects.

Small companies finish faster.

Across the catalog, 19% of projects produced a first usable result in under two months and 16% within two to four months. 39% remain in progress.

Small companies: 29% delivered a first result in under two months, and 27% remain in progress.

Large companies: 8% delivered in under two months, while 52% remain in progress, roughly double the small-company rate.

Figure 34: Time to First Usable Result: All Companies

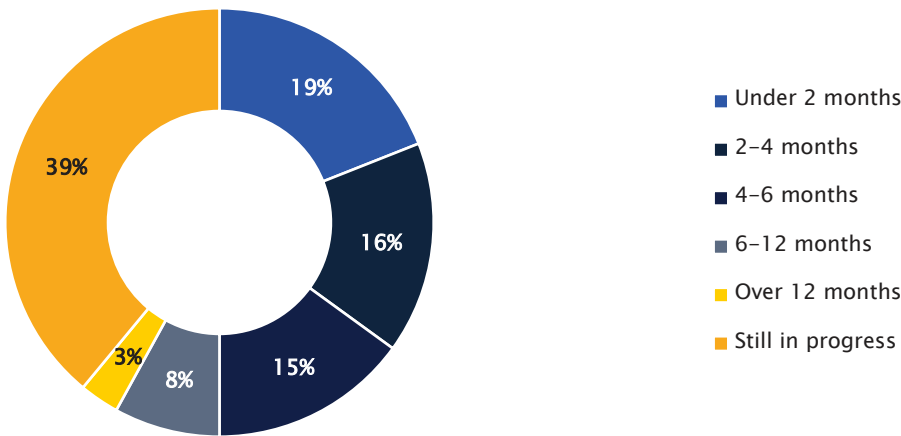


Figure 34. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 35: Time to First Usable Result: Small Companies

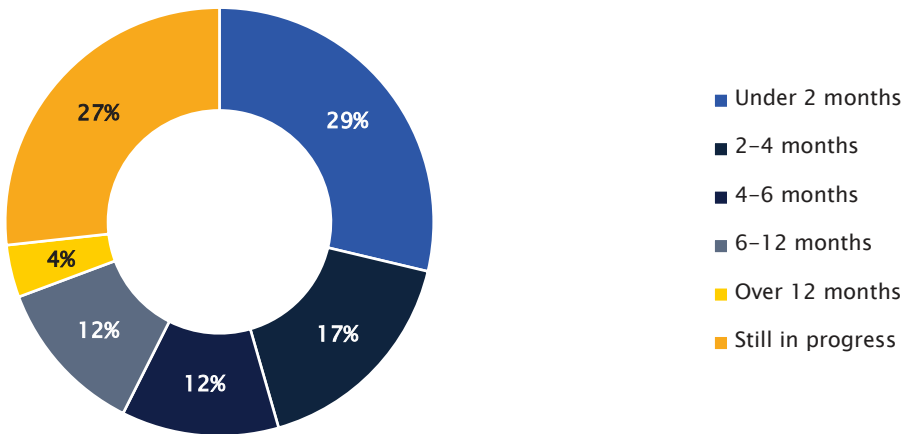


Figure 35. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 36: Time to First Usable Result: Large Companies

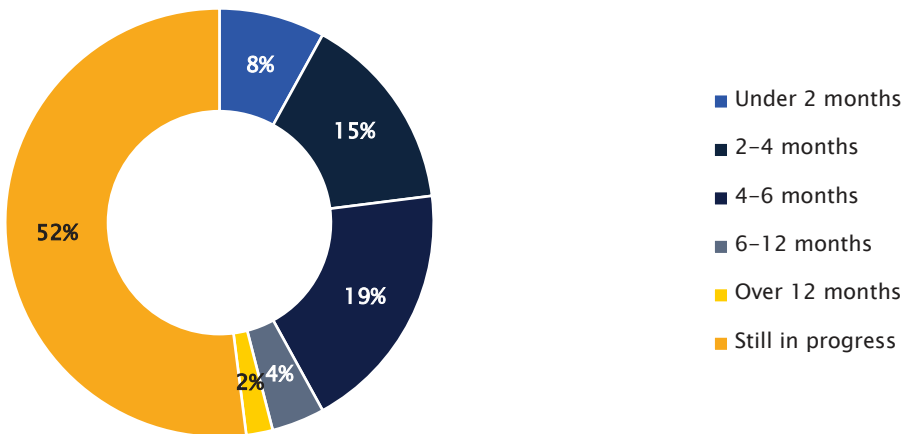


Figure 36. Percent of catalogued projects.

Where value shows up, and where it goes unmeasured.

Productivity is the most consistently reported gain. 40% of catalogued projects report a 10 to 25% productivity increase and 11% report 25 to 50%. 36% report no measured productivity impact at all.

Small companies: 37% report a 10 to 25% gain and 12% report 25 to 50%. 33% did not measure productivity impact.

Large companies: 44% report a 10 to 25% gain and 40% did not measure.

Figure 37: Reported Productivity Gain: All Companies

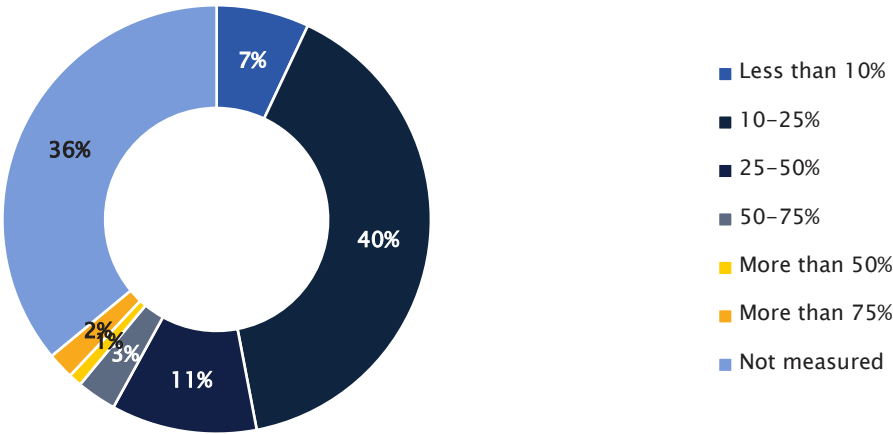


Figure 37. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 38: Reported Productivity Gain: Small Companies

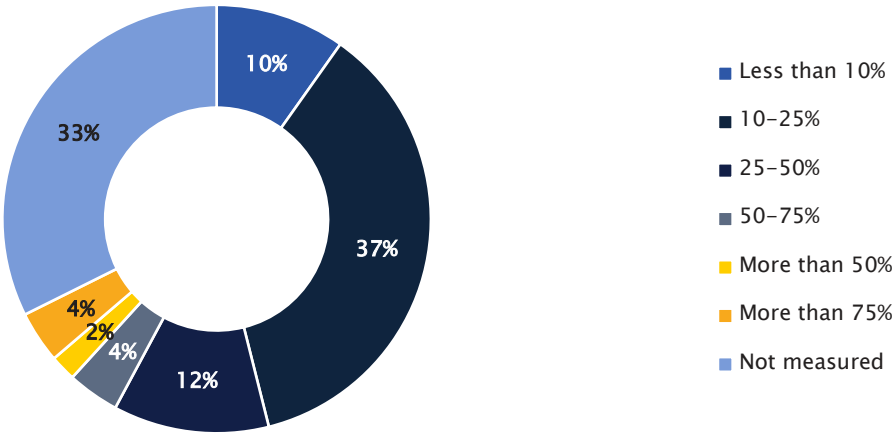


Figure 38. Percent of catalogued projects.

Figure 39: Reported Productivity Gain: Large Companies

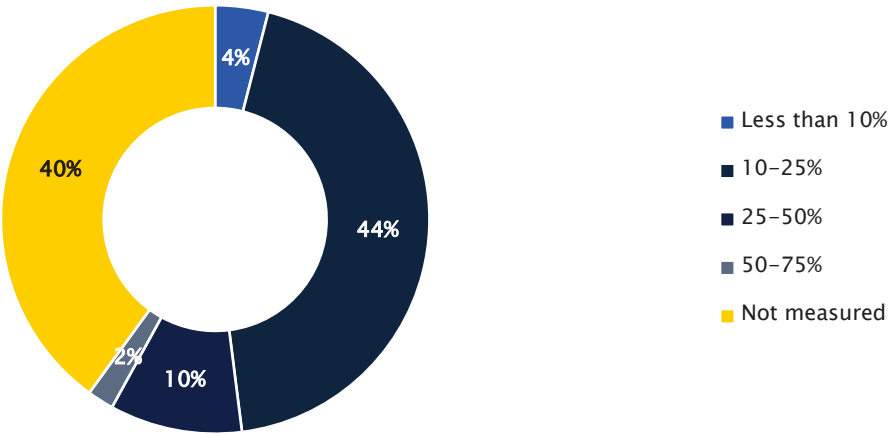


Figure 39. Percent of catalogued projects.

SECTION 5

Not Every Manufacturer Faces the Same Wall

Companies named the barriers that slow their AI adoption. Across all respondents, a lack of internal talent is the most common, cited by 43%. Systems integration follows at 40% and budget at 29%. Finding trustworthy vendors, unclear return, and having no clear owner each land in the low twenties.

Small companies: systems integration is the most common barrier, cited by 42%. A lack of internal talent follows at 41%, then budget at 34%. 20% say AI is simply not a current priority.

Large companies: a lack of internal talent is the most common barrier, cited by 48%. No clear owner follows at 32%, and budget drops to 16%.

Planning maturity splits more sharply than any barrier. Overall, 8% have a documented AI strategy, 23% are building one, 24% have direction but nothing formalized, and 45% evaluate projects opportunistically.

Small companies: 3% have a documented strategy while 32% describe their approach as informal.

Large companies: 20% have a documented strategy and 36% are actively building one. Only 4% describe their approach as informal.

Key Insight

The two groups are stuck on different problems.

Small companies are blocked by integration at 42% and budget at 34%, which are execution problems. Large companies are blocked by talent at 48% and unclear ownership at 32%, which are scaling problems.

Planning splits the same way: 20% of large companies have a documented strategy against 3% of small ones, though 32% of small companies do have an informal direction.

Figure 40: Barriers to AI Adoption: All Companies

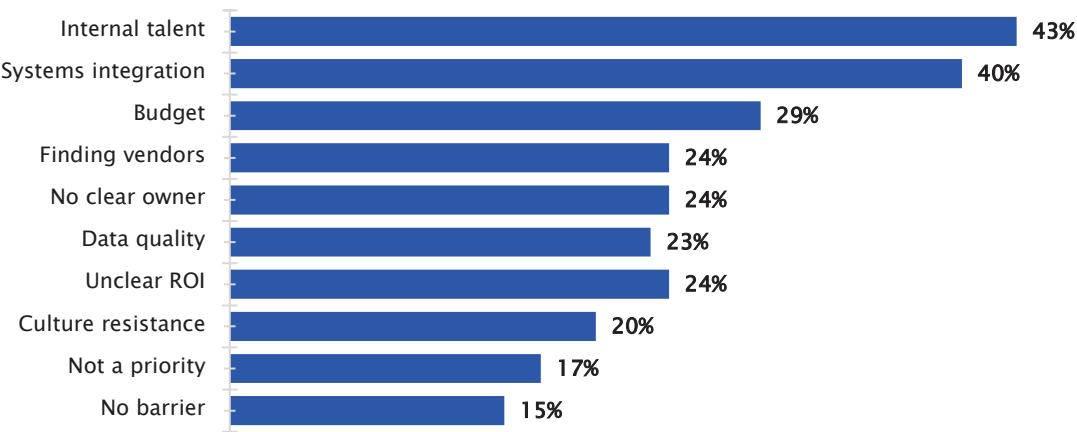


Figure 40. Percent of respondents selecting each barrier. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 41: Barriers to AI Adoption: Small Companies

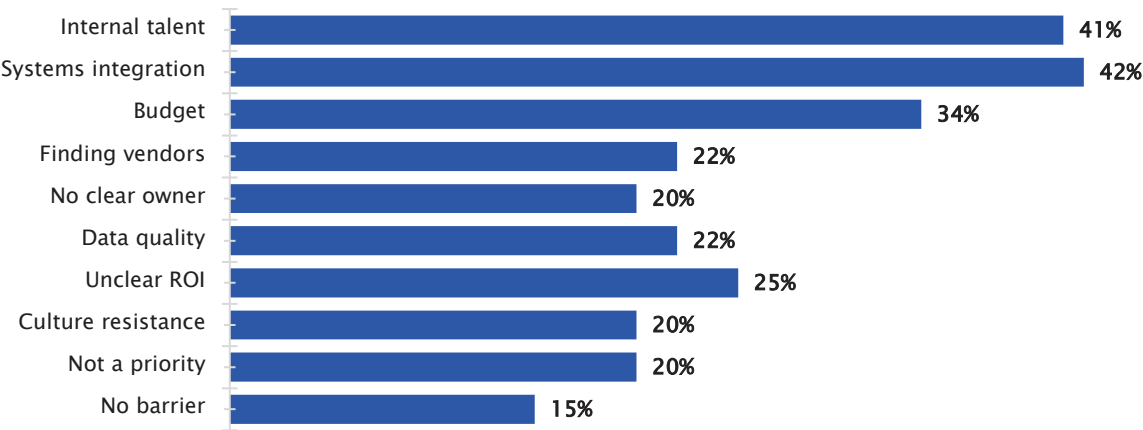


Figure 41. Percent of respondents selecting each barrier. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 42: Barriers to AI Adoption: Large Companies

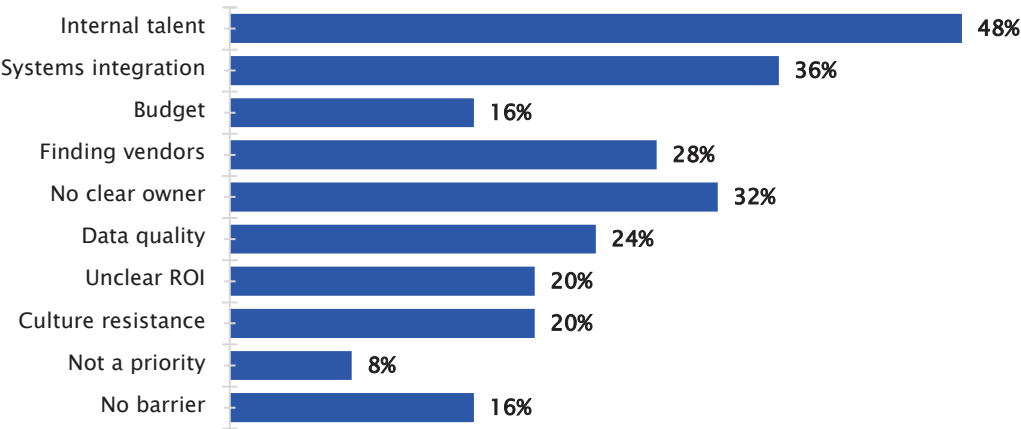


Figure 42. Percent of respondents selecting each barrier. Respondents could select more than one.

Figure 43: Formal AI Strategy or Roadmap: All Companies

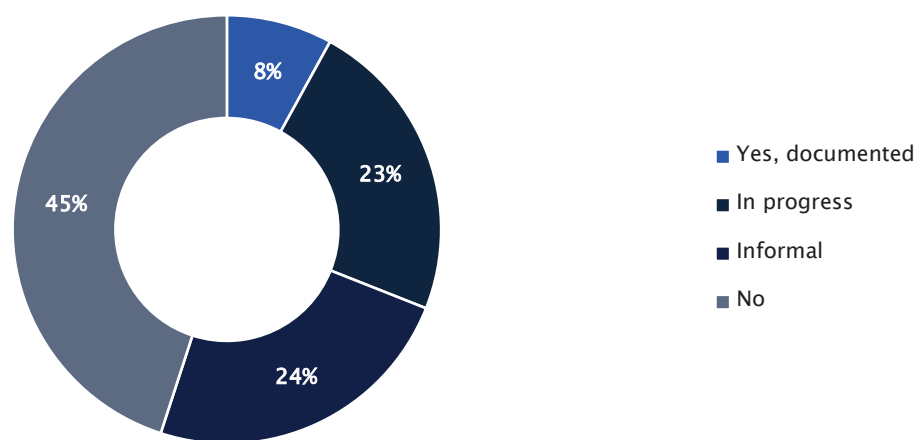


Figure 43. Percent of respondents.

Figure 44: Formal AI Strategy or Roadmap: Small Companies

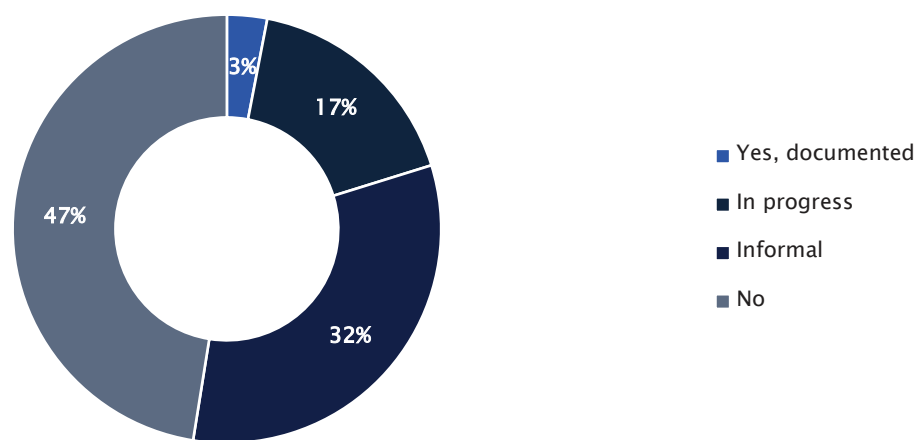


Figure 44. Percent of respondents.

Figure 45: Formal AI Strategy or Roadmap: Large Companies

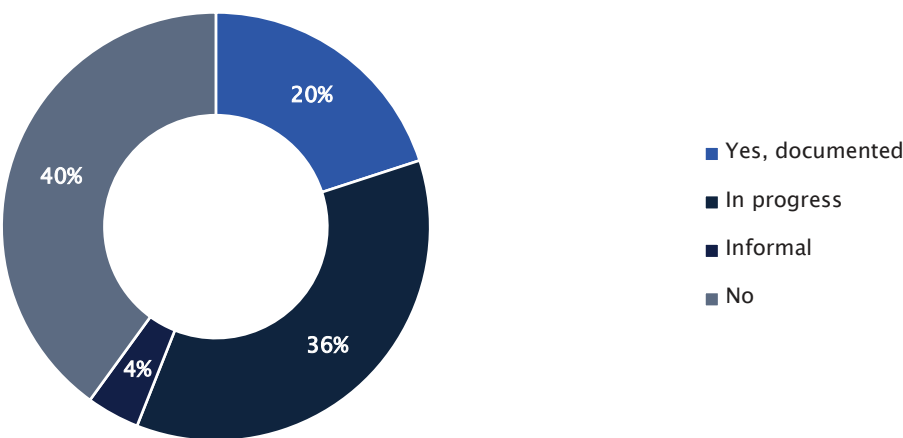


Figure 45. Percent of respondents.

Compare Your Company

Every figure in this report comes from Indiana manufacturing and logistics companies. Take the Conexus AI Maturity Assessment to see your own Conexus AI Maturity Score next to the small and large company averages, your results in each AI Use Dimension, and the resources that fit your answers.

[Take the Assessment](#)

This report reflects self-reported survey responses from Indiana manufacturing and logistics companies, with contextual analysis by Conexus Indiana. It is not a formal research study.