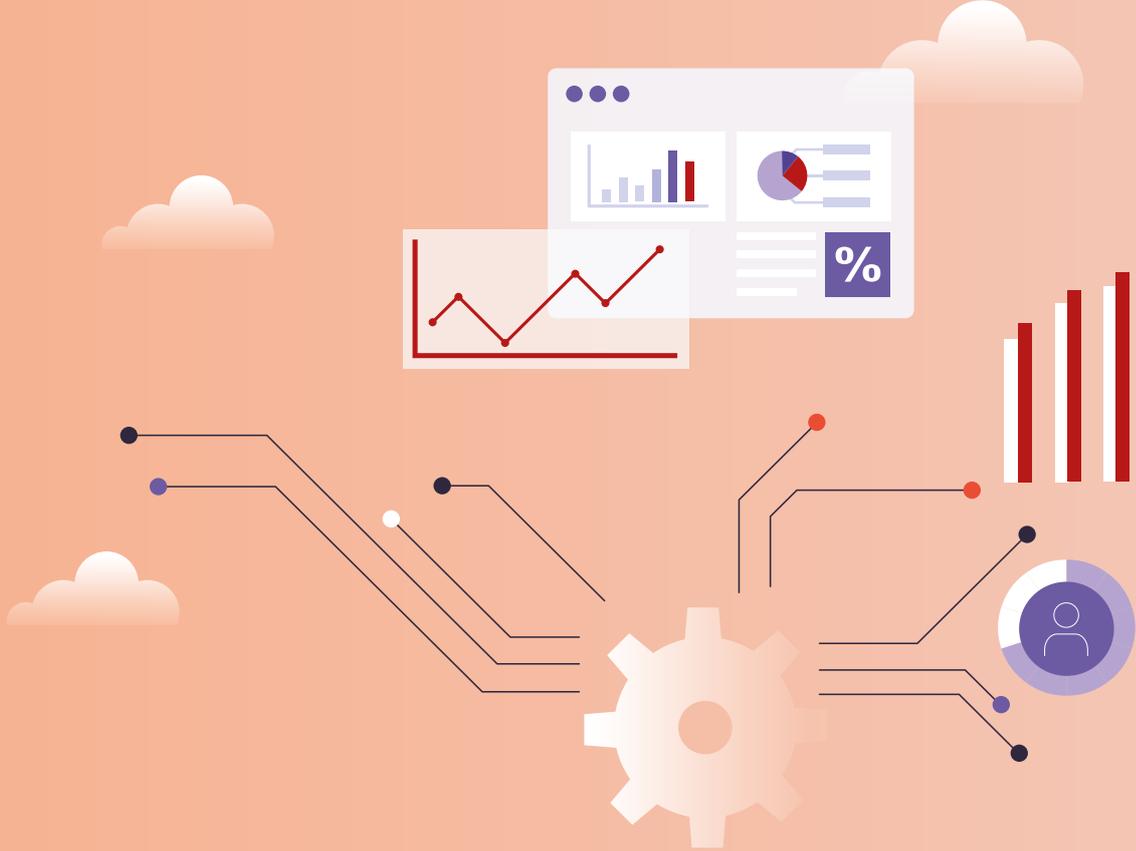


# Inside the leadership growth agenda

Global perspectives on growth, talent, and technology – drawn from a 2025 survey of 400 senior leaders across mid-to-large professional services firms in the UK and US.





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# Foreword

Professional services firms are facing a growth environment defined by pressure and possibility in equal measure. Markets are shifting at speed, client expectations are rising, and technology is redefining how firms deliver value.

In this environment, sustainable growth depends on more than winning new work. It relies on operational discipline, visibility, and confidence in the decisions leaders make every day. Yet our research suggests many of those decisions are being made without the right foundations in place. Blind spots in planning, forecasting, and resourcing leave leaders building growth strategies without a clear view of where they are steering. And here lies the problem.

The result is growth left on the table – and with it, missed revenue targets, eroded margins, and technology investments that fail to deliver. These aren't just operational frustrations; they're strategic risks.

This report explores those blind spots and the visibility gap at their core – and why closing the visibility gap must now be a boardroom priority.



— Matt Cockett, CEO, Dayshape

# Executive summary

Professional services firms are chasing growth in one of the most competitive environments in recent memory. Market uncertainty, consolidation, rising client cost demands, economic volatility, game-changing technology, new delivery models, and intensifying competition are reshaping the rules of how firms operate and grow.

But the greatest threat isn't only external. Growth is slipping through the cracks inside firms – in places leaders aren't looking, or can't see clearly. Blind spots in planning, resourcing, and data quietly erode margins, weaken retention, and leave revenue on the table. Unlike market forces, they are completely within leaders' control.

And without reliable data on which lines of business, teams or countries are most profitable, firms risk building growth strategies on incomplete foundations. The danger isn't only missed execution, it's designing the wrong strategy in the first place.

This insightful study, based on a 2025 survey of 400 senior leaders from mid-to-large professional services firms (750+ employees) in the UK and US, surfaces the blind spots most likely to undermine performance – and shows where growth is at risk from within.

400 

## Senior leaders

C-suite and senior operational

50/50 

Split of professional services firms across UK and US

750+ 

Mid-to-large professional services firms with 750+ employees

“

The accounting profession began in 1887, and for 137 years it operated in a protected shell, but that's no longer the case. The profession is now facing unprecedented competition and strategic change. The top three themes in the boardroom today are talent, technology, and transformation, all hitting at once. The pace of change means what got you to the dance won't keep you there. Now the level of strategic discussion in the boardroom is unparalleled; there's been more in the past four and a half years than in my first forty. Finally, something to talk about.<sup>1</sup>

Allan Koltin, CEO, Koltin Consulting Group



## Four internal blind spots expose firms to risk and impact growth

### The blind spots undermining the leadership agenda

Our research surfaced four internal blind spots that expose firms to risk and impact growth:

- **Revenue planning** – weak resource planning and forecasting leave firms unable to consistently protect revenue and margins.
- **Resource visibility** – without forward-looking insight into capacity and workload balance, utilization is misunderstood and misaligned with actual performance.
- **Talent retention** – leaders often miss early warning signs around fairness and autonomy, putting top performers and future leadership pipelines at risk.
- **Technology enablement** – poor data quality and integration prevent technology investments from delivering foresight, trapping firms in reactive ways of working.

### Insights from the boardroom

The survey findings reveal how these blind spots show up in practice:

- **Revenue at risk** – 42% of firms failed to hit revenue targets last year, with the major contributors to this being inaccurate forecasting, resourcing shortfalls, and planning gaps, alongside external pressures.
- **The utilization mirage** – 86% of leaders believe their people are fully utilized, yet only 69% say leadership has clear visibility into team-level capacity. The result: project overruns (27%), hidden inefficiencies, and burnout in large firms (42% UK, 38% US).

- **Talent under strain** – burnout and fairness are now at the heart of retention challenges. In the UK, 26% cite unfair workload distribution, while in the US, 40% point to poor management and lack of autonomy.
- **Technology ambition outpacing adoption** – technology tops the boardroom agenda (58%), with 39% of large firms planning to invest in AI for scheduling and capacity modeling. However, progress is being held back by poor data quality (38%) and integration challenges (31%).
- **Fragile data confidence** – 25% of leaders lack confidence in their firm's ability to plan long term. Although the remaining 75% express confidence, broader findings suggest this may be misplaced. The data points to uncertainty in foundational data – underpinning challenges across revenue, talent, and technology outcomes.

### The visibility gap

Across every theme, these findings point to one unifying issue: the visibility gap. It's the missing line of sight that turns small blind spots into systemic risks.

When leaders lack live, reliable, forward-looking data, they're forced to make strategic decisions in the dark. The visibility gap isn't just another operational challenge – it's the foundation that underpins growth itself. Every quarter it persists, firms compromise growth and risk drifting further from their goals.

This report helps leaders uncover these blind spots that are threatening their performance and provides the insight needed to close the visibility gap, creating the clarity and confidence needed to plan for growth and deliver it.



# Introduction

# Growth under threat from within

Growth dominates professional services headlines – record revenues, bold expansions, and accelerating M&A activity. But behind the headlines lies a more complex story: how firms are chasing growth, the trade-offs they face, and the bets they are making on a very different future.

Market uncertainty, economic volatility, rising client demands, and intensifying competition are reshaping the environment. At the same time, technology, AI, and new delivery models are redrawing how work gets done and how firms scale. Layer on consolidation fueled by private equity and M&A, and the pace of operational change has totally shifted gear.

Against this backdrop, leaders are making high-stakes decisions about where to invest and how to compete. This report explores what is really on today's leadership growth agenda, drawing on insights from 400 C-suite and senior leaders across mid-to-large firms in the UK and US. It looks beyond the headlines to reveal the internal pressures, trade-offs, and strategic blind spots that may determine whether growth is achieved and sustained.

Drawing on insights from



# 400

C-suite and senior leaders across mid-to-large firms in the **UK and US.**

## What this report delivers



**A cross-market view** of how leaders in the UK and US are setting their growth agendas



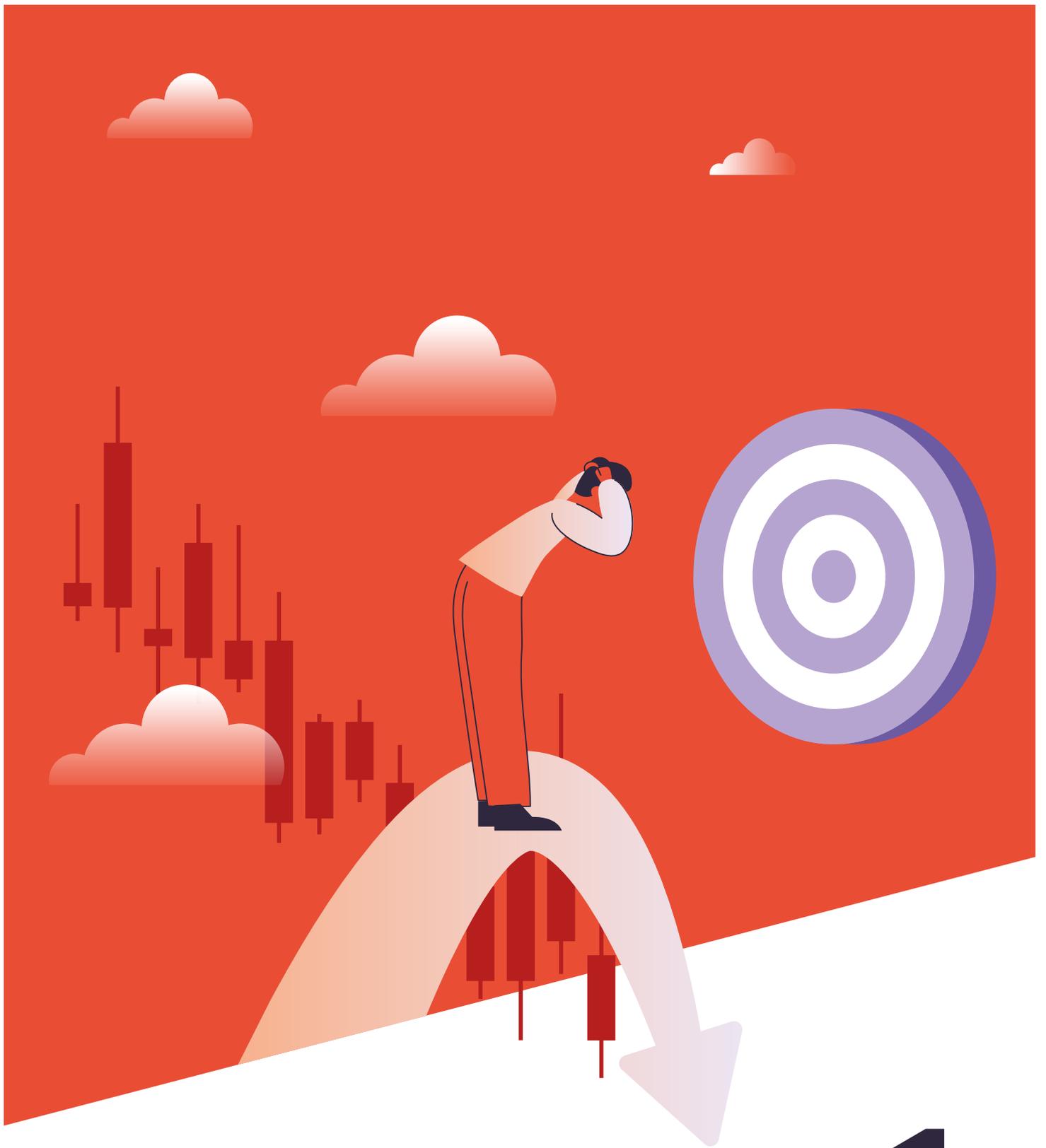
**Evidence** of the hidden blind spots in planning, resourcing, and data that quietly erode performance



**Clarity** on how fragile visibility and weak data confidence translate into missed targets, overworked teams, and stalled technology ambitions



**A forward-looking perspective** on how firms intend to use technology, including AI, to move from hindsight to foresight in decision-making



# Revenue at risk: misses beneath the numbers

# 1

# The leadership agenda: sustainable, profitable growth

Revenue growth remains a key indicator of success for professional services firms – but in an increasingly competitive, high-stakes market, boards and investors are demanding growth that’s both sustainable and predictable.

## The reality: widespread revenue misses

Nearly half of firms (42%) missed their revenue targets last year. External pressures played a role with leaders citing economic uncertainty and competitive losses as key challenges.

But market forces tell only half the story. Internal issues are proving just as disruptive. Among firms that missed revenue targets, inaccurate forecasting was cited as a factor by 30% of UK firms and 23% of US firms. Resourcing and capacity constraints (35% in large US firms) and inefficient operational planning (29%) also emerged as top contributors, alongside talent shortages and market volatility. The data suggests firms aren’t just being hit by external factors; internal planning weaknesses are also leaving them exposed.

## The blind spot: real-time revenue risk

These weaknesses are compounded by the lack of real-time data on the drivers of revenue performance. When asked what information they most need real-time access to, leaders pointed to four critical areas:

- **Capacity** and availability of resources (38%)
- **Profitability** by team, project, or service line (37%)
- **Live forecasting** and scenario modeling (36%)
- **Project delivery** status and risk of overruns (36%)

Without this visibility, firms risk misjudging which clients, services, or projects truly deliver profit. The danger isn’t just missed forecasts, it’s pursuing growth strategies that are at serious risk of being misaligned right from the start. And without clear sight of capacity, profitability, forecasting, and delivery risks, performance is undermined project after project until targets are missed and margins eroded.

Almost  
half of firms

42%



missed their  
revenue targets  
last year.

Much like a ship navigating rough seas, it's the systems below deck that determine whether a firm stays on course. Leaders who overlook these blind spots compromise revenue, as unseen operational cracks steadily drain performance.



Resource managers can struggle to get traction when discussing unassigned hours with partners and directors. But when they shift the conversation — rather than just reporting on the number of unassigned hours, they multiply them by the charge-out rate to show the revenue at risk — it's like flipping a switch. Suddenly, what seemed like a scheduling issue becomes a financial one, and partners become very interested in minimizing that lost revenue number.<sup>2</sup>

— Sam Cornish, Financial Services Partner, BDO



### The opportunity: building resilience into revenue

The same internal levers that erode performance, such as forecasting, planning discipline, and data confidence, can — with the right tools and processes — be rebuilt to stabilize it. In practice, that means:

- **Building live forecasting** that reflects both pipeline and resourcing in real time — and provides a view of the future
- **Strengthening planning discipline** with reliable data as the foundation
- **Creating visibility** into project risk early enough to course correct

Firms that succeed here will not only hit revenue targets more consistently, but also protect margins, reduce risk, and deliver the predictability boards and investors demand. Because in today's market, predictability is growth's greatest ally.

In today's market, predictability is growth's greatest ally.



Without visibility into how people are deployed and whether the work is profitable, you're sailing blind. And in today's market, predictability is as valuable as growth itself. Boards and investors demand to know targets can be hit consistently — and if not, what are leaders doing about it.

— Matt Cockett, CEO, Dayshape





# The utilization mirage: perception vs. performance

# 2

# The leadership agenda: maximizing talent value

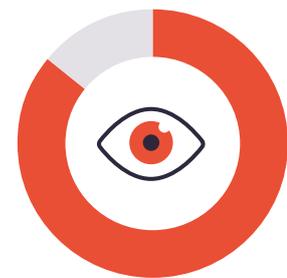
For many leaders, utilization is one consistent measure of whether their people are working at full potential. The logic feels simple: if everyone is fully utilized, the firm must be realizing maximum value from its talent. It's a confidence echoed in our research, where 86% of leaders said they believe their people are being used to their full potential.

## The reality: misalignment between perception and outcomes

The outcomes however tell a different story. More than a quarter of firms report project overruns (27%), while burnout remains alarmingly high in the largest firms – 42% in the UK and 38% in the US. Leaders also pointed to inefficiencies within the delivery model, including not having the right people at the right time (22%) and poor demand forecasting (27% in the US, 17% in the UK). Together, these findings reveal a deeper issue: firms are still struggling to translate utilization into profitable, sustainable delivery.

High utilization doesn't necessarily signal success. A firm can be fully utilized and still see overruns, margin erosion, or overworked teams. Having more people deployed doesn't always mean work is being delivered efficiently; it can just as easily mean inefficiency is going unnoticed. Busy doesn't mean effective. Behind high utilization, firms may not only be missing signs of inefficiency but also overlooking opportunities for growth and development.

86%



of leaders believe talent is fully utilized – yet nearly **one in three** firms admit leadership lacks clear visibility.

“

In professional services, all we have to sell is the time and skills of our people. While it's natural to focus on utilization and revenue maximization, I prefer to flip the perspective. Instead of asking whether someone could have been busier, I ask: What learning opportunities have we missed? Good resource management is about providing a variety of experiences that strengthen problem-solving skills and support career growth.<sup>2</sup>

— Sam Cornish, Financial Services Partner, BDO





Full potential is not equal to 100% utilization. True effectiveness comes from deploying people strategically on the right projects, at the right time, under the right conditions. It's not just about whether people are fully utilized, but whether they're being utilized profitably and in ways that drive individual and business growth.

— Andrew Bone, VP Product & Co-founder, Dayshape



### The blind spot: the utilization mirage

Our findings reveal a leadership blind spot: while 69% of firms say leadership has a clear view of team-level capacity, nearly a third still lack this crucial visibility. Without this full-picture visibility, leaders can't see the true balance of demand and availability. As a result, utilization figures can be misleading, masking whether teams are deployed profitably and sustainably or if capacity exists to capture new opportunities.

This challenge is echoed in Deloitte's Global Internal Audit Hot Topics 2025<sup>3</sup>, which identifies workforce and operational resilience among the key risks facing firms. Their findings reinforce how gaps in visibility don't just cloud planning, they directly undermine performance and resilience.

And this lack of visibility doesn't just impact today's projects, it undermines leaders' ability to plan efficiently and confidently for the future. At a distance, utilization rates look healthy. But as projects approach delivery, cracks appear: uneven workloads, misaligned planning, and talent left on the bench – all of which erode both margins and morale.

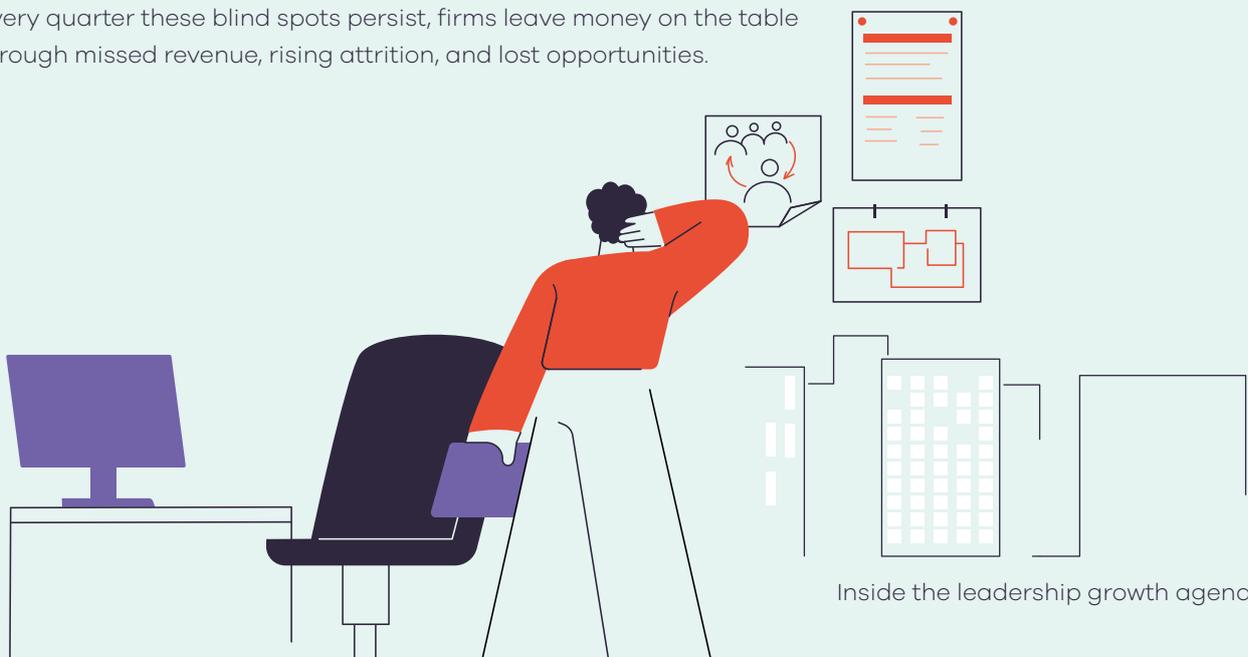
That's the utilization mirage: a metric that reassures leaders on the surface but hides cracks that drain profitability and push talent to breaking point. Every quarter these blind spots persist, firms leave money on the table through missed revenue, rising attrition, and lost opportunities.

Nearly a

1/3



of leaders **lack visibility** of crucial team-level capacity.





Headline utilization numbers may look strong, but they don't tell the whole story. Utilization without margin is a vanity metric – it says nothing about recovery, profitability, or the sustainability of the work being delivered. Without layering in time, capacity, and financial performance, it's impossible to see the true balance between productivity and profitability. The firms getting this right are looking beyond utilization to more holistic metrics that connect revenue, margin, and workload – the full picture leaders need to protect both performance and morale.

— Christine Robinson, Strategic Advisor, Dayshape



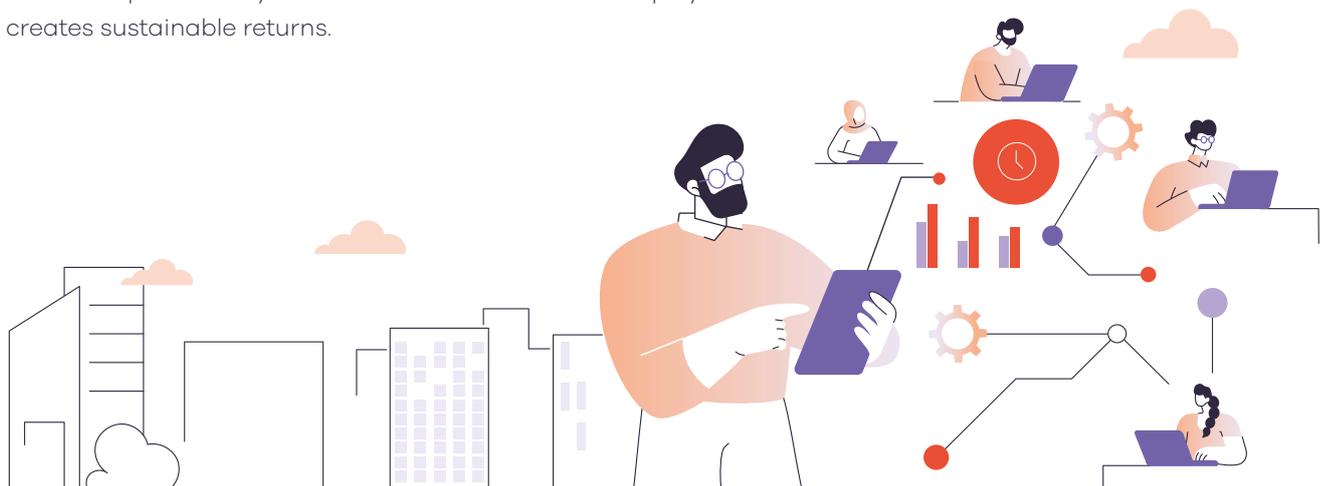
### The opportunity: turning visibility into value

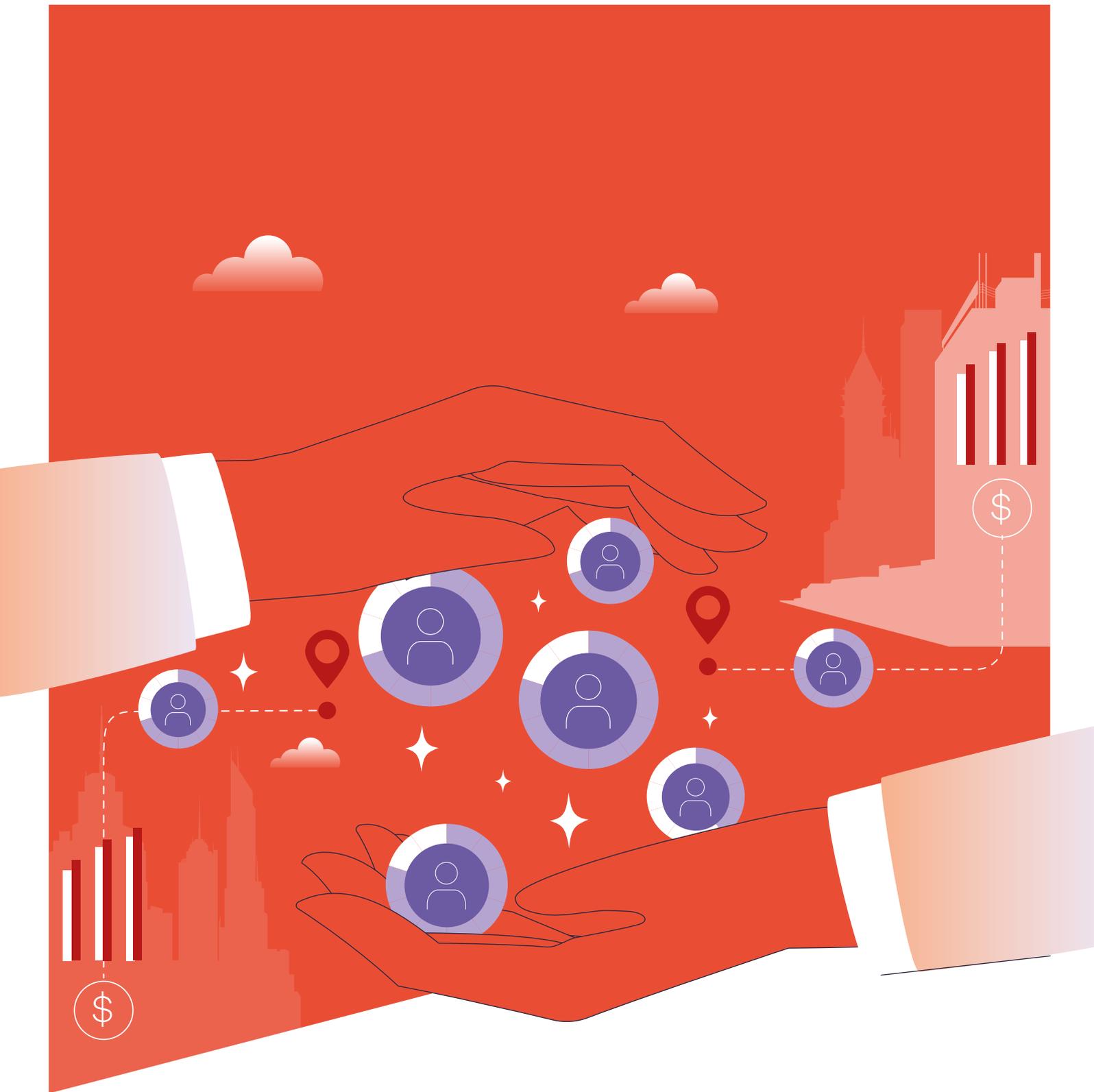
The way to move beyond the utilization mirage is to find clarity. Leaders need continuous visibility into capacity and workload balance – insight that lets them spot gaps early, adapt to shifting demand, and keep delivery sustainable.

In practice, that means:

- **More accurate demand capture** – building reliable forecasts through better project scoping, pipeline visibility, and real-time updates to reflect changing priorities
- **A live view of team and project capacity** – now and in the future – to support better planning and allocation
- **Visibility into workload balance and overrun risk** during planning and delivery
- **Clear, accessible insights that connect people, planning, projects, and profitability** – giving leaders the foresight to adjust plans, resources, and priorities with confidence as demand evolves

Used this way, utilization stops being a tally of hours and becomes a measure of good planning discipline. With live, reliable visibility in place, firms can separate busyness from business value and deploy talent where it creates sustainable returns.





Talent under strain:  
fairness at the  
heart of retention

3

# The leadership agenda: attract and retain top performers

Top talent is both a firm's greatest asset and its greatest risk. They are the future partners, rainmakers, and leaders who will drive the firm forward. Losing them creates more than a short-term gap; it disrupts the succession pipeline, weakens client trust, and slows the firm's ability to compete. This means protecting and retaining high performers is fundamental to any growth agenda.

## The reality: growth ambition vs. attrition

Talent shortages are already holding back growth, cited by 32% of leaders as a top barrier. Protecting and retaining top performers is central to overcoming this challenge.

When asked about the biggest factors driving attrition, leaders in large UK firms most frequently cited burnout (42%) with fairness in workload distribution also highlighted by 26%. In the US, poor management and lack of autonomy were just as commonly selected as external poaching, cited by 40% and 38% of leaders respectively.

This makes clear that attrition is not just about market competition or pay. It's often about how fairly and sustainably people experience work inside the firm.

## The blind spot: hidden attrition risks

This highlights a crucial blind spot: fairness, balance, and autonomy are not side issues. They sit at the heart of retention and are vital levers for leaders who want to attract and protect their top performers and, by extension, their future growth.

The risk is not only visible attrition but also "quiet attrition", disengagement that reduces effort, collaboration, and motivation. McKinsey's Increasing your return on talent research<sup>4</sup> highlights the scale of this issue. It shows that disengagement can carry costs nearly as damaging as turnover, while firms that systematically invest in developing and retaining talent achieve stronger business outcomes and greater resilience.

42%



of UK large firms cite **burnout** as the biggest challenge in retaining top performers.



There's nothing more disappointing to a leader than watching a superstar — a future partner, a future leader, a future rainmaker — walk out the door. And from my experience, it rarely happens in isolation; there's often a domino effect, where other talented people soon follow. To prevent it happening, you have to break out of the short-term mindset. So when a superstar leaves, think about what that means for succession, client relationships, and the future of the firm. And make the necessary changes to stop the next one being close behind them.

Top performers need to be recognized and intentionally given the right clients, the right experiences, and skills like practice development, executive presence, and leadership exposure. That's how you build your next generation of leaders. And it all comes back to resource management.<sup>5</sup>

— Wayne Kaplan, former Partner, Grant Thornton



### The opportunity: protect people, protect growth

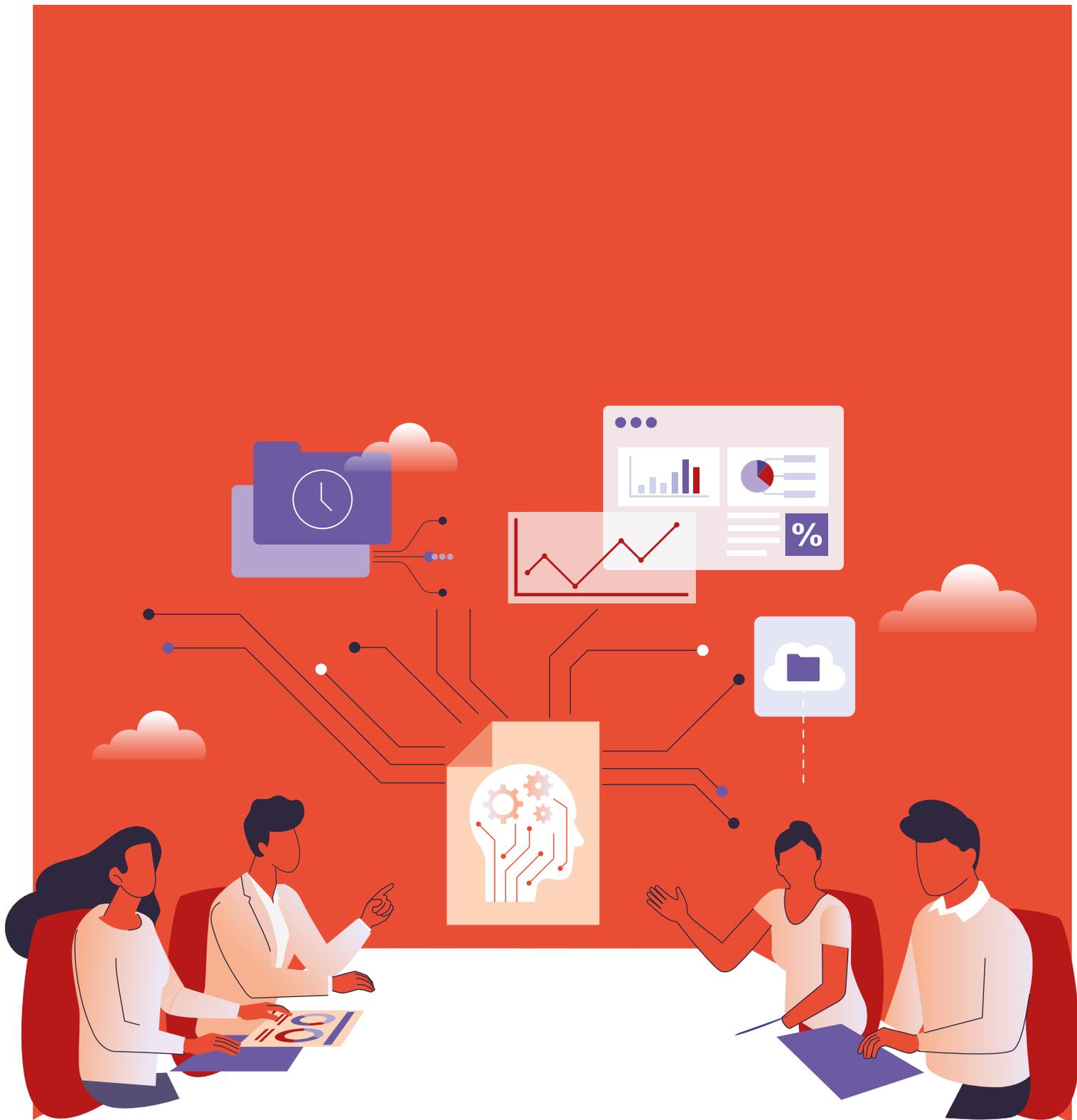
Protecting the employee value proposition goes far beyond pay or perks. It requires systemic action to make work sustainable and meaningful. In practice, that means:

- **Balancing workloads** to prevent burnout and build fairness
- **Creating autonomy** and support that empower individuals
- **Establishing clear career pathways** that develop future leaders

These are not just cultural ideals, they're strategic levers for growth. Predictive workforce data plays a vital role in enabling this shift. With real visibility into capacity, workload distribution, and burnout risk, leaders can address imbalances before they become attrition drivers.

But the challenge is doing this consistently and at scale. McKinsey research<sup>4</sup> shows why it matters: firms that systematically invest in developing and retaining talent see a significantly higher, "return on talent" with stronger business outcomes and greater resilience in turbulent markets. Firms that fail to act, by contrast, risk losing their best people or worse, keeping them disengaged.





# Technology and AI: top of the agenda

# 4

# The leadership agenda: next-level efficiency

Technology is top of the leadership agenda, with 58% of leaders citing it as their number one priority for the year ahead. Close behind, 41% named operational efficiency. Together, these priorities signal a new standard, as firms are under pressure to raise the bar on performance. With clients, regulators, and boards demanding greater transparency and foresight, technology and AI will be essential for firms striving to reach the next level of efficiency.



Professionals solve problems with technology, while amateurs throw people at them. Technology works 24/7, 365 days a year. It doesn't take vacations, it works weekends, and it gets along with everyone in the room. So let's use technology to the best of our ability and let it handle the rote work so people don't have to. What we're trying to do is shift as much of that routine work as possible to machine learning, so our staff can focus on analyzing outputs and growing their skills. That's what helps them deliver true value to clients. And that's where this industry has to go.<sup>6</sup>

— Tom Quinn, CFO, Bennett Thrasher



## The reality: adoption lags behind ambition

Our research shows that while many leaders see AI's potential, true adoption remains limited. Nearly two in five large firms (39%) plan to invest in AI for scheduling and capacity modeling – yet powerful, integrated use in these areas remains rare.

Most firms are still focused on surface-level applications such as analytics (52%) and workforce optimization (40%). These deliver incremental improvements but fall short of AI's biggest opportunity: using predictive intelligence to plan with foresight and schedule with precision.

# 39%



of large firms  
**plan to invest in**  
AI for scheduling.

“

When it comes to scheduling, AI is often overhyped, misunderstood, or misclassified. There's still a lot of confusion about what 'AI' really means, and this means leaders are at risk of being sold simple automation branded as intelligence. True, powerful AI draws on real-time data to make smarter predictions, balance capacity with demand, and continuously optimize plans. Integrated use of AI in these areas remains rare for now, but it's only a matter of time – this is the future reality where AI predicts, optimizes, and adapts scheduling decisions in real time.

— Andrew Bone, VP Product & Co - founder, Dayshape

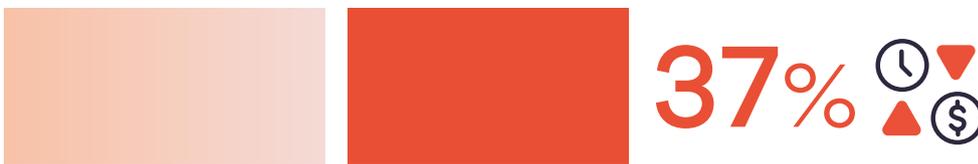


### The blind spot: underestimating AI's potential

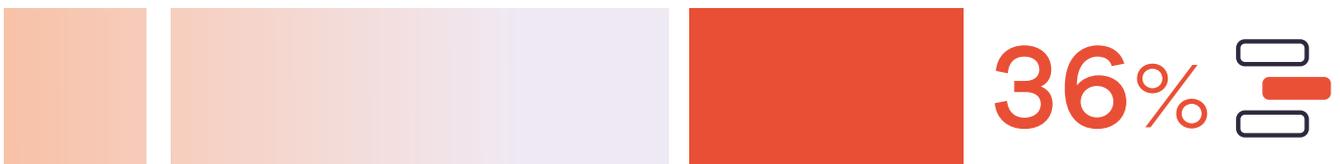
Our research shows leaders want real-time access to exactly the kind of insights AI could unlock:



**Capacity** and availability



**Profitability** by team, project, or service line



**Live forecasting** and scenario modeling

But progress is slowed by persistent barriers. Leaders cited poor data quality (38%), integration challenges (31%), and cost concerns (31%) as the biggest obstacles to advancing AI. These hurdles are real, but they risk masking the bigger blind spot: many firms don't yet fully grasp where AI can unlock its greatest value.

## The opportunity: AI as a true decision enabler

The real power of AI lies not in reporting the past, but in enabling leaders to make smarter decisions about the future and do so consistently at scale. Simply put, it buys significant time back each day. Unlike humans, AI can process the vast volume and complexity of data involved in scheduling and planning, surfacing patterns, opportunities, and risks that would otherwise remain hidden through manual processes.

In this way, AI acts as a force multiplier for resource management, elevating it into a driver of strategic decision-making across the business. For leaders, this unlocks the ability to:

- **Anticipate capacity gaps** before they derail delivery
- **Spot profitability risks** early enough to course correct
- **Adapt to shifting client demand** with confidence and control

With the right data foundations in place, firms can replace reactive firefighting with proactive planning, turning resource allocation into a lever for profitability and resilience. Firms that invest now, and educate themselves on the capabilities AI can unlock, will be the ones to turn ambition into advantage – using AI not just to explain the past, but to shape their future firm.

This trajectory is reflected in Deloitte's Tech Trends 2025<sup>7</sup>, which predicts that AI will become so ubiquitous that it forms, "the unseen substructure of everything we do" embedded so deeply into how work happens that its presence may hardly be noticed. In this future, AI does not just inform decisions; it sits at the core of how they are made in real time. But Deloitte also cautions that this vision depends on strong data, integration, and governance foundations. Without them, firms will stall at automation while others move ahead.





# Conclusion

# The new path to growth

The insights from leaders in this study point to a critical truth: growth strategies are only as strong as the foundations of planning and resourcing that support them. And the reality is equally clear – blind spots in planning and resource data don't just undermine performance, they prevent firms from building the right strategy in the first place.

In today's market, these are not minor operational inefficiencies. They are significant operational weaknesses that erode margins, weaken competitiveness, and leave growth on the table. Addressing them is essential to designing and delivering a strategy that can stand up to today's pressures and leverage tomorrow's opportunities.

This is why professional services optimization must be firmly on the boardroom agenda. At its core is resource management – not as scheduling, but as a strategic capability that connects projects, planning, people, and profitability. It can provide a game-changing foundation for sound leadership decision-making. When elevated to this role, resource management becomes the lever that enables foresight, strengthens resilience, and turns growth ambition into predictable performance.

**The challenge for leaders is clear: do you have the visibility and confidence to deliver your growth strategy – or are you leaving growth on the table?**

“

Every firm has blind spots, and every blind spot is also an opportunity. The leaders who act on them will capture growth others leave on the table because they have the clarity, confidence, and competitive advantage to claim it.

— Matt Cockett, CEO, Dayshape



Professional services optimization must be firmly on the boardroom agenda.

# Methodology

This report is based on a survey commissioned by Dayshape and conducted by OnePoll between August 5 and 14, 2025. The survey gathered responses from:

400 

**Senior leaders**  
C-suite and senior operational



50%

**United States**  
professional services firms

750+ 

**Mid-to-large**  
professional services firms with 750+ employees



50%

**United Kingdom**  
professional services firms

Participants represented a cross-section of professional services sectors, including accounting, consulting, and legal. The survey focused on firm-level priorities, challenges, and investment plans for the year ahead. Questions included a mix of single- and multiple-response formats (e.g., “select up to three” or “select all that apply”).

Where relevant, data was weighted by OnePoll to better reflect the target population using ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates, with adjustments across gender groups. If no weighting was required, results are reported as raw data.

Data collection was carried out online via OnePoll’s platform, which adheres to the MRS Code of Conduct, ESOMAR guidelines, and British Polling Council standards. OnePoll also upholds commitments to inclusion, equality, and cybersecurity through recognized certifications.

The survey was designed and analyzed by Dayshape and ASPR.

# End notes

1. Koltin, A. (2025). Resource Revolution podcast: [The great accounting reckoning: Allan Koltin on what happens when tradition & transformation collide.](#) Dayshape.

2. Cornish, S. (2025). Path to partner: [Leadership lessons and the resource management process.](#) Dayshape.

Originally interviewed for the [Dayshape Resource Revolution](#) podcast.

3. Deloitte (2025). [Global internal audit hot topics 2025: Risks and opportunities.](#)

4. McKinsey & Company (2024). [Increasing your return on talent: The moves and metrics that matter.](#)

5. Kaplan, W. (2025). [Wayne Kaplan on the resource management conundrum.](#) Dayshape.

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6. Quinn, T. (2025). [A CFO's take on resource management ROI.](#) Dayshape.

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7. Deloitte (2025). [Tech Trends 2025.](#)



Dayshape's purpose is to improve people's working lives, and the mission is clear: to harness the power of AI and data to elevate resource management in professional services firms to a strategic function. We help drive revenue, deliver insights that improve decision-making, and build strong organizations and fulfilling careers for the long term. With a vision to define the future of AI-powered resource management, helping organizations achieve extraordinary results.

**For more information visit [dayshape.com](https://dayshape.com)**

