Agile Business Consortium

Skills, Tools and Services Research Survey Report 2026

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Introduction

To understand how organisations are building business agility today, the Agile Business Consortium ran the Skills, Tools and Services (STS) Research Survey at our Agile Business Awards Conference 2025.

The survey explored three core questions. Firstly, in relation to **skills**, which skills matter most for agile organisations and where are the gaps? Secondly, looking at **tools**, which tools and platforms are supporting (or blocking) agile ways of working? And finally, in reference to **services**, which external services are genuinely adding value and what do organisations need next?

While this is an early snapshot, the data offers a useful window into how change-makers, project professionals and leaders are navigating the current landscape.

Supported by our Accredited Delivery Partners

This report is supported by a selection of our Accredited Delivery Partners (ADPs), whose insights and experience working across complex organisational environments helped support the interpretation of the findings.

Their contribution reflects a shared commitment to advancing practical, evidence-based agility across industries. Throughout the report you will see their contributions in the form of quotes and insights.

For more information on our Accredited Delivery Partners (ADPs) or how to become one: https://www.agilebusiness.org/partners/accredited-delivery-partners.html

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"We are entering the 5th Industrial Revolution, and the research confirms what we are seeing with clients. Organisations face an existential threat from AI-native competitors who can move faster and serve customers better."

James Dwan, CEO, Catalyst Consulting

About the Data

So, who responded? The data we gathered representants a mix of geographies, organisational sizes and individual roles.

Geographical Locations
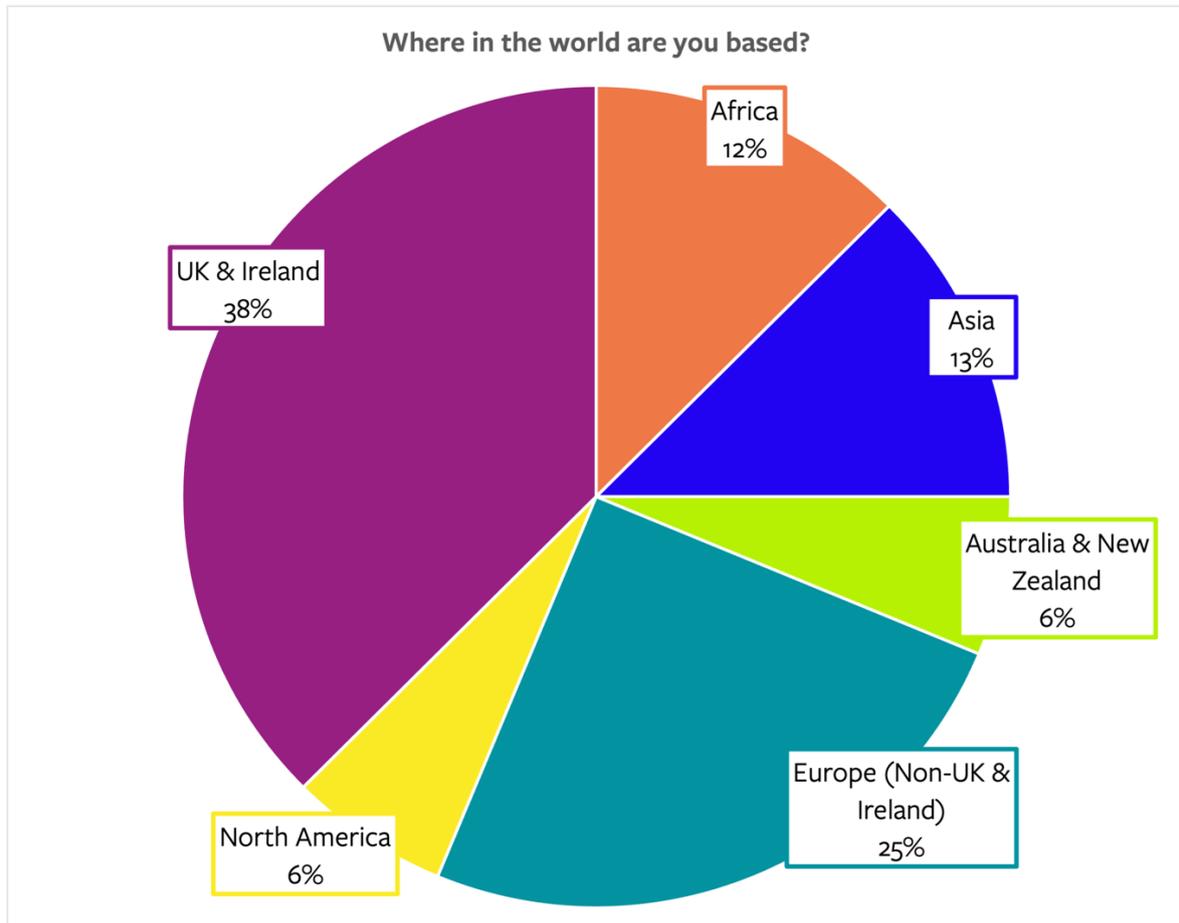
Around two in five respondents are based in the UK & Ireland, with others in Europe (non-UK), Asia, Africa, North America, and Australia & New Zealand.

Knowing that respondents span across the globe affirms that the pressures shaping agility are universal, giving the findings more relevance. You can compare the findings to your own context, knowing this is a multi-region benchmark.

Organisation Size

Roughly how many people are in your organisation?

Over half of respondents work in small organisations of 1-49 people. This tells us that agility isn't just for large enterprises, small organisations are actively trying to build capability too. Smaller teams often face constraints such as limited budgets or having fewer specialist roles available to them. The data presents a link between small organisations and their requirement for agile ways of working as th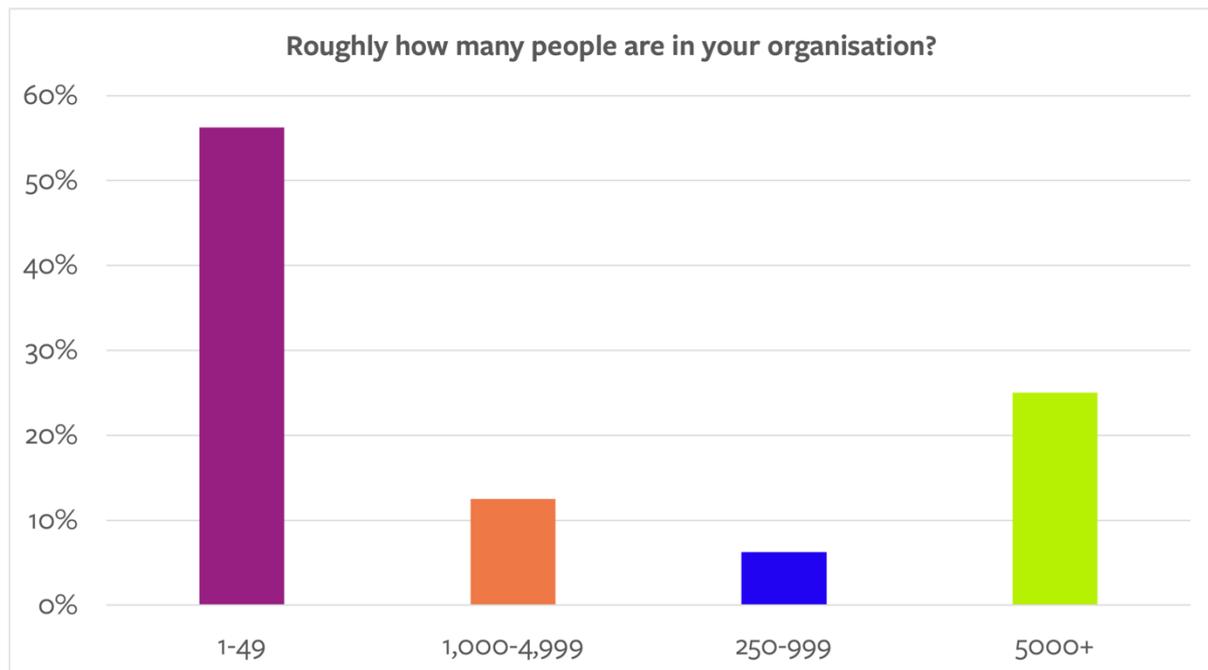ey navigate fast-changing business environments. For larger organisations, this shows that agility can emerge in small, more-resource constrained settings; highlighting the competitive advantage agility provides regardless of team or organisational size.

Organisational Roles

When it came to roles, the largest groups were Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters who collectively made up 25% of the respondents, followed by Project and Programme Managers (19%) and then Consultants (19%).

These roles are *typically* those closest to the work. Their perspectives reveal what is actually happening on the ground, where teams are struggling, which skills and tools genuinely support delivery and what is missing from current organisational capability.

Trends of Today

When asked *which trends have the biggest impact on their teams* and organisations, respondents highlighted a powerful cluster of themes.

Artificial Intelligence and Automation was the standout trend with 7 in 10 of respondents selecting this option. Digital Transformation and Evolving Customer Expectations followed closely with 17% of all respondents selecting this option. In comparison, *Cybersecurity and Operational Resilience* was less of a priority at the lower end.

Skills and Talent Shortages
Evolving Customer Expectations
Sustainability and ESG (Environmental. Social, Governance) Commitments
Artificial Intelligence and Automation
Regulatory Changes and Compliance   Cybersecurity and Operational Resilience
Remote and Hybrid Work Models   Digital Transformation

What this tells us is that AI isn't just another trend in the background! For most of our respondents, it is already reshaping work and decision-making within their teams. However, this doesn't exist in isolation. We see that AI, digital transformation, rising customer expectations and skills shortages combine to create a constant pressure to adapt quickly, responsibly and transparently.

It further confirms that AI is no longer considered an emerging technology, it's an active driver of change in workflows, projects and decision making. Organisations are battling on multiple fronts from modernising technology and improving customer experience to managing evolving workforce needs. More than ever, teams must adapt rapidly, responsibly and with high transparency which places a new requirement on leadership, culture and human skills.

Organisations are rapidly progressing along the AI maturity curve — moving from basic chatbot adoption toward more advanced, agentic AI models that streamline processes, augment decision-making and reshape roles and responsibilities.

While the competitive landscape across platforms continues to evolve, with multiple ecosystems emerging in parallel, the defining challenge is not technological capability — it is organisational readiness.

What remains constant in this environment of rapid innovation is the need for disciplined, well-governed transformation. Change management is not being displaced by AI; it is becoming more critical. As organisations adopt increasingly powerful technologies, the ability to manage behavioural change, cultural adaptation and operating model evolution becomes a core leadership capability rather than a support function.

Jon Bray, Director, Alirity

The Agile Skills Gap: The Capabilities Organisations Need Most in 2026.

High-Demand Skills Driving Modern Agility

When we asked respondents *which skills are most critical for agility*, three themes dominated.
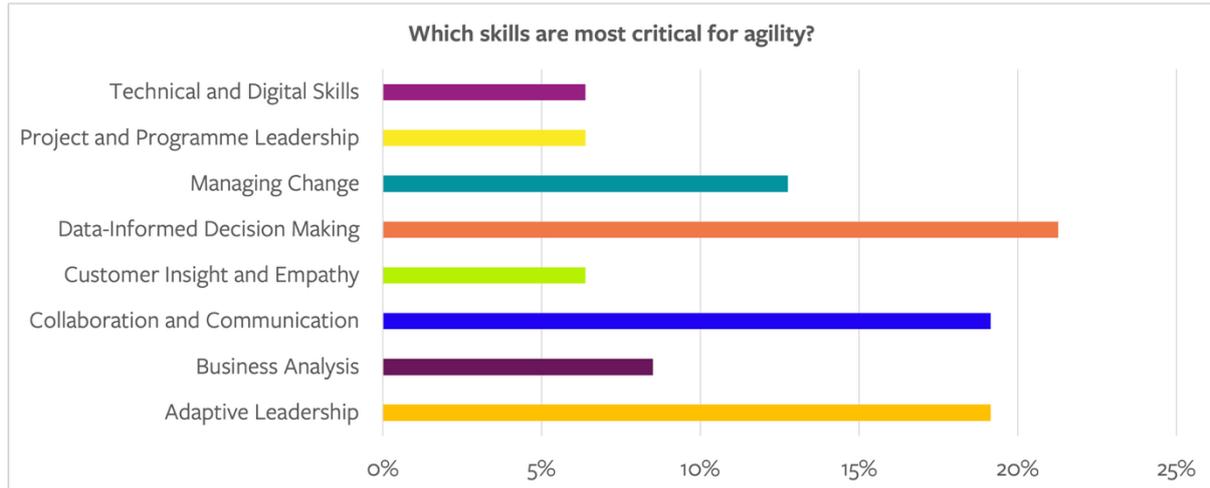
Data-informed decision making was selected by roughly six in ten, adaptive leadership was selected by over 50% with managing change also featuring strongly.

In other words, agility is being understood as a blend of human, analytical and leadership capabilities instead of being reduced down to just technical or delivery skills. This shift is completely aligned with the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s latest Future of Jobs Report 2025 key findings, which highlight that skills gaps are now considered the single biggest barrier to business transformation, with 63% of employers identifying them as a major obstacle through 2025 to 2030. The WEF also reports that 85% of employers plan to prioritise upskilling, and many expect to hire for new skill sets, redeploy talent or reduce roles where skills are becoming outdated.

Together these insights underline a global trend, organisations cannot deliver meaningful agility without investing deeply in the human and leadership capabilities required to navigate complex, fast-changing environments.

The Biggest Capability Gaps

When asked *where their biggest skills gaps lie*, the top answer was in their executive leadership teams. This was closely followed by delivery teams and middle management.

Where are your organisation's biggest skills gaps?

- Middle Management 19%
- Across the Organisation 19%
- Business Analysts 6%
- Delivery Teams 25%
- Executive Leadership 31%
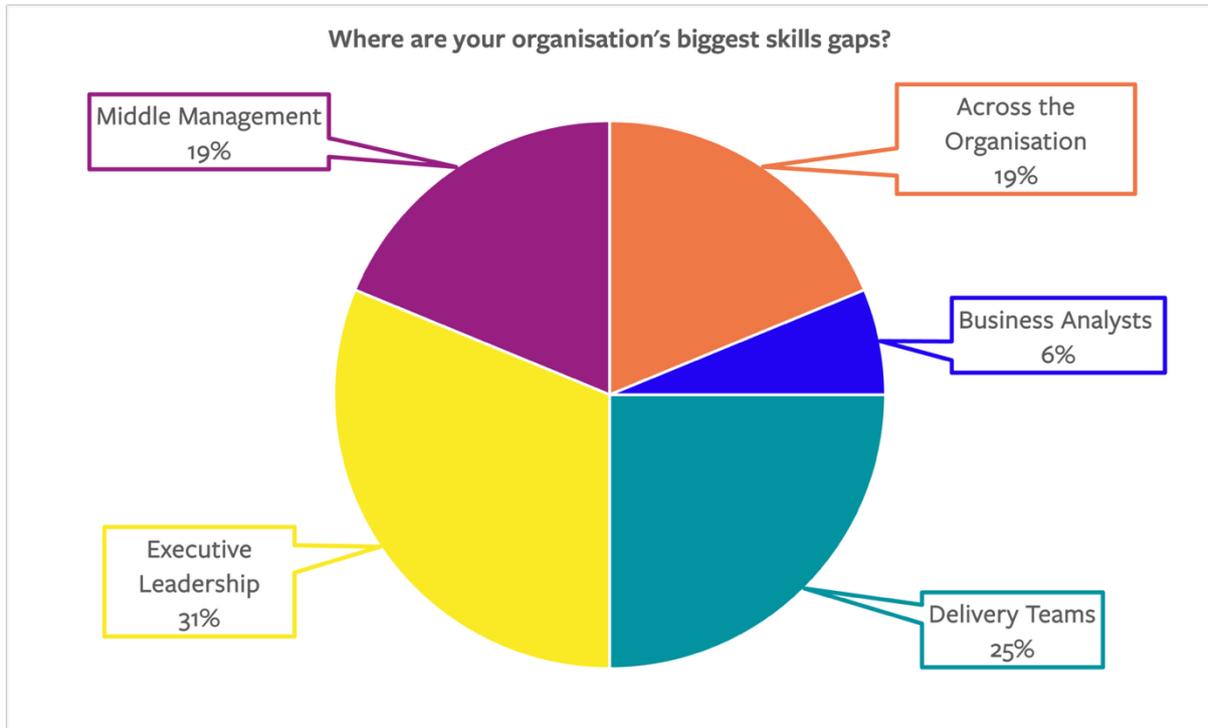
This suggests that agility is still too often seen as something that happens in pockets, rather than being a whole-system capability that needs to be modelled and supported from the top.

Insights from Catalyst Consulting highlight a clear connection between two of the survey's most prominent findings: executive leadership emerging as the largest skills gap, and AI being identified as the dominant trend shaping organisations. These should not be viewed as separate challenges, but as closely connected aspects of the same underlying issue.

A recent white paper on AI in the Agile Workplace found that 70% of AI implementation challenges stem from people and process issues, while only 10% relate directly to algorithms or technology. Where leadership teams lack adaptive decision-making capability, organisations struggle to adopt AI at the pace, scale and level of responsibility required.

Traditional command-and-control leadership approaches, which remain prevalent in many organisations, are poorly suited to the speed and complexity AI introduces. In this context, the leadership gap represents not simply a training need, but a critical capability challenge that will influence whether organisations can compete effectively.

Priority Areas for Skill Development

We also asked *which areas would most benefit from building more skills related to agility*. The priorities were strikingly aligned.

Which areas would benefit most from building more skills relating to agility?

Area	Percentage
Business Analysis	8%
Change and Transformation	25%
Leadership Development	31%
Product Ownership and Management	19%
Project and Programme Management	17%
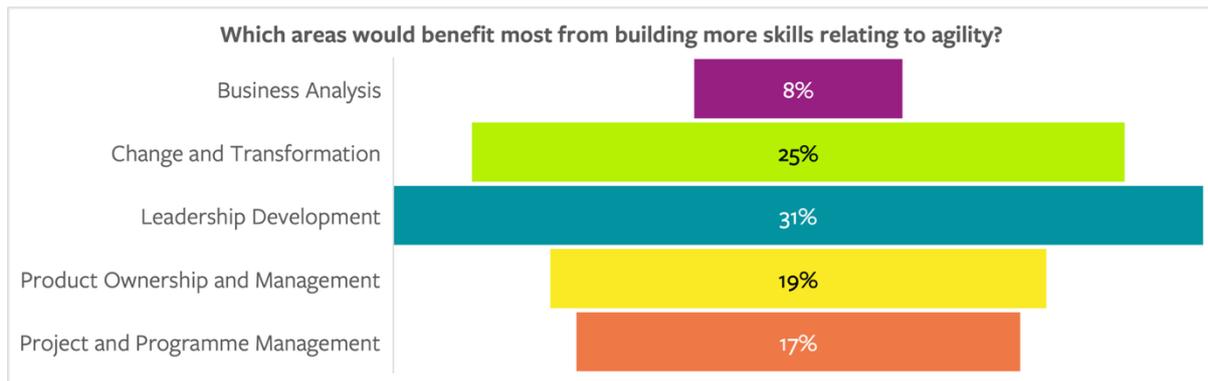
Leadership development was the top area, named by the majority of respondents, change and transformation skills followed closely with business analysis remaining important but was slightly less frequently mentioned.

What does this mean?

This tells us that there is a clear shift from "agile as a delivery method" to agility as an organisational leadership capability. Organisations recognise that leaders must be able to navigate ambiguity, make data-informed decisions and communicate clearly. Middle managers and product owners need to skills to prioritise value, align teams and manage change continuously, not just in big projects or programmes.

For the Agile Business Consortium and its partners, this reinforces the importance of principles, frameworks and learning experiences that explicitly target leadership, product ownership and change instead of just agile mechanics.

Tools That Work and Integration Failures

The Most Common Tools Powering Agile Teams

The survey asked *which tools best support agility in your organisation* today. Respondents highlighted that collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Slack and Miro were the best supporters for their teams. Closely followed by workflow and automation tools such as Jira or Trello. Other top answers were knowledge management systems and data analytics dashboards. Only a minority selected "none of the above" signally that most organisations already have a rich tool ecosystem in place.

We followed up with this question by asking respondents about the integration and satisfaction with said tools in their organisational ecosystem.

On the integration of tools and platforms, 44% of respondents described their tools as *moderately integrated* showing us that integration is present, by not consistent. This creates a clear opportunity for partners who provide tools and services to shape better outcomes for customers and strengthen their role in supporting organisational agility. Technology alone does not transform organisations; *adoption* does. Service providers who offer light-touch change management support such as leadership guidance, communication sessions or coaching can help individuals and organisation overcome cultural and behavioural barriers.

"Tool integration challenges reveal a deeper problem - many organisations lack the systems thinking to understand how value flows from vision through business model to value streams and processes. Without that architecture, you get what we call 'random acts of AI' - disconnected tools which create local efficiencies while making the system worse.

Process improvement disciplines provide the structural thinking to design integration properly. That is why organisations with strong Lean or Six Sigma

Around 6 in 10 said their teams are "mostly satisfied" with the tools available. Others were neutral and a small but notable group were mostly dissatisfied, with one respondent being completely dissatisfied.

Insights from Alirity suggest that the tools organisations find most effective are increasingly those that enable collaboration and shared understanding, rather than those designed primarily for control, compliance or upward reporting. There is a clear shift away from governance-heavy tooling towards platforms that support transparency, dialogue and collective problem solving across teams.

Whilst governance remains essential, it's role is evolving. Alirity's findings also point to growing momentum behind predictive and data-driven tools, driven by advances in AI and the increasingly data-rich environments created by collaboration platforms. However, the value of these tools depends on factors such as trust, data quality and organisational maturity.

Integration as the Growing Challenge for Digital Agility

When asked about the *biggest barriers to adopting tools that support agility,* three themes stood out.

Lack of Skills or Training

The most widely reported barrier was *lack of skills or training*. This indicates that many organisations have the right tools, but teams ack the confidence or capability to use them effectively. Organisations must treat skills development as a strategic investment, not a one-off activity. Without this, even the best tools will not deliver value.

Integration with Existing Systems

Next, we found that integration challenges showed that many organisations have grown their tool ecosystems organically rather than intentionally. This tells us that a clear integration roadmap and governance approach can dramatically reduce friction, duplication and wasted effort.

Lack of Leadership Support

A lack of leadership support emerged as the third major barrier. When leaders do not actively champion tools or ways of working then the adoption of those things begins to stall. This points out the need in organisations for leaders who communicate the purpose behind tools and role model their use.

"Leadership is the linchpin for embedding agility throughout an organization. Without leadership buy-in, agile practices risk remaining confined to pilot teams, never truly taking root.

When challenges arise and resistance peaks, it's leadership support that keeps transformational efforts from stalling. Only with a committed leadership drive from the top can agility become a powerful asset rather than a fleeting experiment. Without this steadfast leadership, no amount of coaching, training, or consulting will be enough to achieve and sustain genuine business agility."

Ross Libby, Chief Value Officer, AgileSherpas

Other themes were identified outside of the top aforementioned three. This included budget limitations and unclear Return on Investment (ROI). Budget being a lesser barrier than expected suggests that many organisations are willing to invest but are maybe uncertain on the value they are getting. This signals a need for organisations to define clearer success metrics, especially when working with tools and services providers.

What does this mean?

This tells us that the challenge is not simply about buying more tools. Most organisations already have plenty. The main friction lies in connecting the tools they have in a coherent way. After this, it is about ensuring teams have the skills and the confidence to use them effectively as well as getting leadership support to standardise and sustain adoption.

For service providers, this hints at a growing need for tool onboarding, training and integration support rather than just recommending the "best-in-class" products. By moving beyond tool delivery to integration, adoption, capability building and measurable value, partners can directly influence both the integration and satisfaction scores highlighted in this research. This positions them not just as service providers, but enablers of agility who can unlock the full potential of their digital ecosystems.

Agile Services That Organisations Value Most

Coaching is King, but Impact is Under-Measured

External services continue to play a significant role in supporting agility. When asked *which services bring the most value to their agility journey,* coaching and mentoring was the most frequently selected service with training and certification and peer networks and communities both valued be a substantial share.

This balance reflects a growing recognition that while structured learning and certification remain important, they are most effective when combined with human-centred support that helps people apply learning in complex, real-world environments. As explored in this blog *"Certification in the Age of AI: Why Authenticity Matters More Than Ever"* from Niamh Trundle (Agile Business Consortium) and Ellie Bowett (APMG), the rise of AI is changing what organisations value in learning and development. Knowledge acquisition alone is no longer sufficient; what differentiates high-performing professionals is their ability to exercise judgement, adapt and apply skills authentically.

Alongside coaching mentoring and training, communities of practice play an increasingly important role in supporting agility. Communities provide a space where practitioners can share experiences, test ideas, learn from peers and translate formal learning into real-world application. In an environment that is changing faster than ever, these peer-driven learning spaces help sustain capability development long after a course or engagement has ended.

Strategic consultancy was also important, while delivery-focused consultancy was mentioned by a smaller number. Again, there were a minority who indicated "none of the above", suggesting that some organisations are still early in their external engagement or did not find it provided a significant role in supporting their journey.

However, when we look at *how organisations measure the success of external services,* a gap emerges. The single most common response was "we do not currently measure success". Others pointed to business outcomes delivered, ROI or customer experience/satisfaction as their success metric. Interestingly, only a small number mentioned speed of delivery or employee engagement/adoption.

"If you are not measuring what external services deliver across four dimensions - implementation progress, capability development, business impact, and cultural evolution - all connected to customer value, you are flying blind. And in the AI era, that is existentially dangerous. Our research showed that 95% of AI projects delivered no measurable P&L impact. The same pattern applies to agility investments. You need to know whether services are building your capability to adopt AI and serve customers better, not just whether they feel productive. When AI-native competitors are capturing your market, optimising for the wrong metrics means you are losing while feeling busy."

James Dwan, CEO, Catalyst Consulting

The Challenge of Collaborating with External Partners

When asked about the biggest challenge when working with external partners, respondents most often cited:

- Lack of internal support or buy-in
- Misalignment with culture or ways of working
- Affordability

This tells us that organisations value coaching, mentoring and training but often struggle to embed and evidence the impact of external support. At the same time, the main barriers are internal such as buy-in or cultural fit and not simply the quality of the service itself.

There is a clear opportunity to help organisations connect external interventions to measurable outcomes via business, customer and people metrics. Investing time upfront in aligning expectations, culture and ways of working when partnering with external providers is key.

"Cultural alignment remains the most critical (and most difficult) factor in successful partnerships. While procurement processes have become highly sophisticated in comparing cost, scope and delivery models, cultural compatibility and behavioural alignment are far harder to assess. Formal scoring mechanisms rarely capture how a partner truly operates in practice.

Authentic partnership is built on shared values, aligned ways of working and mutual accountability - not contractual structure alone."

Jon Bray, Director, Alirity

The Appetite for Frameworks and Future Investment is Strong

Two final questions explored what organisations are looking for next.

Importance of recognised frameworks

When asked *how important it is that service providers offer tools, templates and services aligned to recognised agility frameworks* (such as AgilePM®, AgileBA®, SAFe®), the majority rated this as "very" or "moderately" important.

This suggests that respondents are signalling that they want tools, templates and services to reinforce a shared language and common ways of working. Recognised agility frameworks provide that consistency, helping organisations reduce confusion and create a more joined-up approach to delivery and change.

It also shows that frameworks are valued as practical enablers and not just training or certification pathways. Alignment to recognised frameworks helps ensure that external services (such as coaching or consultancy) build directly on what people have learned through training. This makes it easier to embed skills and apply them in real organisational contexts.

Likelihood of investing in the next 12-18 months

On the question of how likely their organisation is to invest in skills, tools or external services to support agility in the net 12-18 months, most respondents described their organisation as "somewhat" or "very likely" to invest.

This suggests that agility remains a strategic priority, not a discretionary investment. Despite economic uncertainty and competing demands, this indicates that agility is increasingly seen as essential to organisational resilience, adaptability and performance, rather than a 'nice to have'.

What does this mean?

For service providers, this means that in a crowded market, those who can demonstrate alignment to recognised frameworks (such as AgilePM®, AgileBA®, SAFe®) are seen as more credible partners. This is particularly important for organisations seeking to scale agility across teams or functions where consistency and standardisation matter.

Summary

What are the Key Takeaways?

Agility is now deeply entangled with AI, digital transformation and regulatory complexity. Organisations need leaders and teams who can navigate these forces, make data-informed decisions and stay grounded in customer value.

Skills are the real constraint, not tools. Tools are widespread, but the ability to use them in integrated, value-focused ways is uneven. Leadership, change and product skills are where respondents most want to develop.

Culture and leadership are the critical levers. The most frequently cited challenges relate to culture, resistance to change, leadership engagement and internal buy-in. This applies to both agile ways of working internally to the organisation and when collaborating with external partners.

External partners are valued but their impact needs to be clearer. Coaching, mentoring and training are seen as high value, yet many organisations don't yet measure success in a consistent way. If partners can work with organisations to set clear, measurable goals they will yield to be more valuable in the long-term.

Conclusion

The STS Research Survey makes one thing clear. Business agility is no longer a delivery choice. It is a core organisational capability, shaped by AI, digital change and rising customer expectations. Across skills, tools and services, the evidence consistently points to the same challenge. The real barriers to business agility are not technological. They are human and systemic.

Most organisations already have access to a wide range of tools and external support. What holds them back is leadership capability, fragmented ways of working and uneven adoption across the organisation. Executive leadership stands out as a critical constraint, particularly when it comes to responding to change and adopting AI with confidence and pace. This reinforces a growing truth. Sustainable business agility depends on adaptive leadership, data informed decision making and effective change management, not technology alone.

There is clear cause for optimism. Organisations remain committed to investing in business agility over the next twelve to eighteen months. The impact of that investment, however, will depend on how well skills, tools and services are connected, and how clearly success is defined and measured. For the Agile Business Consortium and its community, this presents a powerful opportunity. By supporting organisations to take a more intentional and integrated approach to business agility, we can help turn investment into lasting capability and meaningful business impact.

Our Accredited Delivery Partners

We extend our sincere thanks to the supporting partners for their invaluable contributions to this report. Their expertise in delivering high-quality agile training, coaching and consultancy has enriched the insights presented here and continues to support organisations on their business agility journeys.

AgileSherpas is the world's leading Agile marketing training, consulting, and coaching organization. We help marketing and non-technical teams boost performance by translating Agile ways of working into function-specific mindsets, practices, and skills. We've pioneered Agile marketing, guiding teams across industries toward smarter, clearer, and more effective ways of working. Many of our clients unlock 7-figure savings through better prioritization and more efficient workflows, but the real win is the clarity, focus, and momentum their teams gain along the way.

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Alirity helps organisations simplify transformation and build the capabilities to adapt deliver and thrive in complex or uncertain environments. As an Accredited Delivery Partner with the Agile Business Consortium, we're trusted globally to deliver agile coaching, training, and operating model enablement that embeds lasting capability and drives measurable results. Our work with leading global organisations has aligned teams across markets, improved collaboration, clarified accountabilities, and strengthened execution. By focusing on capabilities rather than roles, we equip teams to respond quickly to new challenges and sustain agility long after we've stepped away.

alirity.com/

At Catalyst we know outstanding business transformation starts with you. Our proven track record is built on developing our clients' in-house capabilities. Together, we bring about real results that win awards and get the world talking. We combine the best of Agile, Lean Six Sigma, digital innovation and don't just do Agile, we are Agile. The result? Ask our clients. Award-winning transformations and ROIs exceeding 5000%.

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