A 2027 State of **DESIGN&MAKE** breakout report

Talent

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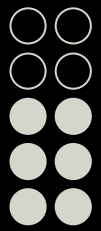
Technology may drive transformation. People determine its success.

Every major trend explored in the *2027 State of Design & Make* report—digital transformation, AI, sustainability, and convergence—depends on people. Organizations can invest in new technologies, but realizing their value ultimately depends on having a workforce with the skills to be productive. As technology continues to evolve, the talent challenge is changing with it.

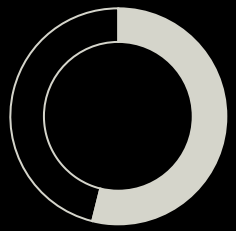
Some long-standing workforce pressures are beginning to ease. Slightly fewer leaders now say skilled talent shortages are limiting growth (54%, down from 58% in 2025), that an aging workforce is creating significant pressure (53%, down from 56%), or that their organizations struggle to adapt to younger generations (40%, down from 46%). Yet one challenge has remained remarkably consistent: 61% still struggle to find employees with the right technical skills. Increasingly, organizations need people who can learn on the job and keep pace with rapidly changing technologies.

That challenge is echoed across Design and Make industries. As Tomoyuki Todoroki, dean of the college of science and technology at Nihon University, explains, “While I believe the fundamental knowledge in science and engineering remains constant, the challenge is keeping pace with cutting-edge technical skills.”



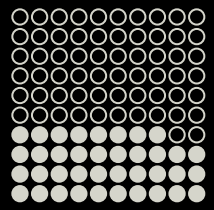
61%

of companies still struggle to find employees with the right technical skills



54%

of companies say lack of skilled talent remains a barrier to growth



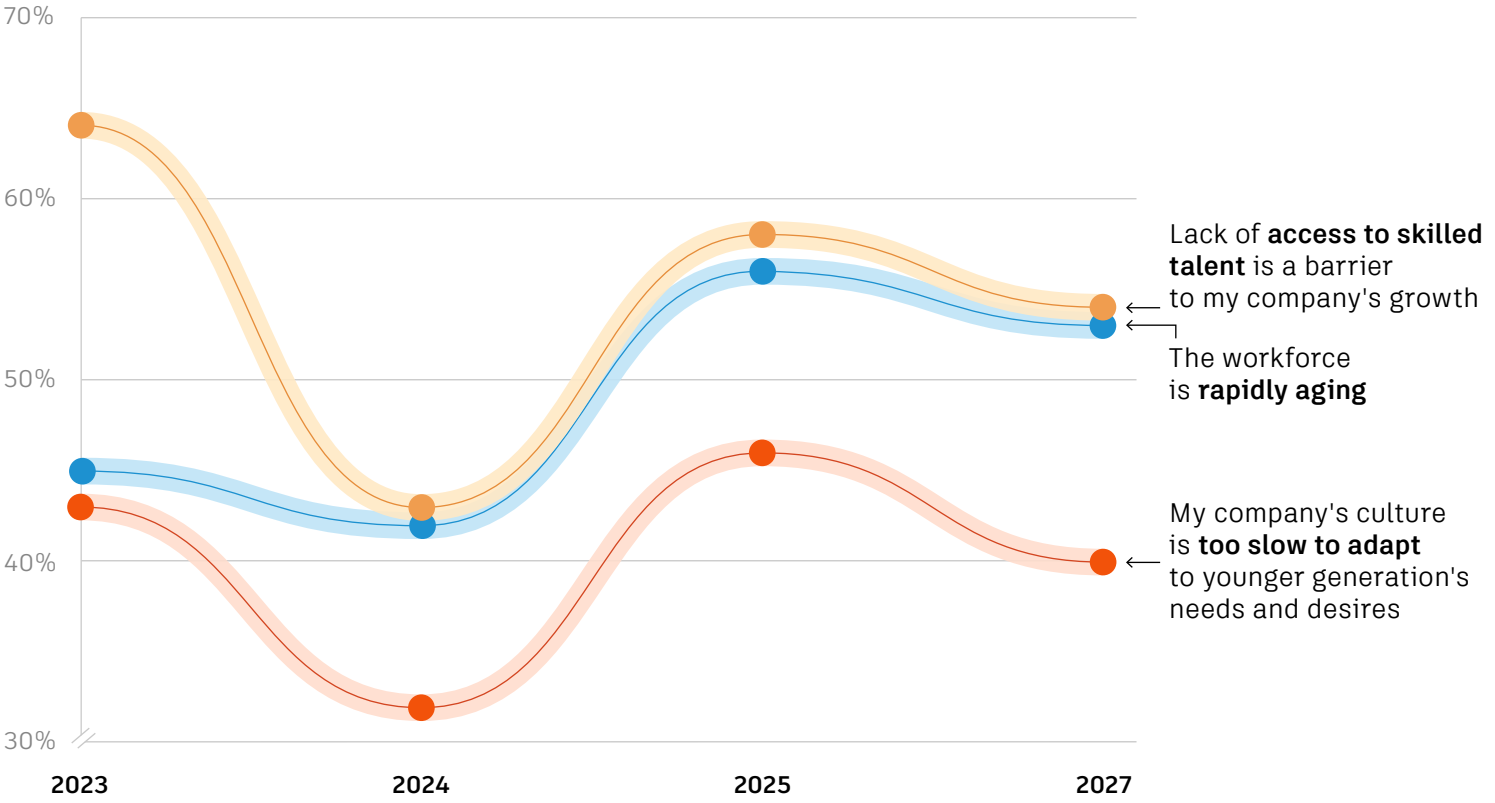
38%

of companies prioritize internal training and upskilling as their primary response

In construction, Rafael Passos Valadares of Grupo Direcionál sees a similar pattern from another perspective: “My biggest challenge is the shortage of labor force.” And in Japan, Keisuke Mito of Shimizu Corporation describes demand that continues to outpace available workers: “It’s very obvious that the demand is rising, and there are less workers... It’s making everything more expensive.” Together, their experiences suggest that organizations are no longer competing simply for talent—they’re competing for continuously evolving capabilities.

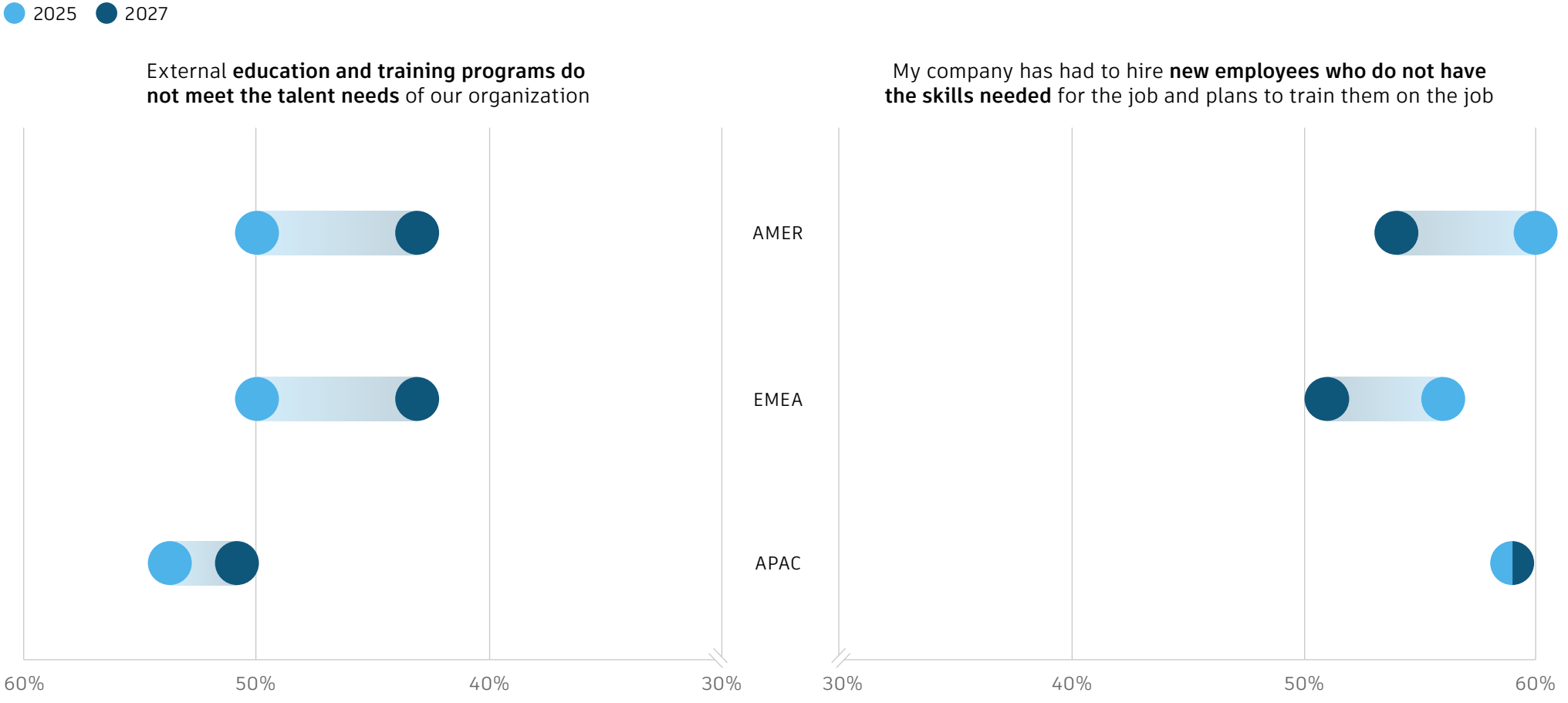
Talent concerns continue across Design and Make industries

Lack of talent still hinders growth, but less so than last year



Survey question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 5-point agreement scale. Top two: “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree.”

As training efficacy improves, the need for external recruitment is dropping



Survey question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: 5-point scale. Top two: “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree.”

The talent you have may be as valuable as the talent you can find

As organizations struggle to find people with the technical skills they need, many are changing how they think about workforce development. Rather than relying primarily on recruitment, leaders increasingly see their existing workforce as the strongest foundation for building the capabilities future work will require. Thirty-eight percent now identify internal training and upskilling as their primary response to technical skills shortages—more than twice the share who prioritize general recruitment (15%).

That shift reflects more than hiring challenges. As new technologies continue to reshape Design and Make industries, organizations increasingly recognize that technical skills have shorter lifecycles than they once did. As Claire Lucas, executive dean and professor of engineering education and skills at Aston University, explains, "We need a dynamic, continually learning workforce, rather than having to recruit anew every time technology evolves."

"It's really difficult to innovate if you don't have a horizontal layer of knowledge… software, electronics, hardware, design, and now AI or automation."

IGNASI PLAZA
CEO and Co-founder, Protofy.xyz, a rapid prototyping and AI automation company based in Barcelona, Spain

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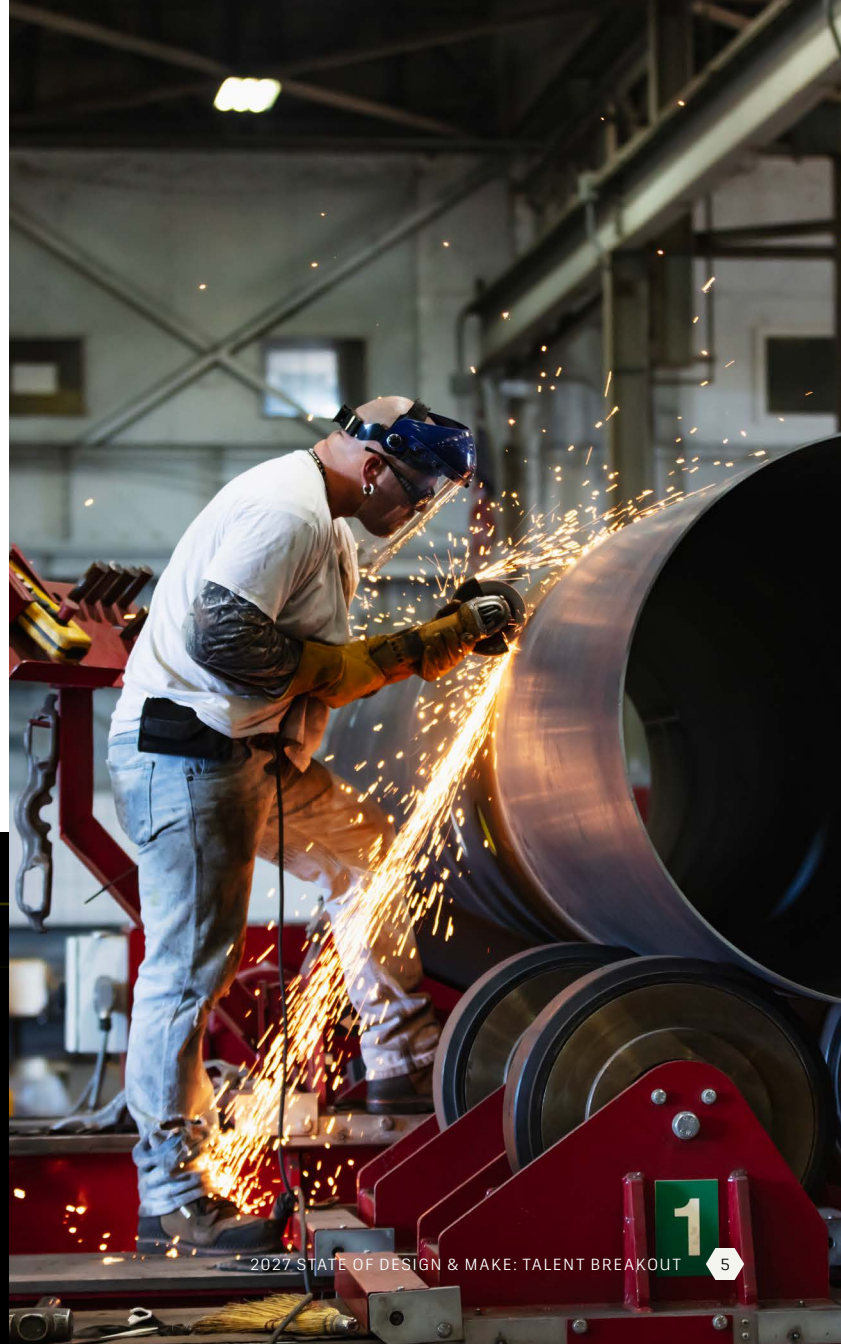
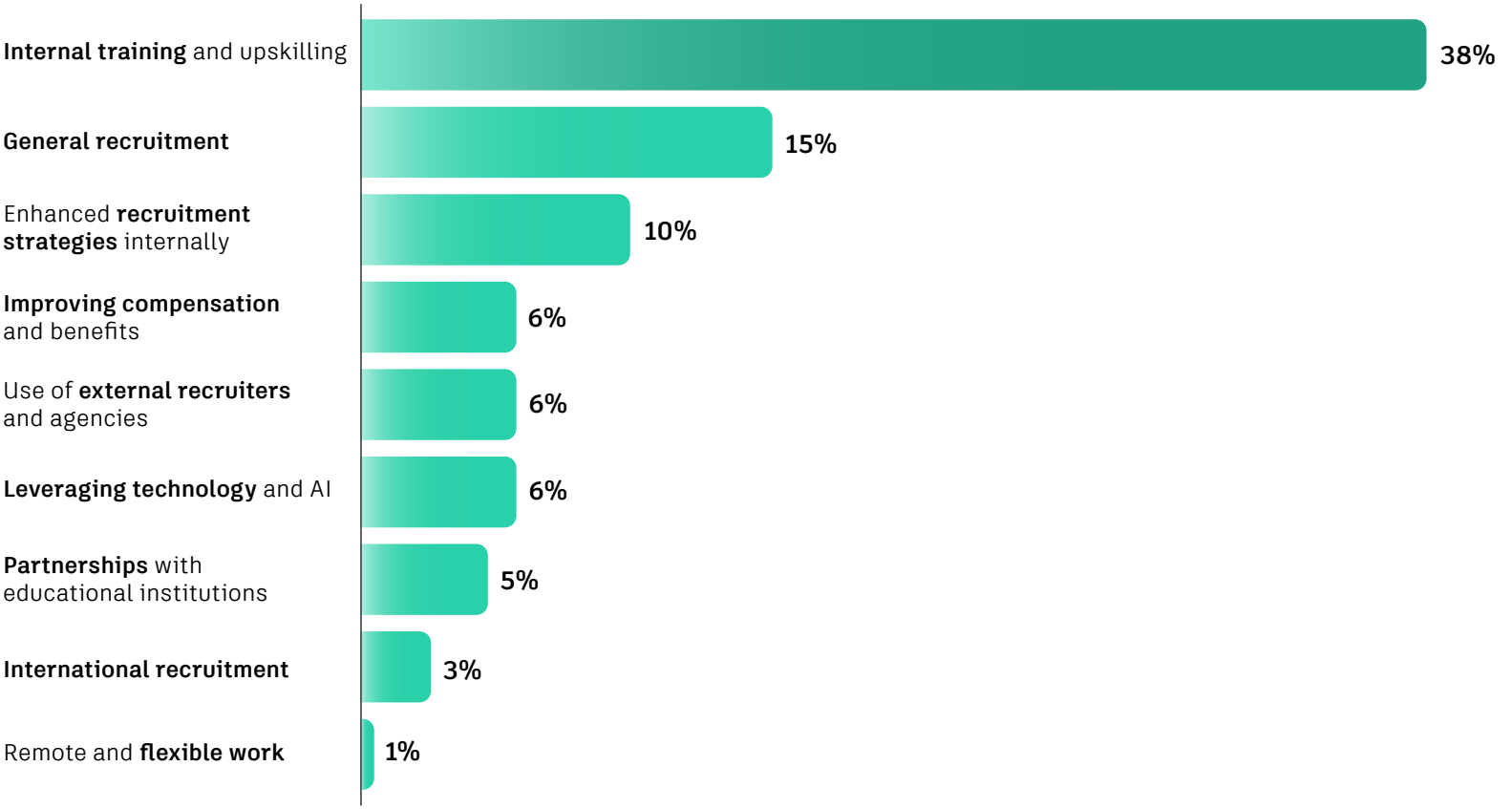
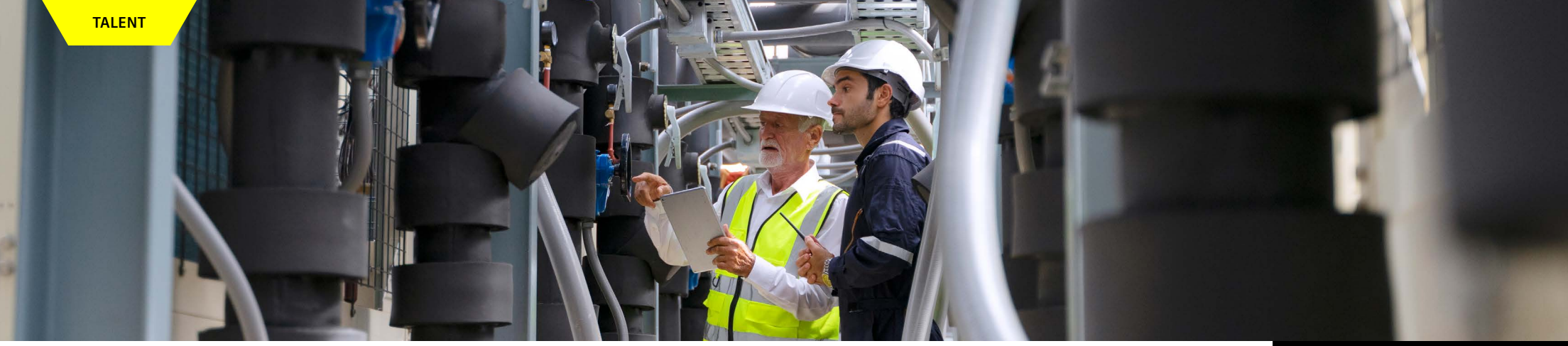


To address skilled-talent shortage, leaders look to upskilling

Organizations are focusing on internal development over external recruitment



Survey question: In the previous question you identified lack of access to skilled talent as a key challenge. What is your organization doing to meet this challenge? Open-ended response analysis. “Off-topic,” “other,” and “nothing/not solving” are not shown.



Continuous learning is becoming a competitive advantage

Building new skills is no longer an occasional training exercise. Across Design and Make industries, organizations are making learning part of how they prepare for continuous change. Eighty percent of leaders now say workforce upskilling is important to their organization's success, 73% plan to increase investment in digital skills training, and 67% have implemented continuous learning programs. Together, these findings suggest organizations increasingly view learning as an ongoing business capability rather than a one-time response to hiring challenges.

Organizations also appear to be becoming better at developing talent internally. The share of leaders who say they lack the skills or resources to build effective internal training programs has fallen from 49% to 39% since 2025, indicating that more organizations are creating the capacity to develop the workforce they need rather than relying exclusively on external talent pipelines.

Andrew Stanford, global technical director for water & maritime at Haskoning, believes this work is becoming even more important as AI enters the workplace. "We already have a skills workforce problem, but I think AI could potentially start to widen that, particularly as senior people move on." His observation reinforces a broader finding from the research: technology alone cannot close the skills gap unless organizations continue investing in the people expected to use it.

80%

of Design and Make organizations say workforce upskilling is important

73%

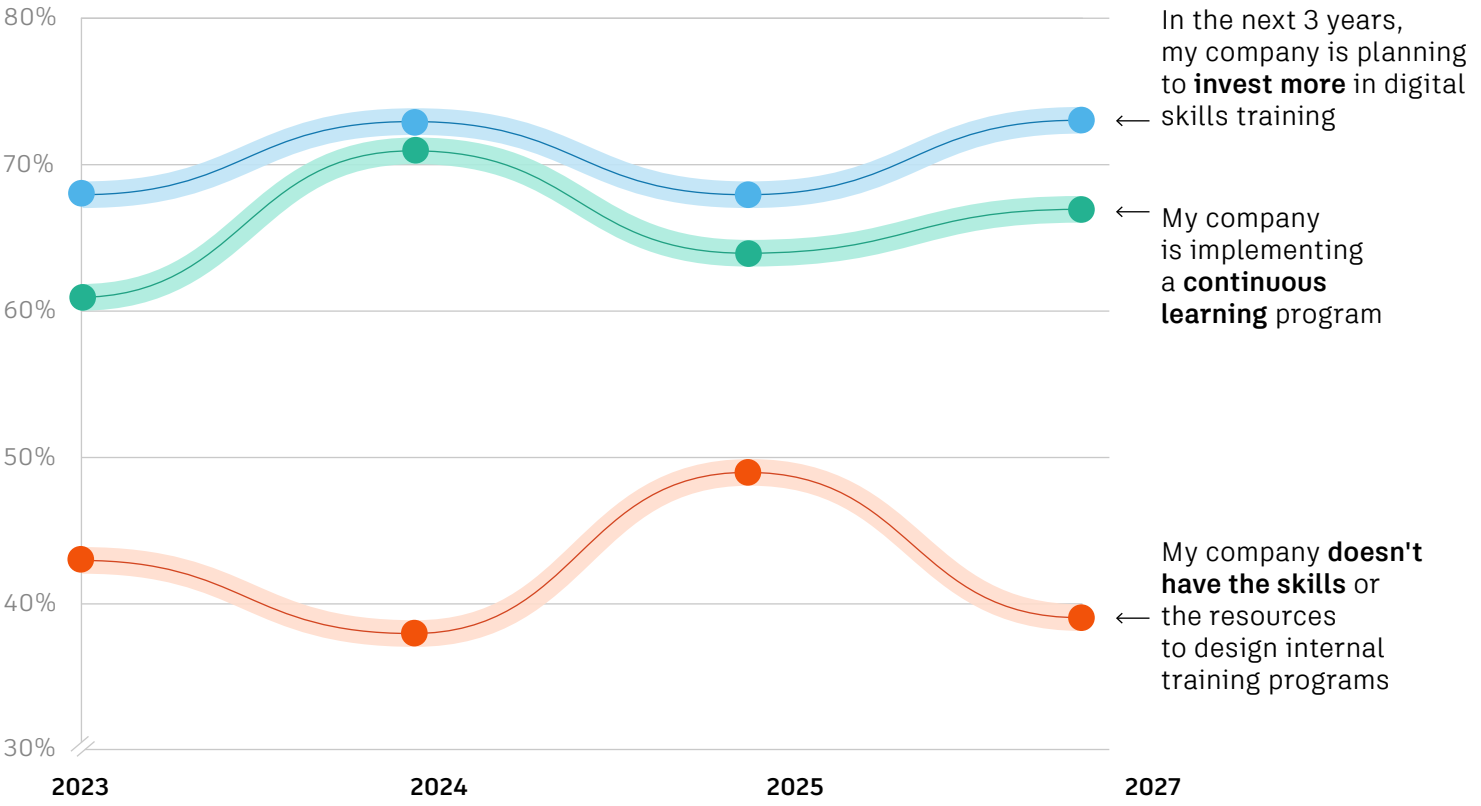
of Design and Make organizations plan to increase investment in digital skills training

"This is not about replacing our workforce, this is about augmenting their creativity and really pushing us towards innovative solutions. And if we do that the right way, then people should really get after this without fear and understand and embrace what it can do for their workflow."

ISADORA GODLEY
VP of Global AI Transformation, Haworth, a global office furniture and workspace interiors manufacturer based in Holland, Michigan

Workforce training is up across the board for Design and Make organizations

Leaders are dedicating significant resources to upskilling



Survey question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 5-point agreement scale. Top two: "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree."

The strongest organizations make themselves talent magnets

The organizations we call **Pacesetters** approach talent as part of their broader business strategy. Rather than relying primarily on recruitment, they create environments where people can continue learning, adopt new technologies, and build meaningful careers as the business evolves.

That broader approach is reflected in the data. Compared with mainstream organizations, 91% of Pacesetters say digital transformation helps attract and retain talent, while 92% say sustainability strengthens talent attraction and retention. They are also far more likely to say sustainability contributes to employee satisfaction and long-term retention (88% vs. 58%). These findings suggest that organizations increasingly compete for talent by connecting technology, purpose, and professional growth rather than relying on recruitment alone.

What are Pacesetters?

Pacesetters are the 11% of organizations in our study that lead simultaneously in digital maturity, AI adoption, and sustainability. They outperform their peers in both business performance and preparedness for future challenges. For details on the methodology, see the *2027 State of Design & Make* report.

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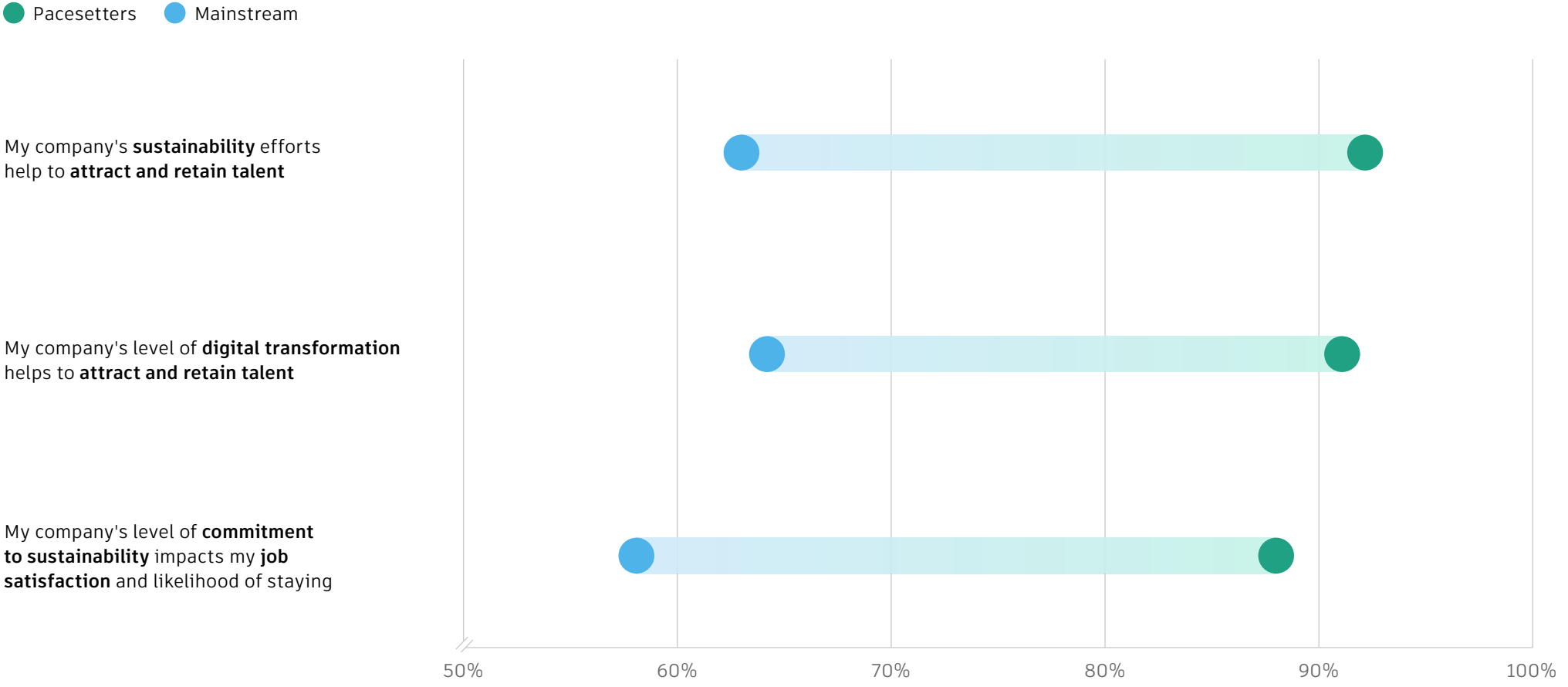
Pacesetters are at a significant advantage in the fight for skilled talent



Survey question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 5-point scale. Top two: “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree.” See the Pacesetter definition on page 9.

Conclusion

The workforce challenge facing Design and Make industries is changing. While some traditional labor pressures are beginning to ease, organizations continue to face a growing need for technical skills that evolve alongside digital transformation, AI, and new ways of working. The challenge is becoming less about finding talent and more about continuously developing it.

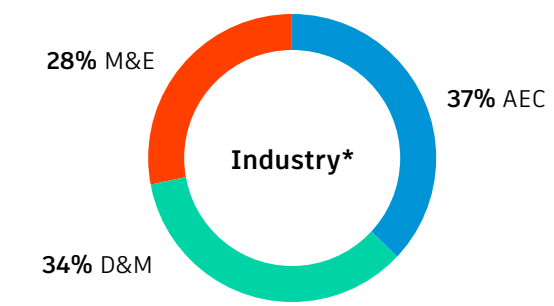
Organizations are investing in upskilling, expanding continuous learning, and becoming more confident in their ability to build talent internally. The strongest organizations go a step further by connecting workforce strategy with broader business priorities, creating environments where learning, technology, and purpose reinforce one another.

The opportunity for Design and Make leaders is not simply to fill today's skills gaps. It is to build organizations that can keep developing the capabilities tomorrow's work will require. As technology continues to evolve, the organizations best positioned for long-term success will be those that treat learning as a continuous business capability rather than a one-time response to change.

About this analysis

This talent briefing draws on Autodesk's *2027 State of Design & Make* study, which surveyed 5,500 leaders and experts across Design and Make industries worldwide. The findings presented here examine workforce trends, hiring priorities, and capability development across industries and regions. Pacesetters represent 11% of the global sample (n=589), with the remaining 89% classified as mainstream organizations.

Definitions for Pacesetters, digital maturity, AI leaders, and sustainability leaders are consistent with those used in the 2027 State of Design & Make *report.*



**Numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding.*

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