

U.S. MBA AI skills: Employer and program priorities

Corporate Recruiters Pulse Survey

October 2026



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About the Corporate Recruiters Pulse Survey

For more than two decades, the [Corporate Recruiters Survey](#) from [GMAC](#) has provided the world's graduate business schools and employers with data and insights to understand current trends in skill demand, hiring, compensation, and perceptions of MBA and business master's graduates. The [latest edition](#) was fielded in January to April 2026 and published in July 2026.

This is the second year that GMAC has supplemented the regular Corporate Recruiters Survey with a shorter “pulse” survey to capture emerging employer priorities between annual survey cycles.

This year's **Corporate Recruiters Pulse Survey** assessed the skills gap between how business schools are preparing their students to use AI and what corporate recruiters are seeking from candidates. In partnership with [Graduate Business Curriculum Roundtable](#), the survey was delivered to U.S. corporate recruiters of MBA graduates, program directors, and deans from September 1 to September 25, 2026.

About the Sample

150

Total respondents

89

Corporate recruiters

51%

From organizations
with 10K+ employees

50%

From consulting,
finance, or tech
sectors

61

Program directors and deans

40%

From business
schools ranked 1-50
by FT or USNWR

60%

From public
institutions

Executive summary

Since the Corporate Recruiters Survey was fielded in early 2026, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the workplace has continued to advance across organizations' operations, communications, and business strategy. To better identify what exactly employers want U.S. MBA graduates to be able to do with AI—and how well business schools are helping their students meet industry needs—the **Corporate Recruiters Pulse Survey** asked recruiters and program leaders about the importance of an expanded list of 24 AI skills, including how prepared today's MBA graduates are to leverage those skills in the workforce. In this context of AI expansion, the pulse survey also asked about the importance of today's core business school curricular elements in the next five years.

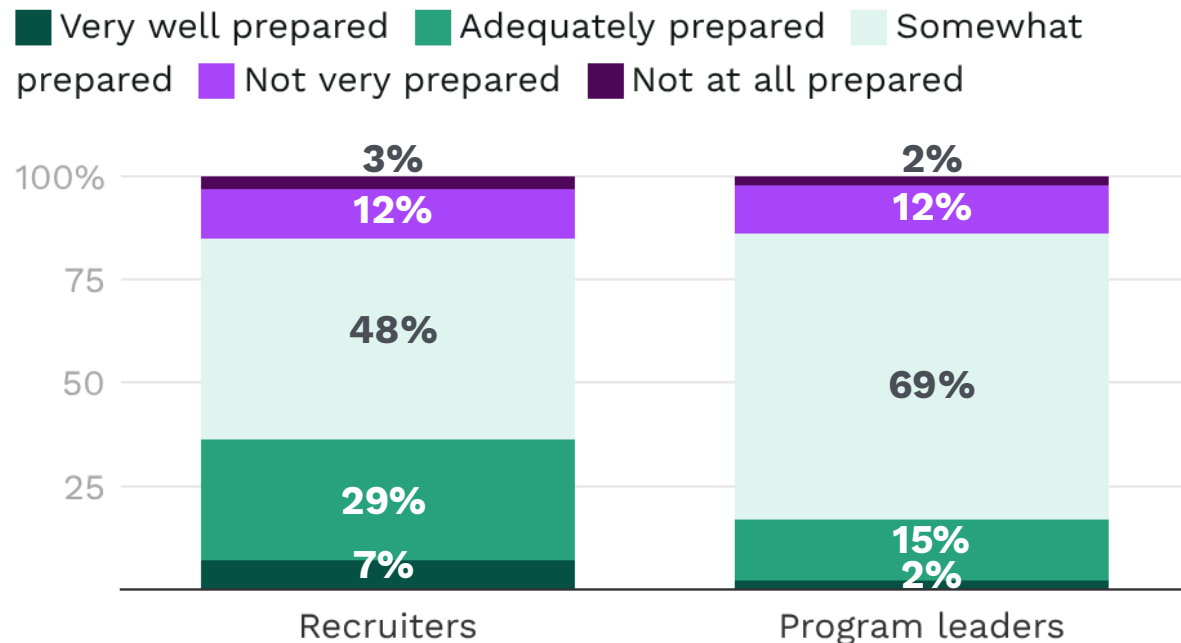
We found that recruiters and program leaders agree on the four most important AI skills: synthesizing large amounts of information, understanding AI risks and limitations, using AI ethically, and interpreting output. Recruiters and program leaders diverged on the relative importance of content generation and data literacy. Program leaders expect recent GME graduates to be able to make materials with AI, but recruiters are more focused on how graduates can manage, interpret, and communicate about data.

When it comes to perceived preparedness across the 24 skills, recruiters generally had a more favorable view than program leaders. However, the few skills where program leaders' expectations of U.S. MBA graduates' preparedness exceeded the recruiter view were some of the most important: understanding AI risks, and using it ethically. This perspective is precisely the value that business schools can—and should—deliver to the future business leaders who will manage the next phases of the AI revolution.



More than three-quarters of recruiters and program leaders agree that U.S. MBA graduates are at least somewhat prepared to use AI in the workforce

How prepared GME graduates are to use AI in the workforce



- Recruiters had more confidence in GME graduates' overall AI preparedness compared to program leaders.
- Not many recruiters or program leaders thought GME graduates are on the extremes of preparedness or unpreparedness.
- A plurality of both recruiters and program leaders reported that U.S. MBA graduates are somewhat prepared to use AI in the workforce.

“AI” can mean many things, so we surveyed a list of AI-related skills by function

Foundations

- Understanding AI limitations and risks
- Using AI ethically and responsibly
- Adapting quickly to new AI technologies
- Upskilling using AI as a resource
- Writing effective prompts

Communications & Content

- Drafting written content (emails, memos, reports)
- Creating presentations or visual materials
- Summarizing or synthesizing large volumes of information
- Creating chatbots
- Translating content

Data & Analytics

- Cleaning, organizing, and managing data
- Analyzing data and interpreting outputs
- Building or evaluating predictive models
- Creating data visualizations or dashboards

Coding & Automation

- Writing or debugging code
- Automating repetitive tasks or workflows
- Building agents or custom AI applications

Business Operations & Strategy

- Managing projects using AI tools
- Performing quality control checks on AI outputs
- Developing SOPs or process documentation
- Forecasting outcomes or modeling business scenarios
- Identifying and prioritizing AI use cases within an organization
- Measuring the ROI or impact of AI initiatives
- Leading or advising on adoption efforts

U.S. MBA recruiters want MBA grads to synthesize information—but also understand AI's boundaries

- Recruiters think **foundational skills** are the most important type of AI skill for U.S. MBA graduates to bring to their organizations.
- The other category recruiters highly valued was AI use in **data and analytics**, with 3 of the 4 skills ranking in the top 10.
- When we conducted the full Corporate Recruiters Survey earlier this year, “automating repetitive tasks or workflows” was the top AI skill; in the context of a more comprehensive skill list, it is still ranked in recruiters’ top 10.

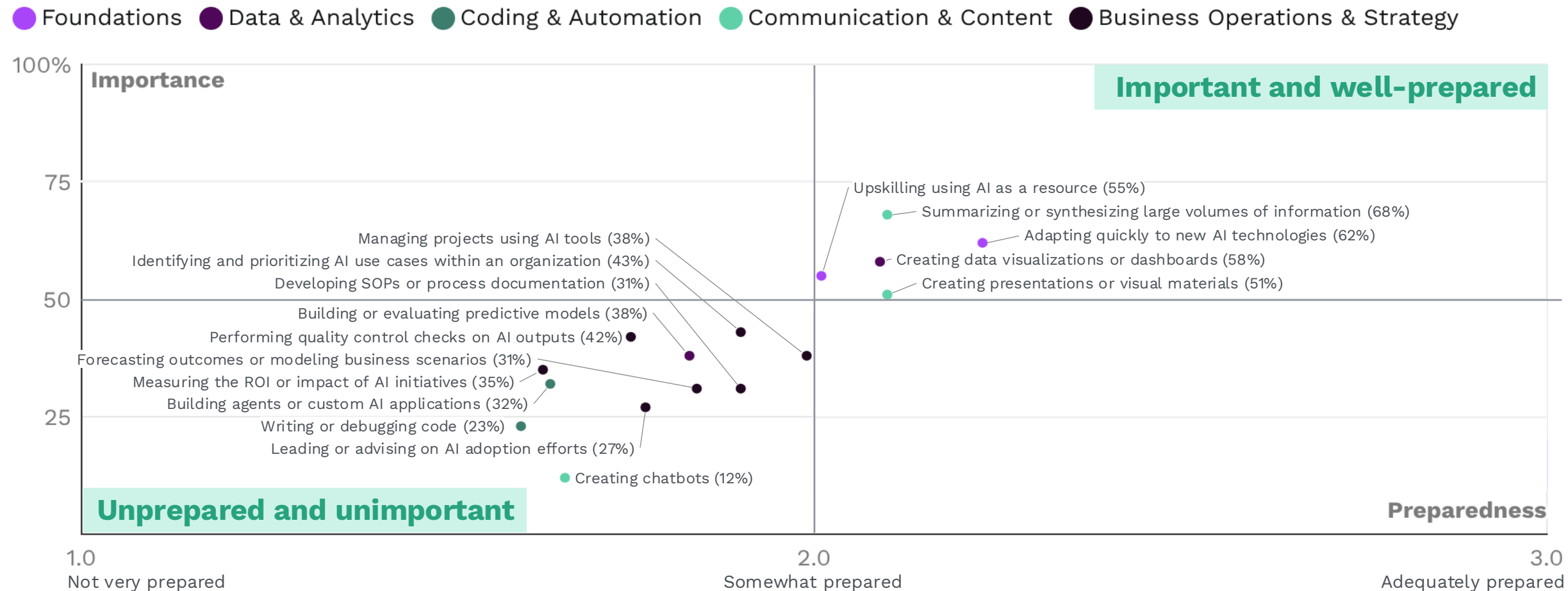
Recruiters' top 10 most important AI skills

Foundations Communications & Content Data & Analytics
Coding & Automation Business Operations & Strategy

1. Summarizing or synthesizing large volumes of information (68%)
2. Understanding AI limitations and risks (64%)
2. Using AI ethically and responsibly (64%)
2. Analyzing data and interpreting outputs (64%)
5. Adapting quickly to new AI technologies (62%)
6. Creating data visualizations or dashboards (58%)
7. Automating repetitive tasks or workflows (57%)
8. Upskilling using AI as a resource (55%)
9. Creating presentations or visual materials (51%)
10. Cleaning, organizing, and managing data (50%)

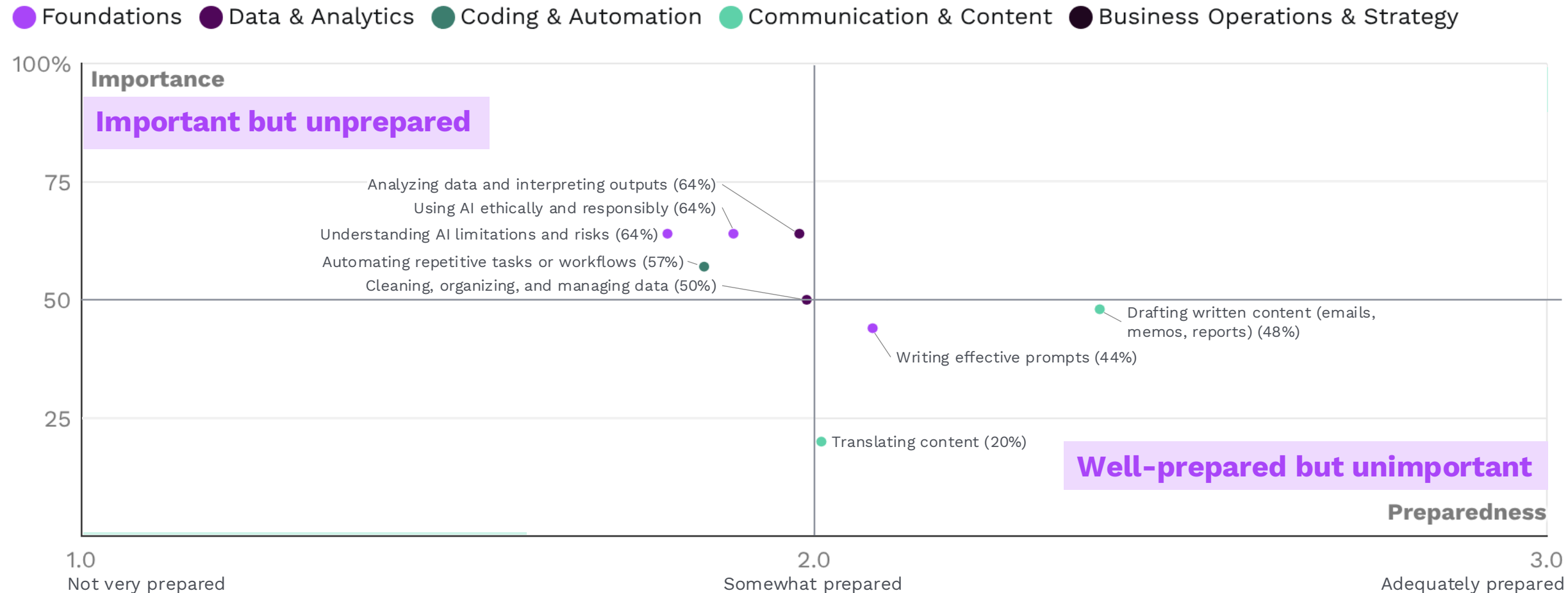
Five AI skills rank high on both importance and preparedness, while strategy skills rank low on both

U.S. MBA recruiters' perceived importance and preparedness to leverage AI skills



Graduates lag on valued responsible AI and data skills, but lead on lower-priority writing

U.S. MBA recruiters' perceived importance and preparedness to leverage AI skills



Program leaders aligned with recruiters on the four most important AI skills

- Program leaders ranked **communications and content** higher in importance than recruiters and **data and analytics** skills lower relative to other surveyed skills; however, more program leaders than recruiters still said most **data and analytics** skills were important.
- Program leaders anticipated managing projects using AI tools to be an important skill for recent GME graduates. However, among recruiters, it was ranked 16th, and only 38 percent of recruiters selected it as an important skill.
- The most important skill from our full survey earlier this year, “automating repetitive tasks and workflows,” was not included in program leaders’ top 10 list.

Program leaders' top 10 most important AI skills

Foundations Communications & Content Data & Analytics
Coding & Automation Business Operations & Strategy

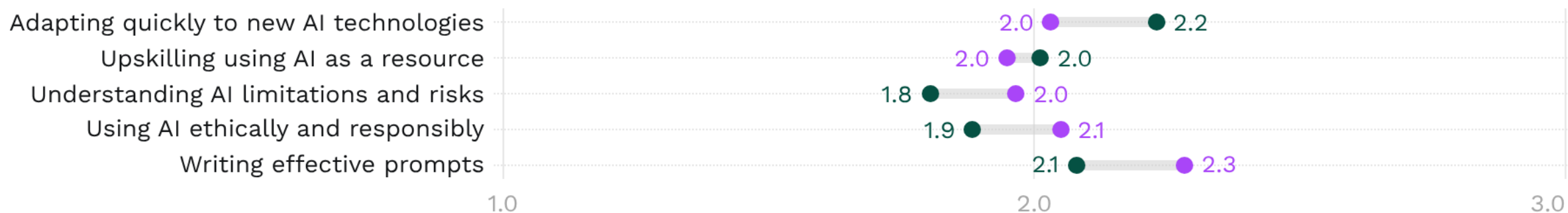
1. Understanding AI limitations and risks (80%)
2. Using AI ethically and responsibly (78%)
2. Summarizing or synthesizing large volumes of information (78%)
4. Analyzing data and interpreting outputs (75%)
5. Creating presentations or visual materials (70%)
6. Managing projects using AI tools (67%)
7. Drafting written content (emails, memos, reports) (65%)
8. Adapting quickly to new AI technologies (62%)
8. Cleaning, organizing, and managing data (62%)
8. Creating data visualizations or dashboards (62%)

Recruiters are less optimistic than program leaders on graduates' preparedness to understand AI risks

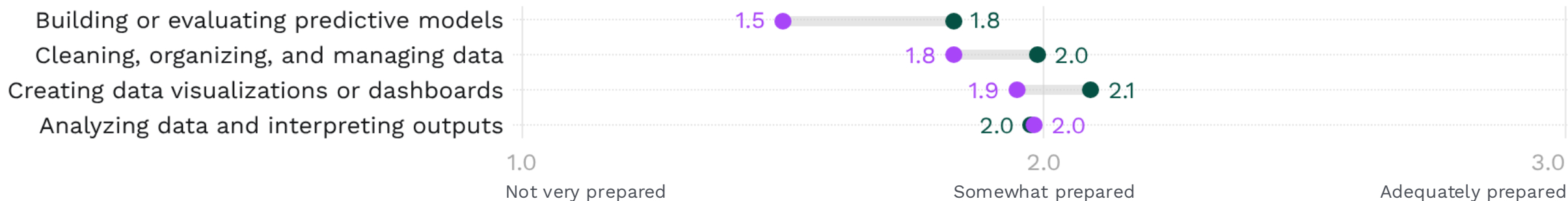
How recruiters and program leaders view U.S. MBA graduates' AI preparedness
(foundations, data, and analytics)

● Recruiters ● Program leaders

Foundations



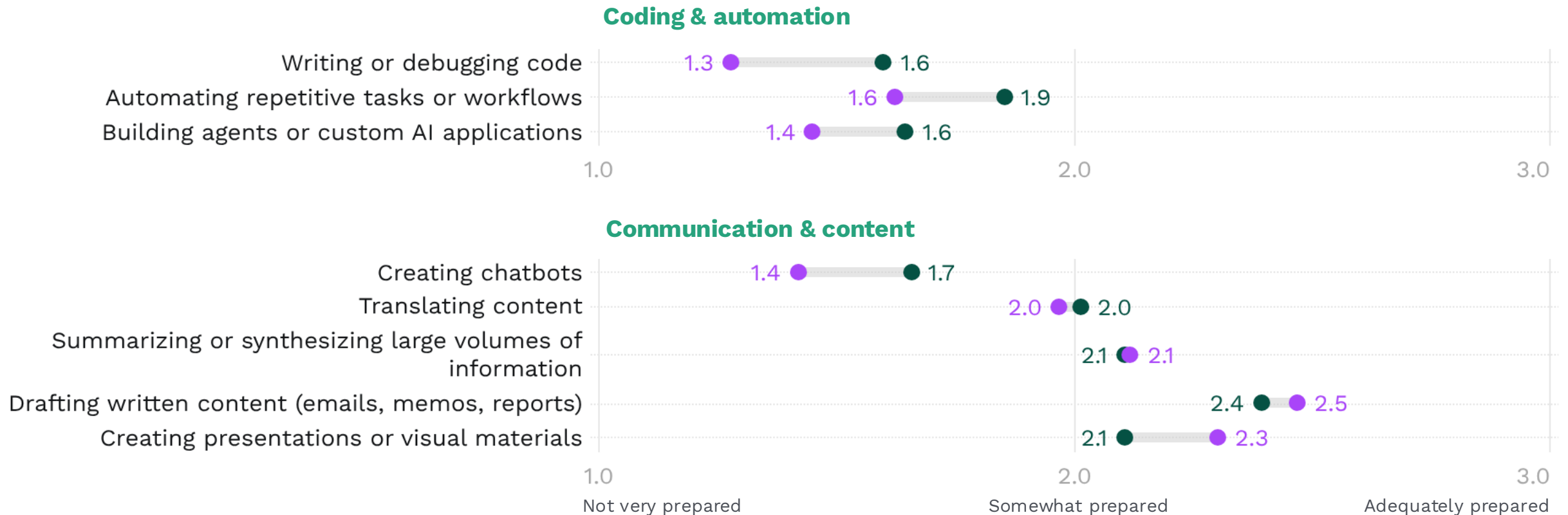
Data & analytics



Recruiters feel better about graduates' AI coding preparedness—but still think it's below average

How recruiters and program leaders view U.S. MBA graduates' AI preparedness
(coding, automation, communication, and content)

● Recruiters ● Program leaders



Recruiters have a more favorable view of graduates' preparedness to use AI in operations and strategy—but still rate it lower than other functions

How recruiters and program leaders view U.S. MBA graduates' AI preparedness
(business operations and strategy)

● Recruiters ● Program leaders

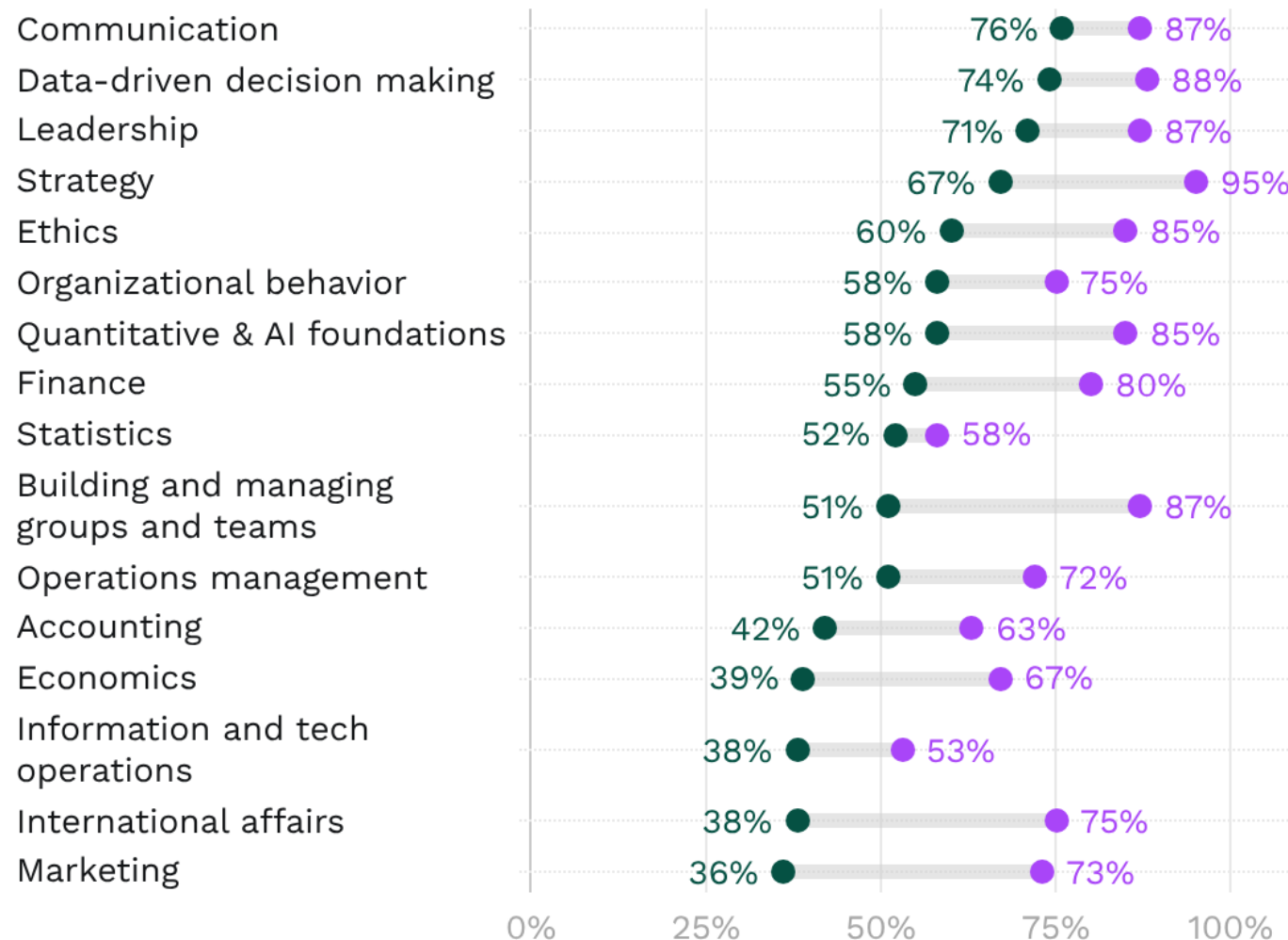


Program leaders project greater future importance of each curricular element than recruiters

- The widest gaps are in international affairs, marketing, and building/managing teams.
- Recruiters and program leaders agree on the critical future importance of communication, data-driven decision-making, and leadership.
- Information and tech operations have relatively limited projected importance among both recruiters and program leaders.

Recruiter and program leaders' projected importance of core GME curricular topics in five years

● Recruiters ● Program leaders



U.S. MBA AI skills: Employer and program priorities is a product of GMAC, a global nonprofit association of leading graduate business schools committed to connecting future business leaders with educational opportunities and advancing graduate management education worldwide. Through assessments, research, events, and recruitment solutions, we provide the tools and information necessary for schools and candidates to discover and evaluate each other. With teams in China, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States, GMAC serves millions of visitors each year across its digital platforms.

The survey was conducted in collaboration with Graduate Business Curriculum Roundtable, a global association of business schools whose mission is to advance graduate business education through curricular and co-curricular innovation.

Contact Information

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