



Corporate Recruiters Survey

2026 Deans Summary



Access the full report at gmac.com/corporaterecruiters

The 2026 Corporate Recruiter Survey results suggest that the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the workforce has reshaped employer expectations and behaviors. Unsurprisingly, the demand for AI-related skills grew faster than any other capability surveyed this year (Figure 1). When asked which skills will be most important to their hiring decisions in five years, skills using AI tools topped the list for the second year in row. But when asked how capable today's graduates are to leverage AI tools in their organizations, most global employers thought they were just somewhat prepared, not very prepared, or unprepared—a new but critical gap in employer expectations of AI integration into the classroom.

Figure 1: Data analysis and interpretation, skills using AI tools, and other technology/IT skills grew the most in value in the last year.

Adaptability is now the third most important skill employers value in their hiring decisions.

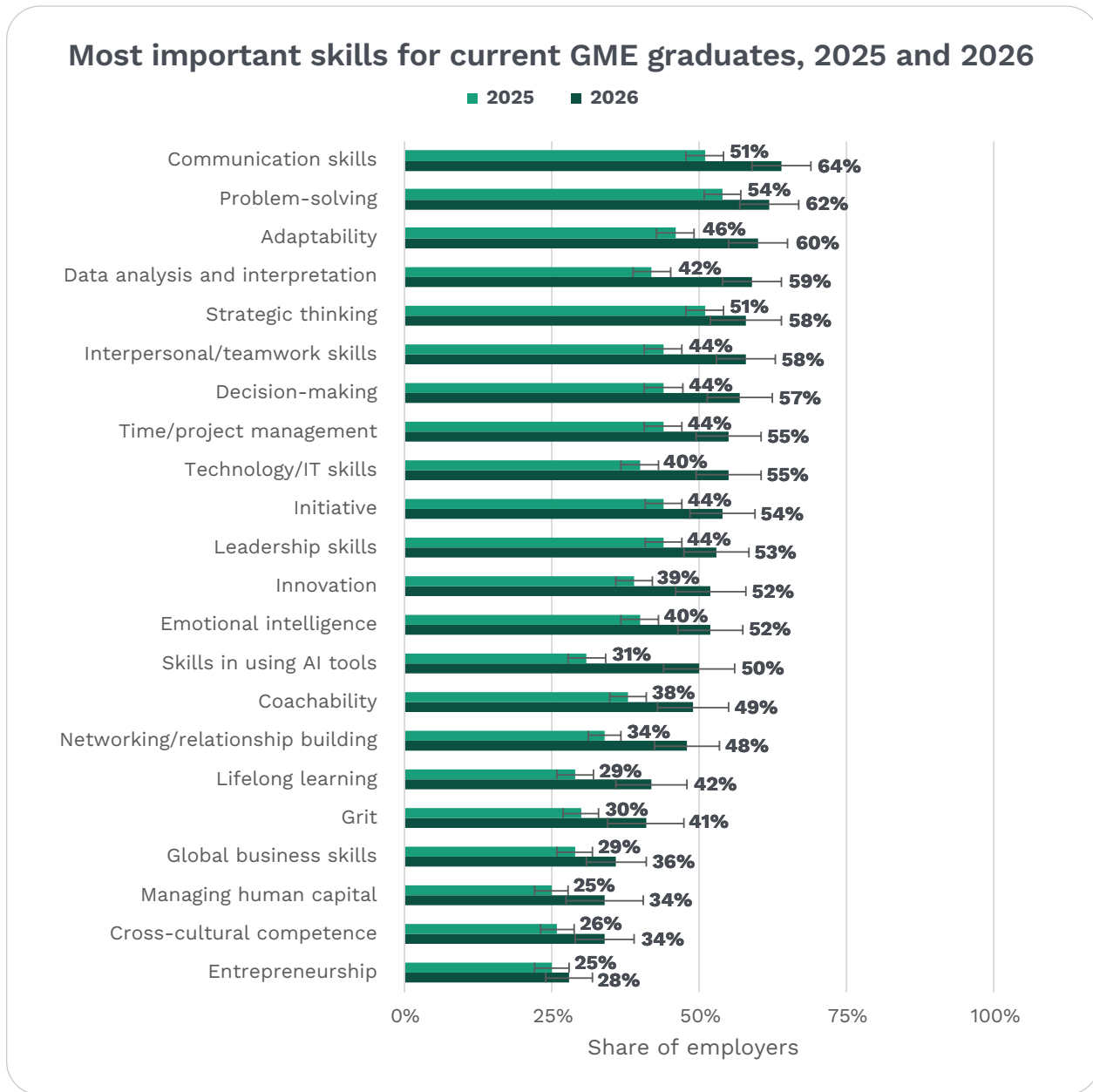


Figure 2: Employers anticipated skills using AI tools will grow the most in importance in the next five years.

More than half of employers thought strategic thinking is important now and five years from now.

Most important *current* skills

1	Communication skills (64%)
2	Problem-solving (62%)
3	Adaptability (60%)
4	Data analysis/interpretation (59%)
5	Interpersonal/teamwork skills (58%)
6	Strategic thinking (58%)
7	Decision-making (57%)
8	Technology/IT skills (55%)
9	Time/project management (55%)
10	Initiative (54%)
11	Leadership skills (53%)
12	Emotional intelligence (52%)
13	Innovation (52%)
14	Skills in using AI tools (50%)
15	Coachability (49%)
16	Networking/relationship building (48%)
17	Lifelong learning (42%)
18	Grit (41%)
19	Global business skills (36%)
20	Cross-cultural competence (34%)
21	Managing human capital (34%)
22	Entrepreneurship (28%)

Most important *future* skills

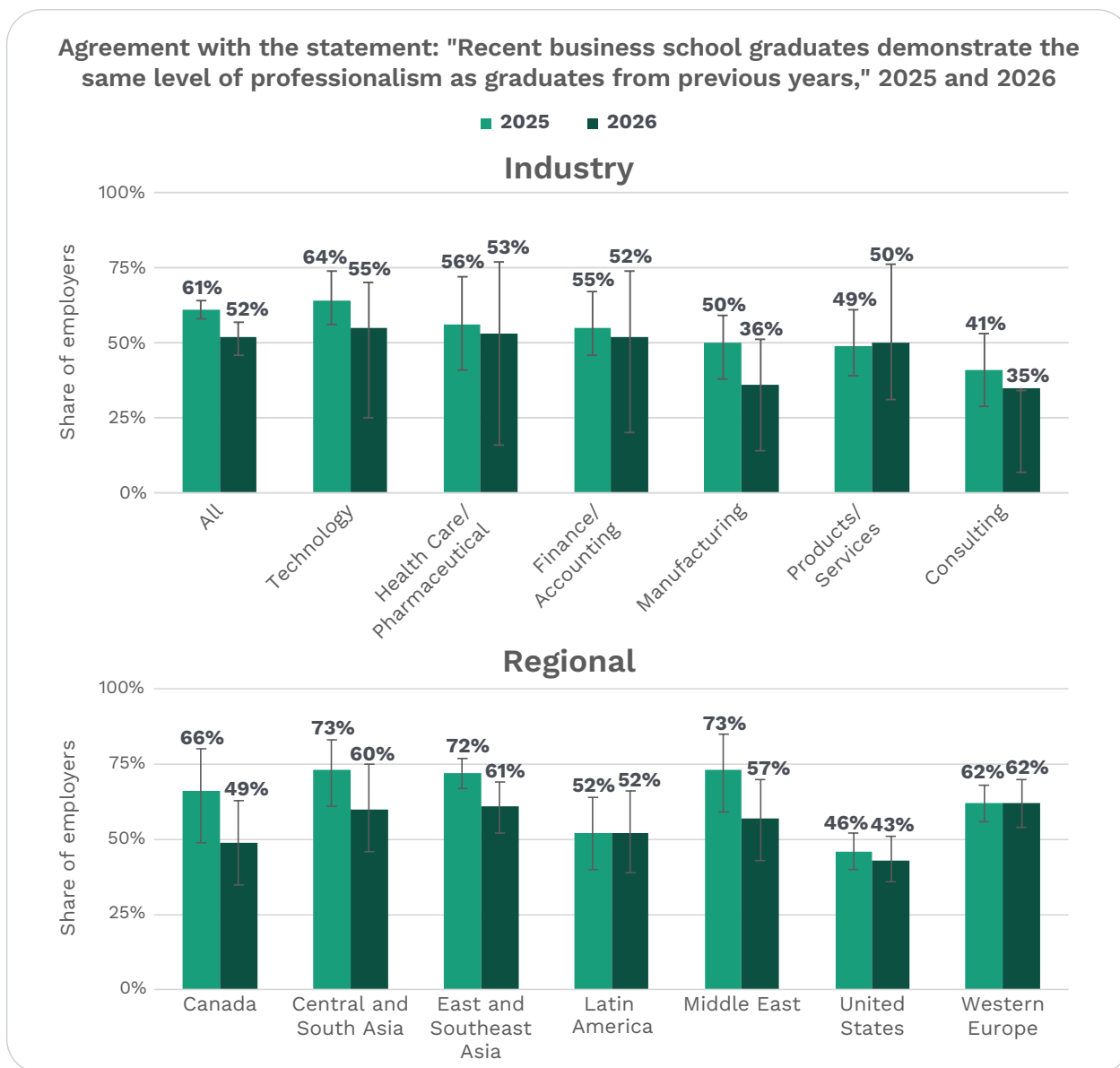
1	Skills in using AI tools (53%)	↑ 13
2	Strategic thinking (50%)	
3	Technology/IT skills (49%)	↑ 5
4	Decision-making (47%)	
5	Problem-solving (47%)	
6	Adaptability (46%)	
7	Communication skills (45%)	↓ 6
8	Data analysis/interpretation (42%)	
9	Innovation (42%)	
10	Leadership skills (42%)	
11	Emotional intelligence (39%)	
12	Networking/relationship building (39%)	
13	Lifelong learning (38%)	
14	Time/project management (38%)	
15	Global business skills (36%)	
16	Initiative (36%)	
17	Interpersonal/teamwork skills (34%)	
18	Coachability (33%)	
19	Grit (33%)	
20	Cross-cultural competence (31%)	
21	Managing human capital (31%)	
22	Entrepreneurship (28%)	

However, AI's impact is not necessarily most recognizable in how employers expect GME graduates to use specific tools and technologies. Instead, its impact is perhaps most profound in the growth of employer expectations for complementary skills like data analysis and adaptability. AI has become so ubiquitous that it has boosted the need for employees who can analyze its output, change direction based on the new information, and effectively communicate a path forward.

At the same time, one in three employers reported already replacing at least some entry-level roles with AI—a signal that the technology is reshaping not just what skills are valued, but which opportunities are available to new graduates. This challenge to entry-level roles comes as employers also express less confidence in today's GME graduates' "professionalism," such as their reliability, respectfulness, accountability, or professional appearance (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Most employers agreed recent business school graduates were as professional as before—but at lower levels than last year.

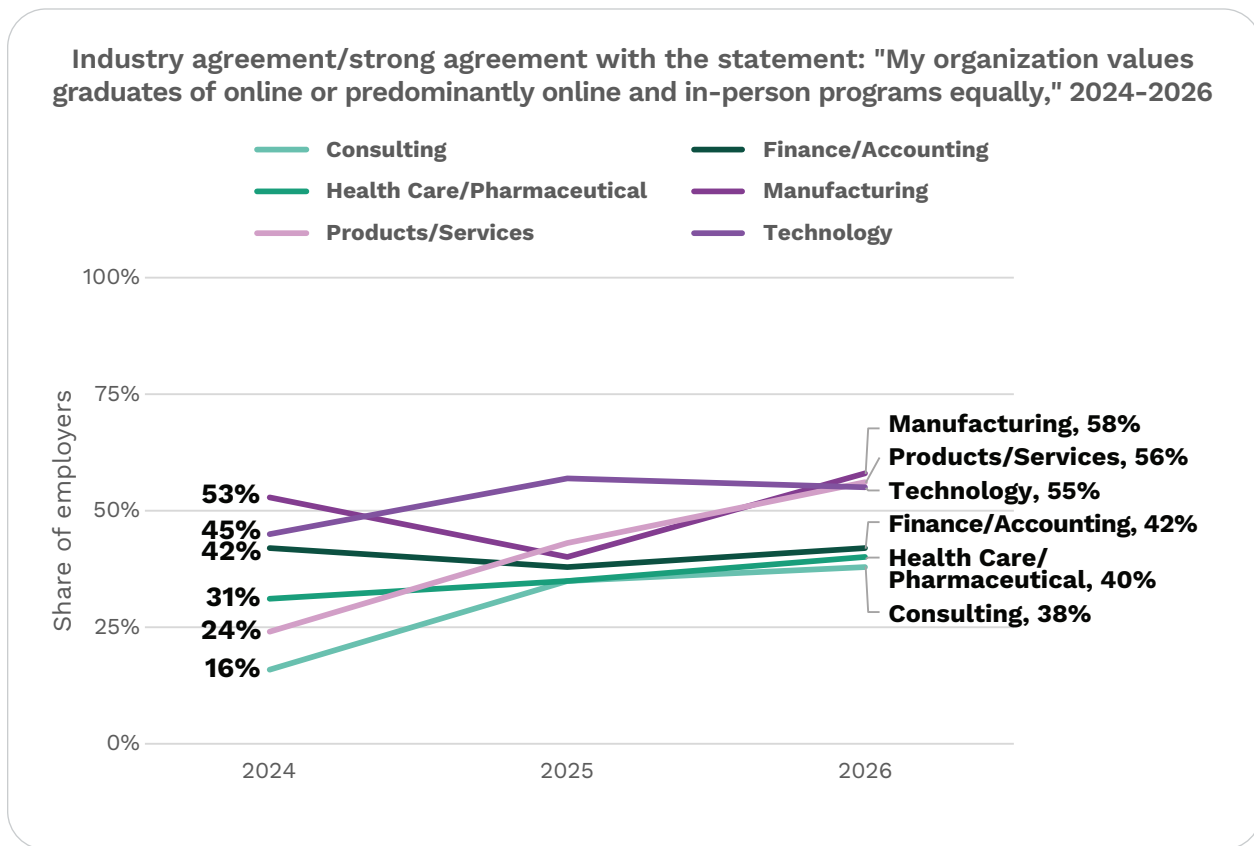
North American, consulting, and manufacturing employers were the least likely to agree.



Though the impact of AI is undeniable, it is not the only factor reshaping employer expectations of GME. Attitudes toward how and where a degree is earned continue to evolve, with 61 percent of employers now valuing online and in-person programs equally—up from 55 percent two years ago (Figure 4). The picture on micro-credentials (such as professional certificates) is more nuanced. While global employers still broadly favor GME degree holders over those with micro-credentials alone, U.S. employers have grown incrementally more open to alternative credentials, a trend worth monitoring for schools considering how to diversify their program offerings.

Figure 4: Across most industries, more employers viewed online and in-person programs equally in 2026 compared to 2024.

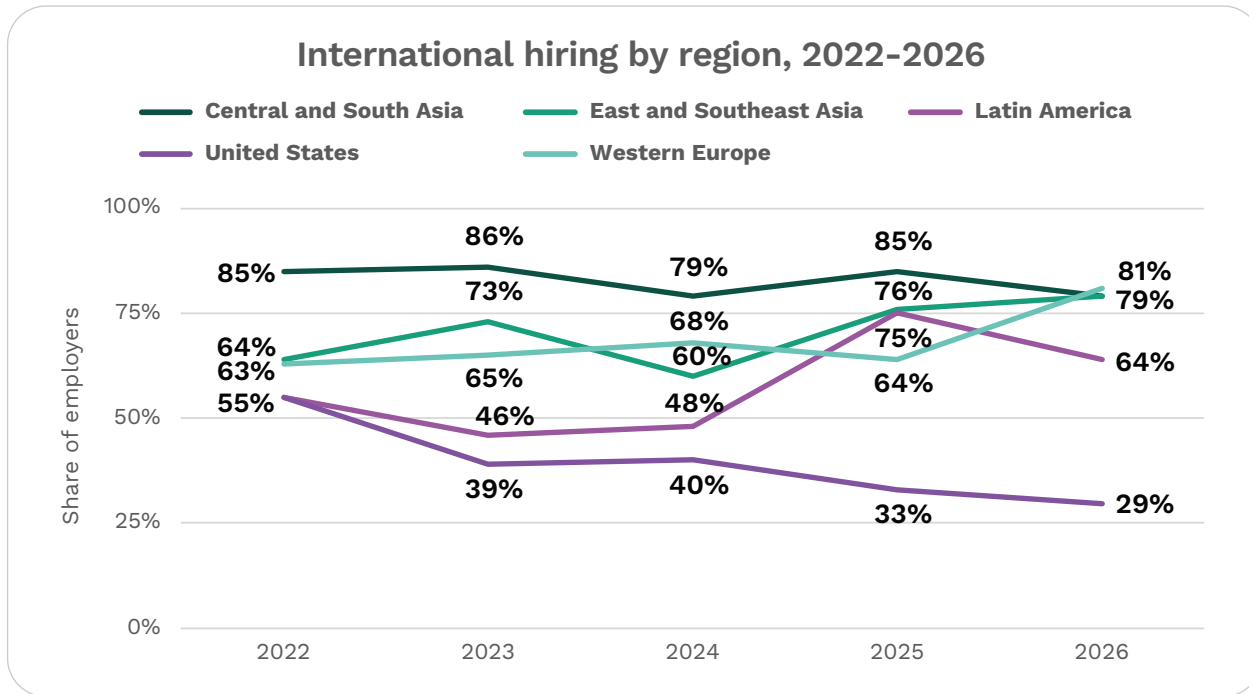
Consulting employers are still the least likely to value the modalities equally, though they have demonstrated the most growth over the past couple of years.



As international students flock to programs in Western Europe and Asia, it appears employers in those regions are more than willing to hire the influx of talent from abroad. U.S. employers, by contrast, have grown less open to sponsoring international hires in the past five years, with some companies redirecting international hiring to their offices abroad in response to changes in U.S. government policy.

Figure 5: Compared to five years ago, employers in Western Europe and East and Southeast Asia are more likely to hire talent who require additional legal documentation.

U.S. employers have grown less likely to sponsor international hires in recent years.



Through all of these shifts, the fundamental value of a graduate business degree remains intact. MBA graduates are still expected to out-earn direct industry hires, and business master's graduates continue to command a premium over bachelor's degree holders. Employer confidence in GME is universal, and hiring intentions are up across degree types. For business schools, the challenge—and the opportunity—is to build on that strong foundation while adapting quickly to suit the needs of organizations undergoing fundamental shifts in how they work.

More key findings



Skill demand in the AI era

- Most employers said candidates are very well or adequately prepared to demonstrate most skills in their organizations excluding AI skills, grit, managing human capital, and emotional intelligence.
- Two-thirds of AI-concerned employers wanted GME graduates to use AI tools to automate tasks.



Employer confidence in GME

- In 2026, employers are especially confident in GME graduates' ability to handle complex global business environments.
- Across industries, more than half of employers agreed or strongly agreed that a graduate business degree is more important than ever as businesses adopt new technologies.



Hiring and compensation trends

- Employers were less likely to attribute their hiring decisions to external factors in 2026 compared to 2025. The financial status of their organization was most likely to have major influence on their hiring decisions, followed by inflation.
- About one quarter of employers at U.S. companies planned to expand their hiring of business school graduates to offices outside of the United States.

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"The results of the 2026 Corporate Recruiters Survey reveal the resilient value of graduate management education during times of change. Employer expectations for AI and technology skills continue to rise, but increasingly in service of better strategic thinking, decision-making, and problem solving-capabilities. Business schools are preparing graduates for a profoundly different business environment, yet with durable skills that have long helped leaders innovate with new technologies, manage intergenerational workforces, and navigate economic and geopolitical uncertainty."



Joy Jones
CEO, GMAC

About the Corporate Recruiters Survey

Since 2002, 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. In total, 621 corporate recruiters and hiring managers from staffing firms around the world participated in the survey, which was conducted from January to May of 2026.



2026 sample stats

621
survey
respondents¹

39
countries
represented

53%
from Global
Fortune 500

1. To determine region-level target sample sizes, we calculated power analyses based on observed effects from last year's Corporate Recruiters Survey. Of the key effects that were chosen, the lowest effect size had a Cohen's d of 0.46. Using G*Power, we simulated required sample sizes given $d = 0.46$ using t-tests and 80% power with the target of having unequal sample sizes at ratio of 2.5. For a target effect size of 0.46, a sample size of 53 is required for the smaller group and 131 for the larger group to achieve 80% power to observe effects. For our regional targets, we increased the larger group to 150 to increase power.

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