



What talent wants 2026

Inside the choices, expectations
and signals shaping India's tech
professionals.

TALENT500

Foreword

I've spent much of my career on both sides of the talent equation: working with professionals making consequential career choices, and with companies trying to build teams that exceptional people want to join and stay with.

What has changed is not simply what talent wants. It is how people decide whether an opportunity is worth pursuing at all.

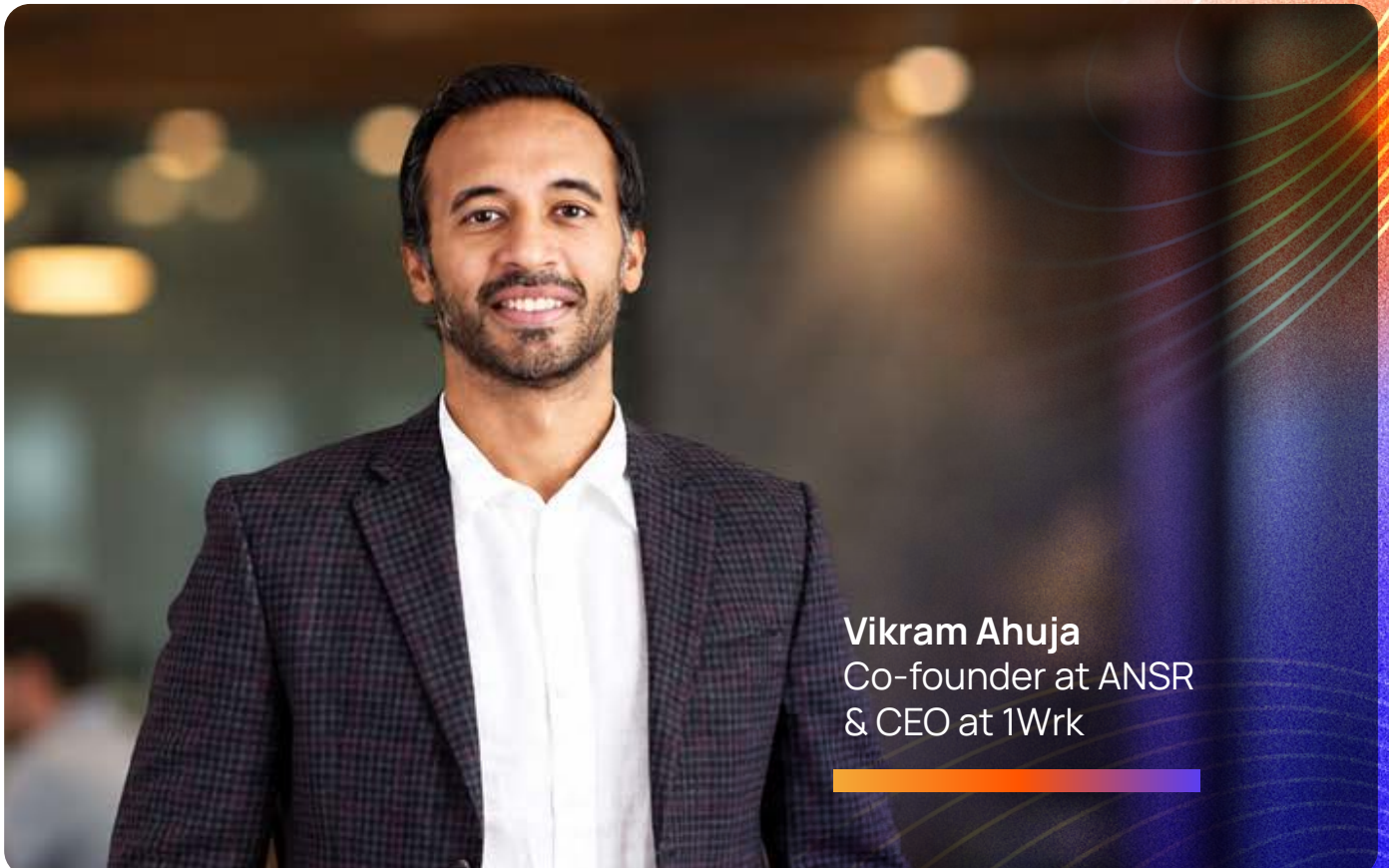
Today, candidates arrive with more information, more questions and more ways to validate what an employer tells them. They want to know where they can grow, who they will work for, what they will own, whether the AI opportunity translates into real work and what the

complete proposition is worth. And increasingly, they are finding those answers before the first interview.

For What Talent Wants 2026, we asked **2,000 tech**, product and data professionals across India how they evaluate employers, what they expect from their next opportunity, who they trust and what makes them reconsider.

The findings point to a simple shift: the career decision now begins long before the offer.

For employers, that changes the job. It is no longer enough to have a strong opportunity. The things talent values must also be clear, credible and visible before candidates are asked to commit.



Vikram Ahuja
Co-founder at ANSR
& CEO at 1Wrk

The decision is made before the first interview.

India's tech professionals are doing more homework before making a career decision. They want to know where a role can take them, who they will work for, whether the AI opportunity is real, what employees say about the company and what the overall proposition looks like before they commit.

We surveyed 2000 tech, product and data professionals across India to understand what they value, where they look for answers, who they trust and what ultimately shapes their choice of employer.

The findings at a glance



Career growth comes first.

87% say defined career-growth information is very important, while 79% would drop an application or decline an offer if there is no clear career path or growth story.



People trust people.

Former employees are the most trusted source at 48%, followed closely by current employees' LinkedIn posts at 44%. Company leadership posts are trusted by just 23%.



The research starts well before the interview.

92% research employers on LinkedIn, 81% visit company or careers pages and 31% now use AI tools before applying. The employer is being evaluated long before the first conversation takes place.



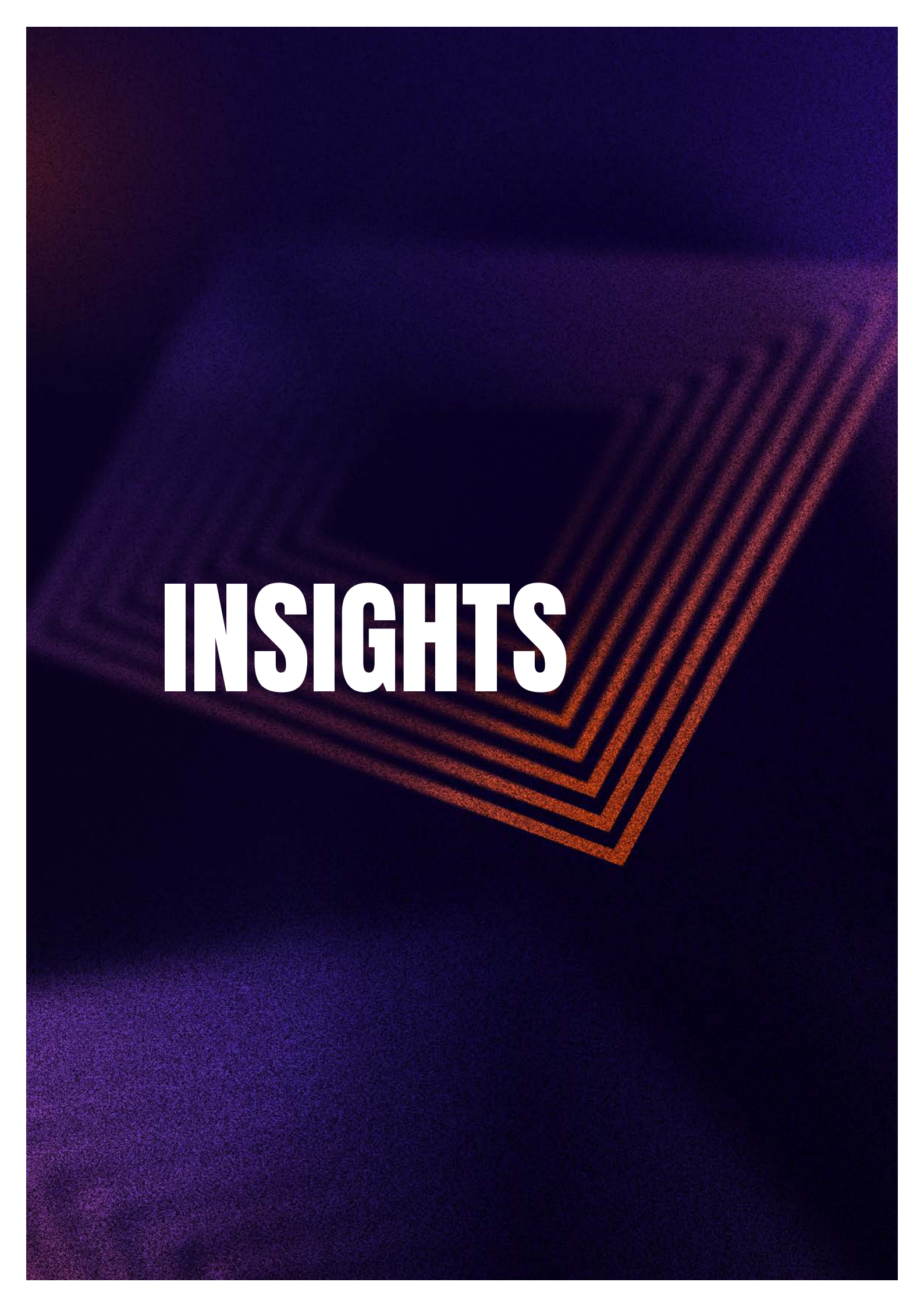
Talent wants to do AI, not just learn about it.

71% say hands-on AI upskilling matters to them, but only 29% say their current employer delivers it, the largest expectation-delivery gap measured in the study



GCCs have become a destination of choice.

69% rate a GCC as a first choice for their next career move. When evaluating a GCC opportunity, career growth leads at 48%, ahead of the global parent brand at 41% and compensation at 17%.



INSIGHTS

6 in 10 are looking for a new job. Less than 20% are happy with their current job.

59%
are already actively
looking for their
next role.

The bigger story is how little of the market is firmly anchored. Add the 15% who would definitely stay to the 3% who would probably stay, and just 18% are settled.

And mobility increases with experience. Among professionals with 12+ years of experience, 91% would consider a move, compared with 72% among those with fewer than three years.

For employers, someone staying today should not automatically be read as someone intending to stay tomorrow.

People were asked what they would do if a comparable offer landed tomorrow

Would definitely stay
with current employer

15%

Would probably stay in
with the current employer

3%

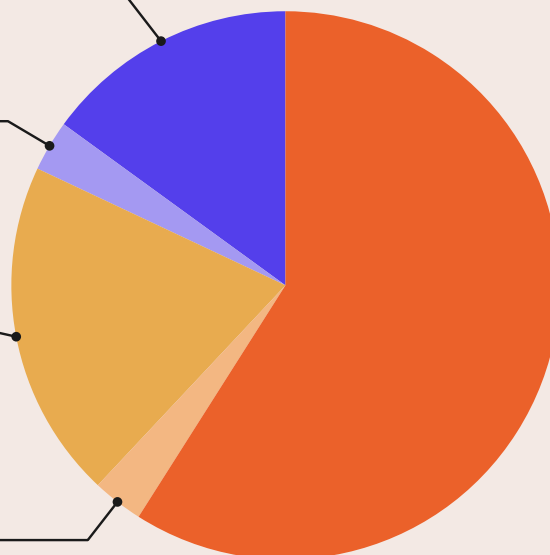
Would seriously
consider the new offer

20%

Would probably leave
the current job

3%

Would actively
consider a change
59%



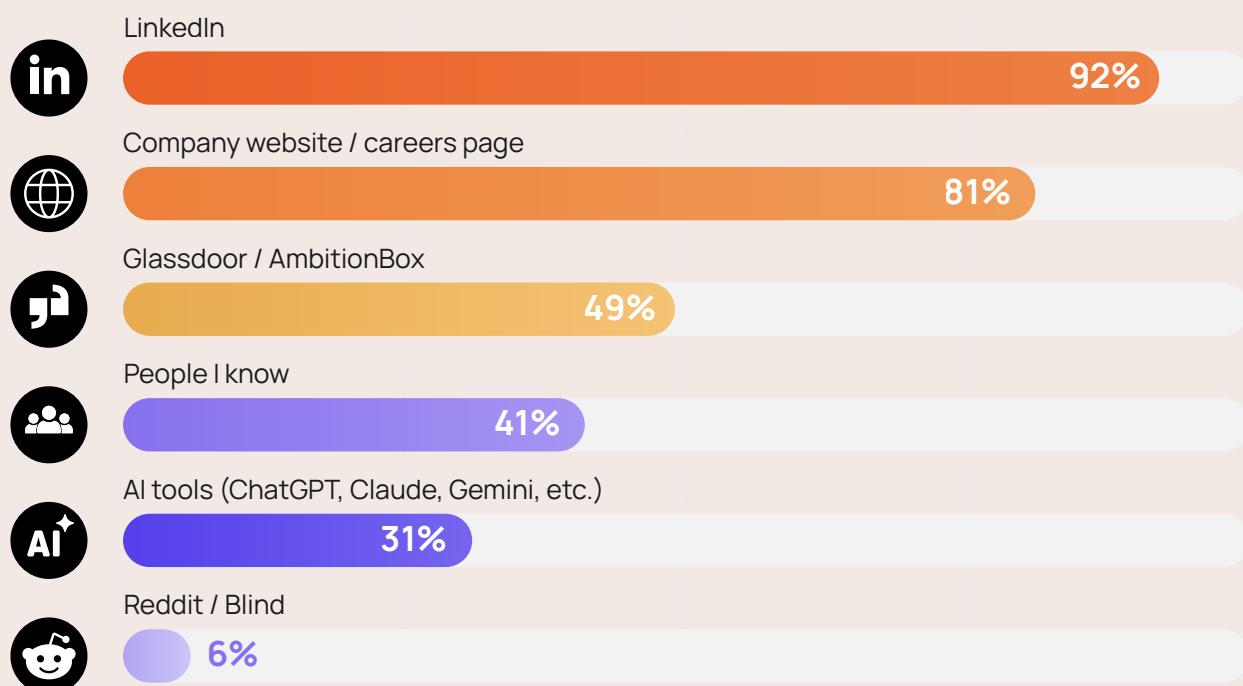
Candidates research employers well beyond the careers page.

31%
now research an employer through an AI tool (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, etc.) before applying.

Candidates are building an opinion of an employer across an entire information ecosystem. LinkedIn and careers pages remain central, but reviews, personal networks and AI-generated answers are all becoming part of the decision.

That means employer brand is no longer defined only by what a company publishes. It is also shaped by what employees say, what others have experienced and what search and AI systems can find and synthesise about the organization.

People were asked where they research a company before applying



Candidates trust employee testimonials more than company messaging.

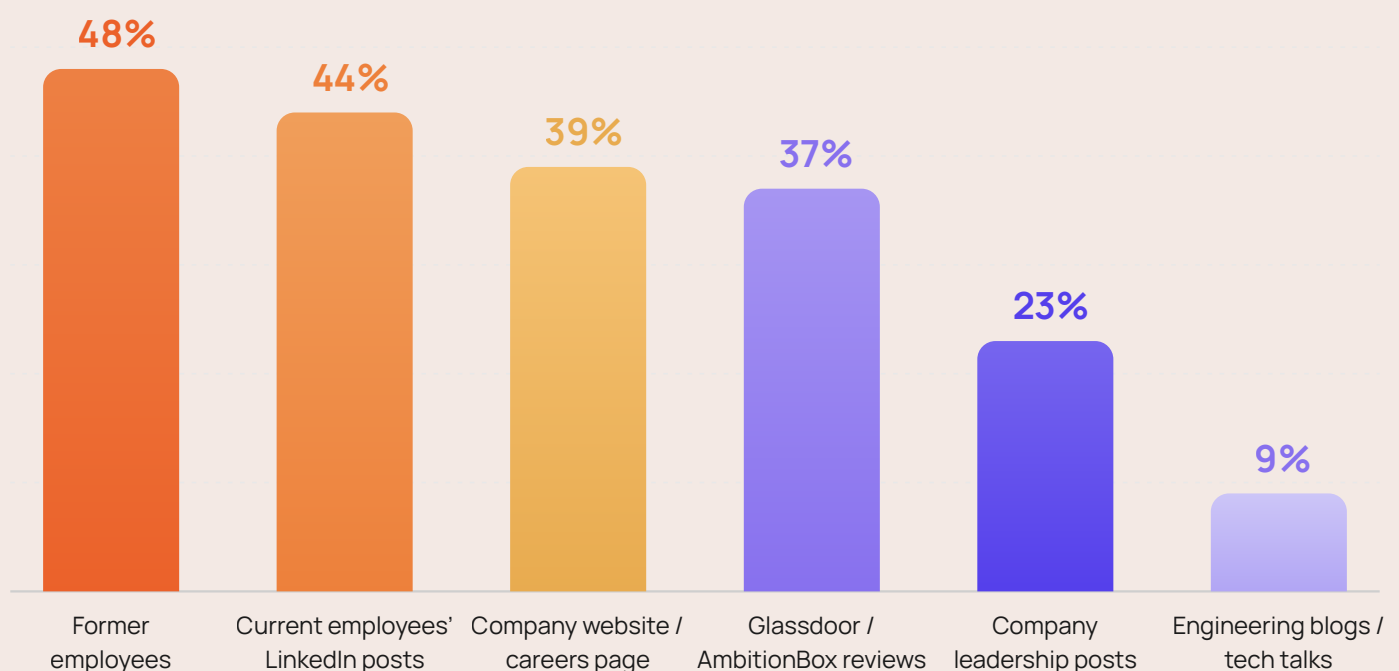
48%
trust former
employees most
when evaluating an
employer.

The most credible employer-brand voices are people who have actually experienced the workplace.

Current employees rank close behind former employees, while company leadership content sits considerably lower. Candidates are effectively cross-checking the employer promise against the people who have lived it.

The employee experience eventually becomes part of the employer brand, whether the company actively communicates it or not.

What do candidates trust most?



Percentages exceed 100 because people could pick more than one option.

Career growth is the strongest signal before candidates apply or accept.

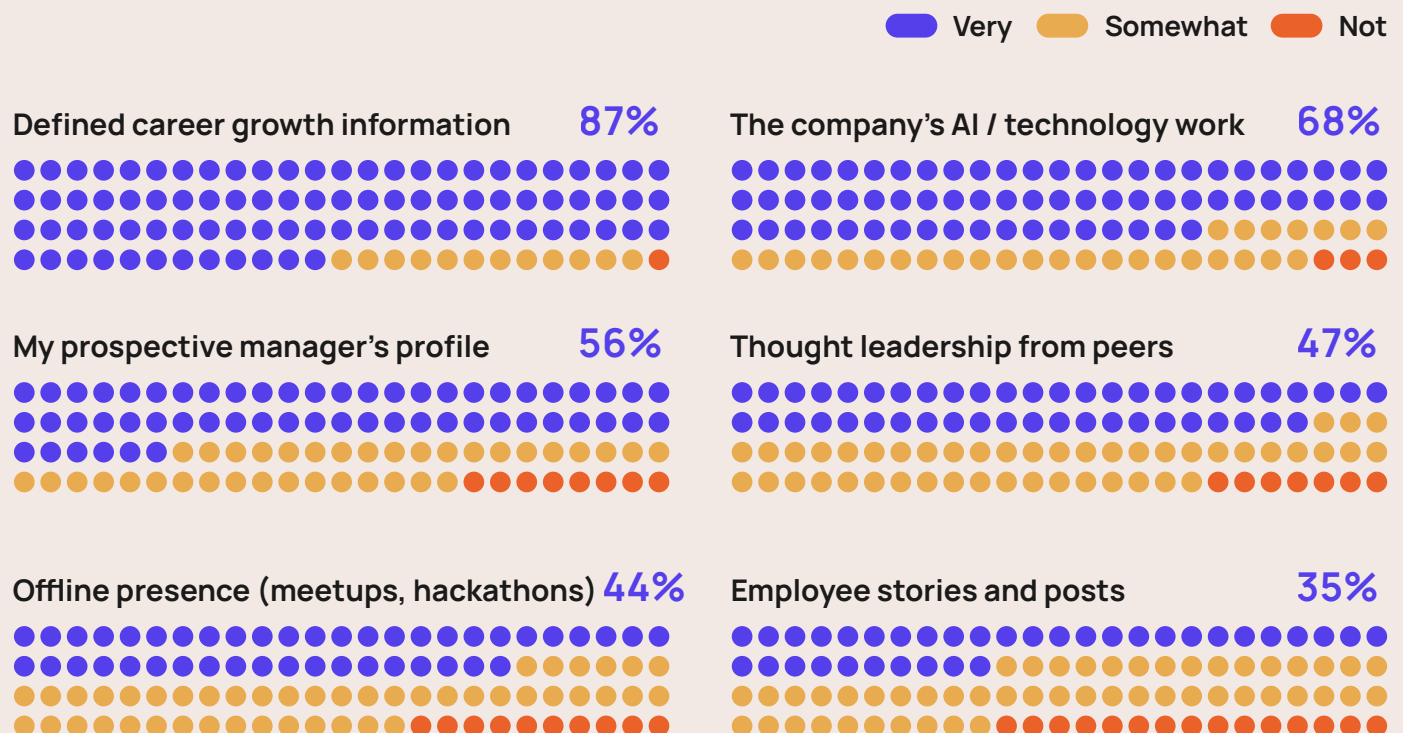
87%
rate defined career
growth information
as very important.

Candidates want to understand where a role can take them before they commit to it

The company's AI and technology work matters too, as does the prospective manager. But the strongest signal is still a visible growth path.

Career architecture therefore isn't just an internal HR construct. For candidates, it is part of the proposition they are evaluating before they join.

What are you actually looking for before you apply or accept?



Percentages exceed 100 because people could pick more than one option.

Candidates are evaluating the manager before accepting the job.

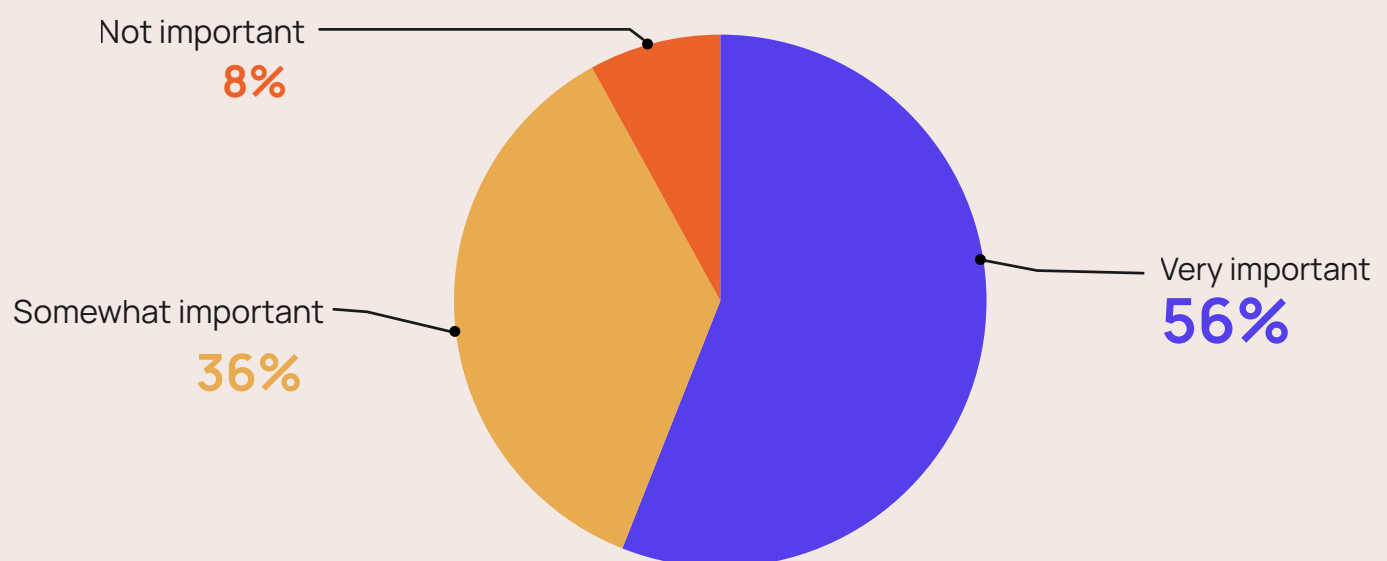
56%
say their
prospective
manager's profile is
very important.

Candidates are researching more than the company. They are looking at the person they may actually work for.

A manager's professional footprint can reveal their experience, perspective and visibility. And when leadership is difficult to find or understand, it can become a reason not to proceed at all.

The interview is increasingly two-way before it even begins.

How important is the prospective manager's profile?



50%
would drop an application or decline an offer over
leadership that is hard to find or read about.

A missing growth story is the biggest reason candidates walk away.

79%
would drop an application or decline an offer if there is no clear career path or growth story.

The reasons candidates walk away point to something bigger than perks or workplace policy.

They want to understand where the role leads. They expect unanswered negative reviews to be addressed. They notice a slow or poor interview experience. And they want to know who will lead them.

Interestingly, a mandatory five-day office week ranks lowest among the six dealbreakers tested.

The hiring experience itself is increasingly part of how candidates judge the employer.

What would make you drop an application or decline an offer?

No clear career path or growth story

79%

Negative reviews left unanswered by the company

59%

Poor or slow interview experience

53%

Leadership hard to find or read about

50%

Employees who seem silent online

34%

Mandatory five-day RTO

25%

Percentages exceed 100 because people could pick more than one option.

Candidates want to see the career path before they sign.

80%
say a defined career path would shape whether they accept an offer.

There is a clear gap between what people want from their next employer and what many experience today.

Only 46% describe their current career path as very clear. For GCC employees, that falls to 36%, compared with 50% in IT services and 51% in startups.

Career clarity therefore has the potential to become a genuine differentiator, particularly for GCCs competing for experienced technology talent.

How clear is your career path at your current employer?

TODAY

Very clear

46%

Somewhat clear

32%

Unclear, figured it out

16%

No path exists

7%

Before accepting a new offer, do you expect to see a defined career path with named levels and timelines?

BEFORE ACCEPTING

Non-negotiable

25%

Would strongly influence

55%

Nice to have

16%

Figure it out after joining

3%

Percentages exceed 100 because people could pick more than one option.

Employees want hands-on AI experience. Current employers are not delivering enough of it.

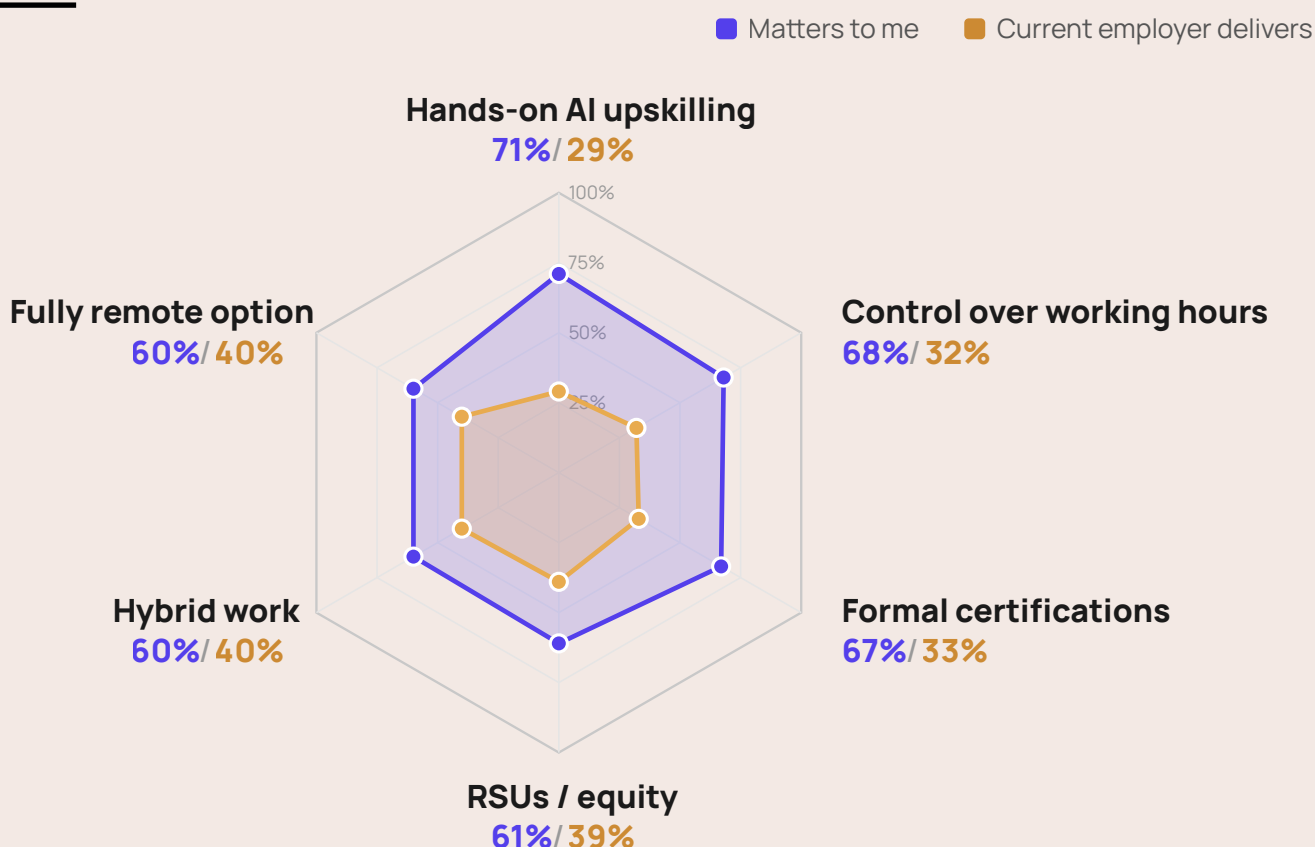
71%
say hands-on AI upskilling matters to them. Only 29% say their employer delivers it.

That is the largest expectation-delivery gap among the six areas tested.

And “hands-on” is the important part. Professionals are looking for opportunities to work with AI, not simply learn about it through courses.

Control over working hours and formal certifications also show sizeable gaps. By comparison, expectations and delivery around equity, hybrid work and fully remote work are more closely aligned.

Which of these matter to you – and does your current employer deliver?



Percentages exceed 100 because people could pick more than one option.

Less than 50% count RSUs or equity as a reason to stay.

48%
of all respondents
say they understand
the vesting, dilution
and fair value of
their RSUs or equity.

That leaves a sizeable understanding gap. Another 23% have only a rough idea of how to value their equity, while 9% say they cannot really evaluate it at all. A further 19% do not receive equity from their employer.

For employers, offering equity is only part of the proposition. Its value also needs to be clear enough for employees and candidates to understand what they are being offered and compare it meaningfully.

People were asked whether they know how to value their RSUs or equity

Yes: understand vesting, dilution and fair value

48%

Somewhat: have a rough idea

23%

Not really: can't evaluate them

9%

Employer doesn't offer RSUs / equity

19%

For GCC opportunities, career growth matters more than the global brand.

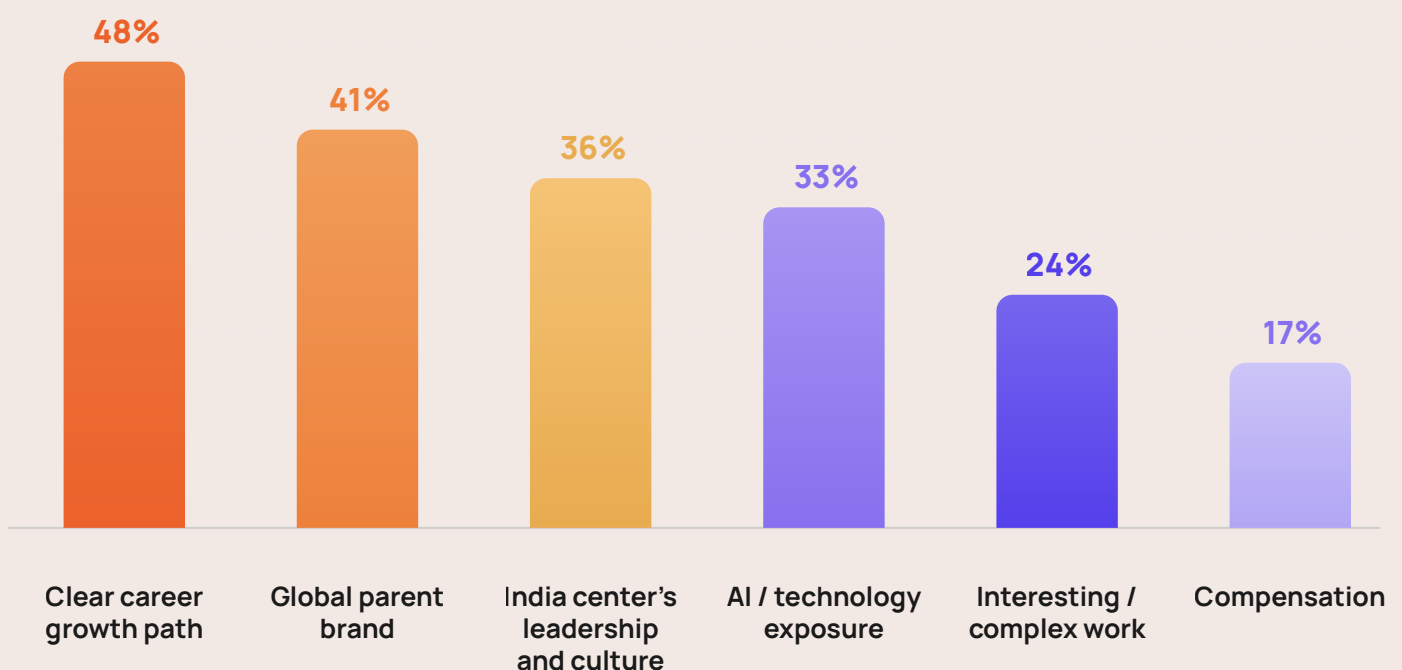
48%
put a clear career growth path among the things that matter most when evaluating a GCC opportunity.

The global parent brand remains important, but candidates are also evaluating the India organization on its own merits.

They want to understand the career they can build, the leadership and culture of the India center, the technology exposure and the work they will actually own.

For GCC employer brands, the proposition therefore cannot end with the parent-company logo. It has to explain why this GCC is a place worth building a career.

What matters most when evaluating a GCC opportunity?



Percentages may not add up to 100 because people could pick more than one option.

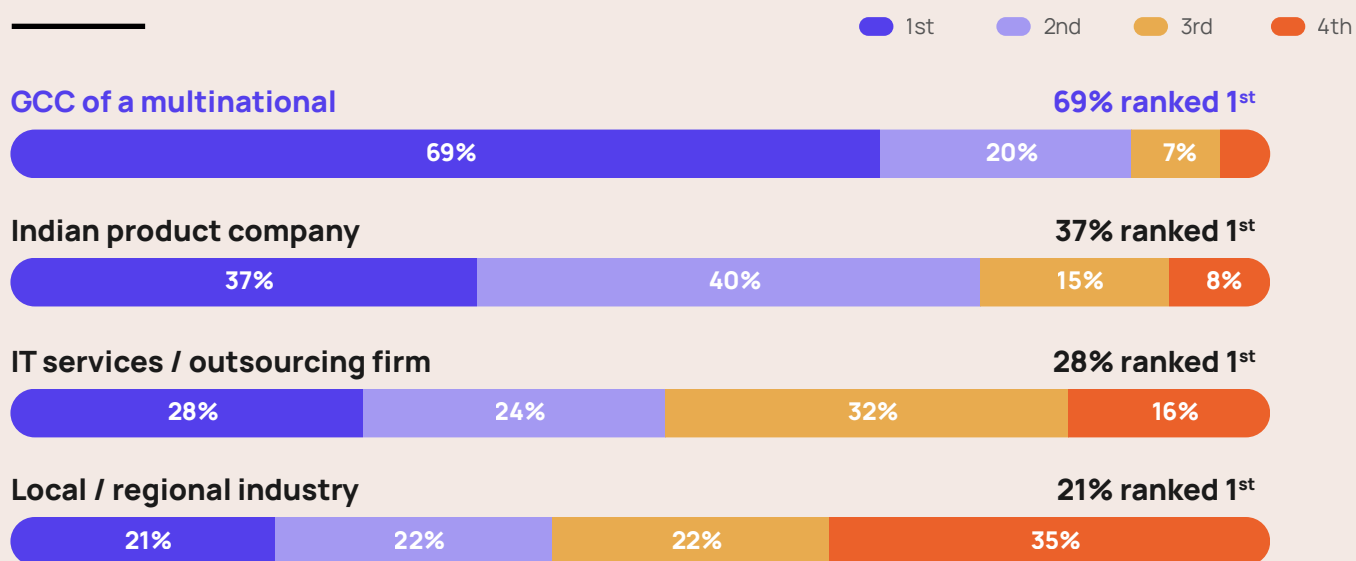
GCCs are the first choice for the next career move.

69%
rate a GCC as a
first choice for
their next move.

The attraction extends well beyond people already working in GCCs.

That changes the competitive question. GCCs no longer need to establish themselves simply as credible employers for technology talent. Individual centres increasingly need to explain why talent should choose them.

Which type of employer would be your first choice?



Share ranking a GCC first, by where they work today



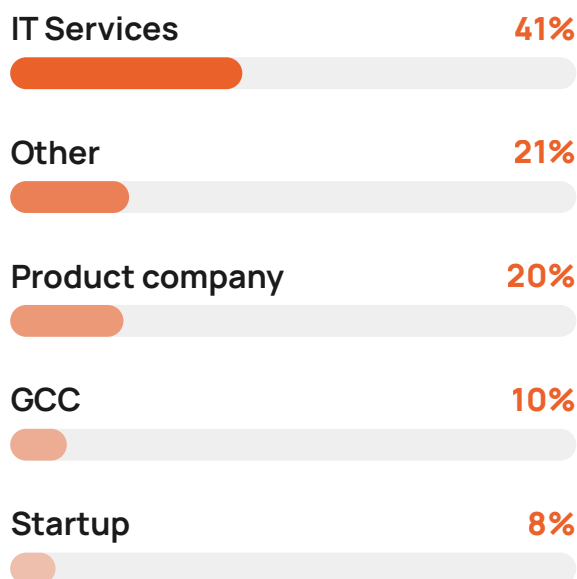
Among current GCC employees, 84% would choose a GCC again. But GCCs are also the first choice for 64% of respondents in IT services, 72% in product companies and 70% in startups.

Whose voice this is

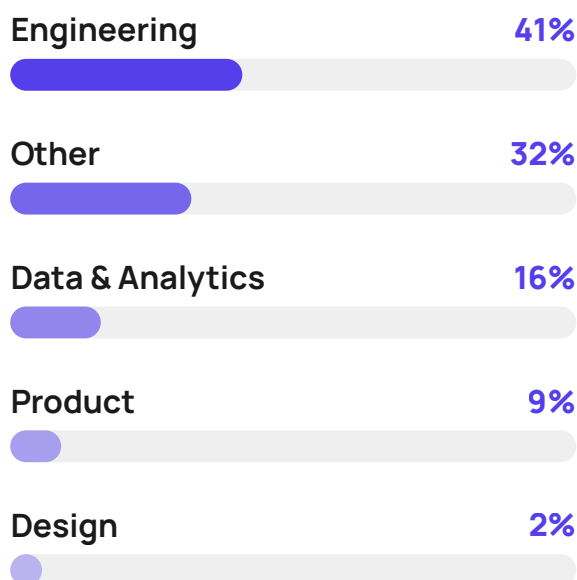
2,000

tech, product and data professionals across India, surveyed through the Talent500 community.

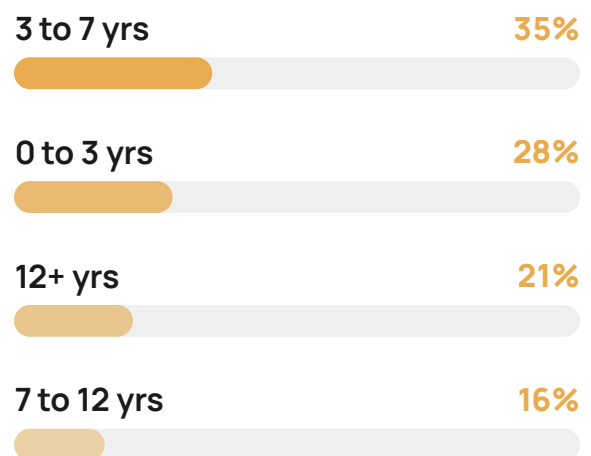
Where they work



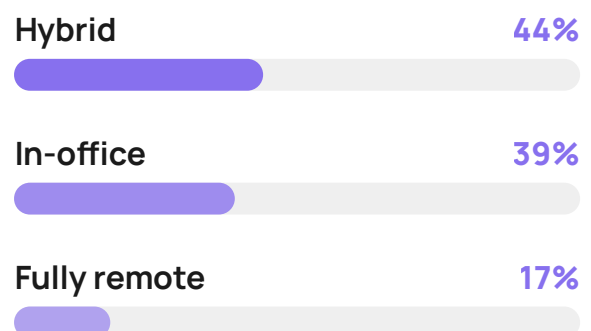
Function



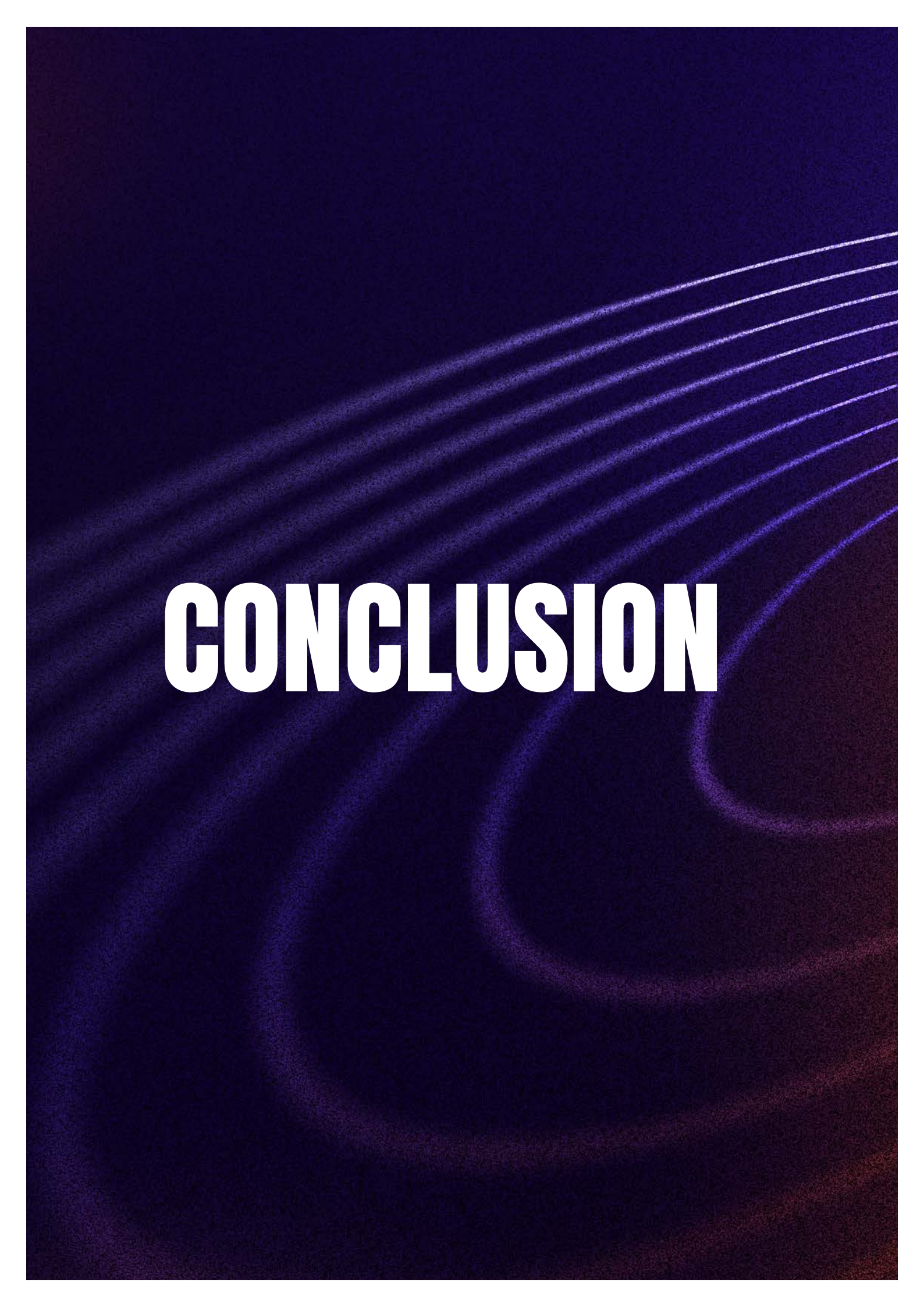
Years of experience



Work arrangement



Percentages may not add up to 100 because people could pick more than one option.

The background of the slide is a dark, textured blue with several glowing, wavy lines in a lighter blue and purple hue that sweep across the frame from the bottom left towards the top right. The word "CONCLUSION" is centered in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

CONCLUSION

Not settled. Just not sold.

This research points to a talent market in which people are doing considerably more due diligence before making a career decision.

They want to know where the role can take them. They research the manager. They look beyond company-owned channels. They want AI exposure to mean real work. And when equity forms part of

the offer, they want to understand what it is actually worth.

For GCCs, there is an important advantage: they are already the preferred next destination for a large share of the professionals surveyed. But preference for the model does not automatically translate into preference for an individual employer.

What tech talent now checks before signing

A clear career path, with named levels and timelines.

87% say career-growth information is very important.

Who they will work for.

56% say their prospective manager's profile is very important.

What the equity is actually worth.

Only 48% of all respondents say they understand vesting, dilution and fair value.

What people who have actually worked there say.

48% trust former employees most.

Whether AI means hands-on experience.

71% say it matters; 29% say their employer delivers it.

The next contest for talent will increasingly be won by organizations that make the things candidates care about visible, credible and easy to verify before they sign.

TALENT500

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